ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF FAMILY MINISTRY: THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESAN COORDINATOR OF FAMILY MINISTRY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES

ELIZABETH DAVIES

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Abstract

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY ABSTRACT

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Diocesan Coordinators are the principal drivers of activities within the Catholic Church in England and Wales to sustain and nourish healthy marriage and family life. This is the first study of their professional context, practices and purpose, further informed by North American accounts of family ministry in Congregational, Reformed and Roman Catholic settings, mainly from the 1980's. This study aimed to better understand the Coordinator role so as to inform capacity-building efforts within dioceses for family ministry.

This is an inductive study using the methodology of qualitative description. Fourteen diocesan coordinators participated in an online survey. Job descriptions, person specifications and diocesan vision statements were reviewed. Four Coordinators were selected for telephone interview. The tripartite conceptual framework draws on the Church's understanding of family ministry, the diocesan-parish relationship and the ecclesial identity of the family.

This study reveals that diocesan Coordinators are primarily responsible for training and networking activities with volunteers engaged in family ministry. Work with families in crisis is largely unacknowledged by their employers. Relationships with parishes are ambivalent. Coordinators tend to develop supra-parish networks of marriage preparation or parenting facilitators, rather than processes which enable autonomous parish family ministry to develop. Diocesan structures of support, including guiding visions for family ministry, are weak, compounding a lack of training for their role. Nonetheless Coordinators have developed important pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks to manage the sensitivities of this ministry. Their practice has implications for broader Church efforts to pastorally accompany families following publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, the pope's post-synodal document on marriage and family life.

More attention to recording practice is strongly recommended in order to facilitate reflective practice, particularly on pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks. Coordinators and their dioceses need greater theological competence, especially regarding the ecclesial identity of the family, in order to better serve the complexity and realise the potential of parish family ministry.

Contents

Documents of the Catholic Church

AA   *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Decree on the Apostolate of the
            Laity) 1965

AL   *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) 2016

CT   *Catechesi Tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time) 1979

CCC   *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994

EG   *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) 2013

EN   *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelisation in the Modern World) 1975

FC   *Familiaris Consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the
            Modern World) 1981

GS   *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern
            World) 1965

GDC   *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997

GE   *Gravissimum Educationis* (The Declaration on Christian Education)
            1965

LG   *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 1964

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Appendices

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Chapter 1: Background to the Study

Introduction

This is a study of the role of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry in the Catholic dioceses of England and Wales. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales understand this role as "caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life; offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family[1]" (Committee for Marriage & Family Life, 1994, p.2), through the provision of information, resources, training opportunities and the maintenance of networks of individuals and organisations involved in family support.

The need for this study was identified in Stage 1 of this professional doctoral programme as I attempted to clarify the factors which drive or inhibit the work of the Coordinators. In Paper 1 (see Appendix 4) I looked at my own experience as Coordinator in a Welsh diocese 1996-2000 and my observations subsequently of other models of diocesan family ministry. I explored the theological ambiguities of combining the terms *ministry* and *family* in the Catholic context. I wondered whether a ministry dedicated, essentially, to building relational *communion* in the family and parish lacks traction in a Church where *communion* is a term that can be applied to the Eucharist and to adherence to the Catechism of the Catholic Church as well as the relational sense of belonging together as members of the Body of Christ. I explored these themes further in Paper 2 (see Appendix 5) drawing on the insights of a series of papers presented at an international conference[2] on the domestic church in Leuven in 2010 and responses to them by a group of individuals who participated in the conference.

Adding to these difficulties in using the terms *ministry*, *family* and *communion*, I considered the ways in which Scripture has subordinated the demands of human

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[1] In this definition the whole parish has a family identity - as the family of God parishioners have family-like ties to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[2] The *Household of God and Local Households: Revisiting the Domestic Church* conference took place at the Catholic University of Leuven in March 2010, under the auspices of the International Academy for the Study of Marital Spirituality (INTAMS) in Leuven. The Bishops' Conference subsidised participation by students and practitioners of family ministry and theology in England and Wales, to deepen awareness of the theology of domestic church.

families in favour of a new family, the family of God (Appendix 5, pp.242-245). I also noted some systemic issues facing diocesan family ministry Coordinators which, in my view, inhibit the resolution of obstacles to their work. These include a lack of uniformity in their diocesan working contexts, a lack of formation, in terms of formal preparation or training and information about family ministry, tensions between Catholic teaching and some of the reality of family life and an absence of accounts of practice relating to diocesan coordination of family ministry.

I concluded my Paper 2 by recommending three areas for further research as a prerequisite for further clarifying the factors that drive and inhibit diocesan family ministry. It is the first of these areas that this study aims to address. In my conclusion I proposed:

> A more focussed and structured enquiry into the experiences of diocesan marriage and family life Coordinators in an attempt to get to the heart of their practice. How do they articulate family ministry for themselves, for co-workers, for those in authority around them and for the families they serve? From what value-base do they operate? What are the joys, and frustrations of their work? How aware or interested are they in any of the factors I have identified as inhibiting the development of family ministry? Are there other factors to be taken into consideration?

In this chapter I frame the context for this study and reaffirm its purpose.

My Role as Practitioner-Researcher

I work for the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales as Marriage and Family Life Project Officer, a role I have held since 2003. I work within a secretariat of 25 staff and my pay grade is that of a manager. I line-manage three others and report to Bishop Peter Doyle, chair of the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life and to Charles Wookey, Assistant General Secretary and Secretary to the Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship. My job description requires me to work closely with diocesan Coordinators of family ministry in order to support their work and discover where intervention, coordination and resource provision might enhance diocesan work.

An example of this is the bishops' Faith in the Future joint fundraising initiative, established to support projects of overarching significance to the church and in the dioceses. This programme funded 10 three-year diocesan family ministry projects

from 2008-11 and is currently funding 10 two-year diocesan family projects with more anticipated. It has been particularly important for this funding process that I understand the driving and inhibiting factors for family ministry. Each project is designed to build capacity and required to have a sustainability plan in place. Without a good understanding of capacity issues and factors affecting sustainability, my evaluation of applications on behalf of the Trustees would be compromised.

There are advantages and disadvantages in my undertaking this research. I am in a good position to study diocesan Coordinators. I know many of them well and have worked alongside them for some years. I hope I enjoy their trust and confidence. My own experience as a diocesan Coordinator provides credibility and since I share with each of them the experience of being employed by their bishop, we have a common cause and responsibility. Another advantage is the access afforded by my position to documents that are not generally in the public domain, such as internal reports and archived materials. More recently this has included responses to the consultations in preparation for the Synods on family convened by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015.

Among the disadvantages is the distinct possibility that my research subjects might be minimally candid with me. They might be reluctant to express opinions contrary to Catholic teaching or to risk disclosing information that would open them to my negative judgement about their performance, abilities or intelligence.   From my perspective I have a contractual responsibility to my employers, who are also the employers of my subjects. All our roles require a certain amount of discretion.

Like all researchers I bring particular personal and professional characteristics to this study. Besides my professional experience of facilitating family ministry in a parish, deanery, diocesan and national setting, I have benefitted from Master's level studies in family ministry and continuing professional development through family ministry events and conferences internationally in Europe and the United States. As I point out in my Paper 2 this level of formation for family ministry is unusual.

I am also a divorced single parent of four adult children and a woman in leadership in a Church that is committed to the sanctity of marriage and to the authority of an all-male, celibate priesthood. These perspectives encourage me to challenge the adequacy of some of the language used in the Church to describe marriage and family life, although not necessarily the principles underlying that language. For

example, the Church maintains that in God's plan the family is founded on marriage (Familiaris Consortio, 1981, #14), which suggests that families who lack an intact marriage are not authentically family in the eyes of the Church or God. I agree that the principle of lifelong, exclusive, commitment to mutual life-giving love, particularly in a sacrament that is administered by one lay person to another, is a rich starting point for exploring the personal and spiritual importance of family. However it is not the only starting point for thinking about family. The working document for the 2015 Synod seemed to recognise this in paragraph 48 which roots the missionary aspect of the domestic church firmly within the baptismal vocation (Synod of Bishops, 2015).

The Diocesan Coordinator of Family Ministry

Ministry to families in the Catholic Church takes many forms. Few would argue that programmes of preparation for baptism, for marriage, celebration of the Sunday liturgy, support at times of sickness and bereavement and a variety of parish social gatherings including coffee after Mass lack dimensions of family ministry. These services are made possible by the cooperative ingenuity and generosity of a wide range of people who might never claim a role as family ministers. So where does a diocesan Coordinator of family ministry fit in?

The role of diocesan staff is to serve the work of Catholic parishes and schools by fulfilling those tasks which are most usefully and economically managed from a central office. These generally include training, advice, resource development, financial and best practice accountability, serving a range of ministries: liturgy, evangelisation, formation, catechesis, vocations work and so forth. As well as meeting the needs of individual parishes and schools, diocesan employees are well-placed to identify emerging trends and to inspire or propose new, different or adapted responses. Diocesan Coordinators fulfil this central support role on behalf of marriage and family life ministry. Whilst not the only responsible agent of family ministry in a diocese, Coordinators are nevertheless in a unique position to be able to understand and describe the overarching contours of family ministry in the diocese, drive its development, articulate its purpose, ensure its connection with the broader life and mission of the Church and supply some of the resources necessary to initiate or sustain good practices.

Usually just one person per diocese is designated as Coordinator, although some work closely with teams, such as in the archdiocese of Southwark or with one or two support staff, such as in the diocese of Leeds until 2013. Not every bishop has appointed a Coordinator, such as in Lancaster, nor do all of those appointed to the role interact consistently with Coordinators in other dioceses or with the Marriage & Family Life Project Office at the Bishops' Conference. In these situations it is very difficult to see what the Coordinator does. Some are simultaneously employed elsewhere or have other significant diocesan responsibilities. There are 22 Catholic dioceses in England and Wales. In April 2016 13 of these dioceses had Coordinators who actively networked on a regional and national basis, and were evidently engaged in family ministry initiatives in their dioceses.

The job-title implies a need for Coordinators to network with local representatives of Catholic voluntary organisations and agencies involved with marriage and family ministry, such as Marriage Care, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Équipes Notre Dames (Teams of Our Lady), the Association of Interchurch Families and Rainbows. Coordinators are expected to know who is delivering family ministries such as marriage preparation, parenting and bereavement support, and to support parishes and/or schools in further developing these ministries, through identifying gaps, offering training and encouraging more volunteer leaders. Since 2006 Coordinators have also been engaged in the Bishops' Conference strategic plan for supporting marriage and family life: *Celebrating Family: Blessed, Broken, Living Love*. This involves supporting parishes to become more family-friendly, raising awareness of the holiness of family life and convening conversations about passing on faith among those involved in home, school and parish catechesis.

To be effective Coordinators need good working relationships, with diocesan clergy, especially senior clergy including the Bishop, and with other diocesan staff whose work also impacts on families. That the role has been described in terms of *coordination* emphasises its collaborative nature: a single individual can neither direct nor deliver these services independently. A range of people and approaches are involved, not least families themselves. Within the complexity of family ministry, the role of diocesan Coordinator signals the strategic importance of a central point of reference, for all, where authoritative information, advice, resources, training is located.

In 1994 the Coordinator profile was boosted when the Bishops' Conference passed a resolution agreeing five aspects of the role:

   i)   caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life. The Coordinator will offer pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family.
   ii) providing information and resources in family matters for all parishioners and clergy
   iii) organizing training opportunities and coordinating lay involvement
   iv) acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need
   v)   strengthening ecumenical links enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes.

In the 22 years since this resolution was agreed, the role can be expected to have evolved. Families change, society changes and knowledge and understanding of family systems and dynamics change. Even in 1999 the bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life noted other aspects which it considered were also important to the role. But the broader context of how family ministry is understood within the Roman Catholic Church also has implications for the role of the diocesan Coordinator.

Family Ministry in Roman Catholic Teaching

Only relatively recently has family ministry been articulated as a discrete ministry within the Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-66) gave renewed expression and appreciation to the critical importance of marriage and family life in the life and mission of the Church. The Council emphasised particularly the family's social and evangelising roles. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, 1964) describes the Church as generated through the family, "in which new citizens of human society are born ... so that the people of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries" (LG #11). Parents, by word and example, are recognised as "the first preachers of the faith to their children", a theme taken up in the Council's Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis, 1965). Here, parents' role in educating their children is described as "so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking" (GE, #3). The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes,

1965) states that "the well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family" (GS #47). The importance of family was reiterated again in 1965 in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem) which declared that the family had received from God its mission "to be the first and vital cell of society" (AA #11).

Mette (1995, p.78) notes that the Second Vatican Council was responsible for two profound developments:

> "Firstly with its recognition of the understanding of marriage and family … in which the traditional patriarchal image has been replaced with a form of life stamped by partnership… Secondly, there is a revaluation of the ecclesiological significance of the family when it is said to be the 'domestic sanctuary of the church', 'a kind of domestic church'."

These shifts in emphasis, from patriarchy to partnership and from the parish to the home, are critical lenses for understanding and interpreting diocesan family ministry and I shall return to these in the course of this study.

The Church's attention to families continued after the Council, with the formation in 1973 of a Papal Committee for the Family, directed to inspire, promote and raise awareness for "centres of reflection, action and witness to the Christian understanding of family relations" (Papal Committee for the Family, 1978, p.2). Theological reflection continued, notably in the 1975 exhortation on evangelisation by Paul VI in which family's identity as domestic church was further, if briefly, explored:

> "This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #71).

Concern for the family was still evident in 1978 when John Paul I welcomed bishops visiting the Vatican from the United States:

> "… let us do everything we can for the Christian family so that our people may fulfil their great vocation in Christian joy and share intimately and effectively in the Church's mission – Christ's mission – of salvation." (Thomas, 1979, p.9)

But it was most evident throughout the long pontificate of John Paul II, energised particularly by the 1980 Synod on Family and the promulgation in 1981 of the post-synodal exhortation Familiaris Consortio.

This document, described by a former President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, as a "magna carta" for families in the Church (Trujillo, 1997), has since been the natural starting point for diocesan Coordinators of family ministry seeking direction for their work. FC is an exhaustive treatment of Catholic teaching on marriage and family life. Divided into four parts it begins with an analysis of contemporary family strengths and challenges, continues with a description of God's plan for marriage and family before devoting considerable attention to the pastoral care of the family, including its stages, structures, agents and situations. It is within the context of a stage of family life – post-marriage – that the document offers a pertinent description of a process for family ministry, implicitly designating it as an informal ministry between and for families:

> "Thus, within the ecclesial community - the great family made up of Christian families - there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace." (FC #69)

In FC the Pope calls for "particular effort in this field from the sons and daughters of the Church" (i.e. ordained and professed priests and religious), maintaining that this special love for families should show itself in a number of activities but especially in "concrete action" (FC #86).

Though FC has been such a seminal document for Coordinators it lacks an explicit definition of family ministry. For this, I had to turn to a letter written by the Synod bishops to families before they left Rome in 1980:

> "Family ministry is of very special interest to the church. By this we mean efforts made by the whole people of God through local communities, especially through the help of pastors and lay people devoted to pastoral work with families. They work with individuals, couples and families to help them live out their conjugal vocation as fully as possible. This ministry includes preparation for marriage; help given to married couples at all stages of married life; catechetical and liturgical programs directed to the family; help given to childless couples, single-parent families, the widowed, separated and divorced and in particular to families and couples labouring under burdens like poverty, emotional and psychological tensions, physical and mental handicaps, alcohol and drug abuse and the problems associated

with migration and other circumstances which strain family stability."
(Synod of Bishops, 1980 #17)

Agreed by Catholic bishops from all over the world, the Synod of Bishops, this definition is another, authoritative, lens through which to view family ministry in the Catholic tradition. It suggests a whole community parish-centred approach that involves all families, animated and driven by experienced leaders, both lay and ordained. More practically, with an explicit emphasis on the *who*, *where*, and *how* of family ministry, it offers a clarity of structure and process to inform both practice and research. Yet this is a definition that has been singularly overlooked and is rarely referenced anywhere[3].

This definition also reinforces a sense that the term *family ministry* has two critical facets: ministry within the church *as* families, as the People of God and ministry by the Church *to* families, "through the help of pastors and lay people", to facilitate their ministry as families. As a practitioner I am committed to family ministry as an expression of the ministry of the lay faithful to each other in their local and family communities. I appreciate however that this is often realised more fully through a ministry of the Church which equips families with sufficient skills, confidence and workable strategies for family ministry. This is where the role of the diocesan Coordinator is so critical.

Family Ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

In my Paper 2 I point to the absence of literature describing the practice of diocesan family ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. This might give the impression that no such practice has existed. Whilst the scope of this study precludes a compilation of the history of Catholic diocesan family ministry in England and Wales, I want to offer three examples here to show that energy and resources have

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[3] I received a copy of the Origins issue which published the Letter via a US colleague. To the best of my knowledge the Letter has only been otherwise published in a Canadian collection of historical writings on family (Letson, 2001), although I have since made it available online at http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/content/download/27573/185308/file/world-bishops-message.pdf. While the author is unknown, the then Archbishop Jozef Tomko was Secretary to the 1980 Synod. Thomas Reese mentions the document in a blog: https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/looking-back-1980-synod-family   Downloaded 12.4.2017

been invested over the past 40 years, and that there have also been efforts to reflect on that practice and how best to further develop it.

Inter-deanery Report on Marriage and Family, Liverpool 1979

Archbishop Derek Worlock was a delegate to the 1980 Synod on Family. His papers are stored in the archives of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Amongst these is a copy of an Inter-deanery Report on Marriage and Family, by the then Fr Vincent Nichols, published in July 1979.

This report was commissioned by Worlock following an inter-deanery meeting in February 1979 at which concerns around marriage and family life were raised. Nichols was asked to look into these matters and suggest some ways forward. His comprehensive report includes a description of the Church's vision of marriage, the reality of marriage, an overall vision of a pastoral ministry to families and married life and some strategies and steps towards achieving that vision. In its original format his report is a densely-typed 18 page document, in a font that is difficult to read. An Appendix includes an extensive list of people consulted within and beyond the diocese, extending to the United States. Nichols concludes with 11 recommendations, as follows:

1. That the work of elaborating a clear picture of local needs be carried on systematically in each area, using parish and/or Deanery teams. In the light of these needs, plans for local action can be drawn up and implemented.
2. That an Archdiocesan Office for Marriage and Family Life be established in order to serve the parishes and priests of the Archdiocese in this and all the following proposals.
3. That the process of preparation for Marriage be clarified and appropriate provision made.
4. That the Liturgical celebration of weddings and the regular celebration of Marriage and Family Life be renewed and expanded.
5. That the pastoral response to people experiencing marital breakdown and court proceedings be strengthened and coordinated, and likewise to those who have been divorced and remarried.
6. That particular attention be paid both in parishes and in the schools to the needs of parents of young children as the first educator of their children
7. That Governors and Teachers of schools review their activities and curriculum according to the check-lists in this report
8. That those working as 'visitors and helpers' in parishes be given the training and support they need.
9. That organisations which promote the development of Marriage and Family Life be given every material support and encouragement

10. That Counselling Organisations receive renewed support and that they strive to integrate their resources more readily into the main-stream of parish life.
11. That a long-term commitment be given to the research and study of Marriage and Family Life, in conjunction with national bodies, in the service of Archdiocesan projects and ministry

This report is evidence that even before the 1980 Synod and the publication of FC there existed, at least in this diocese, strategic direction for family ministry, an awareness of its breadth and diversity, a priority for listening at local level, an identified need for adequate resources and for long term commitment to family ministry by the Church. Nor was this a report that was left to gather dust on the shelf. Letters in the same file point to the creation of a Department for Pastoral Formation (rather than of Marriage & Family Life) within the curial office. Fr Nichols was appointed as its first director. The Archdiocese of Liverpool still employs a full-time Diocesan Coordinator for Family Ministry, located within the Department for Pastoral Formation.

The Pastoral Care of Marriage and Family Life National Project 1987-90

Briefing was the official journal of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales from 1971 until it ceased publication in 2004. From January 1987 until early 1990 seven issues of *Briefing* were dedicated to guidelines for the pastoral care of marriage and family life. This material, developed by the bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life, was also published as a set of six resource packs to support diocesan efforts to equip parishes for family ministry. Each pack focussed on a different stage of family life: *Setting Out Together* (early years of marriage), *A Shared Life* (being family together), *Being Together* (preparing for marriage), *Adapting and Adjusting* (coping with changes in family life), *Healing and Forgiveness* (reconciling differences), *The End is Just the Beginning* (bereavement and loss). Each pack included descriptions of social and community action projects, lists of practical ideas, useful organisations, and liturgies for home and parish.

This resource was developed as a three year project by the Committee to promote the pastoral care of marriage and family life. The clearly stated aim was to create a starting point for dioceses and parishes, which could be supplemented by locally developed materials. Towards the end of the project, a progress review was published which illustrates some of the impacts. One diocese had appointed a paid

worker to take the work forward. In others teams for steering diocesan work had been established.

Briefing also published a report (Gibson and Hornsby-Smith, 1987) of a five year project initiated by a group of priests from several dioceses who collaborated in piloting a variety of strategies to support the early years of marriage. Their principal goal was to enable young couples to form supportive relationships within the parish. They recognised that as priests they could do much to facilitate this, especially through a series of natural opportunities such as a couple's arrival in the parish, a birth of a baby and baptismal preparation.

Between 1981 and 1986 these priests met three times a year, in Chelsea, to share progress and learning from their experience. The group included priests with responsibility for supporting marriage and family life in the dioceses of Clifton, Liverpool and Arundel and Brighton and also priests co-opted by the Archbishops of the dioceses of Westminster and Southwark. The account of their work notes the involvement of the eminent Catholic sociologist Michael Hornsby-Smith from the University of Surrey, through his supervision of a doctoral student[4] commissioned to evaluate the projects (O'Leary, M., 1987).

This Pastoral Care project illustrates an extensive effort to generate and support family ministry, albeit in an ephemeral and limited form of publication. The evidence of such strong clergy collaboration in the development of practice is intriguing given the absence of such networks today. Might these clergy-developed models have been helpful to today's increasingly lay-led ministry? Might that doctoral project have contributed substantially to raising awareness of family ministry?

Supporting the Network of Diocesan Coordinators 1994-2000
Papers relating to the national meetings of Diocesan Coordinators of Family Ministry from 1994-2000 include two important strategy documents. These were drawn up by Fr John Murphy who served the network during that period, in his combined role as secretary to the bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life and national chaplain to Catholic Marriage Care. Both documents describe a

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[4] Hornsby-Smith has confirmed that this doctoral work was not completed.

proposal to reform the network into a more formal association. The 'Proposal for an Association of Diocesan Coordinators for Marriage and Family Life' (Murphy, 1994) reveals that the United Nations International Year of the Family had raised the profile of family needs in the Church. It prompted the Committee to recommend the appointment of a Coordinator in each diocese to "enable the development of services" and to act as "the centre of a communication network" across and between dioceses. The paper proposed the formation of an Association on the grounds that it "would both enhance the diocesan provision of services and develop the Church's response throughout the country to the needs of family life today."

The proposal evidently did not progress because six years later it was revisited in a Working Paper for the Diocesan Coordinators for Marriage & Family Life, called 'Towards a Better Profile' (Murphy, 2000). This paper summarises the position of the network and states that in the five years prior the status of Coordinators has increased in some dioceses and diminished in others. It includes an assessment of the work of diocesan Coordinators and points to inhibiting factors that remain to this day:

> "The ministry for family life is relatively new. It has been characterised over the years by developing services in response to specific needs. One example is the schemes of parenting courses; another is marriage preparation. The diocesan Coordinator is not necessarily the initiator of such work; both examples given could well have originated within a school and a parish….
> …this ministry is not clearly structured within a diocese. This has the advantage of the possibility of shaping the ministry to meet actual needs. The disadvantage is that the coherence of the work may not be acknowledged, and so the role is difficult to describe, and so attracting resources and finances is problematic. The Coordinator has the problem then of having the ministry taken seriously, feels isolated instead of connected."

The paper suggests a number of ways that the national network meetings support individual Coordinators and invites discussion as to how the status of the role can be improved internally within a diocese.

These papers indicate the effort to reflect on practice that has taken place within the diocesan network. But they also illustrate issues with which Coordinators possibly still struggle: a lack of perceived coherence to their work, a sense of isolation in the undertaking and the scope of the work. As Nichols (1979, p.31) points out:

> "Every discussion about marriage and family life sooner or later comes to realise how wide-ranging and inclusive a subject it is tackling. Any one aspect of the topic quickly flows into another…"

Taken together these three examples evidence the practice of family ministry and reflections on family ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales over nearly 40 years. Unfortunately, this evidence is buried in archives, personal collections, unindexed publications and unpublished papers and so is hidden from view. Those involved have retired or moved on. Their efforts – and possibly those of others not represented here - no longer readily inform the work of today's practitioners. This tendency to lose 'the family ministry story' reflects a similar pattern noted by McLoughlin and Simmonds (2010, p.26) in their Catholic perspective on pastoral theology in Britain and Ireland: "an amazing plethora of limited and unfinished initiatives in the hands of practitioners with little time or energy for theorizing or critical reappraisal." This is a pattern that must be arrested at some point. There are sufficient other challenges to family ministry in the Catholic Church without 'collective amnesia' hindering practice.

Challenges for Family Ministry in the Catholic Context

A diocesan Coordinator once expressed to me her view that family ministry sits on a 'faultline' in the Catholic Church. This geological metaphor well describes the pressures when the twin imperatives of 'ideal' and 'real' collide in an unconducive environment. Although the Pope's recent exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) may change matters, Catholic teaching on marriage and family life, as I pointed out in my Paper 2 (see pp.228-230), has been awash with ideal language that barely relates to the messiness of life that many, if not all, families endure each day, including basic struggles for survival, for maintaining and nourishing intimate relationships and reconciling competing needs. Theologically, as I have noted, the Church holds that the family is based on marriage. There is much value to this approach if one is then able to extrapolate the virtues of faithful, lifelong, exclusive self-giving love and apply them also to sibling love, parental and filial love, love across generations and genders and for adopted and extended family members. But if too literally

interpreted and applied, this teaching can disenfranchise those families who, like mine, are not actually underpinned by an intact, normative marriage.

Similarly the Church's teaching has made it difficult to affirm couples who are not 'validly' married, that is, those who have divorced and remarried without a declaration of nullity with regard to the first marriage. There are procedures for investigating a first marriage in order to pursue the validity of a subsequent commitment and these are used. But, often, people are unwilling to have their private lives exposed to the Church's close examination. Nor do they always understand that a decree of nullity does not affect the legitimacy of any children of the marriage. Responses to the 2013 pre-synod consultation confirmed ambivalence towards the annulment process, and a desire for mercy towards those whose marriages have failed. Yet clergy are not always in tune with this zeitgeist. Differences in approaches marked the proceedings of the recent Synods on the family, as reports of a pre-synod presentation to the College of Cardinals in February 2014 noted: "Kasper envisaged a possible way forward on the question of the divorced and remarried. The subsequent debate revealed two very different theological approaches to the question" (O'Connell, 2014).

The Church's teaching on family planning is reputed to be largely ignored by most Catholics. In 1968 the encyclical Humanae Vitae was published following the deliberations of a Pontifical Commission on Birth Control (1963-66). The encyclical reiterated the traditional teaching of the church that "each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life" (HV #11). Since it had been widely reported that the majority of Commission members were in favour of change, the impact of HV was profound. Writing in 1984 Jack Dominian, a Catholic psychiatrist and theologian, described the "divide between the official teaching of the Church" in the encyclical and "the belief and practice of so many of the faithful" as "dangerous" (Letson, 2001, p.291). John Marshall, an early Commission member, acknowledged that it had "met with widespread dissent both within and without Catholic circles" (Letson, 2001, p.297). In recent years however the 'Theology of the Body' of Pope John Paul II has been developed to counter negative perceptions of the Catholic vision of human sexuality. Claims have also been made for the benefits of adhering to the Church's teaching, most notably that

couples who use natural methods of family planning do not succumb to divorce[5]. The use of natural methods of family planning remains, in some quarters, a litmus test of orthodox Catholic practice. This increases the pressure on diocesan Coordinators to ensure access to natural methods of fertility awareness, even though apparently few couples seek this information.

Another area of tension, though one rarely scrutinised, lies in the choice of pastoral response to families' needs. All families face a variety of developmental challenges over their life cycle, most particularly at transitional moments of coupling, uncoupling, births and deaths. These challenges can appear overly ordinary, secular or psychological and therefore not appreciated as a primary opportunity for the Church to serve families. Equally, resources deemed to be 'non-Catholic' can be viewed with suspicion even if from a Christian source, such as the Marriage Course from Holy Trinity, Brompton. Conversely resources that are clearly Catholic, such as charismatic healing ministries, might be embraced without critical thought for the safeguards available to vulnerable people. An example of this is Little Way Healing Ministries who offer a Healing of Memories ministry. Little Way were once proposed to me by a diocesan coordinator as a suitable resource for victims of child sex abuse but there is little information on their website to indicate that they have adequate safeguards in place for this kind of complex ministry.

The very personal, diverse and sensitive nature of family experience adds to the complexity of family ministry. We are all vulnerable when it comes to our families and potentially defensive if we sense judgment. It can be difficult for even the best-intentioned to speak about family without offending at least one person in the audience. On the other hand, too much equivocation risks fudging important truths, and reducing discourse to bland generalisations. In my experience, potential volunteers also resist involvement, wary of being seen as interfering or as experts on family or as perfect Catholics. Yet without the involvement of ordinary people family ministry is impoverished and limited in all sorts of ways.

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[5] Kawental's (2012) online blog notes that statistics must be treated cautiously until cause rather than correlation can be established.

The challenges facing diocesan Coordinators are therefore substantial, but this simply adds to the significance of their role in fostering family ministry and the need for caring and informed responses. As Nichols wrote in 1979 (p.9):

> "It is in marriage and family that the foundations of life and faith are laid. The core realities celebrated in all other sacraments are first experienced there…. So it is for the sake of the purity of our service of God, for the sake of the well-being of people and for the sake of the wholeness of our sacraments that we must seek ways of ministering to every facet of married and family life."

So far in this chapter I have described my role, the role of the diocesan coordinator, the Church's understanding of family ministry, the loss of past experience to present practitioners and a series of other challenges that diocesan coordinators face. All of these factors inform the goals of this research.

Goals of the Research

This is a study of the role of the diocesan Coordinator of family ministry which aims to better understand the factors that drive or inhibit the practice of family ministry in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales. In light of the challenges already mentioned and the lack of practice-based literature I have defined the goals of this study broadly:

1) To describe the role, identify core practices and basic characteristics of the individuals who held these posts during 2012 by reviewing job descriptions, and researching Coordinators' backgrounds, working structures and resources. I want to consider whether diocesan Coordinators are adequately supported by having clarity of purpose, authorisation for their work and sufficient training, support and supervision to do it well. What is it that their dioceses actually expect of them? What do they actually do? What is it that motivates, challenges and sustains them? What have they learned about the job from doing it?

2) To learn how difficult aspects of the Church's work with families are managed. I want to see how diocesan Coordinators negotiate the inherent

tensions in Catholic family ministry, in order to determine how much of a stumbling block these tensions are to developments in family ministry.

3) To establish a broader context in which to reflect more deeply on experience. Despite the lack of publications on English and Welsh Catholic family ministry, there is a sizeable body of literature from the United States arising from Christian and specifically Roman Catholic experiences during the latter part of the 20th century. Can this body of work locate our Coordinators' experience within an established pattern or will it show our context to be very particular? Literature from the United States is linguistically accessible to practitioners here. Nichols refers to two publications by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops in his 1979 Inter-deanery report. So there is a precedent for drawing English and Welsh experience into a trans-Atlantic dialogue on family ministry.

4) A final goal is to develop a practical theology of family ministry as experienced in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales. This is an ambitious target but I want to see how the practice is influenced by theology and theology by the practice. Family ministry is a particularly ripe area for this kind of enquiry because of the many challenges it is faced with. Diocesan Coordinators simply could not manage their role effectively without a practical theological approach.

Limits of the Research

This research focusses very specifically on diocesan Coordinators because they are key drivers for family ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. They are a discrete body of individuals that are readily accessible for research purposes. They possess sufficient commonalities to be able to draw out overarching themes but also sufficient diversity to be able to compare and contrast experiences. This is not a study of parish family ministry nor is it a study of the role of the priest in family ministry, though both these aspects are well worth researching and elements of both may be reflected in the experience of diocesan Coordinators.

This is not a study of Church teaching on family or on ministry, although, again, both areas might emerge in the research findings. In describing, and reflecting upon,

the practices of a discrete group of diocesan practitioners, the employment practices and pastoral priorities of particular dioceses will be implicated, although it is not my intention to explore these in depth. Equally, because the scope of family ministry is so broad, not every finding can be pursued in detail here. I have chosen to focus on issues that emerge especially strongly from the data in the light of my conceptual framework. Where possible I have noted for future reference issues that cannot be fully explored here.

Other limitations concern the literature reviewed in this research. Many of the journal articles sourced from the United States are not indexed by academic services, because they were not published in academic journals. They tended to appear in popular or practitioner-led journals. I have drawn on all that I can find, but subsequent research, in different locations, may reveal other important sources.

A final limit to note is my personal and professional need to balance this research and its findings with my working relationship with my research subjects, and with our mutual employers. This has the potential to positively and negatively impact the quality of the data gathered and how I work with it, as I have already noted. For all of us there is a natural constraint of loyalty to our employers, the bishops, as well as to the people of God that we serve. For myself there is some wariness of provoking defensive reactions among diocesan Coordinators if this study is perceived as criticizing their abilities or intent. However, when I was new to family ministry, a priest friend advised me to choose my battles wisely. After 22 years of experience I know the role of the diocesan Coordinator is of strategic importance and well worth some heated exchanges. This research is a service to my colleagues and to their dioceses but more importantly it is a service to those whom we are all called to serve, in and through their family lives.

The Timing of this Research

This study has taken a long time to complete. The data from diocesan Coordinators was gathered in 2012. The process of interpreting and writing up my findings was interrupted in the autumn of 2013 with the announcement of the Synods on the Family. While a very welcome intervention, the demands of the Synodal processes

have been extensive. In concluding the writing up phase of this study after a considerable time-lapse, a word about its continued relevance is necessary.

Of the 14 survey participants, only 8 now remain in the service of family ministry, 7 within dioceses and one with a national remit. One participant was made redundant shortly after taking part, another left her post in 2012 due to family relocation. A third resigned in 2014 to take up an international role. Three more were employed on grant-funded short-term contracts that have since expired. A seventh participant retired in November 2015. Nonetheless, only two of the vacated diocesan positions remain unfilled. Despite the changes in personnel, diocesan commitment to family ministry remains much the same and so this research remains relevant.

Furthermore the situation regarding formation for family ministry also remains much the same. No further diocesan vision statements have been published. The Bishops' Conference continues to grant-fund diocesan work in family ministry, albeit for shorter-term projects. The strategic interest of the Church in marriage and family life remains high in the wake of the Synods and the publication of AL. Whilst the document retains terminology ("the family apostolate", AL #200) which I have criticised in my Paper 1 (Appendix 4, p. 208), it still echoes previous Synod's definition of family ministry in its recognition of families as "principal agents". So this research remains timely, especially in the light of AL, the implications of which are explored in a postscript.

Terminology

As in my Stage 1 papers, I use here the capitalised word *Church* to refer to formal structures of power, authority and responsibility, particularly the ordained priesthood and the episcopacy. I use the lower case *church* to refer primarily to the baptised people of God, some of whom can be found in the pews on Sundays. I leave the term *family* intentionally undefined, notwithstanding the Church's teaching, with a caveat to the reader not to assume that I have in mind only families of a particular structure, stage or stability. As I have already noted the term *family ministry* has two meanings: ministry by the Church to families and ministry within the church as families. The term *magisterium* is used to describe the teaching office of the Catholic Church particularly the documents produced by ecumenical councils and popes but also documents produced by local bishops. The term *catechesis* refers to the activity of

systematically breaking open the Word of God, so that the faith and religious knowledge of both adults and children is deepened as they grow in relationship with, and understanding of, God. Catechesis is commonly provided by trained individuals – catechists – at moments of initiation into the Catholic Faith and in preparation for the reception of sacraments.

Why A Practical Theological Approach?

Pattison and Woodward (2000, pp.1-19) point to the terms *practical* and *pastoral* theology as often being used interchangeably, although the term pastoral theology has much older roots. Originating in Christ's description of himself as shepherd and his followers as sheep, pastoral theology is a developing framework which has guided the ways in which the Church cares for the personal wellbeing of its members. Pattison and Woodward note that, within the Catholic tradition in particular, the term is used to describe the "theological activity that guides and informs practical pastoral action such as distributing sacraments, marriage preparation, burying the dead etc..." (2000, p.2).

By comparison practical theology emerged as a distinct discipline in the eighteenth-century, German reformed tradition, as that part of the seminary curricula which guided new ministers into ways of ministering. It is concerned with pastoral theology but within a wider context of Church practices that incorporates activities such as liturgy, education and stewardship. The term was preferred by some, according to Pattison and Woodward (p.2) because practical theology is more concerned with "establishing broad theoretical theological and ethical frameworks for understanding issues and situations that extend beyond the immediate pastoral task and church community."

The study of marriage and family life in the Roman Catholic academy usually sits within a pastoral theological setting. So why is my study rooted in a practical theological approach? I came to a Professional Doctorate programme attracted by the *practicality* and *practitioner-centric approaches* implicit in a study of Practical Theology. To colleagues I have explained that my study starts with the practice,

looks at theory and concludes with recommendations for practice. As O'Brien (2007) points out:

> "The strongest common denominator in contemporary expressions of practical theology is the expectation that theological reflection moves in some fashion from practice to theory to practice." (p.49)

According to O'Brien, the documents of the Second Vatican Council emphasise the importance of practical theology as an activity in which all Roman Catholics ought to be engaged, particularly as the People of God, universally called to holiness, journeying together as pilgrim people:

> "If all Christians are to exercise the roles of priest, prophet and king as followers of Christ, then the cultivation of these roles as their habitus[6] is essential, and the fruits of their efforts are integral to the self-understanding of the church. Thus, theological reflection on those efforts is necessary and the "sense of the faithful" is to be taken seriously as a source for theological truth, along with the teaching authority of the church." (p.48)

A third consideration in choosing a practical theological approach is the increasing familiarity of diocesan Coordinators with practical theological method. Cahalan (2008, 2010) describes the contribution of practical theology to discipleship, ministry, teaching and research through a *careful attention to concrete settings and current events* (my emphases) especially in discerning and proposing possibilities for future practice (Cahalan and Niemann, 2008; Cahalan, 2010). The method of theological action research (TAR) developed by the Action Research - Church and Society (ARCS) project based at Heythrop Institute in London was introduced to the diocesan family ministry network in October 2014 as a way of attending more carefully to concrete settings and current events[7], specifically the findings of Listening 2004 (see Appendix 4, p.213). The TAR method grew out of a "desire to find more faithful ways of relating theology and practice" (Cameron et al, 2010, p.1). It explicitly and intentionally distinguishes between the voices of normative, formal, operant and espoused theology engaged, actively or passively, in any given 'conversation'.

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[6] O'Brien explains habitus as the way that the early Church expressed theology: in terms of relationship with God, others and creation, consequent practices and forming/instructing of believers.
[7] In 2014 a member of the ARCS team, Clare Watkins, presented her reflections on Listening 2004 using the TAR method at the network's annual residential meeting.

This method has much to offer a practitioner network that rarely engages formally in theological reflection yet operates in challenging situations, a 'faultline', where family practices and Church disciplines often collide. Being able to recognise the different voices, identifying the ways in which each one speaks, as well as what they say, and to each other, better enables practitioners to hold them together in a creative, rather than destructive, tension. Familiarity with the TAR method, even tentatively, gives diocesan Coordinators the beginnings of a language and a framework for reflecting on their own experience, as well as the outcomes of this study.

Personally, I value the emphasis that practical theology places on *phronesis,* the wisdom gained from experience. I suspect there are aspects of family ministry which, similar to the experience of marriage, parenting and bereavement, only become fully evident as a result of close practical and personal involvement. If so then this learning should be recorded. This study sets out to capture the phronesis, acknowledged or otherwise, of diocesan Coordinators, in the hope of making it accessible to a wider audience, creating an opportunity for it to transform understandings and appreciation of family ministry.

In organising my chapters I have emulated four categories identified by Bonnie Miller-McLemore in the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (2014). Seeking a coherent structure for the *Companion* Miller-McLemore determined that the literature of practical theology encompassed "at least four distinct enterprises with different audiences and objectives" (p.5):

> "it is a *discipline* among scholars and an *activity of faith* among believers… it is a *method* for studying theology in practice and it is a *curricular area* of sub-disciplines in the seminary."

Miller-McLemore uses spatial locations to distinguish and inter-relate these enterprises more clearly: daily life; library and fieldwork; classroom, congregation and community; academic guild and global context (p.5). Her structures have been useful in supporting my goal of developing a practical theology of family ministry. However I have adapted Miller-McLemore's categories in order to organise my material into meaningful chapters. Where she looks at scholarly *discipline,* I look at definitions and understandings of family ministry. In terms of *activities of faith* I consider how family ministry is articulated as an expression of Christian faith.

Miller-McLemore uses this category to review actual activities or practices, but I have focussed on faith perspectives. It is in considering *method* that I review the specific experience of diocesan family ministry, including some of their practices. Finally, in understanding family ministry as a *curricular* area, I review the knowledge, skills and understanding that family ministers need in order to be effective.

Miller-McLemore makes a further point about the sequence in which these 'distinct enterprises' of practical theology emerge, which I think is also helpful for this study. The basic premise of practical theology, she says, is that it starts with the particular, not just as a methodological choice but as a reminder of its purpose (p.7). My chapters are therefore ordered so that data relating to the experience and practices of diocesan Coordinators (method) is presented first (Chapters 3 and 4), followed by chapters on definitions and understandings (discipline) of family ministry (Chapter 5), the faith-sense (activities of faith) that diocesan Coordinators and others make of this work (Chapter 6) and the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for effective family ministry (a curricular area of study) (Chapter 7).

McLoughlin and Simmonds point out that where Catholic pastoral theology "leans towards systematic theology" and where "the practical theology of the Reformed tradition has a strong interdisciplinary linkage with the social sciences" the two "have lessons for each other" (2010, p.38). The experiences of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry are surely ripe for learning lessons.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the background for my research. I refer to Stage 1 papers in which the need for this research into the role of the diocesan Coordinator of family ministry was determined as part of broader attempts to build capacity, ensure sustainability and understand the challenges. I describe my own role as a practitioner-researcher and former diocesan Coordinator of family ministry. I provide a basic outline of the role to illustrate the importance of researching this particular agent of family ministry. My premise is that the practice of diocesan Coordinators is largely invisible and therefore incapable of supporting continuing professional development or raising the profile of family ministry. I offer three examples to demonstrate the existence of past practice, now largely forgotten. I

acknowledge some of the challenges to practising family ministry in a Catholic context before describing the goals and the limits of the research. I conclude by establishing a practical theological context for this research particularly drawing on Miller-McLemore's framework for organising my chapters. In my next chapter I describe the methodology underpinning this research particularly the conceptual framework through which data will be evaluated.

Chapter 2: The Research Design

This chapter describes the methods used in this study of the role of the diocesan Coordinator: the practicalities of designing an achievable enquiry process, the rationale underpinning the various stages of the research, the processes used for organising and analysing the data, the conceptual framework employed to locate the research findings, and the structure through which findings are presented. In Chapter 1 I explored the need for this research; Chapter 2 describes its theoretical underpinning and the practicalities of conducting it.

Methodology

This is an inductive study using mainly qualitative methods. My research does not set out to test a hypothesis, although I explored a number of factors at Stage 1 which might explain the lack of resources for family ministry in the Roman Catholic Church (see Appendix 4). Instead I have set out to present the experience of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry, to set it alongside accounts of United States family ministry experience and to draw from both sets of data some conclusions and theories about the practice of family ministry within a diocesan context.

Because of my working relationship with the diocesan Coordinators and because this is the first time their role has been studied like this, some research methods were not available to me. Ethnographic methods, for example, were excluded because it was unfeasible for me to observe directly the day-to-day life of each diocesan Coordinator. Alternatives such as asking them to complete video or written diaries felt too intrusive and demanding given their many responsibilities.

It was important to gather data addressing a range of basic aspects of the role because this is the first time it has been studied. A measure of success is that Coordinators see in the research an accurate representation of their experience, one which will support them in reflecting more explicitly and confidently on their practice. By representing their experiences within the academy, I hope to raise awareness and appreciation for what they do. For these reasons I was drawn to the methodology of qualitative description.

Sandelowski (2000, 2009) describes this as a method frequently used in qualitative research, although rarely acknowledged in its most "basic or fundamental" form (2000, p. 335). Qualitative description recurs in the methodologies of phenomenological, ethnographical and grounded theory studies. In the basic form that Sandelowski highlights it seeks to provide rich descriptions of practice in the language of practitioners in such a way that most practitioners can agree that the descriptions are accurate "even if they may not feature the same facts in their descriptions" (p.335). The method is useful for obtaining "straight and largely unadorned answers to questions of special relevance" (p.337), with data collection typically directed towards "the who, what and where of events and experiences or their basic nature and shape" (p.338). This method is eminently practicable for this study, being easily accessible, and also essential to laying a foundation for future publications and research. That I have accomplished the goal of accuracy is borne out in the response of a diocesan Coordinator to a draft of this thesis: "So much of it reflects our day to day experience… a valuable piece of research into work that is little understood by those who are not engaged at the coalface." (Hinton, 2016)

Sandelowski also sets qualitative description within the philosophical framework of a naturalistic inquiry, a methodology which respects the meaning or sense that research subjects make of their experiences and interactions. Athens (2010, p.10) reports Matza's (1969, p.5) contention that "a naturalistic investigation 'strives to remain true to the nature of the phenomena under study or scrutiny.'" This too seems important in researching a cohort who often come to their role without previous experience or specific formation. The sense *they* make of what they do has significant implications for the Church's own understanding of family ministry, particularly at a time when it is looking for ways to better serve marriage and family life.

Data Collection Methods

The methods used to collect data were selected for simplicity and convenience. Questions relating to basic working conditions, qualifications etc. of diocesan Coordinators lent themselves to the fixed method of a survey. To simplify responses I offered a multiple choice structure for some questions. Other questions, such as

those relating to how Coordinators negotiate tensions between Catholic teaching and family experiences required the flexibility of a semi-structured interview. A third set of data was collected by asking diocesan Coordinators for copies of their job descriptions and diocesan vision statements for family ministry. This mixed-method approach allowed for the involvement of all diocesan Coordinators, through the survey, whilst selecting from the participants a smaller representative sample for interview. It also created an opportunity for triangulation, noted by Measor (1985, p.73) as "one of the most commonly cited tactics" for validating qualitative data. Aligning data from three primary sources increases the likelihood of reliability when identifying emergent issues. Each method was administered at a distance. The survey was published in an online format using surveymonkey.com. Documents were requested via email. The interviews were conducted by telephone. So the research process was manageable both for practitioners and researcher.

Survey Design and Administration

The questionnaire and interview structure was originally devised together as a series of 39 questions addressing four aspects of the work and background of the diocesan Coordinator:

- Basic information about each individual, their context, including the details of their post and how it fitted within diocesan structures, channels of communication, resources available and support systems in place. Questions in this section also enquired into previous experience of Coordinators, skills, qualifications and so forth.
- Coordinators' motivations, from a personal and spiritual perspective, how they cope with the challenges of the role, the rewards they experience and what they have learned about family ministry from their work.
- Coordinators' understanding of the theological framework for family ministry.
- The 'nitty-gritty' of what diocesan Coordinators actually do, inviting them to prioritise the importance and time given to each task listed in 1994 by the Bishops' Conference, and inviting them to write 'a day in the life' snapshot of a typical working day.

Questions were refined in conversation with supervisors, the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life and an experienced social science researcher. Those with fixed or multiple choice responses were formatted as an online questionnaire administered through surveymonkey. This comprised 29 questions, the first requesting demographic information and the last providing an opportunity for comment. The rest were divided into five sections addressing a) the experience and qualifications of Coordinators, b) their working practices, c) their places of work, d) financial resources and e) day to day activities. Twenty-three questions included multiple choice options to simplify responses. Those who had job descriptions were asked to provide copies.

An invitation to take part in the survey was sent by email in February 2012 to 22 individuals who were in a diocesan Coordinator role, either by virtue of their employed job title or their unpaid appointment by their bishop. At the time of the invitation four of these individuals were ordained priests, two were ordained deacons and the rest (14) were lay women or men. In one diocese the post was held jointly by a married couple.

The emailed invitation comprised a brief explanation of the study taken from the participant information sheet and included, as attachments, copies of the consent form and the questionnaire. Respondents mostly confirmed by email that they were happy to take part or they sent by post the completed consent form. In both cases a link to the online survey was then supplied and written copies of consents sought where they were lacking. Administrative requirements were recorded on a spread sheet to ensure all processes were met.

The initial invitation to diocesan Coordinators to complete the survey was followed up in March 2012 with a reminder to those who had not responded or had responded but not completed the survey. The survey was monitored to check that respondents had completed all sections and efforts were made to follow up on the copies of job descriptions promised. In total 14 Coordinators took part in the survey which is a response rate of 64%. A summary of the survey findings is included as Appendix 1.

The 22 Catholic dioceses are organised into five provinces across England and Wales. One respondent came from the Cardiff province, three from the Westminster province, four from the Southwark province, one from the Birmingham province and

five from the Liverpool province. This equates with the geographical incidence of these roles, there being far more diocesan Coordinators located in the north and south-east than in the midlands and west.

Eight Coordinators also supplied copies of their job descriptions. One withheld a copy for reasons of confidentiality. Two withheld copies because they considered they were out of date. Brief summaries of main tasks were provided in lieu. Two volunteer Coordinators, not in possession of a role description, also offered summaries of their main tasks, which I absorbed into a further analysis of the data, with a note that the provenance of this material was not as robust as formal job descriptions.

Interview Design and Administration

The interview design was finalised after survey data had been collected and analysed. This stage was originally conceived as a means of investigating common practices and determining how diocesan Coordinators cope with the tensions inherent in family ministry. However few practices emerged in the survey data, largely because responses in the area of day-to-day activities were diverse and largely reactive rather than pro-active. It thus became more useful to focus instead on the experience of being a diocesan Coordinator, including their motives, challenges and sustaining factors.

Literature on conducting interviews was helpful. Measor's (1985) paper[8] was an accessible starting point. Of particular value was her reflection on the need to establish a 'research relationship' as opposed to a social or personal relationship. I addressed this by scripting the interview (see Appendix 3) to include a reaffirmation of the purpose and value of the study, as well as the right of participants to withdraw at any time. This placed the proceedings on a formal footing and clarified our relationship as researcher and research-subject. Also useful was her comment that "people do need reassurance when they are being interviewed" (p.62), also noted by Gill et al (2007): 'Other important skills include ….making encouraging noises (e.g. 'Mmmm') during the interview.' So I felt free to interject regularly with 'uh-huh' and

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[8] Measor's paper, though published in 1985, remains well-respected and her work is still frequently referenced, eg by Gabb (2010, p.24).

to give positive affirmation when appropriate. These acknowledgement cues are especially important in telephone interviews, where silence can give the impression of not listening or of a connection being lost.

Measor points out that interviews are about listening, but also 'listening beyond', that is, "listening beyond what is being said on the surface" (1992, p.214). As a technique this is especially important when picking up a contradiction, if commenting might break the empathetic stance. When faced with this dilemma in one interview I decided not to intervene, to avoid communicating criticism. On another occasion, however, I felt able to pursue a contradiction at some length, because the interviewee was more confident and theologically articulate.

The type and ordering of questions was also taken into consideration in the interview design. Doody and Noonan (2013, p.13) suggest starting "with questions the participant can answer easily and then move onto more difficult or sensitive topics." Measor (1985) asserts that over-structured designs are unnecessary, although themes are important (p.67). I prepared by having a series of follow-up questions ready for each of my seven opening questions. My first subject asked to see questions in advance, so I gave each interviewee the seven core questions beforehand whilst keeping the follow-up questions in reserve. Having follow-up questions available greatly increased my comfort as an interviewer and enabled the conversation to flow while I mentally processed responses and noted further questions.

Four diocesan Coordinators were selected for interview to represent the 14 who had completed the online survey, taking into account the characteristics of the whole group: gender, age, marital and religious status, employment conditions and geographical location. Two were female and two male. Three were married and one was divorced. Three were lay people employed by the Church and one was an ordained permanent deacon working in a voluntary capacity. Of those employed, one worked full-time, and two worked part-time. The employment contract of one of the interviewees was short-term grant-funded for three years, whilst the others were on permanent contracts. Two worked within the northern region, one within the south-east region and one within the south-west region. One was aged 31-40, two were aged 51-60 and one was aged 61-70. Between them the four had completed a foundation degree, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, all in theological or

pastoral leadership studies plus a diaconate formation programme. Two had been in post for 3 years and two in post for 5-7 years. I refer to them as subjects A, B, C and D, according to the order in which I interviewed them.

The four were interviewed by telephone in December 2012 for between 75 and 115 minutes each. Three of the four were at their own homes for the interviews. Each interview was recorded on a computer using a pick-up microphone and the computer's inbuilt recording software and was later transcribed by myself. The interview with A was slightly different from the others because he asked to complete the final survey question about a typical day before addressing the interview questions. This considerably disrupted the flow and I neglected to ask all the questions prepared.

Data Analysis and Determination of Key Themes

Survey data was analysed using tools provided by the surveymonkey online package. This generated graphs and enabled responses to be sifted using filters and crosstabs. For qualitative responses the software provides a tagging system for categorising responses as well as an automated text analysis option. Given the quantity and type of data generated by the online survey I found these analytical tools adequate.

Job descriptions were analysed manually, entering each set of responsibilities into a single chart (see Appendix 2) for ease of comparison and alignment, revealing common tasks and those unique to specific posts. Each job description was allocated a reference number and a tick-box collation was carried out in Excel. This provided a clearer numerical indication of predominant tasks recurring across the majority of the job descriptions. I incorporated the volunteer role descriptions in this analysis but distinguished these using bold and italic fonts, a useful visual clue for differentiating patterns in the data.

I transcribed each interview producing around 37,000 words of text. The analysis of interview data was more problematic than the survey data because of its quantity. Having organised interviews around seven core questions I began by dividing the data between these seven areas, reviewing each in turn. In doing so I kept a track of data which diverged from the topic or overlapped into responses to different

questions. I noted my own initial thoughts and then I left the data alone for awhile. I came back to it three weeks later and reviewed it looking for overarching themes. Finally, after reviewing the North American texts used in this study I returned a third time to pick up on themes that had emerged from that reading. I concluded by listening once more to the taped interviews in their entirety to make sure I had not missed anything further of note.

The analysis of qualitative data is, as Robson points out (2002, p.256), often considered more art than science. Swinton and Mowat describe it simply as bringing "order, structure and meaning" (2006, p.57) to the data and yet, without a "clear and accepted single set of conventions for analysis corresponding to those observed with quantitative data" (Robson, p.456) there are sizeable challenges in deciding how best to systematise and reliably interpret the data. Tesch (1990, p.58) condenses the approaches used by qualitative researchers into four categories:

a) The characteristics of language
b) The discovery of regularities
c) The comprehension of the meaning of text or action; and
d) Reflection.

In analysing my data, both from the Coordinators and from the literature, I have looked primarily for recurring themes, the 'discovery of regularities'. But I have also looked for new or different approaches, in a search for deeper meaning and to aid reflection. It is important to be able to identify points of consensus, but differing perspectives can also be generative of new theories. An example of this happened when one of the Coordinators (C) said she felt that people were not looking so much to be welcomed as to be noticed and appreciated for their talents. That insight has remained with me.

Ethical Considerations

The main ethical challenges of this study were the need to protect the identity of participants and the confidentiality owed to the bishop by his diocesan staff. All participants in the study are adult and competent to give consent. However, I anticipated that a guarantee to make every effort to protect the identity of

participants would be necessary. I undertook to separate the data from the identifying information at an early stage. I also undertook to guarantee that the information provided would only be used in this study. I plan to revisit those permissions in future in order to publish some of the findings of this research more widely.

The Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church is the system which regulates the activities of the Church towards fulfilling its mission. Canon 471 determines that employees of the diocese are bound to "observe secrecy within the limits and according to the manner determined by the law or by the Bishop". An additional level of administration was therefore undertaken to ensure that diocesan bishops also had an opportunity to withhold consent for the participation in the study of their diocesan Coordinator. The principal bishop with responsibility for marriage and family life policy at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales at the time, John Hine, wrote to each diocesan bishop informing them of the study, asking that they contact him if they wished to withdraw from the study any information gathered pertaining to their diocese. Four bishops responded, none of them negatively.

Conceptual Framework

> "The idea of theory, or the ability to interpret and understand the findings of research within a conceptual framework which makes 'sense' of the data, is the mark of a discipline whose aim is the systematic study of particular phenomena." (Leshem and Trafford, 2007, p.97)

The conceptual framework in any study provides, as Trafford and Leshem point out, (2008, p.84) a "theoretical overview... and order". They quote Weaver-Hart's (1988) definition as "a structure for organising and supporting ideas; a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions". For this study I constructed a tripartite conceptual framework arising from my work in Papers 1 and 2, to provide a means of framing the research and distilling my reflections on the data. This is a broad and complex area of ministry that has not been studied before and I have struggled at times to achieve coherence and clarity amidst the complexity and richness of this topic. I have relied on my conceptual framework to provide coherence, boundaries and authority to my conclusions.

Theologically three central paradigms guide my analysis and conclusions: the Church's understanding of family ministry, the relationship of the diocese to the parish and the ecclesial identity of family in Roman Catholic teaching. Within each themed chapter summarising the data, this framework is explicitly applied, and particular questions emerging from the framework are used to interrogate the data.

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry

The definition of family ministry articulated by the 1980 Synod of Bishops, in their Letter to Christian Families, is my benchmark for reflecting on other definitions, especially those articulated by diocesan Coordinators. As I noted in Chapter 1, this is the earliest authoritative statement I have located which explicitly defines and describes the meaning of family ministry in the Catholic Church:

> "By this we mean efforts made by the whole people of God through local communities, especially through the help of pastors and lay people devoted to pastoral work with families. They work with individuals, couples and families to help them live out their conjugal vocation as fully as possible." (Synod of Bishops, 1980 #17)

The bishops locate family ministry firmly within the ecclesiology of Lumen Gentium (1965). LG dedicates chapter 4 to describing the role of the laity but chapters 1 and 2 say more about what it means to be the People of God:

> "This people possesses the dignity and freedom of the daughters and sons of God, in whose hearts the holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. … Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all; as the light of the world and the salt of the earth, it is sent forth into the whole world." (LG #9)

In these early chapters LG has not yet differentiated between the "common priesthood of the faithful" and the "hierarchical priesthood" (LG #10), when it stresses the dignity and freedom of being a child of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit, called to live according to Christ's commandment to love, in a communion of love, life and truth in order to be light to the world and salt of the earth. This reinforces a sense that family ministry is the ambit of all the baptised, the responsibility of the whole People of God.

In terms of location, family ministry is embodied, and practised, by and within the *local* community, whether the school or parish or family, with the help of pastors and lay people "devoted" to pastoral work with families. The bishops may be equating the role of the pastor with that of the lay person, both of whom are specialists in enabling and equipping the People of God for family ministry.

The bishops note the focus of their efforts: helping individuals, couples and families to live out "the conjugal vocation". This implies a vocation to marriage, but the list of examples given suggests a much broader understanding of the conjugal vocation, even to the point of being unspecific about "other circumstances which strain family stability". It is interesting that *family* rather than *marital* or *conjugal* stability is mentioned, although this might be symptomatic of a tendency to uncritically conflate the terms 'marriage' and 'family', increasing the challenges of language that I note in Chapter 1. But at least in this definition the purpose of family ministry is the very broad purpose of supporting families to be family.

While this definition firmly recognises family ministry as a responsibility of the whole People of God, I have wondered if diocesan Coordinators are implicated in the mention of "pastors and lay people". However, given the enormity of the task, from a diocesan perspective, of working directly with individuals, couples and families, I have concluded that that is not the case. The role of the diocesan Coordinator is not provided for in this definition. However, the existence of dedicated personnel at local level, whether priests or laity, certainly implies a need for them to be supported, enabled and resourced, with a strategic eye on how, where and when that support is best directed.

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish
Accepting that the Church's understanding of family ministry roots it at local level, assuming even an implicit role for the diocesan Coordinator in providing overarching support demands a closer look at how the diocesan Coordinator relates to parishes. Canon 469 of the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church describes the role of diocesan staff (or curia) as "those institutes and persons who assist the Bishop in governing the entire diocese, especially in directing pastoral action, in providing for the administration of the diocese and in exercising judicial power."

The diocesan Coordinator is certainly concerned with directing pastoral action, although their work may also intersect with the judiciary, on matters relating to the diocesan marriage tribunal and with administration on matters of accountability. But it is the kind of pastoral action that diocesan Coordinators engage in that is under scrutiny in this part of my conceptual framework, particularly whether it is reflective of the gospel parable of the kingdom of heaven:

> "He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Matt 13:33)

In their commentary, Brown et al (1990, p.656) note that Jesus used this parable to point to the "surprising effect that a small movement can have on the whole of society" and also that it illustrates "God's plan working almost invisibly to achieve its purposes." What are the ways that Coordinators add yeast (energy, resources, training etc.) to the flour (the people of God) skilfully and appropriately so that the dough (the kingdom) will rise, multiply in size and feed the hungry, and do they respect the principle of subsidiarity?

The principle of subsidiarity is a long established principle of Catholic social teaching which affirms that decisions and responsibility for action should rest at the most local level practicable. The encyclical Quadragesimo Anno (1931) states:

> "just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do." (#79)

The application of subsidiarity to family ministry affirms that parishes and schools ought not to attempt what is best done by families and diocesan employees ought not to attempt what is best done at parish level. The measure of subsidiarity in practice is participation (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, #189). So the benchmark for evaluating the relationship between diocesan Coordinators and parishes is the degree to which they work to enable parishes to foster families' participation in family ministry. My sense is that they are more likely to work alongside parishes in recruiting individuals to train for particular ministries, important ministries but not necessarily those which have been identified as needed by the parish following a period of parish discernment. In other words, do diocesan

Coordinators see their role as working to a list of priorities agreed by the diocese or as assisting parishes to determine local priorities and how they wish to respond to these?

So in this part of my conceptual framework I will be looking for processes that respect the integrity of local communities, and foster the participation of families, recognising that a diocesan Coordinator cannot personally work directly with "individuals, couples, and families" for any extended period of time. There are tasks of leadership which potentially enable or disable the People of God in exercising their ministry with families. Amongst these is an attitude that rationalises the task of leadership as a time-limited service in which the one served grows in stature, and the one serving diminishes: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

A further driver for this kind of servant leadership is found in FC (#69), which highlights "one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another, those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care", namely:

> "a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace."

The importance of peer-ministry or like-to-like ministry emerges in this paragraph: the wisdom, advice and encouragement that families can offer each other, arising from their own family experiences. But this organic and informal model depends on an environment hospitable to such exchanges, one which a diocesan Coordinator can do much to facilitate.

This part of my conceptual framework is complex because it focuses on relationship, holding the diocesan Coordinator accountable to the parish, the needs of the parish and of parish families, in facilitating parish family ministry, all in respect of subsidiarity and with an eye on increasing participation.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching

The first two elements of my conceptual framework draw on an authoritative definition of family ministry and the specific relationship of the diocesan Coordinator to the local church. These speak to the theological foundations of family ministry and church organisation, crudely the 'what', 'where' and 'how'. My third

element is rooted in the 'why' of family ministry, which is broadly referred to in the definition as helping "individuals, couples and families to …live out their conjugal vocation as fully as possible" (see p.8). But here I want instead to use a richer theological imperative for exploring the 'why' of family ministry: the Church's naming of the Christian family as domestic church.

This ecclesial identity is a particularly important lens through which to view the goals of family ministry, even to critique the Church's own understanding of its family ministry. In Chapter 1 I noted that the Second Vatican Council reinvigorated the ancient description of family as a church-in-miniature (LG #11), a perspective expanded by Paul VI in 1975 to acknowledge the various aspects of the entire church found in the family. However, this metaphor has not always been helpful to families who struggle with models and practices of Church. Nor has its appropriation by families and Church as a valuable resource been helped by the "doctrinal vacuum" (Fahey, 1994, p.91) or "lacuna" (Gaillardetz, 2013, p.111) in theological reflection on domestic church. However it is still reasonable to expect that diocesan Coordinators will use the ecclesial identity of the family in their work and to inform their work, particularly from the standpoint of these three perspectives:

a) Early Church model: the early Christians gathered in private homes, as described in Acts 2: 42-47, to share fellowship, prayer, bread-breaking, teaching and service together. Inspired by this model, diocesan Coordinators might promote home-centred rituals, relationship building between families, valuing of family meal-times, family prayer and family service to others as ecclesial activities of the home.

b) FC model: Sections 49-64 examine "the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family as a 'Church in miniature' in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church". The community life of the family is rooted in the family's life of love, "a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands", which in turn informs the ways that families participate in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ. Inspired by this model, one might expect diocesan Coordinators to focus effort into relationship education, family faith development, family catechesis, supporting parents as first teachers of

their children, family spirituality, family-friendly liturgies, family social action and family-friendly parishes.

c) Quinn model: A confirmation programme for parents written by Michael and Terri Quinn of the Family Caring Trust[9], developed in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Armagh, explores the four marks of the church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, to connect parents with their ecclesial identity. In this model 'one-ness' means to be close, making efforts to spend time together and overcome differences; holiness means to be like God, that is, more loving; catholic means being 'for all' families, including the very broken ones; apostolic means a loving outreach to others. This model of domestic church might inspire Coordinators to further support family relationships and family spirituality but also to articulate more clearly a family-friendly understanding of the distinctive dignity and vocation of the domestic church.

Here I want to return to Mette's (1995) critique that the theology of domestic church has been 'requisitioned' "for the institution in a lofty way" concealing "nothing less than the expectation that the 'Catholic family' is a reliable place for the reproduction of the church [functioning] as an advance bulwark of the 'fortress of God' against tendencies towards liberalism and pluralism" (p.81). This is an important corrective to bear in mind for this part of my conceptual framework. An important test of authenticity when examining whether Coordinators draw on the ecclesial identity of the family is whether they or their dioceses appear to be valuing families as bulwarks of 'the fortress of God' or as 'genuine fields of experience for religion and faith' (p.82). Do the resources they espouse or the activities they undertake assume, even obliquely, that families are at the service of the Church, rather than the Church at the service of families? Have they a primarily catechising purpose in order to help families better appropriate the teaching of the Church, particularly regarding the tensions identified in Chapter 1 (see pp. 14-16)? Or are they able to affirm the messiness of domestic life as deeply spiritual, radically shifting respect for the holiness of homes through loving, caring, feeding, educating, sheltering, nurturing,

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[9] Family Caring Trust produce parenting programmes which are widely used in diocesan programmes of family ministry.

liberating and so forth. Are the words used to describe families able to encompass the richly diverse reality?

To summarise, the conceptual framework underpinning this study is an interrelated trinity of principles that essentially recognises that the agents (who) of family ministry in the Catholic church are the People of God, assisted by clergy and lay specialists, that the locus (where and how) of family ministry is the local community, and that the purpose (why) of family ministry is to support people in their family lives and because of the family's ecclesial identity, which also determines the nature (what) of family ministry. The Church's understanding of family ministry has implications for the relationship between the diocese and the parish where diocesan resources are critical for effective family ministry. The ecclesial identity of the family is the overarching theological lens for holding all of this together, appreciating the importance of family ministry and the way it is practised.

In its basic form, qualitative description is a method that carries a risk of being so purely descriptive that no interpretation of data is required (Sandelowski, 2009) but, in my search for understanding, interpretation of data is vital. My conceptual framework provides the means through which the complex data is sifted and emerging issues revealed and explored. Some of this data originates from the Coordinators and some from key texts reflecting United States experiences of family ministry.

The Use of Key Texts

The use of United States experiences of family ministry in this study needs some explanation. I draw on these texts in each chapter after presenting the data collected from practitioners, using them to inform my interpretation of this data. There are both methodological and practical reasons for this process. Firstly, because this is a first record of the practice of diocesan Coordinators, a naturalistic study in that sense, their accounts are at the forefront of this study, their voices are heard first. On the whole, this cohort has had little specific training for family ministry, and little access to the texts I draw on here. It seemed unfair to start with a review of texts that would put their work into second place. Then again the challenge of locating the texts used in this study has made it practically difficult to use them as a starting

point. The benefit of bringing other voices in after the primary data is to use it to enrich or corroborate the primary data, hopefully in a supportive way.

I draw on the literature to try to demonstrate the ways that family ministry in the United States has developed. These developments would benefit from further research and reflection than I have space to do here. I wanted not only to present the experience of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry for the first time, but to do so alongside a body of experience that might further inform and inspire reflection on family ministry. The formation of future family ministers is a critical means of building capacity and sustainability within dioceses. Establishing a broader context for this formation, through the identification of a solid body of texts, is an important outcome of my research.

The reference list was eventually compiled through a trawl of online academic indexes available to me through Anglia Ruskin University Library and through temporary guest access to library facilities at Dominican University, near Chicago and the University of St Louis, both of which I visited during this research. Google Scholar provided further references and by methodically following all these up, via inter-library loans, personal contacts and second-hand booksellers, I have collected a series of key writings on family ministry from the United States.

As I have said, many of the articles sourced are not indexed in the major academic indexes, highlighting that the literature is developmental in nature, written by practitioners rather than researchers. One can trace through the practitioner literature the development of family ministry in Christian practice and more specifically the Roman Catholic tradition. Throughout most of my chapters I have considered separately the texts emanating from the Reformed and Congregational tradition, and those emanating from the Roman Catholic experience. The authors of the Reformed and Congregational texts seem rarely to be in dialogue with one another; each author mostly makes their own case for family ministry. The Roman Catholic writers, on the other hand, are united by following a single model, drawing on the seed texts that emanate from the US Bishops' Conference. So I decided to treat these texts as two distinctive sets of experience.

With a few exceptions all the material dates from the late 1970's. The quantity of published works gradually declines from the 1990's onwards as the United States

Catholic Church completed a decade of dedicated support for family life. Given that the practice of family ministry is affected by social and cultural factors, not all the practices described in this literature are directly relevant to the contemporary UK context. Nevertheless, the literature is a useful comparison for determining whether themes emerging from my data resonate with family ministry experience in a different time and place.

Presentation of the Data

Sandelowski suggests a number of ways in which qualitative description studies can be presented, that is, categorically, chronologically, and thematically, moving from most-prevalent to least-prevalent. However she says there is "no mandate to produce anything other than a descriptive summary of an event, organised in a way that best contains the data collected and that will be most relevant to the audience for whom it was written" (2000, p.339) .

The structure of chapters 3-7 in which my research data is presented all follow much the same format, to clarify and hold together the complexity of the data, for the benefit of the reader. The data from diocesan Coordinators is presented first, followed by insights from the North American texts on family ministry. The conceptual framework is then used to draw key reflections out of the data.

Reflections on the Research Design and Methods

The practicality of the study design worked well. The online survey was relatively simple to administer. One or two survey participants mentioned the time it took to complete though in fact the average time taken was 2 hours and only three people took longer than this. Participants were free to complete the survey as and when they were able, and most completed it by the beginning of May 2012. Interviews took place in December 2012 over a period of ten days, the shortest lasting 1 hour 20 minutes and the longest 2 hours.

Two deficiencies were noted in the survey design. The first was the absence of a question relating to the guiding vision or authority for their work. This problem was addressed by inviting participants to provide a diocesan statement or policy document. The second deficiency related to questions of finance. These questions occurred three times in the online survey, enquiring into salary, working budget and

total annual budget. This approach was intentional, to allow for cross-checking of financial data. However the questions evidently confused some participants and the terms 'working budget' and 'total annual budget' ought to have been clarified.

The research generated a good amount of data, comprising eight job descriptions, three vision statements, 14 responses to a 29 question survey and 37,000 words of transcribed interviews. The survey enabled me to collect basic data from a significant cohort of diocesan Coordinators. The documents provided a source of verification whilst relieving Coordinators of some direct data provision. The interviews enabled emerging themes to be probed and fleshed out with the personal insights of the subjects. The accounts of United States experience provided additional context for recurring and contrasting themes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the way this qualitative descriptive study has been conducted using a mixed-method approach of survey and interview, verified through the documentation of job descriptions and vision statements. The conceptual framework underpinning the study comprises the Church's understanding of family ministry, the relationship of the diocesan Coordinator to the parish and the ecclesial identity of the family. Taken together these concepts recognise that the agents (who) of family ministry in the Catholic church are the People of God, assisted by clergy and lay specialists, that the locus (where, how) of family ministry is the local community, and that the family's ecclesial identity determines the nature (what, why) of family ministry. The data purposefully collected is a robust representation of the network of diocesan Coordinators at the time the study was completed and is set alongside accounts of family ministry experiences from the United States. The chapters which present the data move from the particular experience of Coordinators, to the ways that family is understood, and within a broader Christian context, before the curricular needs of family ministers is explored.

Chapter 3: The Practice of Family Ministry by Diocesan Coordinators

Having set out the background to this study and the research methodology, the next five chapters present the findings of the research, starting here with the practice of diocesan family ministry Coordinators in their own words. The perspective of their employers, the dioceses, is presented in the next chapter. Taken together these two chapters provide the broad foundation from which to reflect on subsequent questions of how family ministry is conceived, how it is understood as a Christian practice and what formation is needed.

The data presented in this chapter was collected through the online survey and through telephone interviews. Survey participants reviewed their role as recognised by the Bishops' Conference, rating the different tasks according to importance and time. They also described a typical day. Questions of how they manage the challenges of working with families in the context of Catholic teaching and the difficulties and satisfaction of the role were explored in interview. The United States texts on family ministry are then interrogated to shed light on these same issues. Although the two sets of data do not always correlate exactly, the American data offers sufficient insight to confirm and enrich the experience of diocesan Coordinators in England and Wales.

The lens of the conceptual framework is then used to explore how the practice of Coordinators reflects Church understanding of family ministry, their relationship with parishes and the degree to which their practice is evidently informed by the ecclesial identity of the family. Emerging from this reflection is a greater awareness of the significance of practices of deepening community life, practices of respect and authenticity, and practices of empowerment.

The Diocesan Coordinator of Family Ministry

> "I coordinate the effort that supports both marriage and families in every aspect…. I work with a number of groups within the diocese…" (B)

> "I provide information and resources for parishes and clergy but also the extended Catholic community." (C)

"I'm there to support families, either directly myself or to direct them to organisations who can help them… to organise and lead training courses or supportive sessions … to raise awareness and to give practical advice …" (D)

These three interview responses highlight the Coordinators' sense of their role as deeply involved in the whole of church and family life. This is no small task. They feel responsibility towards 'every aspect', 'the extended Catholic community', supporting families 'directly myself', and coordinating, working with, providing, organising, leading, raising awareness, giving practical advice. Their responses point to an extensive web of relationships and a considerable amount of activity, virtually unlimited in scope. This is how Coordinators see themselves, so who are these individuals?

The survey shows that most are married people, aged over 50 years, with a teaching background. Typically employed part-time, working three days a week for around six years, they support families in the diocese, from home, and are accountable to a senior cleric. Diocesan colleagues provide most of their support, fulfilling administrative, financial, supervisory and communications functions, showing an interest in what they do, and being enthusiastic and encouraging. Most Coordinators have access to a diocesan family Commission and some volunteers, but experience these assets mostly as offering advice and prayers for their work, rather than hands-on involvement.

Coordinators mostly lack specific training for the role and have little access to mentoring or training which could remedy this. They identified few advocates for family ministry within the diocese and were mostly unaware of the extent of the financial resources at their disposal, although basic office equipment, phone and internet access is provided. Despite travel being a big part of the job, Coordinators are not generally equipped with a mobile phone or mobile broadband access. Despite all these limiting factors Coordinators mostly see all their responsibilities (see Table 1, p.46) as important even when the time available is insufficient to address each of them (see Table 2, p.47). This is an important finding to be aware of, given the overwhelming potential of family ministry. On one hand, if the Coordinators with all their experience cannot identify the elements of their role that are fundamentally important, or the areas where their efforts will be most fruitful, who else might be

Table 1: Tasks of the diocesan coordinator as rated by coordinators	Very / mostly important	Important / somewhat important
Caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life.	10	4
Offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family.	10	4
Enabling parishes to build 'community'.	9	5
Giving practical help to parishes when requested.	8	6
Being sensitive to the needs of families which are hurting.	8	6
Collaborating with all diocesan agencies and commissions.	8	6
Providing information on family matters for all parishioners and clergy.	7	7
Providing resources on family matters for all parishioners and clergy.	7	7
Helping couples preparing for marriage.	7	7
Holding days of celebration.	7	7
Contact and collaboration with marriage and family life workers in other dioceses.	7	7
Coordinating lay involvement.	6	8
Listening to the needs of the diocese.	6	8
Acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need.	6	7
Revealing the Church's understanding and teaching on marriage.	5	9
Participating in national initiatives.	5	9
Offering a variety of accessible programmes.	4	10
Holding 'contact' or volunteer network support days.	4	9
Organizing training opportunities.	4	8
Enabling dialogue with other organisations in the area of marriage and family life.	3	11
Enabling dialogue with other faith communities in the area of marriage and family life.	3	10
Helping couples at each stage of their life together.	2	12
Participating in inter-diocesan initiatives.	2	12
Strengthening ecumenical links enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes.	2	9

NB: The tasks which were formally approved by the Bishops' Conference in 1994 are highlighted in bold type in this table. The other tasks were identified as important in 1996 by the bishops' Committee for Marriage & Family Life.

Table 2: Time dedicated to tasks of the diocesan coordinator as indicated by coordinators	All / maximum amount of time	Medium /minimum amount of time
Caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life.	9	5
Offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family.	2	12
Enabling parishes to build 'community'.	5	9
Giving practical help to parishes when requested.	5	9
Being sensitive to the needs of families which are hurting.	5	9
Collaborating with all diocesan agencies and commissions.	2	12
Providing information on family matters for all parishioners and clergy.	3	11
Providing resources on family matters for all parishioners and clergy.	6	6
Helping couples preparing for marriage.	3	11
Holding days of celebration.	6	6
Contact and collaboration with marriage and family life workers in other dioceses.	3	11
Coordinating lay involvement.	2	12
Listening to the needs of the diocese.	2	12
Acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need.	4	9
Revealing the Church's understanding and teaching on marriage.	4	9
Participating in national initiatives.	3	10
Offering a variety of accessible programmes.	5	9
Holding 'contact' or volunteer network support days.	1	11
Organizing training opportunities.	3	10
Enabling dialogue with other organisations in the area of marriage and family life.	1	12
Enabling dialogue with other faith communities in the area of marriage and family life.	0	6
Helping couples at each stage of their life together.	1	11
Participating in inter-diocesan initiatives.	0	13
Strengthening ecumenical links enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes.	0	10

The comparison of Table 2 with Table 1 shows that even aspects of the role judged to be very important can only be addressed with a medium or minimum amount of Coordinators' time.

entrusted to do so? On the other hand, if every single aspect of their role is truly very important, this simply reaffirms the grave under-resourcing of family ministry, given that most Coordinators work part-time. At the very least, being in a situation of knowing something to be very important yet unable to give it much time, is one that is frustrating, stressful and potentially disabling.

Given the variety of responsibilities and working relationships, and the tension between what is asked of them and what they are actually able to achieve, Coordinators' accounts of their typical days are an important means of understanding how their role plays out in practice.

A Typical Day

Analysis of typical day descriptions revealed six main activities: responding to queries, developing resources, being accountable, liaising with colleagues, communicating and publicising, and out of hours working.

- **Responding to queries**

Every day a wide variety of queries arrive directly from families, clergy, school and parish staff, via email and telephone. This is an area of work common to all Coordinators:

> "Someone requiring a Marriage Preparation Course... counselling or a general matter… a lady phoned me to ask about prayerful resources for mothers who have lost babies or what kind of liturgy services could they have? … a parent who is having problems with one of their children..."

> "…a distraught mother whose teenage daughter is not coming home at night, or whose son has a mental health problem."

This reactive element of the role demands compassion and competence, wisdom and ingenuity, skilled listening, patience, knowledge of referral resources and an appreciation of the likely impact on the rest of the family concerned. These examples suggest that queries quite regularly come from individuals in real difficulty on a family issue. Here Coordinators are involved in the work of triage, daily assessing difficult, potentially life-threatening, situations on behalf of the church community, and proposing potential solutions, yet without necessarily being equipped to do so. But as one pointed out, being "a social care service for families in difficulty" is not their primary role:

> "This is a frustrating part of my work because, beyond a listening ear and as a signpost to Catholic Care, Marriage Care or other appropriate helplines, I have no resources for addressing needs like this… many people, even within the Church, see [this office] as a social care service for families in difficulty, or as a provider of crèche and children's entertainment at events."

Furthermore, the time taken to respond to queries can be unpredictable:

> "a phone call may require five minutes or an hour."

> "Sometimes this takes up more time than I want it to as I underestimate the amount of time a reply is going to take."

- **Development work**

Nearly as common as responding to queries is the much more predictable and strategic work of developing resources, planning, preparing and delivering events, and also creating materials including policy documents and information packs.

> "If we are preparing a special event such as a training course or a Celebration of Marriage Life I may work four or five hours… Photocopying and a mailshot to parish priests etc. will require 4 -5 hours if working alone, less if another commission member is available to help. A Rainbows[10] training in a school will be up to 8 hours including travel."

> "One meeting in a day could be my work for the day. I could start a day by attending a meeting which takes all morning, e.g. speaking to Head teachers on Grandparents days. All meetings take time to prepare and in this case putting a pack together for all the Heads."

> "09.00 prepare for morning meeting with Diocesan Schools service to develop Rainbows in the Diocese. Means writing short report on initial contact with 5 possible new 'Rainbow sites' in schools and the recent training of facilitators in two York schools. 10.00 Travel 26 miles to meeting 11.00 - 1.00 meeting with Rainbows Support Group then travel 26 miles back. Prepare for twilight session at school …travel 33 miles to school 4.00-5.30 school 'Home is a Holy Place' session for 40 parents, mixed background/levels of faith experience. Though very interested in what their children are doing, need high level of affirmation."

The strategic elements of a diocesan Coordinator's role, offering training, attending meetings, organising celebrations, networking, following up volunteers, working with others and directly with families is time-consuming. The processes are laborious, with the additional lone-working challenges of

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[10] Rainbows UK offer peer-support programmes for bereaved children mainly through schools. See www.rainbowsgb.org. for more information

having to do everything alone, whether photocopying, publicising, preparing, delivering and following up. This is further complicated by the need to adapt materials for different audiences with widely different interests and information needs: headteachers, parish priests, parents, grandparents, couples, families and volunteers.

- **Accountability activities**

Mentioned less frequently, by just half of survey participants, were activities connected with accountability, that is, supervision and support sessions with their line managers and with those they line manage or support as volunteers:

> "Meeting with my line manager for a monthly review and to set three priorities for the following month."

> "Made an observation visit to a parenting programme for quality assurance purposes."

- **Liaising with colleagues**

The activity of connecting with diocesan colleagues, formally and informally, is illustrated in 6 responses:

> "we may stop for coffee … I find out things I would not normally get to know and so spot opportunities for collaboration (there is no other forum for sharing our work)."

> "Liaising with Education and Schools department especially in area of Passing on the Faith."

> "Met with Safeguarding Office to review training sessions."

- **Communications & publicity**

Communication activities, such as maintaining and updating websites, producing mailshots and writing articles for diocesan or parish newsletters also featured in just under half the accounts:

> "Input text on website re upcoming parenting programmes."

> "Communicate/promote resource/event with emails/mailings."

> "[diocesan newspaper] asking for copy for next month's issue."

These activities maintain the profile of the Coordinators' work, but also extend

the demands on their skill set. Survey responses highlight a need for marketing skills in print and online media, and familiarity with website maintenance.

- **Out of Hours Work & Travel**

  Unsocial hours featured in a third of responses, partly in working overtime to complete important tasks but also in delivering presentations or accessing volunteers when they are available. This exhausting work pattern is described by a full-time Coordinator:

  > "If I wake early I will do some work at home before breakfast (from 6.30am to 7.30am)… I get to the office as early as I can …. by 8.30am at the latest to get a head start on the day before others arrive. …. Once home I work from 4.30pm - 6pm (or 7pm if someone else cooks dinner) then after 8pm as necessary and while my children are watching TV or doing homework and my husband is working. I do what I can and what I need to. I do not like to use this time for phone calls …but the truth is this later evening time is usually the only time I can catch Parish Family Ministers, Marriage Preparation Presenters and Parenting Facilitators. I find that people (including myself) find it easier to squeeze family time and to protect work time than the other way around."

The lens of a typical day illustrates the variety of work in which diocesan Coordinators are involved. There is unpredictable work in responding to queries and more planned work in preparing and delivering events, meetings and training, sometimes collaborating with diocesan colleagues. Long working hours and travel across the diocese may be involved. It is worth noting that some dioceses cover considerable areas, comprising three or four counties. A typical day comes across as frenetic, arduous, stressful and potentially exhausting. Not surprisingly, five Coordinators highlighted difficulties in describing a typical day:

> "How do I describe an average day? No such thing really exists."

> "I find this almost impossible to describe!"

> "Oh dear, which day, they are all so different."

The potential variety of queries that may arise adds to each day being different, but the potential scope of planned activities also contributes to atypical working patterns. Again, part-time working patterns add to the challenge. But such variety coupled with the frenetic pace of activity increases the likelihood of a lack of focus among

Coordinators, exacerbated by the ad hoc nature of responding to queries. A lack of focus is a further potentially disabling factor in their work.

Missing from the typical day accounts is any evidence of recording and reflecting activities. Just four Coordinators mentioned planning activity but this was related to specific events or resources rather than strategic planning. Meetings with line managers seem to be about goal-setting rather than reflecting on work accomplished or identifying new emerging needs. Professional development activities are not noted in Coordinators' accounts of their typical day accounts. In fact, all the data gathered in this section - particularly the long working days mentioned - raises questions about safeguards for this work and for those engaged in it.

Yet, as the typical day accounts show, Coordinators are involved in the front line of the Church's ministry, responding to families' immediate, sensitive and pressing needs. Nowhere is their work more challenging than when they have to negotiate the tricky tightrope between faithfully representing the Church and its magisterium and authentically responding in love to those whose family life does not reflect those ideals. A goal of this study was to ascertain how Coordinators experience and manage this tension.

Walking the Tricky Tightrope
Coordinators were asked during interview to name the tensions they experience and to describe how they cope. The only tension that was prompted for related to gay and lesbian issues, because the same-sex marriage debate was underway at the time. Coordinators identified a range of other issues including cohabiting couples, family planning, the Catholic promise regarding raising children in the faith, remarriage after divorce, contraception, misunderstandings around teaching on domestic abuse, a lack of awareness of teaching on divorce and remarriage, perceived failings in passing on faith, attending Sunday Mass irregularly and being imperfect family members.

- **Marriage and Divorce**

Examples given included caring for those in 'irregular' situations, responding to those affected by domestic abuse and presenting the Catholic promise regarding children required in marriage. The Roman Catholic Church applies the term 'irregular' in a religious sense to situations involving trial marriages, free unions,

civil marriages, separated or divorced persons who have not remarried and divorced persons who have remarried. (FC#79-84)

> "…couples who say we would have loved to have married, but we have been living together now for years and we already have some children …" (A)

> "..one area around domestic violence … she said no, you know, I married this person, I'm staying married to this person forever." (B)

> "There's …the promise and declaration of the Catholic partner." (A)

> "He'd been told by his parish priest that he couldn't be a Eucharistic minister anymore. I think he was divorced …living with a partner and wasn't married." (D)

- **Family Planning**

The Church's teaching on family planning forbids any use of artificial contraception or abortion, but also any disruption in the natural fertilisation process such as through In Vitro Fertilisation. Coordinators described a variety of issues including balancing the benefits of a helpline for children in need against the allegations that this helpline advocates abortion to some of its clients.

> "… family planning and contraception very, very rarely raises its head …the reality of how couples plan their family is really very much left to their conscience… It isn't an issue really…" (A)

> "One of the couples that I've been [trying to recruit as volunteers] said, 'yeah but what if I don't actually believe or follow exactly what the Church is saying on say, contraception.' " (B)

> "Something that can arise is couples' misconceptions around what the Church asks of them in family, timing of their family, size of their family etc." (A)

> "Childline… we were asked to remove that from our guide because it might lead people through to abortion advice." (D)

- **Sexual Orientation**

Only A described tensions around sexual orientation, in this example connected more with his media work than pastoral care:

> "Gay couples themselves may be few but people on their behalf think the Church is really being harsh ...." (A)

- **Everyday Tensions**

Both B and D identified more ordinary tensions that spill over into church work with families:

> "…. things like children not going… to church, not agreeing with the Church's teaching in certain areas, what do I do if my 18 year old daughter comes home and says she wants to share her bedroom with her boyfriend overnight …" (B)

> "a lot of these tensions are not always communicated. Lots of people carry them around with them. Almost like an elephant in the room, people may feel already that they are not the perfect Catholic family, that they don't go to church every week, that they are not always the perfect parent." (D)

Pragmatic Approaches and Moral Frameworks

When these tensions arise diocesan Coordinators handle them pragmatically, drawing on moral frameworks that they have found to be helpful. They describe their initial response as one of acceptance: "if they … choose to be open with us about those things, not to react in a negative or a judgemental way." (D) B described the practice of acknowledging human weakness and limitations: "I say yes, there is an ideal but… we are not always going to live up to the ideal. I would have loved to have run the marathon in four hours but I didn't …"   There is kindness in their approaches, echoed in the practice of establishing a welcoming environment, so that "those who attend feel that we are interested in them as individual people…. valued by us, not… judged in any way." (D)

On a one to one level, Coordinators draw on skills of listening, affirming, comforting, identifying possible solutions, being sensitive to individual circumstances and facilitating supportive relationships. Efforts are made to explain the Church's teaching in a positive way: "I do nothing other than quote from our bishops but just … unpack it in a language that is faithful to what they have said but more acceptable" (A). Coordinators assist people to think about the Church's teaching in their own lives: "We talk very positively about their rights and their responsibilities as mature Christians, to be aware of their needs, emotional and financial and relational needs…" (A) .And they also refer people on to priests who can help:

> "…he didn't feel that he had a good relationship with his priest, he couldn't go back and talk to him. He was obviously in a lot of pain… I was able to direct him to another priest who had a good talk with him [so] this man was a lot happier." (D)

These pragmatic approaches seem to work well enough for Coordinators given that they cannot change Church teaching and yet still need to mediate the compassion of the Church when tensions begin to bite. When a situation calls for a clergy response they find a priest who will be sensitive and compassionate rather than exacerbate the situation.

In adopting these approaches Coordinators are influenced and inspired by both scripture and tradition. These are the frameworks identified by the Coordinators and for each I have identified a corresponding Scripture passage:

- "Just a very simple answer... do not judge." (C)
  'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.' Matthew 7:1
- "That's all that Jesus asks us to do, the best that we possibly can."
  'she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on'.
  Mark 12:44 (the widow's mite)
- "…when we fall down… we know where we can go." (B)
  '"How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times."' Matthew 18:21-22:
- "…there is no sin so great that it cannot be forgiven. When you start from that basis its much less constricting, and much more liberating." (B)
  '"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you." John 8:3-11:
- "*Home is a Holy Place* has been really helpful and useful, that whole view of just accepting family life for what it is, that real life is messy and it's actually in those moments where life is tough that we have the opportunity to really make something valuable happen. That really helps in all my work..." (D)
  'For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Romans 8: 37-39:
- "the priest who married us said, 'you are given a conscience and you must let your conscience guide you.'" (B)
  "what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all." Romans 2: 14-16:

There is a gentle, pastoral approach in all these strategies that respects the moral law of gradualness[11] that Cardinal Hume described in an intervention during the World

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[11] Gradualness, gradualism or graduality is, according to Cardinal Vincent Nichols, a "law of pastoral moral theology which permits people, all of us, to take one step at a time in our search for holiness in our lives" (Rocca, 2014). US moral theologian John Grabowski describes it as "simply the recognition that the conversion to which all the members of the Church are called is not a magic, one-time transformation, but an ongoing process of healing, growth and change" (Grabowski, 2014).

Synod on Family in 1980 and which also preoccupied the 2014 Synod (Legge, 2014):

> "We must never fail to listen to the other pilgrims. And they need encouraging. We must speak gently, compassionately, co-agonize with them, lead them gradually and speak a language which enables them to say: 'Yes, that is right; it is now clear, we accept the teaching." (Hume, 1980)

The moral framework developed by diocesan Coordinators for responding to difficult situations springs directly from the gospel of Jesus Christ which calls on us not to judge one another, to do our best with what we have, to expect God's loving, gratuitous, forgiveness when we fail and to trust that even the worst of circumstances contains both the promise of redemption, and the possibility of new life. Their practice anticipates the approach urged by Pope Francis[12] in AL which calls for "understanding, comfort and acceptance" (#49) rather than judgment and draws attention to the need "to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition." (#296)

Given the multiple and various challenges of their role another important area of enquiry was to discover how Coordinators' experience the challenges and what keeps them going in spite of the many demands, the lack of resources and the tricky tightrope they have to negotiate daily.

Challenges and Rewards

Perhaps not surprisingly Coordinators described the difficulties of their role in more detail than the satisfaction they derived from it. The difficulties cover issues such as inertia or resistance, nervousness around family ministry, the language of the magisterium and time limitations. Curiously none of those interviewed mentioned the tension between Church teaching and the reality of family life as a difficulty, perhaps because this question was already addressed.

Two Coordinators used the term *inertia* and two mentioned *resistance* as a difficulty. A described a reluctance on the part of clergy to engage publicly on matters of marriage and family life in their parishes: "Some of the best priests I know [will] say, I can't, will you do it for us?" This was a frustration for him: "There is just a lack of self-help, a lack of ambition for marriage." (A used marriage as a discrete

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[12] The interviews were conducted three months before Pope Francis was elected.

term twice as frequently in his interview as B, C and D combined). B mentioned inertia: "I've worked in all sorts of different organisations and in different hierarches but I find that there is an inertia greater than I have ever experienced within the church". B felt this was more than simply a matter of the Church moving slowly, but an actual resistance to change: "I come up quite a bit against the 'not invented here' syndrome or 'we've tried it before and it didn't work then and we are never going to try it ever again' type of thing." C too described resistant forces: "…when people have been in ministry for many, many, many years and ….they would not even entertain listening to anything other than what they do." D, however, described inertia as a struggle to get people to engage with her work: "you have to work very hard to publicise where you can…. and highlight things to people by word of mouth as well..." But she too encountered resistance from clergy: "some of the clergy may not have much understanding or interest in what you are doing and there are a few who may not really agree".

I wondered if this difficulty was just a normal part of working in the church. But A felt that marriage and family ministry is more prone than other ministries to suffer these difficulties: "when the pressure mounts, certain pastoral initiatives rise to the top… they can more easily recruit catechists and train them. Parishes find it much harder to …step into the area of sexuality and messiness of family life". Pressed for an explanation, A identified the complexity of risking personal exposure and entering into controversy: "I think probably all of us are worried [that] if I start speaking to other people about marriage ... our marriage is going to be on the line. So there's nervousness…. Perhaps our marriage isn't perfect, or our idea of the Church's teaching isn't perfect." Consequently, A devoted a considerable amount of time to reassuring and encouraging potential volunteers for marriage preparation. He commented that once initial nervousness had been overcome, the experience of volunteers was usually positive: "they come back within a year and say this has been the best thing for our marriage that we have ever done..."

Time limitations were another difficulty noted. D had a particular perspective on this because she had a three-year contract: "I haven't had time to do as much as I would have liked … start up as many projects as I'd have liked". For C time was a challenge when building positive relationships with clergy. She tried to meet them face to face, finding monthly local pastoral area meetings a valuable opportunity,

because: "emails or letters don't seem to work very often. They seem to like that [personal] contact". Even so, the time that could elapse between an initial meeting and a request for the diocesan Coordinator's services increased the anxiety for D, who felt that short-term projects don't make sense in a church context: "people work at different paces... Your work doesn't bear fruit immediately in all areas. Some people might react very quickly ... others put things on the backburner for a while."

Language and communications were recurring challenges, especially when engaging families and clergy in family ministry initiatives. D warned that care is needed when publicising events, "in a way which is very accessible to people" so that "they do not feel put off in any way or too frightened". This was especially important when offering parenting programmes. C reported a similar need for sensitivity when communicating with priests: "I said to one, if ever you need help and support… he just thought it was condescending. He nearly ate me alive. I don't say that any more to priests. I just say, if ever you need anything to get in touch with me."

When asked what they prayed for in relation to their work, most of those interviewed highlighted the lack of strategic support in the diocese for marriage and family life ministry.

> "that those who are leaders in the church either ordained or lay would share with me the same passion or love of marriage…. that what the Church considers or proposes as programme or initiatives is seen through the prism of what we need re marriage and family." (A)
>
> "that we would realise we are all actually doing the same job... we are all working, in the same vineyard... family life cuts across everything, everything." (B)
>
> "that the value of the work... is truly recognised and that there is some time and money put aside for this work to continue long term..." (D)

B prayed also for the stamina and resilience to continue: "just [to] keep it going because it is tough… Generally speaking…, you're working pretty much on your own..."

The difficulties mentioned by Coordinators, particularly around resistance, nervousness and language, echo some of the disabling factors I explored in my Paper 2 (see Appendix 5). Interviewing Coordinators I gleaned a better sense of how they cope, but found that most of their strategies focussed on patiently maintaining

relationships - with priests and lay people - and on an extraordinarily attentive sensitivity to the language they use in these relationships. The degree to which Coordinators operate on a threshold starts to emerge here. Acting almost as go-betweens for the family to the Church and for the Church to the family they tread a tricky and demanding tightrope, mediating the gifts and wisdom of each to the other. I am struck by the enormity of this role and the personal demands on Coordinators in order to fulfil it well. That they do so sometimes with little support from clergy, who may have little interest in their work and even disagree with it, is perplexing. It would be easy for Coordinators to get disheartened by all the challenges, especially given the breadth of the scope of their work. To be able to remain in post, and positive, the rewards they experience must surely be deeply felt.

The more satisfying aspects of Coordinators' work were their personal interactions with groups of people and the possibility of positively influencing their lives. Themes of liberation featured strongly here, with three of those interviewed (A, B, and C) describing their satisfaction in freeing people, whether from the negative impact of Church teaching, or by affirming their gifts or by restoring dignity to families.

A demonstrated particular confidence in tackling negativity around Church teaching: "The most satisfying is speaking what the Church has to say in the language of the people, showing them the human and compassionate face of the Church…". For C, "the real soul of my work" is "giving people the opportunity to exercise their ministries." B enjoyed working with groups and the interaction of that process, especially freeing people to realise the dignity of their familial identity: "parents… waiting to be given permission to do things like bless their children… a wonderful revelation!" D mentioned the satisfaction of directly influencing people's lives for the better: "you can visibly see that your work has had a positive impact". D stored the feedback from her work, rereading it when she felt discouraged. I found this practice almost pitifully wise, but it serves to illustrate the loneliness of the role, the busy-ness and the ease with which achievements can be obliterated by tiredness or frustration.

It was intriguing that Coordinators described their rewards mostly in terms of liberation. This is not something I had expected, given that their focus is family

ministry in a Catholic context. More logical, perhaps, would have been the satisfaction of witnessing happier marriages, more peaceful households, more families in church on Sunday, even being part of helping people finding the support they need. A's examples of liberation as freeing people from the burdens placed by Church teaching strikes me as subversive. It feels to me as if his desire to liberate is not unconnected with his frustration and sense of resistance to change among the clergy he works alongside.

Even so, this main satisfaction for Coordinators is worthy of further research. Jesus came to set us free (Luke 4: 14-21) so the liberating potential of their work is certainly worth describing in more detail, evidencing and celebrating. Most accounts of positive impact reported by Coordinators in this study were anecdotal. Only D mentioned working in a team that collected written evaluative feedback as a matter of course. If more resources were devoted to recording and evidencing the positive outcomes of family ministry, these could be more fully reflected on and incorporated into a broader vision for family ministry.

Reflecting on Coordinators' Descriptions of Their Role
The data gathered from Coordinators provides some important insights into a vast, varied and demanding role. Their service to family life takes many forms: reacting to immediate needs; forming volunteers for family work; signposting, informing and communicating; working with individuals, groups, parishes and the wider Catholic community. Their work is time-consuming and requires sensitivity and patience with people: encouraging and reassuring volunteers who are nervous of the implications of involvement. Equally, they must work well with clergy, and be sufficiently resilient when their efforts meet with inertia or resistance. As well as being capable of building good relationships across the diocese, they also need to know who is doing what, where, when and how, for the times when an urgent query arises, when signposting and referrals are needed. Confidentiality is essential and the ability to do good without inflicting more harm.

The frustrations and demands of the role are balanced by the satisfaction of positively impacting people's lives, setting people free. The Coordinators practice listening, comforting, explaining Church teaching, problem-solving and being sensitive to individual needs. They act as mediators between priests and people,

ameliorating the hurt when Church discipline and teaching is experienced as harsh and uncaring.

The moral frameworks they draw on are very important. These are core Christian practices that they themselves have identified as also being essential for family ministry: being non-judgemental; proclaiming forgiveness; practising mercy; respecting difference; offering welcome; trusting in God; accepting human weakness. These are worthy of much greater attention, further research and reflection.

Family Ministry in the United States

The survey data and interview findings revealed the ways that diocesan coordinators of family ministry in England and Wales experience their role. But how far is this experience unique to our local situation and how far is it simply reflective of the nature of family ministry? The United States accounts of family ministry were interrogated for practices and challenges to family ministry in order to answer this question.   However, whether from the Reformed and Congregational Christian churches or in the Roman Catholic context, this material is largely directive rather than descriptive, focussing mainly on the rationale for church work with families and appropriate practices.

Nonetheless analysis reveals a number of recognised practices of family ministry (see Table 3) which echo the Coordinators' typical day accounts and interview responses. There is also evidence in the Reformed and Congregational texts (Leonard, 1982; Olson and Leonard, 1990) of the ways in which experience of family ministry can influence the development of its practice and understanding, which is the closest that the literature comes to acknowledging the tensions between Christian ideals and the reality of family life. Furthermore there is an extensive list (Hebbard, 1995; Curran, 1980b) of obstacles to family ministry which provides a fascinating backdrop to the difficulties expressed by Coordinators.

The Practice of Family Ministry

The practices that emerge from the Reformed and Congregational tradition and from the Catholic tradition of family ministry are strikingly similar (see Table 3, p.62) and echo the practices identified by the Coordinators (see Tables 1 and 2, pp.46-47), especially listening, healing (comforting), educating (delivering training, organising

events, explaining Church teaching), adapting (problem solving), discerning and respecting (being sensitive to individual needs, being non-judgmental, proclaiming forgiveness, practising mercy, accepting human weakness), affirming (organising events), deepening community life (communicating, respecting difference).

Table 3: Practices of Family Ministry

Reformed/Congregational Texts	Roman Catholic Texts
1. Practices of **listening** – both to families (Feucht, 1963, p.80), (Leonard 1982, pp.48-50), (Hebbard, 1995, pp.109-144), (Garland, 2012, pp.494-514), the community (Garland, 2012, pp.514-520) and to God's word in Scripture (Guernsey, 1982, p.97), (Hebbard, 1995, pp.29-62).	1. Practies of **listening** – rooted in 'awareness that understands', listening is enshrined as a core practice in the Pastoral Plan, as an ongoing process (Curran, 1980b, p.21), as part of the pastoral agenda of family ministry (Thomas, 1979a, p.65) and as a ministry in and of itself (Furlong, 1987).
2. Practices of **discernment** – reflecting on what is heard in order to discern God's word (Olson and Leonard, 1990, pp.176-177), identifying family needs, individual gifts and congregational priorities (Feucht, 1963, p.81), (Leonard, 1982, p.50), (Garland, 2012, pp.533-540), and evaluating efforts (Feucht, 1963, p.29),(Leonard, 1982, p.59-61)(Garland, 2012, pp.546-549).	2. Practices of **discernment** – associated with listening is the core practice of discernment so that families' needs may be met: needs assessments and continuing consultation with families (NCCB, 1978, p.2), gatherings to discern the deeper pastoral meaning of the needs that have been identified (Furlong, 1987, p.86); family impact analysis (NCCB, 1990, pp.8-32).
3. Practices of **empowerment**, i.e. affirmation and celebration – to raise consciousness of the Christian role of family life and its importance for human, social and spiritual development and to encourage families (Olson and Leonard, 1990, p.174), (Garland, 2012, pp.434-439).	3. Practices of **empowerment** i.e. naming, affirming and celebrating – adapted to the needs of particular groups and family styles (NCCB, 1978, p.2), to help families become aware of their special charisms, talents and potential for self-help (NCCB, 1978, p.3), demonstrating recognition of leaders by the Church community thus deepening a sense of vocation among family life ministers (NCCB, 1978, p.3), as Christian family empowerment (Thomas, 1979a, p.65).

4. Practices of **healing** – through family counselling, therapy (Guernsey, 1982, p.31), (Hebbard, 1995, pp.148, 158), (Garland, 2012, p.564) and befriending (Garland, 2012, pp.564-9).	4. Practices of **healing** – counselling services (Curran, 1980b, p.9), helping family members develop their potential for healing each other (NCCB, 1978, p.3), freeing people to ask for help (Thomas, 1979a, p.54).
5. Practices of **education** – of church and family (Olson and Leonard, 1990, p.177), in family faith (Hebbard, 1995, p.151), (Leonard, 1982, p.18), for relationships, stages and skills, (Sell, 1981, pp.136-182), (Hebbard, 1995, p.159)(Leonard, 1982, p.22-27), (Garland, 2012, pp.571-580) in leadership for family ministry, awareness of family issues (Sell,1981, pp.183-199), (Hebbard, 1995, p.149), equipping families for religious nurture at home (Sell, 1981, pp.200-227), encouraging flexibility and individuation in families (Guernsey, 1982, p.108).	5. Practices of **education** – in the family's social mission (NCCB, 1978, p.2), helping family members develop their potential for nurturing each other (NCCB, 1978, p.3), to improve parenting skills (NCCB, 1978, p.5), pre-marital education (Thomas, 1979a, p.46), training in leadership, communication, management, providing self-confidence and direction (Thomas, 1979a, p. 67), to enable families to solve their own problems (Furlong, 1987, p.87), (Curran, 1980b, p.22), (Boland, 1981, p.3).
6. Practices that support the **deepening of community life** – integrating family and parish life, clustering families (Sell, 1981, pp.245-252), intergenerational activities (Feucht, 1963, p.83)(Sell, 1981, pp.230-245), encouraging family involvement, fostering fellowship, a sense of co-responsibility and of being extended family for each other (Guernsey, 1982, pp.106, 109-110), (Garland, 2012, pp.580-582).	6. Practices that support the **deepening of community life** – forming a team of caring people takes time (Boland, 1981, p.12), ministry that touches the basic art of living and relating (Thomas, 1979a, p.68).
7. Practices of **service** – responding to specific requests, signposting or referring on, providing resources (Hebbard, 1995, pp.151, 159) and enabling families to engage in acts of service together (Garland, 2012, pp.421-428).	7. Practices of **service and like to like ministry** – the practice of Christian families reaching out to serve others (NCCB, 1978, p.11), the special value of a couple assisting another couple – they will often be able to speak of crossing the same terrain (Thomas, 1979a, p.53 & pp.82-92).

8. Practices of **advocacy and witness** – advocating for family life and the integration of a family perspective in congregational life (Garland, 2012, p.144), particularly in worship (Garland, 2012, pp.450-472) and reaching out beyond the immediate congregation (Olson and Leonard, 1990, pp.180-183).	8. Practices of **advocacy and witness** – to the sacramental nature of Christian marriage and to the realities facing couples and families (NCCB, 1978, p.3) to advocate on behalf of families and a family perspective (NCCB, 1990, pp.32-36).
9. Practices of **leadership** – to develop strategy (Olson and Leonard, 1990, p.175), drive processes, connect people, encourage lay leaders (Hebbard, 1995, p.163-4, 7), (Garland, 2012, pp.484-489).	9. Practices of **leadership** – a movement of the entire community with each member doing his or her proper yet special task (Thomas, 1979a, p.61), to listen, train others, foster like-to-like ministry, develop counselling services (Curran, 1980b, p.21), sharing a vision (Boland, 1981, p.7)
10. Practices of **adaptability** – both in the congregation and in the home, trying new ways of doing things, thinking outside the box, being flexible (Guernsey, 1982, p.107)(Hebbard, 1995, p.161), and understanding processes of change (Hebbard, 1995, p.234), (Garland, 2012, pp.540-542).	10. Practices of **adaptability** – emphasis is placed in this entire plan on flexibility so that [all] can proceed in the ways that work best for them (NCCB, 1978, p.7), keeping various parish ministries in balance (Curran, 1980b, p.21), you have great freedom to adapt… this makes your efforts tailor-made for your own community (Kehrwald, 1991, p.91)
11. Practices of **social justice** – empowering families to make a difference in their neighbourhoods and in the powerful social institutions that impact their lives (Leonard, 1982, pp.27-28), (Garland, 2012, pp.582-584).	11. Practices supporting **social justice** – because the family always exists in relation to the wider society, careful attention must be given to public policy as it impacts family life (NCCB, 1978, p.5).

Table 3 clearly illustrates strong consensus among all writers on certain family ministry practices and the range of circumstances in which they might be applied. Evident too is the way in which their purpose has changed, adapted or emerged over time. This is particularly noticeable where congregations who began to equip families for stability and the religious education of children have learned that equipping families to lead on their own social and faith-forming responsibilities is

just as important, if not more so. There are echoes of Mette's (1995) benchmark here, that the family is coming to be seen as "a genuine field of experience for religion and faith" (p.82). The staple practices of listening, discernment, education, hospitality, healing and deepening community life is very apparent. These practices have clearly withstood the test of time. By comparison the practices of witness, social justice and leadership are relatively undeveloped.

Table 3 also reinforces the sense that our experience in England and Wales fits easily within a broader trans-Atlantic and interdenominational tradition of family ministry, providing a stronger foundation and wider context for self-reflection and professional development. It therefore provides stronger starting and reference points for shaping future academic studies and research into family ministry.

Balancing the Tensions in Family Ministry

The Roman Catholic texts give no indication of how the difficult issues in family ministry are managed in practice; the tension between Church teaching and the reality of family life is barely acknowledged. Only Boland acknowledges a difficulty, that of preparing parishioners who were 'task-oriented': "They found the formation sessions awkward and were anxious to get down to planning and doing something" (1981, p.11). He felt that this arose from an American tendency to be more focussed on productivity and efficiency than in developing relationships. But perhaps his parishioners were exhibiting a subtle form of resistance to the process he had prepared for them to follow.

The lack of focus on the tensions could be explained by responsibility for certain practices being clearly aligned to particular areas of Church leadership. The bishops' 1978 Pastoral Plan places responsibility for leadership formation and training, communication with movements and organisations and work with government agencies at the *national level*. Within the *diocesan office* sits responsibility for research, consultation, planning, programme management, collaboration and networking with organisations and movements. The *parish* has responsibility for assessing local needs, developing a local plan, selecting suitable programmes, training leaders, and implementing proposals. This division of labour, which embodies the principle of subsidiarity, depends strongly on each area taking its

responsibilities seriously but is also a strategic model that omits the need for an enquiry service for families in need. It is a pastoral strategy that seems not to take account of the diversity of family circumstances.

Within the Reformed and Congregational texts, Leonard's work (1982 onwards) illustrates that the experience of practising family ministry greatly increases the complexity of describing it. Writing in 1982 he is emphatic about organisational processes. This text is a methodology for congregational family ministry that refers idealistically to the Christian family in terms such as "a laboratory", "a school", "a missionary enterprise", and "an engine of social change" (p.9). By 1990, writing with Olson, the broader question of promoting a family perspective and the critical matter of strategy – the how of family ministry - emerge as far more significant challenges. Olson and Leonard categorise practices in very broad terms as strategy, theology, education, and advocacy, rather than describing them in detail. These feel like watchwords to the wise, born out of struggle. In 1990 when Olson and Leonard are writing about working with 'families in flux' (ie experiencing unemployment, disability, single-parenthood, remarriage, unshared faith, childlessness and inter-cultural living), they do so with none of the certainties about family life that influenced Feucht's text in 1963 nor even Leonard's 1982 work. Since their experiences influence their understanding of family ministry I will explore this in more detail in Chapter 5.

Barriers to Family Ministry
The obstacles mentioned in texts arising from the Reformed and Congregational traditions correspond somewhat to the difficulties identified by Coordinators, further informing issues of inertia or resistance. Sell (1981) identifies a "home-church conflict" (p.30) for church leaders, who may be reluctant to sacrifice their own home and family life for the greater good. He also mentions a "conflict with mission" (p.31) implicated by favouring families at the expense of a broader common good as well as the charge that family ministry neglects "atypical households, such as single people and childless couples" (p.32). These are valuable observations worth exploring with Coordinators and their diocesan colleagues. If this is how others see their work, should they be answering these charges?

Hebbard's (1995) experience is that family ministers simply cannot expect to be welcomed:

> "...you must prepare yourself for various responses…. Some …will be easily managed with time and discussion. Others will be highly emotional and charged with years of untapped pain and denial. Often the corporate and familial pain of the church will be directed against you as the agent of change." (p.64)

Hebbard also notes a congregation's tendency to use simplistic solutions to address complex problems, denial, reluctance to speak openly of difficulties, the enormity and severity of the task, the unpalatable nature of some of the issues raised, the emphasis on quantitative rather than qualitative growth, lack of support from colleagues, resistance to planning and prioritising, the surplus of local 'experts' on family life, the lack of a theological base, and the problem of how to manage corporate pain when trying to change the system. For each of these challenges he provides an example of how this has been manifested in his experience. While his list may be reassuring to Coordinators who feel personally responsible for their difficulties, it is certainly a daunting list that raises questions of the viability of family ministry.

Roman Catholic accounts note fewer obstacles. Only Curran (1980b) lists barriers in detail:

- Lack of pastoral vision, essentially the need for the pastor to be supportive of family ministry, both in listening to families and finding ways to respond effectively (p.10).

- Failure, whether by priests or parishioners, to accept that this is a shared or collaborative ministry.

- Failure to share a vision of the parish as a faith community rather than an educational institution: "Prolonged emphasis on the primacy of the classroom and of content over the home and faith results in parental feelings of inadequacy and in lack of resources for family ministry" (p.14).

- Lack of an understanding of the changing sociology of the Catholic family.

- Failure to promote a vision of the interrelatedness of catechesis and family life, and failure to convince parents of their primacy in fostering faith.

- Reluctance to accept the myriad needs in today's families as areas of authentic church ministry.

- Failure to address uncomfortable issues which come to rest in the family, such as contraception, the changing role of women and divorce and remarriage.

- Failure to generate a family-to-family style of ministry: "when a pastoral team considers additional ministries… it tends to view them in relation to its ability to implement them rather than in relation to the ability of the total parish to meet new needs" (p.18).

Again, this list could be very helpful to diocesan Coordinators and their colleagues not only in anticipating some of the issues particular to Roman Catholic experience but also as a starting point for deeper reflection. How many of the above feed into the resistance and inertia they describe? The question of pastoral vision will be examined further in Chapters 5 and 6, but since family ministry is laid out here as fundamentally collaborative, echoing the Church's understanding of it as a ministry of the whole People of God, Coordinators need to be thinking about whether the myriad needs of family life are really seen as authentic places for ministry? Do they see this as a family-to-family ministry? What ought they to do with the uncomfortable issues?

The United States accounts have provided a stimulating and informative partner to the data gathered from Coordinators. The list of practices derived from these texts reinforces a sense that family ministry is naturally deeply complex and demanding work. The particular experience of Coordinators in England and Wales is therefore part of a much broader experience that is equally challenged, even outside the Roman Catholic context. I now want to use the lens of my conceptual framework to explore the data as it relates to the Church's understanding of family ministry, the relationship of the diocese to the parish and the ecclesial identity of the family.

Applying the Conceptual Framework

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry

My question here is how far the experience of diocesan coordinators reflects the Church's understanding of family ministry, particularly whether they see themselves

as enabling, equipping and empowering the People of God for parish family ministry.

A mixed picture emerges from the typical day accounts, where a good amount of energy is given to the reactive work of responding to queries. The more proactive developmental work described certainly suggests, in places, that the People of God are being equipped by Coordinators for family ministry. Meetings are being held locally with groups of grandparents, parents, and head teachers. Training is being offered and celebrations of family life are being organised. Parish family ministers are mentioned explicitly by one Coordinator. Much effort is put into communication work to raise awareness and attract participation.

However, it is not clear whether all of this activity has emerged as a result of working with parishes to identify their specific needs. It could just as easily have arisen from needs the Coordinator, or their line manager or the bishop has identified from their own observations, conversations with individuals or from the number and type of queries that arise. But, from the difficulties they describe, it seems that Coordinators are sometimes developing initiatives for which there has not been a process of local community discernment. They describe inertia, resistance, sensitivities with clergy and long delays between making their offer and it being taken up. This is a serious problem for Coordinators. They may be employed to extend the provision of marriage preparation, for example, and this might rightly be identified as a need by the diocese, because less than 50% of engaged couples are able to access a programme delivered by laypeople. But unless the parishes concur with that need, a Coordinator risks recruiting and training providers who lack essential parish support. If volunteers are not rooted in their parish, selected by a parish, supported and encouraged by their parish, they become part of a floating diocesan network, at risk of being unappreciated and unacknowledged. This places greater demands on the Coordinator in supporting, resourcing and retaining their services. So for the Coordinator there is a considerable risk of sustainability when establishing 'supra-parish' networks of volunteers who are isolated from their parish communities.

Tables 1 and 2 reflect the findings of the online survey where Coordinators rated the tasks identified for the post by the Bishops' Conference and the bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life. Whilst these tasks do not explicitly acknowledge the parish as the base community within which families serve one another, the parish family is mentioned, as are the need for parish resources, and the need to offer training and coordinate lay involvement. The task of 'enabling parishes to build community, giving practical help where requested' was rated by two-thirds of Coordinators as very or mostly important and by another third as important or somewhat important, yet only a third could give this task all or most of their time. For the other two-thirds this task received a medium or minimum amount of their time. My argument, based on the Church's understanding of family ministry, is that developing parish family ministry demands all of a Coordinator's time and attention. The US bishops identify the constituent parts of parish family ministry as "assessing local needs, developing a local plan, selecting suitable programmes, training leaders, and implementing proposals". The Coordinator's role is to equip and encourage parishes for these processes. This is the practice of deepening community life.

How might Coordinators be encouraged to move away from working on a one-to-one basis with families and closer to fulfilling a more strategic role in mobilising the People of God? Without more reflection and strategic planning it will be difficult to break the cycle of reactive triaging, out of hours working and atypical days. The challenges of being a diocesan Coordinator of family ministry requires much stronger structures of support and a more disciplined approach to reflective practice.

Diocesan Commissions and Working Groups are support structures for Coordinators whose potential is as yet largely unexploited. This must be addressed. Coordinators need an informed consistent dedicated sounding board, both to give direction and the distinctive contextual support which is so necessary to rooting diocesan family ministry theologically, within the tradition and within the contemporary context.

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish
My question here is how far the diocesan Coordinator is truly invested in the parish as the locus for family ministry, not only the executive locus, in terms of ministering, but the political locus in terms of determining the shape of family ministry. A critical

factor here is the degree to which their work encourages parish families to participate in the processes of parish family ministry.

Again the picture emerging from the data is mixed. The ways that Coordinators manage the tensions between family life and Church teaching illustrates their skills on a one to one basis. Here they focus on listening, being non-judgemental; proclaiming forgiveness; practising mercy; respecting difference; offering welcome; trusting in God; accepting human weakness. But their relationship with parishes is communicated rather differently based on their interactions with parish priests: "he nearly bit my head off". Could this explain their heartfelt prayers for more internal support and understanding: "that we would realise we are all actually working in the same vineyard" (see p.51).

Something is amiss in the relationship of the Coordinator to parishes and the data is insufficient to clarify how far this is related to the Coordinator's understanding of their role in relationship to the parish. Are they asking too much of parishes in the service of priorities identified at diocesan level, instead of working with parishes to identify their own needs and desires? But this is difficult to confirm. As one Coordinator noted, parishes, particularly parish priests, "find it much harder to …step into the area of sexuality and messiness of family life". As the United States literature confirms the barriers to family ministry are many.

Those identified by Curran however point to three failings which are particularly relevant to questions of how Coordinators relate to parishes: failure to accept family ministry as essentially collaborative, a lack of clergy involvement in listening and responding to families, and failure to appreciate that family ministry is a family-to-family activity. There is little evidence of collaboration or promotion of a family-to-family style of ministry in the data gathered from Coordinators. They seem to be promoting programmes more often than processes (although listening skills are mentioned) and this is causing them difficulty.

Greater focus on three of the practices revealed in my analysis of United States family ministry texts might alleviate these difficulties. Practices of adaptation and flexibility highlight a Coordinator's role in change management, whether in adapting strategies to "the particular characteristics" of each parish (Kehrwald, 1991, p.91) or accepting Garland's view that "Family ministry in essence means planning

72

congregational change" (2012, p.540).[13] Diocesan Coordinators appear not to appreciate their role as change agents, although this is certainly intuited where inertia is identified as a difficulty. If Coordinators considered their work anew within theories of systems and change processes, this might increase their resilience and their effectiveness.

Practices of respect and authenticity are also important to their relationship with parishes. Thomas (1979, p.41) describes these practices as leaving room "for creativity and for the uniqueness of the many families in the Church". Furlong (1987, p.13) describes the need to "minister to families where they are and not where we would like them to be". Kehrwald's first principle of partnership (1991, p.87) is that "there must be an atmosphere of mutual respect. We recognize your strengths, gifts and talents, and your needs." He concludes: "When we treat others as equals, with gifts to share and a piece of 'the truth' to impart, they will be much more willing to engage in partnership and treat us the same way." These values are essential to an effective relationship with parishes, just as they are for parish work with families, and could form part of a regular self-reflection by Coordinators. They do not need to have all the answers for every family problem, just the skills to facilitate the sharing of gifts and the participation of all to whom God has given these gifts.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching

My question here is how far the work of the diocesan Coordinator reflects and is guided by a broad understanding of the ecclesial identity of the family, particularly whether they draw proactively on this understanding to empower families.

The data suggests an implicit awareness, but one communicated incidentally rather than explicitly. Survey responses, for example, illustrate that organising celebrations

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[13] Garland describes three levels of change: continuing to do what parishes already do, but better, mainly in short-term initiatives (perhaps a Marriage Week UK celebration to support couples); incremental changes that add to existing parish practices with a more long term commitment and with minimal disruption to the life of the parish (perhaps the introduction of Family Groups to help families get to know each other better), and more radical changes that affect the whole parish community, such as changes in style of the Sunday liturgy, perhaps to become more family-friendly.

of marriage and family life is a fairly typical activity. The interview data points to the primacy of one's conscience as an important moral framework for dealing with tensions. B describes giving 'permission' to parents to bless their own children. The ecclesial identity of the family is mentioned explicitly only when C quotes from FC.

Yet the survey data also shows that a third of Coordinators see revealing the Church's understanding of marriage and family life as a very important part of their role. In his interview A described the empowering impact of this in practice.

> "An elderly man, extremely connected in the church, very involved in parish … stood up and he said, 'bloody hell, I love my church, I've been married for years... why have I not heard any of this before?'"

> "For two weeks we'd talked with this group about the fruitfulness of married love particularly the unity of the couple and the forgiving and the reconciling, …one lady came back and said, 'I told my husband what you said. When we married we couldn't have children. For the last 40 years every time we made love we asked God for forgiveness because we felt so guilty that we knew we couldn't have children and therefore what we were doing was wrong."

For A, therefore, revealing the Church's teaching is about correcting wrong impressions that marginalise people: "communicating with a tenderness and compassion that's in the teaching but in a language that they need". In contrast, the practice of naming, affirming and celebrating the "special charisms" of families is a significant theme throughout the accounts of family ministry in North America. This is particularly evident in Roman Catholic approaches which seek to empower families to become more aware of their ecclesial identity:

> "to raise the awareness of the Church to the sacramental nature of Christian marriage…. to help families themselves become aware of their special charisms, talents and potential for self-help and ministry to others." (NCCB, 1978, p.3)

Thomas (1980, p.20) highlights the need to name, as Christian, "the many expressions of interpersonal generosity, support, forgiveness, and care, which specify the events of the home". This he says, creates an opportunity for an "extraordinary interpretation of the very ordinary" (p.21), "not so much to tell families to be ministers to each other but to awaken them to the reality that it is already going on" (p.33). This sense of noticing and celebrating the extraordinary in the ordinary was expressed by one Coordinator as "bringing out of people what is

really good" (C) and by another as "fundamentally, understanding God's presence within their family" (D).

The goal of empowering families is to bring them a greater sense of self-worth and thus to generate more of what is already good, encouraging families to "be even more responsive to the many chances that they have to live faithfully" (Thomas, 1980, p.33). I believe these practices are essential, not only to affirming the ecclesial nature of the family, but also to addressing some of the challenges that Coordinators identified, particularly the nervousness around family ministry and the inertia encountered. They are also essential to enabling participation in family ministry.

That Coordinators are able to name the liberating aspects of their work as most satisfying suggests they possess an intuitive understanding of what it means to empower families: "the soul of my work"(C), "a wonderful revelation" (B), "the human and compassionate face of the Church" (A). When people are liberated they are freer to be who they are and that can have unpredictable outcomes. But a greater appropriation of the ecclesial identity of the family in this effort would root their work more firmly within Catholic teaching.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reveals the busy-ness of the daily life of the diocesan Coordinator, their pragmatic approaches to coping with the tensions between family life and Church teaching and their challenges and rewards. The practices of family ministry as articulated by diocesan Coordinators include: listening, comforting, explaining Church teaching, problem solving, being sensitive to individual needs, delivering training, organising events, providing information, communicating with colleagues, being non-judgemental, proclaiming forgiveness, practising mercy, respecting difference, offering welcome, trusting in God, accepting human weakness. United States experiences confirm the practices of listening, discerning, empowering families, healing, education, deepening community life, advocacy and witness, service, adaptability, leadership, hospitality and social justice.

The difficulties identified by Coordinators are reiterated in the American texts, but in greater detail, which could usefully inform and stimulate the reflective practices that are so necessary yet lacking in typical day accounts. The role of diocesan

Commissions on Family Life could be strengthened here, not only to ameliorate the isolation of Coordinators but to provide a supportive framework for reflection.

The lens of the conceptual framework highlights the problematic position of the diocesan Coordinator within a system where their role is largely unrecognised and unsupported, despite being a critical resource for the People of God's participation in family ministry. A greater focus on their facilitative role in parish family ministry would address this isolation. Three practices emerge as particularly significant: practices of deepening community life which will enable Coordinators to equip the People of God for family ministry; practices of respect and authenticity which will provide greater definition to the respective roles and responsibilities of parish and diocese, and practices of empowerment which are rooted in and reflect the ecclesial identity of families, a theological principle which is so critical to our understanding of family ministry and to the relationship of families to the wider church community.

This chapter has focussed on the experience of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry in England and Wales, in their own words. The next chapter examines the perspective of their employers, the dioceses, through the documentary evidence collected.

Chapter 4: The Role of the Diocesan Coordinator as Conceived by Dioceses

Robson (2002, p.349) describes documents as 'unobtrusive' methods of data collection and it was partly for this reason that diocesan Coordinators were asked to supply copies of their job descriptions rather than give their own accounts of their role. These documents are strong and significant sources of data. They indicate how the role is conceived, in advance of employment, by the employer, the diocese. Notwithstanding any other theoretical or theological possibilities, job descriptions state what it is that diocesan Coordinators are expected to actually do, while person specifications set out the qualities, skills and experience necessary to meet those expectations. Given the complexity of the role as described by Coordinators in Chapter 3, the documentary data illustrates the degree to which dioceses also understand the role in the same terms.

The documents supplied give a fascinating picture of a very broad and demanding role, unrealistically demanding in some cases. They also point to the ways in which dioceses manage the tensions between Church ideals and the reality of family life. On the one hand dioceses require their diocesan Coordinators to be faithful, practising Catholics and to uphold the teaching of the Church. On the other hand they also require them to be open-minded, flexible, sensitive and able to learn.

Diocesan vision statements were requested as part of the document collection, once it was appreciated that the job descriptions drawn up in dioceses lacked a clear rationale for the Coordinator's work. This data is included in Chapter 5 which explores how family ministry is defined and understood. Important to note here is that only one diocese provided a vision statement which reflected family life in any depth, including its ecclesial identity. This should be borne in mind when considering the job descriptions and person specifications. Although six of these include 'plan implementation' as a task, it was not clear whether a plan had already been drawn up nor even whether an over-arching vision for family ministry existed.

Analysis of the Job or Role Descriptions

Formal job descriptions were provided by eight diocesan Coordinators. A quasi-formal task list, derived from a project plan, was provided by another. Five others provided personal accounts of their responsibilities, either because they lacked a formal job description or said that it was out-dated. Five of the formal job descriptions related to permanent posts and three to fixed-term grant-funded posts.

I expected that job descriptions of permanent, full-time staff would be more detailed and wide ranging than those of fixed-term, part-time staff, but that was not always the case. The number of responsibilities overall varied from 4 to 15 across all descriptions, with the most responsibilities being borne by a full-time worker and the second highest (13 responsibilities) by someone employed only 21 hours a week. Both were permanent employees. Two part-time, fixed term employees each had 11 and 9 responsibilities respectively. Three permanent staff, two full-time and one half-time, had a mid-range number of responsibilities (7-8 each).

As mentioned, some job descriptions were reported as being out-dated. One had been drawn up in 2002; two had been recently revised. One was withheld for reasons of confidentiality; a task-list was provided instead, and treated as an informal description. The analysis was therefore conducted on the basis of 8 formal job descriptions, 1 quasi-formal description and 5 informal accounts. The informal accounts were remarkable only in that they included a) mundane tasks omitted in formal job descriptions such as monitoring and ordering office supplies and b) very specific tasks such as visiting parishes to assess particular programmes.

A content analysis approach grouped recurring tasks and areas of work, revealing 58 separate categories of work of which 29 were common to two or more job descriptions. Similar themes were then grouped to create a shorter list, describing the principle responsibilities of a diocesan Coordinator of family ministry. This separated activities from their focus in order to distil the skills of diocesan coordination and the priority given to various elements of family ministry.

It became clear that two responsibilities are common to most diocesan Coordinators:

- Organising training opportunities, whether self-delivered or by others, alone or in collaboration with a broader team or related agencies. This responsibility appeared in 11 out of 14 descriptions.

  "providing effective support and training across the Diocese"
  "To provide appropriate formation and support"

- Networking, across the diocese in a variety of ways, was also mentioned in 11 out of 14 descriptions.

  "To build effective working relationships with existing agencies and others across the diocese involved in the support of families"
  "Networking with other Agencies."

Less significant were the following activities:

- Supervising staff (6/14).
- Coordinating implementation of the diocesan plan for family life ministry (6/14).
- Coordinating lay involvement, volunteer networks and support (6/14). (Just one volunteer Coordinator had this responsibility.)
- Representing the diocese at national or regional meetings (5/14).
- Providing information and resources (4/14).
- Organising events, celebrations, and conferences (4/14).
- Fundraising to ensure the sustainability of work (4/14).
- Reporting and fulfilling accountability criteria, ensuring compliance with diocesan policies especially concerning safeguarding and financial accountability (4/14).
- Articulating the marriage and family life perspective within diocese (3/14). (NV[14])
- Developing policies and procedures (2/14). (NV)
- Communicating to raise awareness of family ministry issues (2/14.)

The areas of family ministry on which these activities were focussed were as follows:

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[14] Not found in volunteer role descriptions

- Marriage preparation (10/14)

- Hurting families, specifically 'dysfunctional families', the bereaved, the poor and marginalised, those experiencing mental health issues or domestic abuse (9/14).

- Family Spirituality/Home is a Holy Place National Project (9/14).

- Parenting (8/14).

- Marriage enrichment (6/14). (NV)

- Everybody's Welcome National Project (6/14).

- Passing on the Faith National Project (4/14).

- Leadership training (3/14). (NV)

- Relationship education for young people (2/14). (NV)

- Families with special needs (2/14).

Bringing together the tasks and foci that are common to at least 50% of Coordinators, the role is best described as one of a) effective networking with diocesan colleagues and others involved in family ministry in the diocese and b) providing support and training to those involved in delivering family ministry programmes. This work is most frequently directed towards preparing couples for marriage, ensuring adequate pastoral responses are available for hurting families, supporting parents and promoting family spirituality.

Immediately apparent from the analysis of job descriptions, in relation to Coordinators' own accounts of their daily work, is that the task of 'responding to queries', or meeting families' immediate needs, is not included in job descriptions except perhaps in terms of 'providing information'. Nor do the job descriptions give any more attention than Coordinators to the tasks of research, consultation or planning identified by the US Bishops as a diocesan responsibility. Recognised more clearly than the Coordinators articulate, however, is the purpose of developing local networks.

Word Analysis

Verbs, goals and networking relationships were then distilled to create 'Wordle' images to express visually the frequency of recurrence. These images give an accessible illustration of the issues that emerge in the employment documents, both in the multiplicity of terms that feature and the frequency of recurring terms, which

are indicated by font-size. The first image, Figure 1 (p.81), is based on the verbs extracted from job descriptions. Some overlap in meaning (for example, work-with and collaborate) but the overall impression remains that diocesan Coordinators are expected to engage in many activities and require a broad skill set.

Since *networking* and *relationship building* was so important in job descriptions, Wordle was also used to analyse the individuals, communities and organisations identified. Figure 2 (p.82) points to the complex pattern of anticipated working relationships including diocesan colleagues, unspecified 'others' already supporting families, agencies and organisations within and outside the church, parishes, deaneries, local pastoral areas, families themselves and family members at different stages of family life and in different family circumstances.

Figure 3 (p.83) illustrates the foci of activities and networking. Although some terms overlap, such as relationship education and marriage preparation, the former was used in conjunction with young people rather than with engaged couples.

The Wordle illustrations are helpful for seeing patterns in the work described in formal job descriptions. They show a broad range of actions (develop, maintain, enable, establish, support, provide etc.) directed towards a range of goals (marriage preparation and enrichment, parenting, family spirituality, family-friendly parishes) through interacting with a range of individuals, networks and agencies (diocesan commissions, parishes, families, schools, agencies, colleagues, volunteers).

The purpose of all this work is not always clear in the job descriptions, which is why vision statements were sought. Statements vary from the aspirational:

"Facilitating the achievement of fulfilled and meaningful family life"

to the non-specific:

"To strengthen the support offered to Pastoral Areas and parishes…"

to the task-focussed:

"To develop a network of trained volunteers to work within the deaneries to promote awareness of the holiness of family life."

Figure 1: Actions detailed in Formal Job Descriptions
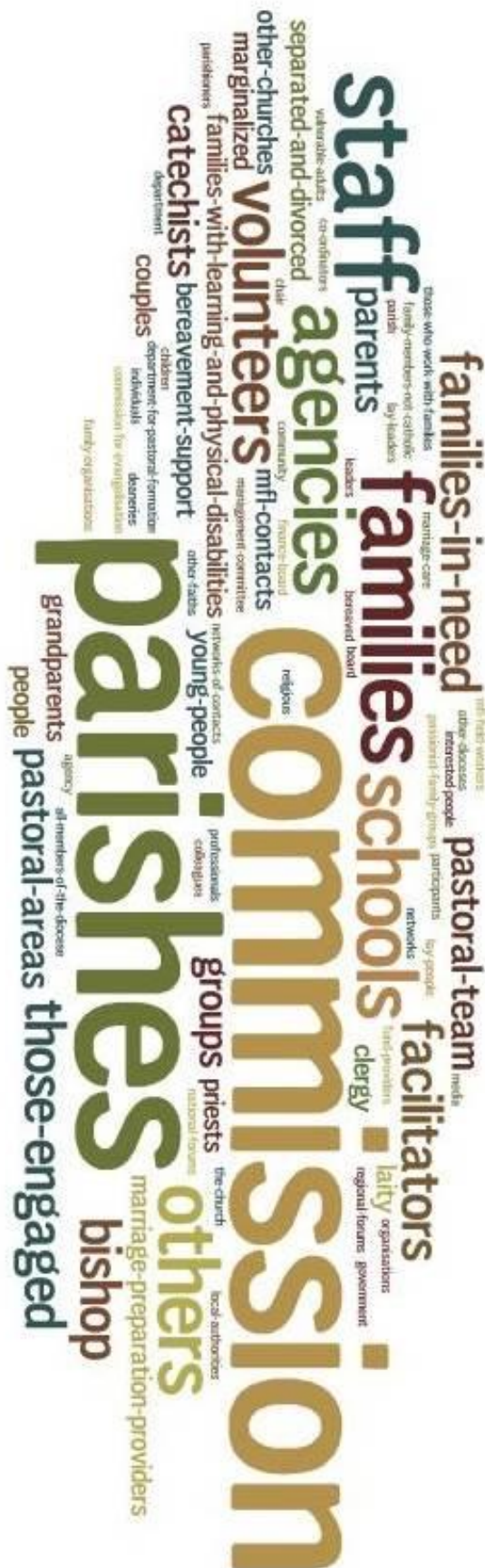
Figure 2: Networks of Influence featured in Formal Job Descriptions

Figure 3: Work Foci detailed in Formal Job Descriptions

These variations stem, I believe, from the lack of an overarching diocesan vision as much as they are symptomatic of low awareness of the meaning of family ministry. However, without an awareness of how coordination of family ministry fits within the broader context of diocesan mission, work objectives are more prone to definition according to the preferences, interests, even the whim, of another diocesan employee or curial officer.

Person Specifications

Although the job descriptions imply a range of skills, only five person specifications were available to show how dioceses describe the necessary experience, skills, qualifications and other general requirements of the role. Even these varied considerably, comprising a range of five to 24 statements, some of which were quite complex:

> "A team player who has a positive, sympathetic and sensitive approach to dealing with issues / enabling families to derive benefit available from the spiritual support of others in their parish community."

Analysis revealed that four practical characteristics featured in most (80%) specifications:

- Previous experience of supporting families in the context of Church:

  > "A proven track record of enabling parishes to build 'community' and facilitating the development of Marriage & Family Life formation initiatives either in a paid or voluntary capacity."

- The ability to work independently and with others (one also mentioned the ability to work with minimal supervision!):

  > "Have the ability to work independently (taking the initiative) and collaboratively (good relationship skills with others)."

- Strong interpersonal and communication skills for a variety of media and interest groups:

  > "a person with strong interpersonal communication skills, oral and written."

- Good up to date IT skills including, in one diocese, the ability to maintain a website.

Qualifications expected of successful candidates varied. These included a theology degree in one instance, 'appropriate qualifications' in another and 'professional qualifications or experience' in a third. The need for a valid clean driving licence was more consistent, mentioned in three specifications, as well as access to personal transport. Three required the post-holder to be a practising Roman Catholic, including being "in touch with the Church of today" or "who has an understanding of current Church developments" or "fully aware of and in agreement with the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and family life." A fourth stated that the post-holder should be able to represent the diocese and have a commitment to its mission. The fifth asked for an informed understanding and commitment to the Church's teaching and to the life of the community as well as confidence in working with matters of Catholic faith.

Some additional faith-based criteria featured. Two dioceses required "a clear understanding and working knowledge of Scripture". One of these also looked for "a person of faith, attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, who is able to lead prayer and enable others to lead prayer." A third specification looked for "a committed individual whose faith manifests itself in their daily actions and in their relationships with others."

In terms of professional skills the most common criteria mentioned (in 60% of specifications) were good organisational and leadership skills, being a 'self-starter' able to respond to changing circumstances, prioritise and plan strategically, and capable of planning and delivering training to adults in the use of resources. Team-working aptitudes, commitment to ongoing personal development and a willingness to listen and learn from others were mentioned in 40% of specifications. Individual specifications identified skills of monitoring, evaluating, problem-solving, group facilitation, establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries including confidentiality. Procedurally just two (40%) looked for a willingness to participate in diocesan procedures for the protection of children, young adults and vulnerable people.

Personal qualities identified in specifications are illustrated in Figure 4 (p.86). This illustrates the compassionate heart of the diocese, implicitly recognising that someone representing the Church on issues of marriage and family life must not be

Figure 4: Personal Qualities detailed in Formal Job Descriptions

closed-minded, inflexible or lack sensitivity. Although post-holders are required at the very least to be practising Catholic, fully supportive of Church teaching, dioceses evidently desire Coordinators who can be open-minded, sensitive, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory. Other words to note here are: good-judgment, discerning, mature, warm and sympathetic. The need for energy, enthusiasm, determination, emotional-resilience and a good sense of humour also speak to the complexity of this specific role.

Reflections on Documentary Evidence

Job descriptions and person specifications reveal a number of peculiarities: a greater emphasis on personal qualities than on theological qualifications, a need for prior experience even though the opportunities to gain such experience are limited, a paucity of formal direction for these roles, and the complexity of the tasks coupled with the web of relationships within which Coordinators are required to network.

My conceptual framework provides a structure in which to reflect more coherently on these emerging issues.

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry

This element of my conceptual framework asks for the data to be considered in terms of how far the diocesan documents reflect the Church's understanding of family ministry, particularly whether Coordinators are envisaged as enabling, equipping and empowering the People of God for family ministry in the parish.

On the whole job descriptions do reinforce a sense that diocesan Coordinators are seen as specialist lay people who support the development of family ministry in local communities. The tasks and foci common to at least 50% of job descriptions indicate that the role is best described as one of effective networking with diocesan colleagues and agents of family ministry and one of providing support and training to those involved in grass roots family ministries. This work is most frequently directed towards preparing couples for marriage, ensuring adequate pastoral responses are available for hurting families, supporting parents and promoting family spirituality. Diocesan perceptions of the role are therefore, to a degree, in tune with the Church's understanding of family ministry. However, despite parishes being a primary 'network of influence' in the job descriptions (see Figure 2, p. 81) the

impression is that these are seen as recipients of Coordinator's services rather than the driver for their work. This example illustrates the task of bringing people together, identifying and developing talent which is a common model, and certainly in tune with the Church's understanding of family ministry.

> "To strengthen the support offered to Pastoral Areas and parishes through networking those working in similar areas, identifying people with particular talents and empowering them through appropriate formation, contact and support".

The training and networking envisaged and the coordinating of lay involvement is largely articulated in job descriptions as programme rather than process-oriented. The only conclusion to draw is that Coordinators do not describe their role in terms of parish family ministry because the diocese simply does not require them to. This is a considerable limit to the implementation of the Church's understanding of family ministry.

Job descriptions also indicate a marginal preference for meeting the needs of hurting families or families with specific needs rather than addressing more universal or basic needs, such as parenting support. As a preventative strategy, investment in a ministry with parents, over time, is an effective means of addressing specific needs, particularly where mental health is concerned (Knapp et al, 2011, p.6). Yet the needs of hurting families have an important claim on the Church's attention and Pope Francis certainly sees the Church as a field hospital (Spadaro, 2013).

None of the job descriptions allow for the day to day reality of Coordinators fielding enquiries on pressing and complex family issues. Given that this features so strongly in typical day accounts it should be accommodated within the acknowledged scope of the role. If not then thought must be given to who else will meet this need. If it is accepted as part of the job, then other tasks and expectations need to be adjusted. Just one job description includes the task of establishing "strategies to assist parishes to respond positively to families in crisis".

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish
This element of my conceptual framework asks for the data to be interrogated further in terms of how diocesan documents understand the role of the parish in family ministry and the relationship of Coordinators to that parish role.

Given the lack of emphasis on parish family ministry already noted, it is not surprising that the documentary evidence suggests that forming volunteers specifically for leadership in parish family ministry is a low priority: it is mentioned in only four job descriptions. Three other descriptions include the task of coordinating or motivating volunteers, which, being vague, may or may not include parish leadership formation. However most of the training envisaged in job descriptions is directed towards specific ministries such as marriage preparation. So whilst a general need to equip the people of God to serve families in their local communities is largely unrecognised, the development of 'supra-parish' networks, working to diocesan priorities, is the main priority. As I noted in Chapter 4 this strategy is not helpful to Coordinators and poses considerable challenges to sustainability.

A further strategic concern emerges when one considers the greater emphasis on the task of training volunteers as compared to supporting those same volunteers post-training. Whilst 11 of the 14 Coordinators surveyed are involved in delivering training only 6 are required to offer ongoing support to networks of volunteers. This trend is especially marked where volunteer Coordinators are concerned. Yet family ministry will never be consolidated if volunteers are not supported, nor will practical wisdom and reflection on practice be recorded and shared. This situation is particularly puzzling in the light of expressed difficulties with engaging people in family ministry. This surely demands greater attention must be given to retaining volunteers once they have been recruited.

The Wordle illustrations highlight parishes as important in the network of relationships, yet the way that Coordinators are expected to relate with parishes is unclear. There is a strong emphasis in job descriptions on programme delivery (eg marriage preparation) but not on listening to and consulting with parishes about their own priorities. The job descriptions reinforce a lack of focus on enabling parish family ministry, that is, building capacity within a parish for families to work together to identify and address common concerns and strengths. Just one job description counters this trend when it mentions:

> "a) Education in preventive care of the family, adult learning processes, relationship education and family spirituality.

> b) Skills training in communication, group facilitation, leadership, workshop presentation and volunteer management."

However this full-time role was also expected to deliver across the diocese a wide range of pro-active programmes covering marriage preparation and enrichment, parenting, bereavement support, relationship education for young people, support for hurting families and family spirituality.

A final point to note in this consideration of the relationship of Coordinators to parishes is the strong focus in one informal job description on policy responsibilities:

- To prepare policies for the diocese, where applicable, which give direction to parishes on work that can be undertaken in this area.
- To assist in the development of catechetical benchmarks for the preparation of the sacraments of marriage and baptism.
- To visit parishes to assess their marriage and baptism preparation courses and recommend changes where appropriate.

I have assumed that these tasks form part of a quality assurance effort but if applied insensitively their implementation could damage and make untenable the relationship between the Coordinator and parishes. That this is a delicate relationship was illustrated by C in her interview:

> "I don't feel that many people out there want to belong but I think many people want to be liked, right? For who they are and for us to see some good quality in them."

For a Coordinator to be too intensely focussed on policies and benchmarks could blur the need to actually like the parish and parishioners they work with. Equally, if the Coordinator is to make any headway, she or he in turn needs to be liked and appreciated by the parish.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching

The question for the data within this part of the conceptual framework is the degree to which the diocesan documents reflect the ecclesial identity of the family in the way the role of Coordinator is framed. More specifically are they proactively engaged in empowering families through sharing this theological understanding? If a diocese sees itself as a family of parishes, then it might recognise and build into its systems the need to tailor and adapt services to individual parishes. Equally, if parishes see themselves as families of families and each family as church in its own

right, then they might recognise a similar need to enable families to be heard, and ministered to according to their particular structure, stage, culture and so forth.   If the diocese recognises the ecclesial dimension of the family in this way, one would expect Coordinators' job descriptions to somewhere reference the skills and practices of respect, authenticity and empowerment which emerged in Chapter 3 as so necessary for adapting ministry, enabling families as leaders and recognising the family as domestic church.

Unfortunately, the documentary evidence gives little indication that the work of diocesan Coordinators is explicitly located in the family's ecclesial identity. Although person specifications indicate a need to be familiar with, and committed to, Church teaching on marriage and family life, the teaching is not specified in a way that might offer Coordinators clearer direction for their work. None of the formal descriptions mentions the domestic church and only two reference family spirituality, although four others mention the family spirituality resource *Home is a Holy Place*. The Church's teaching on family is broad. As things stand, diocesan Coordinators seem to be left to interpret this as best they can and perhaps that is the intent of their employer. Given the tensions already identified in Chapter 1 (and explored further in Chapter 3), the dioceses may be reluctant to appear overly prescriptive in their job descriptions, given the sensitivities, the breadth of the work and even their own lack of reflection on the role.

If the few person specifications obtained are typical, dioceses are prioritising the type of people they want to appoint over and above those who may have theological expertise on marriage and family life. Theological qualifications were rarely specified. Only one explicitly required agreement with Church teaching. The qualities sought include the need to be open-minded, sensitive, discreet, visionary, flexible and even to have a sense of humour. Dioceses are clearly aware of the sensitivities of this area of work and they don't seem to look to Coordinators to enforce Church discipline. That's not their expectation of the role. However, they do see them as involved in the containment of pastoral challenges, such as those illustrated in Chapter 1. However realistic the overriding concerns and expectations of diocesan job descriptions, the deeper empowering potential of families' ecclesial identity are neglected in the process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the particular experience of diocesan Coordinators through the eyes of their employer, the diocese and the way that dioceses express the role in job descriptions and person specifications. Based on features common to at least 50% of documents the role is best described as one of effective networking, with diocesan colleagues and others involved in family ministry in the diocese, and one of providing support and training to those involved in delivering grass roots family ministries. This work is most frequently directed towards preparing couples for marriage, ensuring adequate pastoral responses are available for hurting families, supporting parents and promoting family spirituality. The reactive work of triage so apparent in typical day accounts does not feature in job descriptions; neither do the strategic tasks of research, consultation and planning. Yet most job descriptions suggest that diocesan Coordinators work to a pre-determined diocesan programme rather than to processes of listening to parish families and enabling parish family ministry. Although the focus of work is very much about equipping the whole People of God for family ministry, the networks of volunteers envisaged seem to be located only incidentally to the parish structure, in a supra-parish reality managed by the diocesan Coordinator. This orientation might be problematic for engaging others in their work. The challenges of mediating the teaching in real family situations is also evident in the documentary evidence, with dioceses favouring people skills over theological expertise. Yet without theological expertise the tensions between ideals and reality cannot be fully addressed.

It is clear from this chapter and from Chapter 3 that the way that family ministry is conceived within the diocese is essential to understanding how it operates and especially in clarifying what is offered and to whom. The next two chapters will explore understandings of family ministry and the broader question of how it is seen as an authentic expression of Christian faith.

Chapter 5: Conceptualising Family Ministry: Definitions and Understandings

Having examined the experience of diocesan Coordinators of family ministry and the diocesan documents which govern their role, I now want to look at definitions and understandings: how do diocesan vision statements inform these? How do Coordinators describe their role, understand family ministry and feel their role is perceived in their diocese? The texts emanating from the United States illustrate a variety of ways in which family ministry has been understood and given expression, particularly the impact that experience has on conceptualising family ministry. A number of themes emerge and re-emerge in this chapter: firstly that family ministry is inherently challenging to define; secondly, that a tension exists between the family and the parish as the primary locus of church activity; thirdly, that the diocesan Coordinator has a critical, though not the only, role in enabling parishes to support families. A further tension already apparent between process and programmatic approaches to family ministry cannot be satisfactorily resolved without an appreciation of why family ministry is more broadly important to the Church, as an expression of Christian faith. This will be the focus of Chapter 6.

Diocesan Vision Statements

The job descriptions considered in Chapter 4 cover a multitude of responsibilities. Though this provides flexibility for the employer it gives the employee a sizeable burden of choice, depending on how they interpret, or are guided to interpret, their responsibilities. This reinforces the need for a guiding vision, a point of reference, to help distinguish greater from lesser priorities, to order activities according to their anticipated outcomes, to lend authority to decisions about the best use of time and resources, and about the best - or least worst - response when circumstances become especially challenging.

A request for diocesan vision or mission statements was made after respondents had completed the online survey and sent in job descriptions. In reviewing this data it had become clear that an important question had been overlooked in the original research design: was there an overarching diocesan policy to guide Coordinator's work in family ministry?

Perhaps because this question was an after-thought, just six responses were received. Two were additional copies of job descriptions. One provided two paragraphs from the diocesan website. Another admitted that no such document existed:

> "I recognise the short-comings of this situation and accept that this is something that needs to be remedied in due course."

A fourth Coordinator supplied three documents, none of which had the authoritative status envisaged: one was a text welcoming visitors to the diocesan family ministry website, another a diocesan family ministry publicity leaflet and a third a vision document developed by the diocesan Coordinators of the northern region of England in 2002. This Coordinator also noted difficulties in sharing a vision of family ministry:

> "The three main groups I work with see the world in quite different, if overlapping ways. So, priests (not all but generally) respond to 'religious' and specifically Catholic terminology, ideas and practices; schools (not all) respond to educational and attainment languages. Meanwhile families, which actually bear and nurture the life that the future depends on, do not seem to have a language that sufficiently esteems what they do. This difference in perspective and inadequate language sets up huge potential for misunderstanding and conflict."[15]

A fifth response referred to a diocesan pastoral plan produced in 2005 (Diocese of Portsmouth) which is both a vision and a pastoral implementation plan, developed over an 18-month period of prayerful and structured collaborative reflection in the diocese. Reviewing its content on family ministry, the word family is used three times: once in reference to 'the Christian family' (p.5), once in reference to family prayer (p.8) and once in reference to parishes as the family of God (p.12). The word marriage appears five times in sections on *liturgy and sacraments* and on *supporting each other* and in an appendix describing the curia. Only the section on *supporting each other* offers some direction to the work of family ministry, noting that each person has a vocation, needs to give and receive support at different stages of life and that love in action is the hallmark of a disciple.

A sixth Coordinator provided a diocesan vision document, which offered a more comprehensive treatment of the family, starting from an acknowledgement of the family as domestic church: "the primary place where Christian living is nurtured and

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[15] Email dated 3.12.12

where holiness, communion and service are everyday realities". Also recognising "great stresses in family life and marital relationships" the statement embraces the vision of helping all "to understand the nature of Christian Marriage and, recognising these stresses with understanding and compassion, to offer encouragement and support to couples striving to live out this high calling in their daily lives" (Diocese of Brentwood, 2004, p.4)

This statement gives clear theological context for the work of the Coordinator of family ministry, within the framework of a broad diocesan vision. It affirms core teaching and gives priority to the domestic church in the teaching it chooses to reflect, in sensitive language that endeavours to communicate understanding and compassion.

A search of diocesan websites revealed a further vision document (Diocese of Clifton, 2008) which emerged from a two-year consultation. Family Life features in a section entitled Church as Communion (p.12):

Guiding Principle: "God wished to be born and to grow in a human family. Thus he consecrated the family as the basic and ordinary way of his meeting with humanity."

Pastoral Guidelines: We are called to deepen an awareness of the vocational nature of marriage and parenthood and be aware that families today take many forms. It is through the supportive practical love of the family that the Church can most effectively express its conviction that God is love.

This simple approach belies the profound theology which underpins it. The guiding principle is a quote from Pope Benedict XVI on the Feast of the Holy Family in 2009. The pastoral guidelines home in on the relationship between love in the family and the love that is God. But the vision statement is not overly clear on how these principles can be translated into practical action on behalf of families.

Mission and vision statements potentially provide diocesan Coordinators with a secure reference point, conceptualising and authorising the work to be carried out, including whether it is to be flexibly responsive and, if so, in what ways. These documents ought also to locate family ministry within a broader ecclesial context, enabling Coordinators to collaborate more effectively, with colleagues in other curial positions and with parish clergy, on the basis of sharing common goals. When dioceses more visibly 'own' and 'direct' the work of the diocesan Coordinator, and

put guidelines in place, personal accountability is enhanced. Mission and vision statements are also sources for perceiving the ways in which dioceses understand the ecclesial identity of the family and reflect this in diocesan mission and ministry.

The vision statements reviewed provide an ambivalent picture. The terms *marriage* and *family* are used interchangeably, blurring the distinction between the two. Only one demonstrates appreciation for domestic church in any depth, and here the focus is on supporting couples in *marriage*, despite an acknowledgment of the stresses and strains of *family* life. In others the term family is applied as frequently to the People of God in the parish as to the human family. This again blurs both the distinction and the relationship between both entities. The diocesan visions of family ministry are essentially inadequate for generating awareness and broader understanding of this work. They are also inadequate for guiding and supporting the work of the Coordinator.

I want to acknowledge here the semantic challenges, noted by one Coordinator, in formulating a shared vision, one which will serve all the constituencies involved. If priests respond best to "'religious' and specifically Catholic terminology, ideas and practices", schools "to educational and attainment languages", while families "do not seem to have a language that sufficiently esteems what they do", where does a diocese begin to create an overarching vision? Given this challenge, the Coordinators' role as translator takes on greater importance - a role described eloquently by A in Chapter 3 (see p.54). But how do Coordinators themselves understand and articulate family ministry?

Interview Data
Definitions and understandings were explored in a number of ways during the interviews to discern Coordinators' perceptions of family ministry, their role and especially how they communicated these. They were asked about their own understanding of family ministry and what it means to them. They were also asked how well they felt their role was regarded, in general terms, within their diocese. They were also asked whether they did, in fact, adapt their explanations for their different potential audiences.

How do Coordinators Understand Family Ministry?

> "To put the wellbeing of marriage and the wellbeing of family life at the centre of everything that the diocese plans or puts into practice, whatever initiatives it has." (A)

> "it's understanding God's presence within their family… that's where I begin." (B)

> "it's love and support… bringing out of people what is really good." (C)

> "To … help the priests in their role ... to serve families.., in terms of their home life, their life away from the church, … parenting, bereavement, loss of a job, all those different issues …to walk alongside them in their problems but also direct them towards solutions…. to make the church a more welcoming place... to support families in their everyday life as well." (D)

I had hoped that this question would elicit personal and perhaps theological reflections on the meaning of family ministry and its purpose. A's clear and succinct response is a classic family perspective model of ministry, which will be further explored later in this chapter. B described an orientation underpinning his work: the recognition that God abides everywhere. C's response is a broad generalisation, applicable to any ministry. D alone draws attention to the multidimensional nature of family ministry, in a very tangible description that most people would easily understand and see as distinctive to family ministry.

C drew a parallel between personal family experience and church expressions of family ministry:

> "family ministry means the way I am with my own family is the way I am with everybody else… heartfelt support, honesty, integrity, truthfulness… forgiveness… understanding…"

Yet not all family qualities are as positive and life enhancing as the examples she gave. Family ministry cannot simply be an unqualified extension of family life and love applied to a bigger community. Some levels of truthfulness and understanding are only feasible within the context of a long established family unit, founded on long-term intimacy, shared experiences, common language and the learning that can only be acquired through arduous interpersonal negotiation. Although replication might be attempted in a wider domain, since we are called to be siblings in Christ, this must be a much more tentative effort. The space between people, in a parish or even a small group, is rarely, if ever, held together in the same way as in a human family.

Intriguingly, these expressions of family ministry barely touch the complexities of the day to day work of diocesan Coordinators: the variety of tasks, the web of networks, the juggling of responsibilities, the moral frameworks and pragmatic approaches and the liberating potential of their work. The inadequacy of their language reinforces the challenge of defining family ministry.

Adapting Language
Both B and D agreed that they adapted their explanations of their role depending on the audience, specifically whether they were talking to a practising Catholic and/or someone who had had a deeper involvement with the Church:

> "..it depends really …whether they are from a direct faith background or of no faith at all. But everyone understands family..." (B)

> "I might use different language [with] someone who works within the Catholic Church …but I would still try and put the same ideas across." (D)

However, C felt that her description was comprehensible to anyone.

> "Not at all because I think that incorporates everybody whether you're a practising Catholic, whether you're not, you are still important, you're still part of our parish." (C)

Reflecting on their responses it seems to me that Coordinators' default position is to use universal rather than ecclesial language when articulating their role. There was very little specifically religious language in their explanations, except the reference to God's abiding presence. Despite the fact that they were talking to someone with a direct faith background, working within the Catholic Church, I didn't hear evidence of adaptation. This suggests that Coordinators are more used to explaining their work to laypeople whose expertise in ecclesial language is unknown. I wonder if their descriptions would therefore lack traction among clergy, especially when it comes to having their practice and experience, and their need for support and resources, taken seriously. So the question of regard for their work was important to pursue.

Regard for Coordinators' work within Dioceses
Happily, responses to this question were mostly positive, though where the clergy was concerned the picture was more ambiguous.

"there is great appreciation, but only as long as it doesn't cost [priests] anything…as long as I give them the resources [or] a team who will do it for them…" (A)

"there is a great deal of respect… [the clergy] recognise that there is somebody… that they can contact …a source of help and information" (B)

"I think in [C's department] it's very valued… with the clergy in general it's valued although they are so busy … where it says 'the pastoral intervention of the church in support of family is a matter of urgency'[16] … it made me stop and think whether clergy are aware of this…" (C)

"there's a mix. ... some really seem to appreciate it… and are very grateful … others whose view is that a lot of this work should be done by the clergy… [others] who don't seem to be aware at all that you are there …" (D)

It is worth reiterating here the survey data that shows Coordinators experience most energy and enthusiasm for their work from diocesan colleagues and co-workers. Overall their role appears to be valued most by those who have directly encountered or benefitted from it. As D points out some will always remain unaware of what they do. C's comment implies no ill-will on the part of clergy but simply acknowledges they too are stretched. Only A's response adds a touch of cynicism: as long as a diocesan Coordinator makes life easier for them, clergy will be supportive.

If this conditional appreciation is typical, it is hard for diocesan Coordinators to ask anything of clergy, particularly problematic for the resourcing and authorising of diocesan family ministry. This example illustrates the resistance in one diocese to family-friendly working practices, essential if the Church's understanding of family ministry is to be fully realised:

"I would like the terms and conditions of Family Life Ministry (indeed most ministries) to be designed to suit families. …This has not been universally supported. One Diocesan official complained [but] the work is already poorly paid and it would not suit those needing the kind of money they would get from full time work or longer hours."

All the data gathered from the dioceses, through documentary evidence and through interviews with Coordinators, suggests that the Church's family ministry and the role of the diocesan Coordinator is poorly understood at diocesan level. Yet the experience and formal descriptions of the role demand a clear vision, a holistic understanding of family ministry and the variety of roles within it. In the absence of

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[16] FC #65

a vision, both diocesan authority for family ministry is challenged and safeguards for families and Coordinators are compromised.

Coordinators' responses highlight, sadly, their own lack of expertise in presenting a credible vision, notwithstanding the challenges of adapting this for different audiences. This may be a symptom of a lack of formation and of reflective practice. But their ambiguous relationship with diocesan clergy clearly underscores a lack of diocesan ownership of their work, a situation that can hardly be allowed to continue.

I want to turn now to the experience of practitioners and theologians from the United States, to discover if this can further inform, even address, the challenges of conceptualising family ministry.

Understanding Family Ministry in the United States

> "How does family ministry look in the context of the local church? ...Well, that depends on the church and on how you define 'family ministry'." Jones & Stinson, 2012, p.155

Jones & Stinson suggest that the term family ministry is difficult to define because it means different things to different people and that for all intents and practical purposes it is especially dependent on context for meaning. They give examples from their experience:

> "In one church "family ministry" may simply refer to a counselling program for troubled families. Another congregation... might require a churchwide emphasis on parental involvement in their children's Christian formation. Some communities of faith perceive family ministry as a program that provides a full roster of intergenerational events." (ibid)

They offer Clark's explanation of why this is so: "Unlike other areas of ministry focus, family ministry emerged without any sort of across-the-board consensus of what it is." (1997, p.13) Although the data gathered from dioceses reinforces a strong possibility that 'any sort of across-the-board consensus' is lacking, I want to look at the published accounts in more detail to verify the truth of this claim, beginning with the experience of the Reformed and Congregational churches (Jones and Stinson are writing from a Southern Baptist congregational perspective).

In his foreword to *Ministry to Families* Feucht's (1963) broad definition of family ministry implicates it as a core ministry of the Church:

> "a ministry of Christ's people, to Christ's people, in Christ's name. It looks upon the congregation's concern for and work with families as the natural expression of the Gospel working in a parish." (1963, p.3)

A further note from the Lutheran Missouri Synod's Family Life Committee states the purpose of helping "the congregation [to] develop its own family life education[17] services, carefully selected to meet its own needs." Christian family life education is explained as "helping every family by the grace of God to become a spiritually growing, responsible, Christian family unit" (1963, p.11) able to fulfil "their mutual service one to another" (p.15) within and beyond the home, as "the carriers of the Gospel" (p.17).

 Implicit in Feucht's chapter structure is the sense that family ministry exists to support faith development and faith practice at home, to strengthen family relationships, to ensure counselling is available to those who need it and to ensure that everyone, across the family life-cycle, feels included within the congregation. These goals are very similar to those adopted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 2005 of supporting parents and grandparents in passing on faith, and of developing family-friendly parishes, themes which emerged from listening to families about their needs[18].

Sell's (1981) definition of family ministry as "the enrichment of family life through the church" is also his book title. He describes this as family life education, "the church's task of Christian education *of* the home", and family nurture, "Christian education *in* the home". His Evangelical approach echoes Feucht's Lutheran understanding of family ministry as "concern for and work with" (1963, p3) families, by, for and with family members. Again, the objective is "to help the home", but, more specifically for Sell, in order that cycles of family abuse, alcoholism and marital breakdown (1981, pp.12-13) can be broken. Whereas Feucht's work was certainly given impetus by changing family structures, by 1981 concerns have become much more focussed on preventing 'problem' families.

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[17] The family life education movement emerged in the 1960's, taking an approach informed by social sciences, of preventing family difficulties by equipping families with knowledge and skills at pre and post-marriage, for parenting, financial planning and so forth.
[18] See the bishops' dedicated family website www.catholicfamily.org.uk/what-we-do/celebrating-family. Accessed 17.4.2017

Despite the work of Feucht and Sell, Guernsey (1982), from the interdenominational Fuller Theological Seminary, writes in *A new design for family ministry* that "it is a fact that for all practical and effective purposes neither a theology nor a methodology of marriage and family ministry now exists" (1982, p.6). Yet Guernsey too concurs that family ministry is "a two-dimensioned specialisation... the preventive and the corrective" (p.30). His "new design" guides congregations towards adopting "a Family of Families" model, where the extended human family is a model for the extended family of the congregation.

By contrast, in *Family ministry: a practical guide for a teaching church*, Leonard (1982, 1988), from the American Baptist Churches, offers both theology and methodology, defining family ministry as "all the efforts of our church to meet us in the context of our family relationships" (1988, p.9). This implies a family life education model but Leonard's framework is much broader. He stresses family faith development as well as education for sexuality and relationships, thus echoing Sell's emphasis on family nurture. Leonard goes further still, identifying two more tasks for family ministry: a theological task "where the theological power and significance of family experiences are recognised and honoured" (1982, 1988 p.15) and where the church as family of God can be fully realised; and an advocacy task of negotiating with public bodies on behalf of families, sharing community organising skills so that social action can flourish. These tasks take Christian practice of family ministry into new territory, one in which family is no longer seen as simply a problem to be solved but as an energetic life force having its own potential to transform society.

By 1990 Guernsey appears to endorse Leonard's approach when he reformulates his definition of family ministry as "the church's empowering the people of God to relate to one another as if they are family, especially if they are." He sees this as a shift "away from a static, programmatic definition to a more dynamic and relational one." That shift is further reflected by Olson and Leonard (1990) as they urge churches to see ministry to families less as programmes and more as processes: "the way church activities are promoted and carried out is often more important in ministry with changing families than adding a special program for a particular family type" (Olson & Leonard, 1990 p.173) .

Whilst the earlier texts understand the importance of healthy family relationships primarily so that families can be strong and problem-free, by the 1990's healthy family relationships are emerging as paradigms for the ways in which members of congregations ought to relate to each other. Even more significantly, the ways in which congregations themselves relate to families is beginning to be perceived as potentially of greater importance than what the church actually offers to, with and for families.

Hebbard (1995) too, in *The complete handbook for family ministry in the church*, understands family ministry less as a programme than a philosophy. A minister in the American Churches of Christ, Hebbard draws on John 4:1-26 for his paradigm: Jesus offering the Samaritan woman acceptance, hope and healing. In Hebbard's view effective family ministry is dependent on the ability to sit by wells and listen, that is: "who we are as transparent co-strugglers in relationship with the people we serve". Whilst acknowledging that definitions are hard to formulate, he looks to the key questions that, in his experience, repeatedly arise for practitioners: is this ministry, is it pro-active or reactive, what is the goal, what kinds of families do we serve, is our focus the church or the world? This leads Hebbard to conclude that: "family life ministry is ministry of the church through preventive and therapeutic efforts designed to strengthen all forms of families in the church and the community." (1995, p.6)

Writing from a Baptist perspective in *Family ministry: a comprehensive guide*, Garland (1999, 2012) subverts almost totally any interest of the church in preventive, therapeutic or social intervention into family life.

> "Family ministry is any activity that directly or indirectly (1) forms families in the congregational community; (2) increases the Christlikeness of the family relationships of Christians; or (3) equips and supports families for the work to which they are called together." (Garland, 2012, pp.120-121)

By stressing the faithing and vocational role of families as the key driver for family ministry, Garland suggests that the church ought only to be concerned for what a family does as Christians rather than in its structure. The measure of effective family ministry for Garland is therefore whether it enables families to be Christ-like, with all that that implies.

All these authors – and more – published on family ministry prior to Clark's assertion (1997) that the meaning of family ministry lacks consensus. These many accounts simply illustrate a variety of *formulation* of meanings. Commonalities certainly do exist: preventive and therapeutic approaches, the valuing of family life in Christian contexts, the role of the home in discipling Christians. These accounts also suggest that the practice of family ministry affects how it comes to be understood. Congregations started by wanting to help couples avoid marital breakdown and to prevent fractured families, but discovered that even in these challenges Christlikeness may be found.

In contrast to these different and largely unconnected initiatives, Roman Catholic experience of family ministry in the United States was almost totally driven by the bishops. The foundational documentation is a collection of materials from 1978 called *Parish Family Ministry Resources* in which the bishops set out their *Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry: a Vision and Strategy*. The plan describes rather than defines the ways in which the bishops understand family ministry. They coin the term "total family ministry" specifying that this:

> "goes beyond the concept of providing only a modicum of service, such as a marriage preparation programme, some marriage counselling, encouragement for family prayer and a tribunal system for nullity cases." (p.vi)

Instead the bishops frame total family ministry as covering six distinct but interrelated areas: ministry for pre-marrieds and singles, for married couples, for parents, for developing families, for hurting families and for leadership couples and families (pp.7-9). It is "a type of ministering not only *to* but *with* people" (p.11), an important development that acknowledges the "reality of the People of God as it is lived by all its members – laity as well as clergy and religious" (p.v). But also that "with the large number of families to reach, it is necessary to rely on many lay leaders and leadership families to undertake this like-to-like ministry" (p.vi).

Some general principles are outlined, broadly summarised as "awareness that understands, caring that enables, ministry that serves and structures that truly facilitate" (p.4). In practice this means:

- raising awareness in the Church of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage and of the challenges facing families and raising awareness

among families of their "special charisms, talents and potential for self-help and ministry to others".

- enabling couples and families to be caring, helping to develop "their potential for nurturing and healing each other, for reaching out in active concern to others".

- calling to ministry lay persons in the family, recognising the importance of like to like ministry.

- establishing structures and programmes that will facilitate this understanding of marriage and family life ministry (p.3).

These early documents precede the publication, and subsequent influence, of FC in setting out a theological basis for family ministry. In *Family Life and the Church*, Thomas (1979), who was involved in developing the Pastoral Plan, draws on Paul VI's exhortation EN (1975), to connect the ecclesial mission of the family with that of the parish, the family being a "ministerial" (p.34) as well as an evangelising and worshiping community. Thomas stresses the need for lay leadership in family ministry (p.60), as "a specialized ministry in the Church" and a "most significant activity" (p.66). He describes family ministry as "person-centred" and "life-centred" (p.72). Within the family it is expressed as ministry to one's marriage partner and to one's children (p.73) and beyond the family it is expressed as outreach to others, depending on "our own awareness of what others realistically need and what we can realistically provide" (p.90). "Given the range of family ministry, there will be ample tasks for everyone"(p.116), he writes. Family ministry "doesn't pour programmes into the community" but "seeks to draw from people the riches that are already there but undeveloped" (p.117). Thomas summarises family ministry theologically as:

- koinonia, or service to one's life partner and to one's children, in nourishing a community of love, citing GS #48[19] (pp.77-81).
- diakonia or reaching out to others, using examples such as the fostering of children, citing AA #11[20] (pp.82-92).

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[19] The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws; it is rooted in the contract of its partners, that is, their irrevocable personal consent. It is an institution confirmed by divine law and receiving its stability, in the eyes of society also, from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other. (GS #48)

- kerygma, or witnessing to Christ in word and deed, within and beyond the family, citing EN #71[21], LG #35 and also Matthew 28:19 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'. (pp.93-101)

In contrast author and religious educator Curran (1980b) highlights the variety of ways in which family ministry can be misinterpreted. In researching effective models of family ministry for the bishops' Pastoral Plan, she recalls being repeatedly directed by diocesan staff to parishes "with successful religious education programs for children" (p.3).

> "Many in leadership positions who should know better judge family ministry by what takes place under specifically parish auspices rather than by what takes place in the home. And they judge it on the basis of a minority of their families – the active, supportive, enthusiastic ones. They don't hear the needs of the fragmented, the unchurched and underchurched, and the hurting families." (1980b, p.5)

Curran poses a question mooted in the 1978 National Inventory of Parish Catechetical Programs:

> "Is family ministry envisioned as an ad hoc function responding to a momentary surge in family awareness? Or does it see itself as a ministry which must establish recognition, budget and a clear definition of how it differs from other ministries?" (p.7)

Curran herself sees family ministry as an "umbrella" term (p.10) that essentially embraces everything the church does to address family needs beyond religious education. She and Thomas both strongly emphasise the family ministry of the

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[20] Among the various works of the family apostolate the following may be listed: adopting abandoned children, showing a loving welcome to strangers, helping with the running of schools, supporting adolescents with advice and help, assisting engaged couples to make a better preparation for marriage, taking part in catechism-teaching, supporting married people and families in material or moral crisis, and, in the case of the aged, providing them not only with what is indispensable but also procuring for them a fair share of the fruits of economic progress. (AA#11)

[21] The family…has rightly been called the domestic church and this title has been confirmed by the second Vatican council. It declares that in every Christian family the various features and characteristics of the universal church should be found. And accordingly the family, just like the church, must always be regarded as a centre to which the gospel must be brought and from which it must be proclaimed. Therefore in a family which is conscious of this role all the members of the family are evangelizers and are themselves evangelized. (EN#71) Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also through the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with an appreciation of the faith (sensus fidei) and the grace of the word (see Acts 2:17-18; Apoc 9:10) so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life…. The Christian family proclaims aloud both the virtues of the kingdom of God here and now and the hope of the blessed life thereafter. Hence by example and by their testimony, they convict the world of sin and enlighten those who seek the truth. (LG#35)

home, that is, not just within the home but in reaching out to others: "ministry by parishioners to parishioners" (p.22).

Furlong (1987), a priest-practitioner prefers to describe what family ministry is not. It is not new, he writes, not a programme, not telling families what to do or doing for them what they can best do for themselves. Neither is it education "in the traditional sense" (p.13) or a reaction to the sociological needs of families. It is "not merely having a family perspective" or "just another lay ministry" (p.14). "Perhaps," he concludes, "we as a church merely have to identify what families have been doing for themselves for centuries in order to understand family ministry" (p.14). Furlong's technique helpfully indicates the kind of challenges and assumptions he experienced in implementing the process approach envisaged by the bishops.

A key difference that emerges in the Roman Catholic accounts of family ministry in the early 1980's as contrasted to other Christian experience is the much greater emphasis on the role of families themselves as active participants in family ministry. There is less focus on family life education and greater emphasis on the complexity and breadth of supporting the diversity of family life. However, in making a process rather than a programme the basis of their Pastoral Plan, significant challenges emerged for the bishops. The struggle to fully comprehend and give coherence to what this process might mean in practice is reflected by Boland and Furlong:

> "I still remember my confusion and frustration in reading about the 'basic principles' of the ministry process…. I couldn't grasp the import of these phrases and kept saying to myself: Understands *what*? Enables *what*? Facilitates *what*?" (Boland, 1982, p.3)

> "'The concept is too nebulous.' I was told this many times." (Furlong, 1987, p.9)

Perhaps because of these difficulties the bishops' conceptualisation of family ministry moved into a family perspective phase following publication of FC in 1980. Taking to heart that "no plan for organised pastoral work at any level must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral area of the family" (FC#70), the bishops Ad Hoc Committee on Marriage and Family "became convinced that implementing a family perspective in the Church's policies, programs, ministries and services was

the next necessary and logical step in the development of family ministry" (1998, p.vi).

The family perspective model became the new focus for family ministry in the Roman Catholic Church in North America from 1988 onwards. In a handbook for applying family perspective in a parish setting, (NCCB 1990), Bishop Hubbard affirms the importance of family as a primary community. He notes that because all parish ministry is connected to the reality of family life, there is "a sense in which we can say that all parish ministry is family ministry" (p.1). The family perspective model challenged all parish ministries to be evaluated for their impact on families: their Christian vocation, their family system, their cultural and social diversity and their relationship to other families and social institutions.

Whilst the bishops proposed a new series of programmatic steps and outcomes, Foley's (1995) approach was more organic, perhaps intuitively agreeing with Furlong's assertion that family ministry is not merely about adopting a family perspective. Foley called for the church "to emphasize the family rather than the parish as the primary unit of church" (p.7). This led him to explore a series of paradigm shifts from a passive to an active laity, from an individually pious, disembodied, other-worldly, 'neutered' spirituality to one that is relational, embodied, and focussed on ordinary life.

So whereas the Reformed and Congregational accounts start with programmatic approaches to family ministry and learn from this that processes are extremely important, the Roman Catholic bishops began by adopting a process and then moved towards programmatic approaches. In practical terms this shifted the locus of family ministry effort back to the "parish real estate" (Thomas, 1980, p.19) arguably absolving the Church from a more pro-active, and therefore costly, investment in families as leaders. As their official for work with families, Richard McCord, pointed out:

> "The [bishops] default response is not to establish a formal ministry, but to hope (and maybe make some concrete effort) that others already in formal ministries will act with "a family perspective". (Przybysz, 2005 p.5)

Reflections on how Family Ministry is Conceptualised

This chapter highlights the lack of robust diocesan vision statements to give direction for diocesan family ministry, a situation exacerbated by the difficulties of Coordinators in articulating family ministry. These challenges are situated in stark contrast to the richness and diversity of the literature emanating from the United States which gives definition and expression to family ministry. My conceptual framework highlights some particular issues worthy of closer scrutiny.

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry.

A recurring theme in this chapter is that family ministry is hard to describe or define succinctly. Although it is tempting to attribute the broad terminology evident in the Coordinators' responses ('raise awareness' 'give support' 'provide information and resources' 'coordinate the effort') to a lack of formation and reflective practice, the earlier US texts also use broad terms that lack specificity:

> "a type of ministering not only *to* but *with* people" USCCB, 1978 p11

> "that expression of ministry that *builds family relationships"* (Thomas, 1980 p.19)

> "the enrichment of family life through the church" (Sell, 1981)

> "all the efforts of our church to meet us in the context of our family relationships" (Leonard, 1988, p.9)

Yet if the substance of family ministry depends on the particular needs of a local congregation, a lack of specificity is inevitable. Diversity is a hallmark of family ministry when adaptability is part of the way it is conceptualised. Unfortunately it also exposes family ministry to being variously interpreted, so that its overarching focus and distinguishing characteristics are easily blurred if not obliterated.

But the realisation that family ministry is difficult to define is also a helpful finding. It is important that diocesan Coordinators don't feel inadequate when struggling to define their role; others struggle too, even after greater reflection and more theological training. Their efforts though provide a good starting point for today's practitioners. The identification of these texts, and the developments in family ministry which they illustrate, is a significant outcome of this study.

An important tension emerges in this chapter between programmatic and process approaches to family ministry when enabling the People of God to take responsibility. The US bishops provided a process through which family ministry could take shape locally according to local needs and strengths. Yet this was problematic: people found it hard and confusing to work with (Boland, 1981; Furlong, 1987). Yet it is a process closely aligned to the Church's understanding of family ministry. On the other hand, the Reformed and Congregational approaches began largely with programmatic approaches and found, over time, that these often failed to respect the strengths and vocation of Christian families, and even the grace of God operating within hurting families. I believe that the relationship between programmes and processes emerges from this dichotomy as closely connected. As I stated in my introductory chapter, I am committed to family ministry as an expression of the ministry of the lay faithful to each other in their local and family communities, but I appreciate the need for a ministry which equips families with sufficient skills, confidence and workable strategies for family ministry. Programmatic approaches offer a means of building this confidence and increasing skills, so that processes can be harnessed in a less anxious and clumsy way. However, to adopt a pure process approach will require Coordinators to engage in the messiness of community development within a culture that not only resists change but on some issues forbids it. Good community relationships are risked in this approach. But to adopt a purely programmatic approach might mean eschewing parish priorities and neglecting the principle of subsidiarity. A mixed method of process and programme approach represents a pragmatic way forward.

Both approaches, crudely summarised as the *how* and *what* of family ministry, need to be informed by the *why,* the ecclesial identity of the family.

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish

The data gathered from diocesan Coordinators demonstrates their busyness, the breadth of their work, and a lack of reflective practice. Also indicated is a tendency to focus on developing supra-parish networks and to work to diocesan priorities, rather than working closely with parishes to facilitate parish-determined family ministry. This chapter highlights the diffidence of Coordinators in articulating family ministry and a conditional regard for their work by clergy. While the United States accounts richly inform understandings of family ministry, these sources are also

persuasive on the subject of Coordinators' relationship to the parish. Both the Roman Catholic bishops and the Congregational and Reformed texts focus very strongly on the local congregation as the locus for family ministry. Given that Coordinators are already steeped in delivering programmes I want to consider the possibilities of them equipping parishes for process-oriented approaches to family ministry.

The four step process outlined by the US bishops in 1978 ("awareness that understands, caring that enables, ministry that serves and structures that truly facilitate") confirms family ministry as a local activity, one in which families are affirmed in their strengths, encouraged to collaborate in caring for one another, identifying for themselves areas of common concern and acting together on them. The skills are those of community action, and collaborative ministry but they are not without difficulties.

Practising these processes, when human frailties, anxieties, and resistance abound, is challenging. It is often much simpler to identify and implement a programme than facilitate a whole community open-ended project. Additional challenges emerge in a Roman Catholic context in encouraging family-determination of ministry. What if families want to change Church teaching and practice? Or if they cannot or will not actively engage otherwise? Or if parishioners who disagree on aspects of Church teaching find it impossible to work together? The 'fault-line' on which this ministry sits has been noted, as has the inhibiting impact of Church teaching on the recruitment of volunteers. Does this make parish family ministry a completely unrealistic possibility?

It would be unfortunate if dioceses shied away altogether from a process approach because of these difficulties. Avoiding conflict, even around Church teaching, does not resolve it or make it disappear. Skilful facilitation can allow difficulties and differences to be named and acknowledged, an activity which in itself is capable of altering the dynamic of a group. Here again practices of respect and authenticity are essential (see p.68). This is where a diocesan Coordinator, already experienced in negotiating tensions and drawing on an authentic moral framework to do so, can offer useful assistance.

Another approach might be to propose a series of programme options to parishes, alongside a process for selecting or adapting some of these according to local family

needs. The process approach is not lost but the optional programmes focus attention in tangible directions. Subsidiarity is respected. The complexity of process that potentially disables family ministry remains unacknowledged unless or until it surfaces naturally in the process, at which point an experienced diocesan Coordinator can intervene.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching

The balance between programme and process approaches still fails to take into account the 'why' of family ministry. In this chapter, the lens of the ecclesial identity of the family in Roman Catholic teaching highlights tensions between the family and the parish as the primary beneficiary of family ministry and issues of language, particularly in esteeming families' purpose and activity.

In Guernsey's 'new design' (1982), the focus is on the congregation as "a Family of Families". Writing in 1990 this emphasis remains for him, albeit in a more nuanced understanding of family ministry as "the church's empowering the people of God to relate to one another as if they are family, especially if they are." In contrast Foley calls for the family to be emphasized "rather than the parish, as the primary unit of church" (1995, p.7). These two examples illustrate Mette's (1995) tension (see Chapter 1, p.7) between the family perceived as "a reliable place for the reproduction of the church" rather than "a genuine field of experience for religion and faith" (p.82).

While Roman Catholic theology affirms that the wellbeing of both institutions are closely intertwined, "the good of the person, of society and of the Church herself passes by way of the family" (Charter, 1983), it is clear that families are not equally respected in practice. As one diocesan coordinator pointed out, problems of language within the church keep families in an unequal relationship with those who have responsibilities towards them, so that:

> "all the important developmental, educative, spiritual, practical and 'social' work of the family remains, beyond an often glib and patronising lip service, under-valued, under-appreciated and under-resourced…"

Hawksley, in my Paper 2 (p.245), identifies the practices of welcome, reflection and sharing as ways to help people more fully realise the spiritual significance of family life. The United States accounts offers some direction for these practices, suggesting

ways to address the imbalance between families and parishes, especially when there is a tendency to negatively judge families.

Olson and Leonard's (1990) affirmation that God's grace is still to be found, even amidst the pain and suffering of difficult family experiences, if families are able to readjust in positive ways, is striking in its relinquishing of structural approaches to family strength.

> "When families are not crushed by tragedy, but find new ways to create strong healthy relationships, that is a sign that the God of resurrection is still at work. We hold to the conviction that the work of the creating, redeeming, resurrecting God may be seen in changing families." (p.18).

Here the emphasis is on resilience, survival, hope and faith. Hebbard's challenge to family ministers to sit by the well and co-struggle with families adds something more. Rather than conceptualising family ministry as a way to 'fix' families – notwithstanding the need for counselling and healing ministries – surely parishes are the natural space in which the grace that emerges from family struggles, even tragedy, can be embraced: collectively identified and acknowledged, sensitively named and celebrated. This is after all the heart of 'like-to-like ministry' and of the Paschal mystery. Garland endorses this view in defining family ministry as activity that increases the Christlikeness of the family relationships of Christians.

The day to day experience of diocesan coordinators and their job descriptions have revealed little explicit emphasis on the family's ecclesial identity as domestic church. This chapter points to the existence of only one diocesan vision statement that draws on this theological driver for ministry:

> "The title "domestic Church" marks the family as the primary place where Christian living is nurtured and where holiness, communion and service are everyday realities." (Diocese of Brentwood, 2004)

A much greater focus on more nuanced understanding and appreciation of the ecclesial identity of the family has the possibility of totally transforming the work of the diocesan Coordinators. But such an understanding would need to focus far more on what families do rather than how they are structured, and especially attend to family life as a genuine field of experience for religion and faith.

A possible starting point in this respect would be to focus as much on baptism as on marriage, because it is that sacrament which brings us into a sibling relationship with Christ, and with each other.   As I noted in paper 1 (p.215)

> "Husbands and wives are first of all brother and sister in Jesus Christ before they are husband and wife. Sons and daughters are also brother and sister to their father and mother before they are sons and daughters." (Knieps-Port le Roi, 2008)

Family ministry practices could then address the need to develop our sibling ways of relating lovingly to one another, whether we are also in relationship as spouses, parents or children. This would counter-balance an over-emphasis on the regulating of relationships and also nuance the relationship between the home and the parish. The home is where we first learn to relate as brothers and sisters in Christ, which are skills and experiences needed to relate as siblings in the parish setting. The home has much to teach the parish as this response to a pre-Synod consultation suggests:

> "When family members fall out or have disagreements, the desire to resolve issues ultimately is due to loyalty to people to whom you are connected by blood. It is much easier to walk away from disagreements with friends or acquaintances without a backward glance." (CBCEW, 2015, p.13)

A greater focus on baptism might well provide a new language of esteem for families. At the very least a new perspective which holds all Christians together in a more equal relationship would honour the meaning of our shared baptism: the call to bring the Gospel and the kingdom to life in whatever settings and circumstances we find ourselves. Wherever two or more of us are gathered, there is Christ, and there too is Christ's church, whether at home, in the parish, or in the wider world.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a considerable amount of data relating to how family ministry is conceptualised. It begins with noting the poor quantity and quality of diocesan vision statements, continues with the responses of four diocesan Coordinators to questions about how they understand family ministry, adapt their explanations of it and perceive their role in their diocese. Unsurprisingly, given the lack of diocesan vision, their explanations lack consistency and clarity and their role is not one that is consistently appreciated. United States experiences suggest that family ministry is difficult to define succinctly, possibly because understanding develops as it is

practically experienced and because family ministry will inevitably appear different according to its local context. Programmatic and process approaches are both emphasised in these accounts, each problematic in its own way. The role of the diocesan Coordinator is suggested as a facilitator of processes at parish level rather than as an implementer of supra-parish programmes. A more nuanced emphasis on the ecclesial identity of the family as rooted in baptism could address the tensions between the family and the parish as loci for this church activity. The next chapter looks at the overarching Christian context for family ministry and why and how it is regarded as a valid expression of Christian faith.

Chapter 6: Family Ministry as a Christian Practice

While Chapter 5 explored the way family ministry is understood or conceptualised this chapter reviews the ways that it is contextualised more broadly within Christian faith and mission. Coordinators were asked how their work relates to other areas of the Church's mission, to their own Christian faith and to their motives and inspiration. The accounts of United States family ministry were interrogated to identify how scripture and magisterial documents have been used to describe family ministry as an expression of Christian life. Emerging from all this data is a deeper appreciation that family ministry serves personal, family and communal life. Although this chapter confirms once more that the family's ecclesial identity rarely informs the practice of diocesan Coordinators, explicitly at least, Scripture emerges as a resource which could effectively support families in appropriating their ecclesial identity.

Interview Data

Despite the findings of previous chapters - that the work of diocesan Coordinators is very varied and that there is little evidence of either Coordinators or their employers reflecting deeply on family ministry - this chapter reveals that scriptural and doctrinal positions are in fact used by Coordinators to underpin family ministry. The surfacing of the ways in which they connect faith with life as a family minister, their practical wisdom, is a very important outcome of my research, because it fills the middle ground between what the Church says and how that is received and applied in practice. This chapter reveals what is important – and not so important – about their Christian faith to those working with families on behalf of the church.

Family Ministry in the Broader Context of Church Mission

It was anticipated when asking how their work in family ministry relates to other areas of the Church's ministry that Coordinators would describe, for example, how family ministry relates to and support the work of colleagues involved in liturgy, adult formation, social action or education. But given earlier difficulties in describing their role and defining family ministry, this question too received some broad general responses.

C felt that family ministry was simply indispensable: "Without it I just don't know where the church would be." B echoed the doctrinal position that family is the smallest cell of society (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, ch.5): "if it's not right within the family then it's not going to be right within society". In contrast D's response reflected the experience of working very explicitly as part of a team within a single department of a curial office. This had provided opportunities to collaborate on joint projects, and to compare her work more closely with that of her colleagues. D had learned that family ministry is more outward looking than other Church ministries.

> "Mine is quite different…. really the outreach work. Other… work is based upon what happens in church…. whereas mine was working with people who didn't actually attend Mass..." (D)

D described the courses that she offered, often attended by those with a loose connection to the Church, accessed because their children attended a Catholic school. They came because she offered something directly relevant to their everyday life. This suggests that one of the distinguishing characteristics of family ministry is that it is more likely to be serving those closer to the margins than the centre of the Church community, or at least those who don't attend Sunday Mass. Its evangelising potential is rooted in a strong witness of love and care for family relationships, rather than an explicit proclamation of the Gospel in words.

Which Christian Beliefs Mean Most to Diocesan Coordinators?

All those interviewed highlighted the connection between the human and the divine, and the importance of loving one's neighbour:

> "the idea that each and every person without any exception is made in the absolute image and likeness of God." (A)

> "…all of us are loved by God, valued in the eyes of God and should be valued in the eyes of the church and in the eyes of the world..." (D)

> "To love one another… it's who we are created to be." (C)

B mentioned two pieces of scripture that particularly exemplify the meaning of Christian love in the context of family ministry:

> "...Matthew 25: I was hungry you fed me, I was naked you clothed me, I was in prison... The other is around 4.2 Corinthians, what love is and what love isn't..."[22]

A took a much more sacramental approach in his response, stressing elements of the rites of baptism and marriage:

> "…in baptism when the gifts of the spirit are lavished upon us, there is no distinction made in the richness…, the gifts are lavished upon us in equal measure but differently… that marriage is a holy mystery and unpacking what the word mystery means, what the couple living marriage are meant to reveal to the world…"

A also acknowledged the significance of God becoming human, born into a family and experiencing our own dependence and vulnerability:

> "…the utter humanity of Jesus, ... [which] had to be nurtured and nourished and developed… what more wondrous responsibility could we be given than to nurture and foster the human being...... that Christ himself needed in the home..."

All these responses focus on the centrality of the incarnation to family ministry: God made human, humankind made in the image of God, the practice of love of neighbour as making God more tangibly present in the world, the obedience to the great commandment. These are not tangential Christian beliefs. They locate the rationale for family ministry firmly at the heart of Christian life.

What Motivates, Inspires and Sustains Coordinators?

When asked why they took the job, each Coordinator mentioned in different ways a commitment to marriage and family life, though mostly from a social or justice perspective. A had previously observed the exclusion of family ministry from diocesan planning:

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[22] Matthew 25:31-46 is a passage used by Coordinators delivering Family Caring Trust's 'Noughts to Sixes' Parenting Programme as a reflection for parents. In the reflection the child says to the parents: "In spite of the enormous upset I caused to your life and household, you were actually delighted to share your home with me. I was born completely naked and you wrapped me in little sheets and blankets, and then babygros and clothes. I appreciated the sacrifices you had to make to feed me, and the boredom of constantly cleaning up the mess I made. I was sick, with teething and wind, with bouts of 'flu and temperatures and measles and chicken pox and constant colds. And you comforted me, and you lost your sleep, and you were anxious and worried and suffered along with me and stayed off work and cared for me. I was in the prison of my own immaturity, resisting limits, acting up, throwing tantrums. And you didn't just visit me – you came and stayed with me, imprisoning and tying yourself up – for years – for my sake, so you could lead me out into freedom and maturity and an enjoyment of the wonders of life." (Quinn, 2010)

> "Although I knew how vital marriage and family life was to the life of the diocese, it was very much on the edge and never consulted or never involved …never asked for advice or asked to contribute… they never [thought] what the implications would be for MFL in this."

This motivated A to adopt a family perspective approach to his work. B simply wanted to give families the best chance of happiness:

> "The best times I have is… with my family… but I was seeing that many, many families weren't… I felt that there was a better way...."

D's motives were similar:

> "I've always felt that family is central to society … [the job] just grabbed me… I had most of the skills and background... the job fitted like a glove."

C admitted to not realising the extent of the role:

> "Maybe that was a good thing because maybe I wouldn't have applied for it, had I known how big the job was. So why did I take it? ... When I was in the interview I experienced this joy that was inexplicable. It was just bubbling up inside me."

Coordinators revealed more emotion in these responses than when describing their role. They highlight their attraction to the work, their passion for it and the joy they experience through it. The role became more alive in this part of the conversations: A's desire to address an organisational injustice, B's desire to make life better for others, C and D both excited by an opportunity that intuitively felt right, matched their values or used their gifts. They gave little attention though to the importance of families to the church, as transmitters of faith, as domestic churches or as leaders in the parish.

But what continues to inspire and sustain them, given their challenges? For A, it was families themselves:

> "..just the ordinary, daily, unspoken self-sacrificing love. .. that absolutely ordinary but incredible faithfulness…people wearing themselves out without any reward at all ...being able to observe those things ..."

B too was sustained by those he served:

> "… very little things, where an email comes in and says thank you … I like those little 'touches on the tiller'…."

But C was sustained by faith, her colleagues and being able to express who she is, in and through her work.

> "…obviously God ... the people I work with, the support and encouragement I get. The Pope, John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, reading things like that… And also just... allowing myself to be…. in this role you can actually bring to it a richness of ministry or gifts that you are allowed to express…"

This latter point echoes the practice of adaptability but also raises questions about the safeguards for a diocese should their Coordinator have narcissistic tendencies. There is a balance to be struck between "allowing myself to be" and the common good.

Like B, D appreciated positive feedback but also the encouragement of colleagues in other dioceses:

> "Direct feedback is …most inspiring to me…also when we have our [national] meetings and I hear about what's happening ….it really galvanises me to try and make those things happen in our diocese as well."

Coordinators' responses illustrate that family ministry operates at the margins of church life, both in terms of reaching families on the margins and the significant degree to which Coordinators operate as lone workers. Only C mentions the sustenance of colleagues locally. This reinforces their role as a counter-cultural presence within the curia, highlighted in the lack of strategic and practical support for their work. Yet Coordinators root family ministry in central Christian principles, of being made in the image and likeness of God, in order to love as God loves. The centrality of their role within Christian belief contrasts so sharply with their position within the diocese that it reflects something of Christ's own vulnerability.

The responses in this section further reinforce the sense that Coordinators are operating as change agents in the lives of individuals, making a positive difference in their family lives. Testimony to these positive impacts, tangible evidence of success, is an important source of sustenance. Given that I recommended a move away from directly serving families to preparing others for that role, how would they survive without this nourishment? A valid measure of success in parish family ministry is that parishes become less dependent on a Coordinator, as the parish itself grows in skill and confidence; families, together with their pastoral ministers, identifying and

addressing common concerns and strengths. It would be important therefore to develop other ways of ensuring that diocesan Coordinators have sufficient encouragement to sustain their resilience.

Family Ministry as a Christian Practice in the United States

Coordinators pointed to the incarnation as the primary context of Christian family ministry: God made human, humankind made in the image of God, the practice of love of neighbour as making God more tangibly present in the world, and the obedience to the great commandment to love. The accounts of family ministry in the United States offer a richer perspective, particularly the Congregational and Reformed authors who draw primarily on Scripture for inspiration and rationale.

Feucht (1963) asserts that family ministry is a Christian ministry because it is both a service of the Church "to equip the people for their ministry" (Eph. 4:12) (p.15) and a service of the people "to one another" (Matt 20: 25-28) (p.16). He emphasises the role of the home, particularly the parents, in "the Christian nurture of the child" (p.13), citing Deuteronomy 6: 6-9 and Ephesians 6:4. "Equipping the family for its religious tasks is one of the first duties of the Christian congregation", he writes (p.14). Further, service to families is "significant" because "God made the family the basic unit of society. … What we become as persons is largely determined in the preschool years by home teaching and environment." (p.14)

Sell's (1981) rationale is more expedient, based on the ills that families face, the needs being so "urgent" that family ministry often resembles "a rescue effort more than it does an educational venture" (p.19). His main premise is twofold: that the church wants to "help the home in training future generations in the faith" but also because "the church cannot function as it should … if it cannot rely on the home to play the major part in Christian nurture….." (p.29). Further, and more kindly, he acknowledges that "the Christian's search for a better home life is part of the search for the abundant life that Christ tells us can be ours in all spheres of life." (p.29)

Guernsey (1982) devotes a chapter to the connection between the gospel commands of Jesus and the "viability of the family as an institution", since this is an "interrelationship that is a linchpin for ministry to families" (p.9). He selects

Matthew 28: 19-20 as just one of a number of key texts that provide a theological starting point for ministry to the family:

> "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

From here Guernsey explores the nature of discipleship as relationship with Christ, a vocation which requires relationship skills, capacity for which is primarily determined in the family: "a place where disciplelike relational skills are learned… a primary group in which disciple making takes place" (p.11). Just as baptism, "that event in which the individual identified himself with Jesus as Jesus has redemptively identified Himself with mankind" (p.13), brings people in to the church it is within the family that people are socialised into finding their place as members of Christ's body. Guernsey's third emphasis is on values: "to whatever degree a Christian family succeeds in passing on the value system espoused by Jesus, that is the degree to which … obedience to his commands is achieved..." (p.15).

Guernsey's parallels between the Church's tasks of making disciples, baptising and teaching obedience, and the family's tasks of establishing primary relationships, socialisation and building values, is one possible way to contextualise family ministry as an expression of Christian faith. However, it is a perspective which tends to see family as an institution at the service of the Church, rather than as "a genuine field of experience for religion and faith" (Mette, p.82).

Like Feucht, Leonard (1982) affirms the home as the primary place for nurturing faith in children (Deut. 6: 4-9), but he uses other Scriptural texts (Luke 2: 41-51; John 7:3-5; Mark 3:33-35) to disrupt cosy notions of family and show Jesus distancing himself from his own family. Leonard asserts that Jesus himself placed limits on the authority of families. Therefore, the "congregation is called to be a familial group, that both reinforces the strengths of smaller family units and overcomes the failures of individual family systems" (p.36). This potentially places the congregation in a paternal relationship with families but Leonard is more refreshing in his acknowledgement of Jesus' less comfortable words on family life:

"Let all who (sometimes self-righteously) define 'Christian family' in narrow terms take note!" (p.33)

By 1995, writing with Olson, Leonard focusses less on family failings and more on the Christian vocation of families, citing scriptural authority for this:

> "our discoveries lead us to a basic conclusion: The Bible mandates empowering families so that they meet basic human needs and equip their members in turn to be agents of God's redemptive power." (Olson and Leonard, 1995, p.19)

Their argument draws on Niebuhr's (1951) work *Christ and Culture*, recognising that the Bible is culturally conditioned and that its tenets can be freshly interpreted for the contemporary world. In scripture Olsen and Leonard see both the importance of marriage and family life yet also many instances of the covenants of family life being disrupted. They recognise God's creative intent but also God's absolute love as the tension within family ministry that both holds high the ideals and equips families to live up to those ideals, but also stands ready to hold close those who struggle and sometimes stumble. Olsen and Leonard also acknowledge the many atypical families in scripture through which God works in surprising ways, including the death and resurrection of Christ, God's own son, through which God redeems God's people. This leads to a confident assertion that "the work of our creating, redeeming, resurrecting God may be seen in changing families" (p.18).

Hebbard (1995) uses the parable of the Good Samaritan as the scriptural basis for a holistic approach to family ministry. Many churches, he argues, are comfortable with meeting spiritual, intellectual or physical needs but not so comfortable meeting emotional needs. And yet "the pain in families is so great that they are open and eager to hear any word from God" (p.30). The loss to churches of families experiencing a family crisis is reason enough, he suggests, for churches to offer assistance with complex family problems. He proposes eight biblical principles for family ministry: support for family relationships because the essence of Christianity is relationship with Christ; a needs-based ministry in tune with Matthew 25; a ministry realistic about pain and suffering, which "washes the feet" as Jesus did, even of those who betrayed him (John 13); support for families in faith development and for the church as a faith-family; inclusive just as Jesus was inclusive with the Samaritan woman and little children; a "broad-based ministry that capitalizes on the

individual strengths of its membership" (p.53) who comprise the Body of Christ; having high standards while ministering to "fallen people" (John 8:1-11); embracing real rather than ideal or perfect families, like the complex families who feature in the Bible. Hebbard concludes with the overarching statement that "the biblical basis for family life ministry is a study in Christian relationships."

Garland's background in community mental health services informs her sense that "family ministry should be much more than family social services offered in the context of a religious community" (p.121). Congregations have a responsibility for nurturing the "founding and growth" of families who have "committed themselves to follow Jesus and to be family for one another" whether they are related biologically, live under the same roof or not. Citing St Paul, "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3:26) Garland suggests that family ministry is an essential expression of Christian life because through it, the church learns what it is to be brothers and sisters in Christ, members of the family of God.

In prioritising the family of faith, she, like Leonard, subverts the primacy of human family, while also using it as the starting point for transformation, drawing on scripture. She too endorses the community of faith as a critical support for human families: "followers of Christ need special relationships – families – within the larger community of faith, and within the ever widening circle of neighbours for whom we are to show love" (p.110). Further, Garland identifies four specific principles arising from Christ's life and teaching: "the Christian family is one of adoption; living faithfully as family is a Christian vocation; family relationships are not our first loyalty; a congregation is a community" (p.111).

The wide range of scriptural texts revealed in this brief review is a significant resource for addressing the lacuna in theological reflection on family ministry. Especially important is the recognition that families have a ministry of their own, which can and ought to be supported by their faith community, reflected in various ways by many of these authors. Although the desire for stable family life is a strong and important motivating factor, so too is the appreciation that all family experience can teach us something about what it means to belong to the family of God and that we cannot limit God's interest to normative families. These accounts also clearly

challenge an over-emphasis on nuclear families and patriarchy, preferring to support people as siblings in Christ.

In contrast, Roman Catholic accounts focus heavily on Church teaching as their context for understanding family ministry as an expression of Christian life.   In their 1978 Pastoral Plan, the US bishops affirm that: "The family is called to be an expression of God's creative and redemptive love" uniting "the spiritual with the material and psychological dimensions of human existence" (p.3). Their statements are not always clearly referenced and, since, they write, the family's mission is clear in Church teaching, family ministry exists to support it.

> "Family-centered ministry should be based on a perception of the Gospel foundations of the family's own mission. These have been initially elaborated upon in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and in the apostolic exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World. In these documents the importance of the family's Christian ministry as a witnessing community, a worshipping community and a serving community is communicated" (p.11).

Thomas (1979) explores this threefold mission further, noting that the Church's pastoral concern for families coincides with "a rich development in the theological understanding of marriage and family life" (p.30) following the Second Vatican Council. The model of Church as a community, as the People of God (see Lumen Gentium Ch. 1), is important for appreciating the role of the family in Christian life, which Thomas sees as incarnating the love that is God:

> "Christian family life is filled with moments of intimacy, acceptance, caring and support. From a human standpoint these expressions of interpersonal warmth are indispensable for the development of the human personality. From a Christian standpoint they are required so that the love of God may again take on human form and become a part of the personal history of each Christian. To put it simply: The Church needs the Christian family!" (p.31).

The goal of all ministry, Boland (1981) points out, is to build up the Body of Christ, the Church, in unity. Family ministry, he writes, leads "to a new experience of Church", enabling "in fact as well as in theory, a community of caring intimacy and loving service" (1981, p. 34) to be sustained. Further, "a renewed family life and a developed sense of family ministry" are fundamental to parish renewal and to evangelisation (p.36).

In their family perspective documents (1988, 1990, 1998) the US bishops reference the Second Vatican Council and FC when affirming the family as "the basic foundation of the Church and of society, the most basic of all human communities" and that "the value, the dignity and the mission of the domestic church" (1998, p.5) must be recognised:

> "Because Christians enter into a covenant of love with Jesus Christ, we are called to try to act with a consciousness of Christ's presence in our family lives" (1990, p.5)

Kehrwald (1991) puts the imperative for family ministry more bluntly into a parish context:

> "The quality of community, worship, Christian education and apostolic service expressed by the parish is directly related to the quality of household life. The expression of Christian values shared in the home, and passed on from one generation to the next, builds a foundation for the same expression in the larger community of the parish. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the parish to support and nurture family living." (p.6)

Although the Roman Catholic texts draw heavily on magisterial teaching and on tradition, the absence, by and large, of any scriptural references is a disappointment. The implication of this approach is that a further obstacle is put in the way of appropriating family ministry as a Christian practice because familiarity with the documents of the Church is first required.

Reflections on Family Ministry as a Christian Practice

Despite the difficulties of defining family ministry illustrated in Chapter 5, interviews with diocesan Coordinators revealed a number of core Christian beliefs (p.115) which operate as a theological framework and guide for their work. The understanding that each of us are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) inspires them to offer ministry that values, accepts and includes each person. The great commandment to love one another (John 13:34) focusses their efforts not only towards acting lovingly themselves but also offering ministry that supports loving family relationships. They draw on Matthew 25:31-46 to emphasise the ministry of the home but apply this text also to their own work of feeding the hungry and liberating the imprisoned.

The accounts of United States experience reveal a great many more texts from scripture and the Church's magisterium that support family ministry as an authentic Christian practice. Through the lens of my conceptual framework three issues emerge particularly clearly: the efficacy of Scripture compared with Church doctrine for understanding family ministry, the relationship between the person and the community, and the extent to which diocesan practice is uninformed by the ecclesial identity of the family.

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry

The identification by Reformed and Congregational writers of scriptural texts that energise, inform and direct family ministry offers an accessible and enlivening resource for practitioners. This contrasts with Roman Catholic writers who draw mostly and often obliquely on magisterial documents. Though these are primary texts for Catholic self-understanding (LG and GS, for example), they can be daunting and are, on the whole, likely to be less familiar than scripture to the families that Coordinators are seeking to engage in family ministry, perhaps even to the Coordinators themselves. Moreover, the language in which these documents are couched is sometimes impenetrable and non-inclusive, depending on the translation selected.

In my Paper 2 I wondered if scriptural texts, specifically the way Jesus subordinates the natural human family to the wider family of humankind, might be a reason why the Roman Catholic Church resists family ministry (see Paper 2, pp.242-245). But now I believe that scripture, rather than Church documents, offers the strongest basis for family ministry. People are exposed to scripture more frequently and draw on it naturally as part of their own moral framework, as the Coordinators' responses in Chapter 3 illustrates. Given the rich seam of texts highlighted in this chapter – including the texts which critique the primacy of the family – there is new scope for stimulating the kind of reflection so necessary to the practice of diocesan Coordinators and to developing the vision of their employers.

Especially helpful is Garland's perception that family ministry supports the practice of living as brothers and sisters in Christ. In her model, family experience is an essential precursor to appreciating the intensity and struggle of being siblings in Christ that we are called to as fellow Christians in the congregation. This

understanding explicitly identifies families as a resource for the whole community: both a model and a testing ground. This is a far cry from families being the focus of efforts to ensure they are stable, reliable and faithful to one another, although that is still part of being siblings in Christ. But the change in emphasis recognises that family ministry primarily serves the need to be better siblings in Christ rather than, primarily, the need to prevent family breakdown. This strongly coincides with the Church's understanding of family ministry as an activity of the whole People of God.

That said, the concern that different audiences need different forms of words, different reasons to engage, looms large at this point. This practical piece of wisdom foils attempts to be overly prescriptive when contextualising family ministry as a Christian practice. Clearly magisterial documents and concern about divorce statistics speak strongly to certain audiences. Anxiety lies at the heart of many challenges for family ministry in a Roman Catholic context (see Chapter 1). So it will be important that Coordinators are able to pragmatically balance their use of scripture and doctrinal sources when communicating family ministry as a Christian practice in different situations.

The importance of 'imago Dei' as a particularly rich inspiration for diocesan Coordinators is significant in that it is not highlighted in the United States accounts, despite a mention of the incarnation of God's love. Imago Dei is a principle that originates in Genesis and features in GS and FC[23]. The Coordinators draw on it to emphasise the dignity and importance of each human person, and that we are made in God's image which is love, for loving one another and God. The foundational work in developing self-worth and learning about love and God happens first in the family, for which families deserve support. By drawing on Imago Dei as a central Christian belief underpinning family ministry the Coordinators are also echoing Sell's (1981) point that:

> "the Christian's search for a better home life is part of the search for the abundant life that Christ tells us can be ours in all spheres of life." (p.29)

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[23] The Vatican's International Theological Commission studied this theme from 2000-2002, see Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html#_edn1 Accessed 10.1.16

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish

The same focus on "the idea that each and every person without any exception is made in the absolute image and likeness of God" (A, see p.115) and that "all of us are loved by God, valued in the eyes of God and should be valued in the eyes of the church and in the eyes of the world..." (D, p.115) explicitly frames family ministry as Christian service to the person. In their busy working lives, diocesan Coordinators seem to give more time responding to queries from individuals and developing supra-parish networks than to developing parish family ministry. The United States accounts reflect similar tensions between person-centred, family-centred and parish-centred approaches.

Feucht's (1963) handbook recognises the Christian nurture or person-centred perspective: "What we become as persons is largely determined in the preschool years by home teaching and environment" (p.14). Others emphasise the community element of family ministry, both the community of the family: "the importance of the family's Christian ministry as a witnessing community, a worshipping community and a serving community." (USCCB, 1978 p.11) and the community of the parish: the "congregation of believers is called to be a familial group" (Leonard, 1982, p.36). These interchangeable emphases and impacts reinforce the complexity of family ministry and potentially blur its purpose and focus. Family ministry can legitimately mean different things to different aspects of church. This is a strength until different emphases compete or conflict. If the parish is seen as more important than the family, or the person more important than the parish or the family more important than the person, then vision and practice are both affected.

In practical terms, a diocese or a diocesan Coordinator need not be prescriptively selective about whether family ministry serves the person, the family or the parish, because it does all of those things intrinsically, when it centres on the person in the context of their family and wider family-like relationships ideally found in the parish. But, it is important to be clear about this triple effect, and to distinguish the main goal – the full life that Christ calls us to – so as to avoid the temptation of setting one against the other. Similarly it is important to recognise personal, family and parish responsibility for family ministry so that the diocesan role can better

become facilitative and informative, rather than totally responsible as it seems to be at the moment.

The overriding image for maintaining the equilibrium between family, parish and diocese whilst also asserting the personal focus of family ministry, is the relationship that binds the Trinity, and yet this is not highlighted at all in the data, despite the focus in responses on relationships. In my Paper 2 (see Appendix 6) I noted Hilberath's (2010) exploration of the Trinity and communio theology as a model for human relationships both at home and in the church. The Trinity has certainly been used as a model (CBCEW, 2008) for the radical human relationships to which family and church aspire[24], but it could be unpacked even further. As Downey (2003) points out:

> "The proper exercise of ministry makes manifest the trinitarian life, the God whose very being is to be in relationship: Father, Son, Spirit – toward us, for us, with us, in us…." (p.20).

In her seminal work on the doctrine of the Trinity, Catherine Mowry LaCugna explores the need to correspond to what we believe about God: "that God is personal, that God is ecstatic and fecund love, the God's very nature is to exist toward and for another" (1992, p.383). Among the implications for ecclesial life of this kind of communio are the challenging questions of whether:

> "our institutions, rituals and administrative practices foster elitism, discrimination, competition, or any of several 'archisms', or whether the church is run like God's household: a domain of inclusiveness, interdependence, and cooperation, structured according to the model of *perichōrēsis*[25] among persons." (p.402)

A deeper reflection by Coordinators on Trinitarian theology would speak to them not only of the quality of relationships envisaged in Christian communities, including families, but also of the multi-faceted dimensions and impacts of their work, even when they appear to be engaged in a single process or programme.

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[24] See also FC #11: God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

[25] *Perichōrēsis* is a term referring to the relationship between the three persons, sometimes described as a dance, flow or movement, but certainly of the connection and mutuality between Father, Son and Spirit.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching

Alarmingly, the ecclesial dimension of the family does not feature strongly in Coordinators' responses. I have noted the 'lacuna' or 'doctrinal vacuum' in the literature on domestic church (see p.36) and in the visionary documents of English and Welsh dioceses (see p.103). Roman Catholic texts from the United States point to "the value, the dignity and the mission of the domestic church" (NCCB, 1988, p.5). However my research indicates that it is a term that has yet to gain traction in the practice of diocesan Coordinators. This is alarming because the ecclesial identity of the family is so important to understanding family ministry and especially the relationship of the diocese to the parish and family. It is a critical factor in ensuring that the dignity of the family – and of family ministry - is respected and adequately resourced by the Church.

As I point out in my Paper 2, some efforts have been made in recent years to address the doctrinal vacuum on the domestic church. Publication of the papers presented at the 2010 international conference has, for example, greatly increased the literature on domestic church. Yet most of these papers are written in the language of the academy, a language that Coordinators are not always well versed in[26]. The busyness of Coordinators and their lack of reflective practice are also limiting factors. Furthermore, there are few resources in which the domestic church is unpacked in family-friendly language, the Quinn programme noted in Chapter 2 (see p.39) being an exception.

Matthew 25:31-46 emerges as an important scriptural source for locating family ministry within the broader Christian tradition. Various versions of a reflection for parents based on this gospel have circulated in the Coordinators' network for some years, connecting the feeding, thirst-quenching, welcoming, clothing, healing and liberating work of the home with the criteria on which the final judgement will be based. Although this is not explicitly claimed by Coordinators as a representation of the domestic church, it certainly speaks to the ecclesial identity of the family, making "what is truly essential to the Church's nature present in the setting in which [they] are placed, from the position only [they] can occupy, in which [they] cannot

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[26] An exception being Thomas Kniep-Port le Roi's (2015) paper, Being One at Home: Interchurch Families as Domestic Church, published in the book of the same name, in which he succinctly summarises the scriptural, patristic and conciliar sources for the domestic church.

be replaced by any other, not even by the clergy and where, nevertheless, the Church must be." (Rahner, 1977)

A more traditional model of domestic church summarised as *koinonia, diakonia* and *kerygma* (broadly translated as community, service and witness) could be of help here. Thomas (1978) uses these terms to define family ministry of the home: service to one's life partner and to one's children, in nourishing a community of love; reaching out to others; witnessing to Christ in word and deed, within and beyond the family. He cites magisterial documents as sources, and although the family's role as priest, prophet and king is explored in detail in FC (#51-64), these practices originate in scripture, from the experience of the early Christians who gathered together in homes as communities of fellowship, worship and service (see Acts 2).

In these sections of FC the Christian family is presented as a) a believing and evangelising community, one which receives and puts into practice the Word of God, thus preaching the Gospel through its witness, and reaching the whole of creation; b) a community in dialogue with God, through prayer and a deep sacramental and spiritual awareness that draws together their liturgical and their everyday experiences as Christian families; and c) a community at the service of humanity, one in which "inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God" (FC #63). These FC sections draw also on Matthew's gospel to illustrate God's abiding presence wherever two or more are gathered in God's name, as in the Christian family:

> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (18:19-20)

Further reflection on the insights of the first Christians, especially in their counter-cultural embrace of widows and orphans, might well assist families to perceive in their ordinary lives "the various aspects of the entire Church" which Paul VI identifies as key to understanding the meaning of "the beautiful name of domestic church" (EN #71). Especially valuable is that this approach, and that evidenced in Matthew 25:31-46, connects with what families *do*, rather than with their structure.

133

So not only are these potentially accessible approaches but also inclusive ones.

The ecclesial identity of the family is essential to the whole church's self-understanding, not just to families and yet its richness remains largely untapped, unexplored and unappropriated. Who will address this lacuna if not families themselves? The diocesan Coordinator surely has an important role in facilitating this.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the broader context of family ministry as a Christian practice. Coordinators were asked how their work relates to other areas of the Church's mission, how their faith informs their work and what motivates, sustains and inspires them. Responses continue to emphasise a lack of reflective practice but reveal the importance of the theology of Imago Dei and the liberating impact of family ministry. The wide range of scriptural texts revealed in the American sources is a significant resource for addressing the lacuna in theological reflection on family ministry. Especially important is the recognition that families have a ministry of their own, which can and ought to be supported by their faith community, reflected in various ways by many of these authors. The lens of the conceptual framework suggests some important challenges for dioceses and the Coordinators: the need to more deeply appreciate the importance and richness of Scriptural sources for understanding family ministry. Also apparent is the potential tension in the relationship between persons, families and parishes as foci for family ministry and the need to hold this relationship in balance, so that it reflects the mystery of the Trinity. Although this chapter reveals that the family's ecclesial identity rarely informs the practice of diocesan Coordinators, explicitly at least, Scripture again emerges as a resource to better support families in appropriating their ecclesial identity.

Chapter 7: Knowledge, Skills and Understanding needed for Effective Family Ministry

This study has presented the particular experience of family ministry as described by diocesan Coordinators, and as envisaged by their employers. It has reviewed the ways in which diocesan Coordinators, their employers and United States practitioners understand family ministry and also considered how all these agents see family ministry as a broader expression of Christian life. This chapter concludes the research data by reviewing formation needs for family ministry. This offers a fresh perspective on all the preceding elements, but one which, logically speaking, is anticipated to confirm existing findings.

The online survey revealed that 12 of the 14 respondents were educated to at least foundation degree level. Seven had earned Bachelor's degrees and five had proceeded to Master's degree study. Seven also held post graduate qualifications and six held professional qualifications, not all relevant to the practice of family ministry. Of the four with specific qualifications for the role, three had completed an MA in Leadership for Family Ministry and Faith Formation at Dominican University, Illinois and two had completed a Certificate course in Family Ministry at Ushaw College, Durham. This included one of those interviewed, though the other three all had experienced some level of broad theological formation approaching and including degree level. This chapter also needs to be read in the light of the five person specifications analysed in Chapter 4 (see p.88). These stipulated previous experience of supporting families in the church, the ability to work independently and with others, with minimal supervision, using strong interpersonal, communication skills and IT skills.

Three issues emerge particularly strongly in this chapter. Diocesan Coordinators need greater knowledge of Roman Catholic understanding of family ministry. They need to embody and practice the relationship skills which they offer to families when relating themselves to clergy, parishes and families. They need to place at the heart of their ministry an appreciation of the family's ecclesial identity, so that relationships of mutual respect can develop between families and the church, thereby

creating a framework within which to discern appropriate responses to the changing needs of families.

Interview Data

Interviews with Coordinators addressed the question of knowledge, skills and understanding in three ways: what advice would they offer to someone just appointed to the role, what would they like to have known before they started and what they had learned about family ministry from their experience.

Advice to New Coordinators

The two most common pieces of advice were a) to find out what is already happening to support marriage and family life in the diocese and b) to build effective working relationships with others already involved locally in the pastoral care of marriage and family life. Both pieces of advice reinforce the coordinating nature of this diocesan role. Many individuals, organisations and groups are actively engaged in supporting families so a good overview of who is doing what, where, when, with whom and how, is necessary. This enables 'supply' to be connected with 'demand', and people with similar interests to be connected. Gaps or duplication of effort can be identified, additional support and training provided where necessary and effective work noticed, celebrated and appreciated more fully. The tasks of finding out what is happening and building effective working relationships are closely connected, but the former can be a driver for the latter.

Subject A highlighted a need for sensitivity and respect when making contact with people: "engage with them, support them and don't inadvertently trample on their toes... Learn from others in the first place…" D reiterated the need for an open, respectful approach, rather than a personal agenda, in order to build on existing work:

> "Make contact with the main people, and have a good conversation.. [find out] what their aims are, the history of whatever it is, who they are in contact with, who they've worked with, [to] get a general feel… it's really important…. It's an awful waste of time trying to reinvent the wheel." (D)

B identified who these key people might be: "…people on parish councils, the catechists that run the First Holy Communion programmes, parish priests." Family ministry colleagues in other dioceses were important to A, though with a caveat:

"what we learn from each other at our regional and national gatherings is an amazing starting point for anybody new [if] a bit daunting because it all seems like …a big act to follow."

Advice on taking time to develop and sustain good working relationships with clergy was highlighted by two Coordinators. "Relationship is key in this ministry," said C. "Although I haven't had a chance to form a relationship with all the priests, a working relationship is essential." B noted that a visit from a diocesan employee could be a novel experience for some clergy:

"A priest said to me, 'do you realise I've been in this diocese, in this parish for 12 years and you are the first person from the diocese who has come out to see me?'"

The purpose of a personal relationship with clergy was described by C:

"It's only when you have a one to one with a priest that you begin to get insight into them as a person … then you find that you can phone them, speak to them, find out whatever..." .

C described a diocesan colleague, in post for 35 years, who had developed strong relationships with most of the clergy, working at it, investing time and energy, assiduously maintaining these relationships whenever possible:

"I don't know whether [family] ministry has time for that really, maybe it will come in time…..Maybe networking is good… I see her relationship with the priests and the bishop and I see others don't have the same relationship."

Other suggestions addressed the importance of insider knowledge about how the diocese functions and forming effective partnerships.

"Talk to others to find out about your own diocese, to understand how the diocese works, because they are all slightly different in some way, shape or form." (B)

"Do a good job in one place and you will very often get follow up or questions from other places. That happens a lot. So I would say, learn from others, see what's there already, and form partnerships, collaborations." (A)

Prayer was recommended by C: "an hour each week to … make room for God. … there is a busyness of life…so it's time out." The need to be realistic, especially when meeting obstacles, was also identified: "Don't expect it all to happen overnight," said B. "Always look for a win-win solution," said C. "If there is an absolute block to something that you are trying to engage in ….don't take offence... think of the bigger picture, in a couple of years' time, things may change."

What Would Coordinators Like to Have Known When Starting Out?

Responses to this question were more hesitant, perhaps because there was a criticism implicit that they had been unprepared for the role. D acknowledged that some learning can only be done 'on the job':

> "I don't think there's been any nasty surprises, I think it's pretty much how I imagined it would be … with any job you're never going to recruit the person who knows everything already. Whatever job you have, you learn."

C felt that had she known more about the job she might never have taken it:

> "I would have took fright…. they said it was 187 parishes, only after I had started. I said 'Oh really?'"

D would have liked more 'insider knowledge' to help her work more effectively. This related to the facilities available across the diocese, but also to understanding which parishes would be more receptive to her efforts.

> "I ended up plumping for a parish and asking whether I could run a course there and they weren't very forthcoming. Then later on I was told 'oh no, that's a bit of a black hole there, it's not really worth trying to run a course there because the parish priest isn't very supportive of our work'. I wish I'd known that beforehand..."

A acknowledged a weakness in the system that did not offer formal guidance:

> "Our diocese doesn't have policy documents [relating to family ministry]. Marriage and family life always had a very light touch before and a very modest profile. …Now that in a sense is strength, because I've got freedom. I can just respond as I feel able. But also it's a weakness because I am not held accountable as maybe I should be, or as how someone else coming into the role would need to be."

What Have Coordinators Learned About Family Ministry From Doing It?

Just two Coordinators were asked this question. For B the experience reinforced the importance of family life, particularly in the ups and downs:

> "how wonderful families can be and how difficult it can be when things don't go quite according to plan."

B also noted the reality check that comes from working with families:

> "A lot of my colleagues… think of a family [as] mum, dad and 2.4 children and one of them is usually in a buggy. …I see families very often as the elderly Nan who has the grandchildren round once a week or something…. all the different shapes, sizes, combinations, the single parent families, that's

the reality. When I go to a school … I know that at least 50% of those are going home to, predominantly, Mum, because that's the reality of it."

Even though this seems perfectly obvious, it is important to stress that practical involvement in family ministry sharply reinforces awareness of the diversity of family life. B is reflecting on the structural diversity that does not fit with images of family that the Church usually prefers. As he says, his colleagues in the curia usually think of family in more traditional nuclear terms, with pre-school children.

For D the experience of family ministry simply reinforces its importance:

> "it's a very powerful thing, something which can have such a positive impact on families… I've learned what a great need there is for it, what value there is in it and also that it should be a central part of any diocese".

D had a caveat though. She had learned that family ministry ought to be done in a certain way: "a way that makes people feel welcome and not judged, so they can feel enriched and also very supported and valued … give them courage to move forward".

What strikes me especially strongly in all these responses is how little the Coordinators focus on theological or theoretical knowledge, whether in advising new post-holders or reflecting on their own learning needs and experiences. Instead, they focus on very pragmatic practicalities of the reality of contemporary family life, of forming working relationships, of clarifying who is doing what and where, and of understanding the internal workings of the diocese. In other contexts these responses might indicate that staff persons come to the role already competent in knowledge, skills and understanding of their work. However the survey data and interview responses suggest otherwise.

It could be that Coordinators simply aren't aware of the skills and knowledge they lack and frankly it makes little difference to their work load or job satisfaction. Given the enormity of the role there is plenty of scope for an individual to focus on aspects to which they are best suited and for which they are sufficiently skilled. As C pointed out there is a freedom in this work to tailor it to personal gifts and inclinations. Moreover Coordinators have few models of family ministry to draw on in their coordinating role and no reason to challenge their existing model.

Another possibility is that Coordinators have development needs, but are unable to articulate these because they engage insufficiently in reflective practice, have a heavy workload, poor support and supervision, and a lack of time or inclination as a result of exhaustion. My sense is that the horizon of Coordinators' work is very close to hand. The busyness of their role and the amount of time they spend responding to queries makes local knowledge and referral options a priority for them. They seem most open to learning from colleagues in other dioceses and so as long as much the same model is shared diocese to diocese, this will continue to perpetuate their current level of thinking. Only a long term formative intervention is likely to change matters. But what might this consist of? The texts from the United States offer some insights.

Insights from the United States Experiences of Family Ministry

Despite the richness of these texts in relation to understanding family ministry, identifying its Scriptural roots and describing practices, these accounts are also less expansive when describing formation needs. Only Guernsey and Hebbard go into detail on the curricular needs of family ministers, though Feucht, Sell, Leonard and Garland allude to them implicitly. Most identify character traits that are necessary for effective working, echoing the importance of personal qualities that are stressed in diocesan job descriptions. Here I introduce a new voice, pastoral counsellor and practical theologian, Herbert Anderson (1984), to highlight some aspects of these.

Guernsey (1982) raises a concern about inappropriate personnel filling the family-oriented posts created in his congregation:

> "Bluntly said, without retraining, we cannot afford to give the task to youth pastors who are no longer young… the task is too critical to be assigned to someone who has not garnered the skills needed to do an effective job." (p.30)

Guernsey's understanding of family ministry as primarily preventive and corrective leads him to stress the importance of specialists who will a) understand the socialisation tasks of the family and possess the skills to stimulate them and b) understand and mediate the family as a system, including facilitating short-term therapies and dealing with most crises that families encounter:

> "…we cannot afford to foster the neglect of the family by giving it anything other than our best in terms of the kinds of people who enter that ministry". (p.31)

Where volunteers are concerned, Guernsey says they should be "recognised to be healthily in process" and that their relationships, whether with spouse, parent or child, "give evidence of being whole and functional". Yet perfection in family life is not essential: "Whoever they are, they have come to their expertise in the school of hard knocks rather than in the classroom" (p.110). This is an interesting distinction between the specialists who might be employed in family ministry settings and those who support their efforts as volunteers.

Since Guernsey raised the issue of being 'healthily in process' and 'whole and functional', I want to bring Anderson (1984) in here. The influence of family of origin on family ministers is a critical issue for Anderson who calls attention to unhealthy or inappropriate behaviour patterns and stresses the importance of self-awareness:

> "unless we self-consciously and intentionally choose to change, we are likely to minister to families in ways that are similar to the ways we functioned in our own families of origin." (p.106)

He gives examples. Someone with a strong sense of gratitude, whether for their life or an event in it, may find it impossible to restrain their desire to be of service. Conversely, someone with a strong sense of failure may be driven to do penance or try to save others from similar situations. Someone with a strong sense of being blessed, whether by predecessors or superiors, may come with a sense of being chosen and set apart for this work. Anderson's point is that everyone has learned patterns of behaviour, arising usually from early family experiences, which may or may not be appropriate for ministry. Part of the preparation for leadership therefore ought to involve deepening the critical self-awareness of the particular patterns to which a potential leader is predisposed. Anderson invites his readers to take a pilgrimage into their own families of origin, their dominant myths, the stories which support those myths, the roles, rules and rituals which sustained their family (p.10) and to study family systems in the light of that self-awareness.

Hebbard (1995) identifies three areas where family ministers need formation: theology, marriage and family counselling and adult education. Theological studies should include training for ministry and evangelism. Family ministers should be able to interpret scripture and be knowledgeable in "church growth, pastoral care,

preaching, teaching and visitation" (p.272). Within marriage and family counselling, family ministers should be trained therapists, familiar with "family systems and how those systems affect the church", reiterating Anderson's point that there should be no unresolved issues outstanding from their family of origin. They should have received good supervision and be familiar with a wide range of family problems. As adult educators, they should also understand how adults learn and be able to design and develop programmes.

Hebbard (pp.274-282) offers an exhaustive list of competencies: design, development and delivery of family life programmes; needs analysis; effective teaching and preaching; marriage and family therapy; assessing community resources and referrals; programme promotion and advertising; budgeting and financial planning; multiple staff operations (team-working); recruiting, training and maintaining a volunteer organisation; working with diverse populations; working with church leaders; interpersonal relations, human and organisational relations and conflict resolution; goal setting, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation; training and practising effective evangelism through family ministry; leadership skills and developing leadership skills in others.

Hebbard (pp.282-285) also addresses the personal qualities that are necessary: openness to lifelong learning; a pioneer spirit; an independent initiator; ability to retain focus in order to achieve; a sense of humour; commitment to long-term working; leadership qualities; love of people; creativity; ethics and credibility. Among all the texts reviewed Hebbard alone devotes considerable attention to the profile of suitable family ministers, and in the process identifies a broad mix of skills, knowledge and personal qualities. These may be difficult to find in a single individual but nonetheless, reinforce a sense of just how complex family ministry is in a church environment.

In stark contrast Garland (2012) provides a different perspective:

> "Family ministry leaders... are not primarily the ones doing family ministry; instead they are the ones who remind, call to collaboration and orchestrate the leadership of others in the diversity of the church's activities and programmes." (p.484)

Garland assumes - faithfully - that all the knowledge, skills and qualities needed for family ministry are located in the congregation. This frees leaders to simply enable the participation of many in sharing their gifts, though Garland, like Hebbard, acknowledges the necessity of the skills of effective preaching (communication), volunteer management, organisational relations and leadership development. She notes that "family ministry is not best constructed as a short-term or annual emphasis" (p.484) and further stresses the value of tackling a limited number of initiatives, reviewing them regularly and discarding those no longer useful.

The accounts of Reformed and Congregational experience usually reflect a scenario within which a pastor or a pastoral associate is charged with family ministry and has only the families of a single congregation on which to focus. This is not the situation faced by a diocesan Coordinator. Even so the broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding identified offer much food for thought, especially the possibility of these being supplied by the faith community as a whole, rather than by an individual.

Turning to the Roman Catholic texts, the US bishops in their 1978 Pastoral Plan also recognise the importance of supporting family ministry leaders with formation: "Unless this takes place, the total implementation of this plan will not be realised in the diocese" (NCCB, p.6). However, the texts mostly focus on the needs of parish rather than diocesan leaders and vary as to whether formal study is necessary or whether there is sufficient competence residing already within the parish and family.

Thomas (1979), for example, identifies a need for theological guidance in the areas of Church sacrament, ministry, marriage and the family, but suggests that skills are "rarely a matter of classroom instruction", touching the "basic art of living and relating" (p.68). Conversely, Curran sees a need for "a professionally trained family minister" responsible for "developing listening structures, training leadership couples and families, counselling marriages and families and developing like to like ministry in the parish" (1980b, p.21). She recommends a master's level degree, including courses in counselling, family sociology, ecclesiology and behavioural sciences. These two approaches reflect Guernsey's distinction between specialists and volunteers. Curran's recommendations might be a realistic expectation of a diocesan employee but perhaps not for a parish volunteer.

Boland (1981, pp.7-12) outlines the content of six formation meetings he organised for parish volunteers, addressing the intrinsic sacredness and goodness of Christian family life, the loving service of family members to each other as ministry, the inclusive nature of family, the six areas of family ministry outlined in the Bishops' plan, like to like ministry, and the family ministry process of caring that enables, awareness that understands, ministry that serves and structures that facilitate. This is a very specific programme oriented to the bishops' pastoral plan, and Boland notes that his volunteers were uncomfortable with it (see p.65).

Furlong (1987) formulates a job description and person specification for a parish family minister identifying "potential for leadership skills, an organisational ability or [willingness] to gain such skills". He also stipulates that volunteers should not "hold another major volunteer position simultaneously." In the family perspective model of family ministry (NCCB, 1988, 1998) family ministry leaders are simply expected to have sufficient competence, whatever that might mean, to communicate and implement the four elements of a family perspective outlined in the bishops' document.

More usefully, in 2006 a special issue of Family Perspectives Journal[27] considered the question of formation for family ministry. Heaney-Hunter, an associate professor at St John's University, New York, specified core knowledge areas and orientations as follows (pp.1,3):

1. For both parish and diocesan practitioners it is essential to know and live Catholic teaching and traditions especially the influence of Hebrew and Christian scriptures.
2. The history of the development of Christian marriage as a sacrament.
3. Contemporary teaching on marriage and family life particularly the theology of the domestic church, and major documents such as FC, documents of the US bishops and Deus Caritas Est.
4. The stages of family life, a good working knowledge of individual and family dynamics – personality types, family systems theory and principles, communication skills and strategies, what contributes to family dysfunction and how to refer on appropriately.
5. The programmes that are available to serve families from pre-marriage to post-annulment and everything between as well as an overview of the various marriage preparation philosophies and appreciation that marriage preparation is a lifetime occupation.

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[27] The journal of the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers

6. A commitment to on-going training and an awareness of how to connect with supportive colleagues.

Heaney-Hunter notes a further essential orientation:

> "Our attitudes and hearts must be those of Christ. He, who reached out to the young couple at the wedding of Cana, who raised the son of the widow of Nain, who was compassionate and loving to all the wounded individuals and families in his midst, is our ultimate model for family ministry. Acceptance and inclusion of all the different people who seek to be part of our life-giving, healing church is a hallmark of Catholicism." (2006, p.3)

In the same issue, Kehrwald, (2006), a practitioner of family ministry and faith formation, itemises the skills needed as interpersonal, leadership, strategic planning, volunteer recruitment and programme planning. He also highlights the necessity of being creative:

> "Effective family ministry training must invite – perhaps demand – that participants be innovative. Today's problems and challenges in family ministry cannot be solved with old thinking. We must encourage creative strategizing within the context of a timeless vision."

The American texts provide a useful starting point for considering the question of the skills, knowledge and understanding needed for effective family ministry, though it is not always clear whether the authors have in mind leaders who are parish or congregation based or leaders who have a wider facilitative remit across a diocese. In this context the potential barriers to family ministry must also be taken seriously (see Chapter 3, p.63) and included in curriculum planning. I now want to reflect on all this data in the light of my conceptual framework.

Reflections on the Knowledge, Skills and Understanding Needed for Effective Family Ministry

The conceptual framework is applied here to explore the need for knowledge of how the Church understands family ministry, the skills of relating as a diocesan employee to the parish, and an understanding of the ecclesial identity of the family.

A: The Church's Understanding of Family Ministry

Although none of the Coordinators interviewed identified theological formation as something they would advise or even look for themselves, the American writers

suggest this is a basic and essential formation need (Hebbard, Thomas, Boland, Heany-Hunter). The curriculum proposed in the texts includes training in ministry, evangelism and Scriptural interpretation (Hebbard), sacrament and marriage and family life theology (Thomas), ecclesiology (Curran), history of marriage as a sacrament and theology of the domestic church (Heany-Hunter). Boland, for his parish teams, identifies a need only for broad, positive, inclusive aspects of Church teaching.

Curiously none of these writers identifies the Church's vision of family ministry per se as a topic for study although Boland includes the six stages of the bishops' pastoral plan for family ministry in his content. This may be because family ministry is a relatively new ministry, has rarely been the focus of theological enquiry and so has not fully evolved as a discrete discipline or field of study. Nevertheless some essential topics emerge in these texts: Church teaching on marriage and family life, sacramentality, scripture, ministry, ecclesiology and evangelism. Formation for spiritual accompaniment and liturgical worship is however notably absent.

Family ministry in England and Wales, and diocesan Coordinators especially, would be well served by a deeper understanding of ministry, because this speaks to the heart of the Church's understanding of family ministry. They need to be family specialists certainly, but not at the expense of a theology of ministry. In my Paper 1 I found O'Meara's work on ministry to be a potentially transformative corrective to prevailing hierarchical models of priesthood, models which hinder, in my view, the Church's understanding of family ministry as an activity of the whole People of God:

> [O'Meara] … highlights the example of Jesus who took ministry out of the temples and into homes, streets and fields. He stresses the role of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of the kingdom of God and the concretisation of grace in the ordinary. In pointing to incorrect ecclesiology he alerts us to discern whether a distinction between ministry to families and ministry by families is wholly appropriate. …If the Pentecost event is the key ministry event in the life of the church, it suggests that everyone is equipped by the Holy Spirit in some way to offer service to the building up of the Kingdom. (Paper 1, p.10)

Similarly, a greater focus on baptism is recommended. In chapter 5 the importance of baptism emerges as critical to a revised appreciation of family ministry as a

ministry which supports the People of God's relating to one another as siblings in Christ. Our very identity as People of God arises from our common baptism. Curran describes the barriers to family ministry as including failing to transmit a sense of shared ministry, failing to see the parish as a faith community, failure to generate a family-to-family style of ministry and failing to convince parents of their primacy in fostering faith. Every one of these challenges is rooted in a lack of appreciation of "the common priesthood of the faithful" (LG #10) through baptism. Yet the knowledge needs identified in this chapter focus more on the sacrament of matrimony than the theology of baptism.

This suggests that the Church itself doesn't always know how it understands family ministry. The formation task is therefore even more complex and must be set within a broader historical context of ministry, sacrament, scripture and ecclesiology. It must also be informed by the *phronesis* - the wisdom gained from experience - of contemporary reflective practitioners so that theological discourse can move forward in ways that are, where appropriate, both continuous and discontinuous with tradition. It may be that such a reflection finds the Church's understanding of family ministry is inadequate. But this study should provide a few starting points for such a conversation.

B: The Relationship of the Diocesan Coordinator to the Parish

Also emerging in this chapter are questions around the skills of relating as a diocesan Coordinator to the People of God in the parish, including the parish priest. Of the advice Coordinators would give to newcomers, much stresses the importance of relating well to others. Relationships are noted as the key to effectiveness, especially with clergy, even though these relationships take much time to develop.

Hebbard's list of key competencies is exhaustive, and in that light I appreciate Garland's more concise rendition of the skills necessary for the leadership role of reminding, calling to collaboration and orchestrating the leadership of others. These fit with the Church's understanding of family ministry as the work of the People of God, rooted in baptism, facilitated by dedicated priests and lay people. They fit too with the practices of empowerment, respect and flexibility explored in Chapter 3.

Especially critical at this juncture however is the self-awareness that Anderson proposes for family ministers. This principle is often reflected in the content of pre-

marriage and parenting programmes used by Coordinators. In each case couples or parents are invited to reflect on their family of origin. Which patterns of behaviour, attitudes, traditions, learned first at home, do they wish to bring with them into the new relationship? Which do they want to avoid or adapt? Which are healthy or unhealthy influences? These are standard questions in relationship education so it is curious that some Coordinators evidently don't apply them to themselves as ministers. Both A and C at different times in their interviews point to the possibility that family ministry can become a personal expression of an individual's interests and gifts. This is a serious risk for a diocese and for families if little thought has been given to providing a guiding vision, or if little support and supervision is available to a diocesan Coordinator. But if a Coordinator is emotionally immature, has a personality disorder, succumbs to a depressive illness, or feels 'called' in a particular direction or to a particular set of strategies, harm can easily be visited on families and communities. This issue is particularly important in a diocesan context where Coordinators may be experiencing inadequate support and supervision and where expectations of their role are misguided or unrealistic.

A number of practical skills, some of which were stipulated in person specifications (see Chapter 4) do not feature in this chapter, including evaluation, group facilitation and presentation skills. The skills of relating well to parishes and of engaging groups within parishes also remain largely unarticulated here, although Curran mentions listening skills, Hebbard mentions needs analysis and a number of authors (Hebbard, Garland, Kehrwald) mention volunteer management. There are also the skills of collaborative ministry[28], set out by the Bishops' Conference in 1992 in their document *The Sign We Give*, which are especially appropriate in the context of family ministry and the involvement of the whole People of God. Yet these are not mentioned at all.

C: The Ecclesial Identity of the Family in Catholic Teaching
If knowing the Church's understanding of family ministry is an intellectual need and relating well to the faith community is a practical skill in the hands of a well-rounded individual, the ecclesial identity of the family lies at the heart of the role of diocesan

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[28] "Collaborative ministry is a way of relating and working together in the life of the Church which expresses the communion which the Church is given and to which it is called." (CBCEW, 1995)

Coordinators. From this understanding flows the respect that is necessary for positive relationships to develop and the framework for discerning where leadership efforts are best located. But as I note in Chapter 7 (see p.127), diocesan Coordinators hardly mention the family's ecclesial identity when describing family ministry as an expression of Christian life. Nor do they mention it when asked how they understand family ministry. C wondered how aware are clergy that "future evangelisation depends largely on the domestic church", but how aware are diocesan Coordinators? To paraphrase Gaillardetz, there is not only a lacuna in the literature on domestic church but also a lacuna in the practices of the Church.

This certainly needs attention. One of the English-language groups at the 2015 Synod on family included these comments in a report of their deliberations:

> "We also considered certain phrases which have become commonplace in Church documents, among them "the Gospel of the family" and "the domestic Church". These … have become clichés, which are less clear in their meaning than they are usually assumed to be. …In general and especially when speaking of marriage and the family, it was felt that we needed to beware of a kind of Church speak of which we are barely conscious." (Group C. Holy See Press Office Bulletin, 9.10.2015)

A lay member of this group was reported as deploring the relinquishing of the term 'domestic church' yet her version of domestic church is very particular:

> "In this small "domestic church" she depicts a home where the Rosary was prayed daily, the house was blessed annually by a priest, and "we had holy water, crosses, miraculous medals, images of St Michael and other holy images in each room of the house." (Phillips, 2015)

The concerns of Group C have to be acknowledged, but given the lack of formation, vision and support for family ministry the time to give up on 'domestic church' has not yet arrived. The papers of the international symposium I attended in 2010 (see my Paper 2) are just one extraordinarily rich source for Coordinators in exploring this term further (Knieps-Port le Roi et al, 2013). As Mannion (2013) acknowledged in the concluding session the term domestic church can be "clumsy and alienating" and yet:

> "the reality which it seeks to describe is nonetheless both theologically and ecclesiologically tantalising: namely that in the variety of relationships which the umbrella concept of 'family' encapsulates, we might mirror *and* partake in the very being of God" (pp.383-4).

In their role diocesan Coordinators have a privileged and pivotal part to play in communicating this truth so that families and parishes can be nourished and in translating family experience back into language that can be appropriated by the academy and magisterium. But clearly their own formation needs must first be addressed and addressed as a matter of urgency.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for effective family ministry as indicated in job descriptions and person specifications, survey data and interview responses. Only four out of 14 research participants had experience of specific family ministry formation programmes; their reflections on learning needs focussed on the practicalities of the job rather than gaps in their own knowledge, skills or understanding. In contrast the literature suggests a broad curriculum for family ministry yet one which still fails to clearly address the skills of relating well to parishes and building community. Three issues emerge particularly strongly in this chapter. Diocesan Coordinators need greater knowledge of how the Roman Catholic Church understands family ministry, particularly as a response to baptism. They need to embody and practice the relationship skills which they offer to families when relating themselves to clergy, parishes and families. They need to place at the heart of their ministry an appreciation of the family's ecclesial identity, because they have a unique role to play in revealing the tantalising truth of what it means to be domestic church, to families, to parishes and to the Church as a whole. Also essential is a need for greater self-awareness on the part of Coordinators in order to safeguard both themselves, the families they serve and their employers, the diocese.

Chapter 8: Summarising the Research Findings

This has been a wide-ranging study of the role of the diocesan Coordinator of family ministry in England and Wales. Research findings have been structured so that Coordinators' experience is presented before examining the way their work is conceptualised, and subsequently contextualised as a Christian practice. Finally the formation needs for effective family ministry are explored. Within each chapter the voices of diocesan Coordinators are presented before the voices of practitioners from the United States, before applying the lens of the conceptual framework. In this chapter I summarise my findings chapter by chapter, and present conceptual conclusions, before returning to review my original research questions.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides the background for this study. The need for this research was determined as part of a broader attempt to understand why family ministry is so poorly resourced by the Church in England and Wales. I describe my own role as a practitioner-researcher and outline the significance of the role of the diocesan Coordinator. My premise is that the practice to date is largely unrecorded and therefore incapable of supporting continuing professional development or raising the profile of family ministry. I offer three examples to demonstrate that useful practice has emerged but is now largely forgotten. I acknowledge some of the challenges to practising family ministry in a Catholic context before describing the goals and the limits of the research. I conclude by establishing a practical theological context for this research particularly drawing on Miller-McLemore's framework for organising the data.

Chapter 2 describes the way this qualitative descriptive study has been conducted using a mixed-method approach of survey and interview, verified through the documentation of job descriptions and vision statements. The conceptual framework underpinning the study recognises that the agents (who) of family ministry in the Catholic church are the People of God, assisted by clergy and lay specialists, that the locus (where, how) of family ministry is the local community, and that the family's ecclesial identity determines the nature (what, why) of family ministry. The data collected for this study comes from a robust representation of the network and situation of diocesan Coordinators in 2012. It is presented alongside key texts from

United States experiences of family ministry in the twentieth century, within a framework that starts with diocesan Coordinators experience, followed by diocesan expectations of the role, understandings of family ministry, its place within Christian experience and the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for effective family ministry.

Chapter 3 draws together survey findings and interview data to illustrate the particular experience of being a diocesan Coordinator of family ministry. The activities of a typical day are reported, as are the pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks used to address a range of tensions that arise between Church teaching and the reality of family life and the challenges and rewards of the role. Accounts of United States experience reveal a wide range of practices that are considered essential elements of family ministry: listening, healing (comforting), educating (delivering training, organising events, explaining Church teaching), adapting (problem solving), discerning and respecting (being sensitive to individual needs, being non-judgmental, proclaiming forgiveness, practising mercy, accepting human weakness), affirming (organising events), deepening community life (communicating, respecting difference). The American voices also reiterate many of the challenges to family ministry experienced by Coordinators. Through the lens of the conceptual framework the diocesan Coordinators' tendency to focus on reactive work and their lack of reflective practice and support systems emerge as problematic. A stronger role for Diocesan Commissions on Family life is suggested. Practices of deepening community life, respect and authenticity in the ways diocesan Coordinators relate to parishes and practices of empowerment of families, the domestic churches, all emerge as possible remedies.

In Chapter 4 the particular experience of diocesan Coordinators is viewed through the eyes of their employer, the diocese and the way that dioceses express the role in job descriptions and person specifications. Based on features common to at least 50% of documents, the role is best described as one of effective networking, with diocesan colleagues and others involved in family ministry in the diocese, and one of providing support and training to those involved in delivering grass roots family ministries. This work is most frequently directed towards preparing couples for marriage, ensuring adequate pastoral responses are available for hurting families, supporting parents and promoting family spirituality. The reactive work of triage so

apparent in typical day accounts does not feature in job descriptions; neither do strategic tasks of research, consultation and planning. Yet most job descriptions suggest that diocesan Coordinators work to a pre-determined diocesan programme rather than to processes of listening to parish families and enabling parish family ministry. Although the focus of work is very much about equipping the whole People of God for family ministry, the networks of volunteers envisaged seem to be located only incidentally to the parish structure. They present as a supra-parish network managed by the diocesan Coordinator. This orientation might be problematic for engaging a broader constituency in their work. The challenges of mediating the teaching in real family situations is also evident in the documentary evidence, with dioceses favouring people skills over theological expertise. Yet without theological expertise the tensions that arise in this work cannot be fully addressed.

Chapter 5 presents a considerable amount of data relating to how family ministry is conceptualised. It begins with noting the poor quantity and quality of diocesan vision statements, continues with the responses of four diocesan Coordinators to questions about how they understand family ministry, adapt their explanations of it and perceive their role in their diocese. Unsurprisingly, given the lack of diocesan vision, their explanations lack consistency and clarity and their role is evidently not one that is consistently appreciated. United States experiences suggest that family ministry is difficult to define succinctly, possibly because understanding develops as it is practically experienced and because family ministry will inevitably appear differently according to its local context. Programmatic and process approaches are both emphasised in these accounts, each problematic in its own way. The role of the diocesan Coordinator is suggested as a facilitator of processes at parish level rather than as an implementer of supra-parish programmes. A more nuanced emphasis on the ecclesial identity of the family as rooted in baptism could address the tensions between the family and the parish as loci for this church activity.

In Chapter 6 the broader context of family ministry as a Christian practice is explored. Coordinators were asked how their work relates to other areas of the Church's mission, how their faith informs their work and what motivates, sustains and inspires them. Responses continue to highlight a lack of reflective practice but reveal the importance of the theology of Imago Dei and the liberating potential of

family ministry. The wide range of scriptural texts revealed in the American sources is a significant resource for addressing the lacuna in theological reflection on family ministry. Especially important is the recognition that families have a ministry of their own, which can and ought to be supported by their faith community, reflected in various ways by many of these authors. The lens of the conceptual framework suggests some important challenges for dioceses and the Coordinators, including the need to more deeply appreciate the importance and richness of Scriptural sources for understanding family ministry. Also apparent is the potential tension in the relationship between persons, families and parishes as foci for family ministry and the need to hold this relationship in balance, looking to the image of the Trinity. Although this chapter reveals that the family's ecclesial identity rarely informs the practice of diocesan Coordinators, explicitly at least, Scripture again emerges as a resource to better support families in appropriating their ecclesial identity.

Chapter 7 reviews the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for effective family ministry as indicated in job descriptions and person specifications, survey data and interview responses. Only four out of 14 research participants had experience of specific family ministry formation programmes; their reflections on learning needs focussed on the practicalities of the job rather than gaps in their own knowledge, skills or understanding. In contrast the literature suggests a broad curriculum for family ministry yet one which still fails to clearly address the skills of relating well to parishes and building community. Three issues emerge particularly strongly in this chapter. Diocesan Coordinators need greater knowledge of how the Roman Catholic Church understands family ministry, particularly as a response to baptism. They need to embody and practice the relationship skills which they offer to families when relating themselves to clergy, parishes and families. They need to place at the heart of their ministry an appreciation of the family's ecclesial identity, because they have a unique role to play in revealing the tantalising truth of what it means to be domestic church, to families, to parishes and to the Church as a whole. Also essential is a need for greater self-awareness on the part of Coordinators in order to safeguard both themselves, the families they serve and their employers, the diocese.

This is an important, complex and wide-ranging study. I want now to draw together some recurring themes that have emerged across all chapters in the light of the

conceptual framework before I return to my original research questions and then offer some concluding thoughts and recommendations.

Conceptual Conclusions

The conceptual framework has provided a useful structure within which to hold together the Coordinators' day to day experience, their job descriptions, the ways they and their dioceses conceive family ministry and its purpose, the broader context of family ministry within the Christian tradition and the knowledge needed for the role.

Through the lens of the Church's understanding of family ministry it becomes apparent that the day to day work of diocesan Coordinators only partially reinforces a sense that they equip the People of God for family ministry, even though the definition does not explicitly provide for a diocesan role. Envisaging that they might be expected to support *dedicated pastors and lay people* this research reveals that they are much more likely to be directly responding to immediate and pressing family needs. Even where more strategic work is concerned, their focus is more likely to be on training volunteers than in supporting them afterwards and also on initiatives to support hurting families rather than a more universal approach to the preventative care of family life. Diocesan Coordinators find it hard to define and describe their role and also family ministry more generally. They also find it difficult to frame their work within the broader diocesan context of mission. This may be connected to the difficulties of finding language that suits every audience and to the lack of diocesan envisioning of family ministry. Where their own knowledge needs are concerned, it is troubling that diocesan Coordinators do not identify any theological gaps, seeing practical information about people and the diocese as more essential.

The Church's understanding of family ministry also suggests that a much greater emphasis on baptismal identity and mission is essential if the identified challenges of engagement and communication are to be addressed. This is borne out in United States accounts of practice which also suggest Scripture is a much stronger source of vision for family ministry than previously anticipated. In Chapter 6 a significant number of different texts are noted in the work of a range of Reformed-Congregational authors on family ministry.

On a more positive note, despite their lack of support and formation and despite their frenetic and isolated work life, diocesan Coordinators have much to contribute to the Church's understanding of family ministry: that it takes much time and patience, that it reaches out to those on the margins, that it is liberating and transformative, that it seeks to bring out the best in people, that it is rooted in Imago Dei. The accounts of United States experience offer more ways of expressing similar truths, particularly the importance of co-struggling with families, and of trusting in the Paschal[29] mystery. The Coordinators have developed pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks to overcome the challenges of working in this area of ministry, even though these do not fully resolve the potential of Church teaching, when applied unmercifully, to sabotage the involvement of the People of God in family ministry.

Through the lens of the relationship of the diocesan Coordinator to the parish the importance of practices of adaptation, respect and authenticity emerge as critical yet there are signs of ambiguity and tension in the relationship between Coordinators and parishes. The United States experience suggests that the degree to which a congregation can adapt to cultural stress is also the degree to which it can offer authentic family ministry. However, in a Roman Catholic, adaptability is limited by discipline and tradition. The impact of this has been evident in the difficulties Coordinators have with recruiting volunteers, who are nervous about having to defend Church teaching and work in such a sensitive area of ministry. The way that Coordinators manage this challenge is reflected in their pragmatic approaches to the tension between Church ideals and family reality: being non-judgemental; proclaiming forgiveness; practising mercy; respecting difference; offering welcome; trusting in God; accepting human weakness.

Another challenge emerges for Coordinators' role as change agents, though one they may not fully appreciate. Their position within the church system, as part of that system, might limit their impact, though their sense of isolation could counter that possibility. Challenges emerge as a tension with clergy, on whose pastoral 'territory' they might be seen to encroach. Working towards diocesan priorities, developing supra-parish networks, are they neglecting to listen to parishes, taking their lead from them? Here the process versus programme dilemma emerges sharply. To adopt a

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[29] See chapter 5, p.114

pure process approach will require Coordinators to engage in the messiness of community development within a culture that not only resists change but on some issues forbids it. Good community relationships are risked in this approach. But to adopt a purely programmatic approach might mean eschewing parish priorities and neglecting the principle of subsidiarity. A mixed method of process and programme approach represents a pragmatic way forward.

It would also help Coordinators to be more explicit about the connections and relationships between persons, families and parishes. They, their dioceses and the parishes and families they serve, would be much clearer about the primary and secondary purposes – and impacts - of family ministry. In this respect also, the doctrine of the Trinity, the relationship of Three in One, could inform the conversation. Self-awareness on the part of the Coordinator is another essential requirement if ministry is to be truly for the good of the other rather than for the healing or satisfaction of the self.

Through the lens of the ecclesial identity of the family it becomes apparent that the important Church doctrine of the domestic church is not informing diocesan practice of family ministry in any meaningful way. Diocesan investment in the domestic church ought to be apparent at least in initiatives devoted to home-centred rituals, relationship building between families, valuing of family meal-times, family prayer, family service, relationship education, family faith development, family catechesis, supporting parents as first teachers of their children, family spirituality, family-friendly liturgies, family social action, family-friendly parishes and affirming the distinctive dignity and vocation of the domestic church. Although some of these activities are faintly apparent in the data gathered from diocesan Coordinators, it was not possible to determine whether they happen because dioceses value and want to empower the domestic church or because dioceses utilise healthy families to build healthy parishes. The data captured in chapters 5 and 6 are critical for discerning Coordinators' motives, but, as I note on p.116, there was very little in their responses that echoed the role that families play in faith transmission, or as domestic churches or as leaders in the parish. Even where the domestic church features in a diocesan vision statement its potential is limited by a focus on the couple relationship, family prayer and vocation.

The accounts of United States experience reflect a similar tension around the meaning of family in the term family ministry – the family of the parish or congregation or the family at home. However, some important knowledge emerges from these accounts, not least from Olson and Leonard (1990):

> "When families are not crushed by tragedy, but find new ways to create strong healthy relationships, that is a sign that the God of resurrection is still at work. We hold to the conviction that the work of the creating, redeeming, resurrecting God may be seen in changing families" (p.18).

The point here is that God abides in all families and that whatever God is or does within families is important for everyone, because it tells us something more about God and something more about family and church.

A further important question arises for the Roman Catholic Church in its focus on baptism and marriage as sacraments of ecclesial belonging, to parish church and domestic church. Is there room to complement the emphasis on marriage by increasing the emphasis on baptism as the root sacrament of domestic church? The importance of the baptismal vocation has been revisited repeatedly throughout this study, particularly where ministry and participation are concerned but also the quality and equality of relationship between home and parish and diocese.

Another way of further exploring the domestic church with diverse family types is to focus on what families do rather than what they look like, drawing on the characteristics of the threefold mission of priest, prophet and king. In Thomas's view (see p.104) this is expressed at home through "service to one's life partner and to one's children, in nourishing a community of love, reaching out to others, witnessing to Christ in word and deed, within and beyond the family." The Coordinators prefer the model of Matthew 25 which also emphasises family love rather than family structure.

But nowhere is the lack of emphasis on domestic church more evident than in the chapter on the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for family ministry. Unless the dignity of the human family is taken more seriously by dioceses and their employees – at least as seriously as the diocesan Coordinators take the dignity of the human person - the challenges faced by diocesan Coordinators in their work will be impossible to address satisfactorily.

Reflections on the Research Questions

This project set out with four goals and here I reflect on whether these have been achieved.

1: The first aim was to describe the role, core practices and basic characteristics of diocesan Coordinators of Family Ministry employed in 2012, which I have summarised in Chapter 3. I have concluded that Coordinators are not adequately supported by enjoying clarity of purpose, authorisation for their work and sufficient training, support and supervision. Diocesan vision statements are inadequate and give insufficient direction for the *why* of family ministry which is so necessary to interpreting how and what is done. Support systems are limited and the structures that do exist, such as Diocesan Commissions and working groups, provide prayer and advice instead of reflection and direction. This research shows that what Coordinators actually do is a little different from what their diocese expects, in that they attend to immediate family needs as much as to strategic needs. This must be taken into account by dioceses in revising their expectations of the role. This research also shows that although Coordinators provide training for family ministry they are not so involved in following up that training. Moreover, their work is governed more by diocesan than parish priorities and therefore sustainability and relationships are further challenged. Coordinators are motivated by the liberating aspects of their work, challenged by the inertia of the organisation and sustained by the positive impact they have on family lives. Their experience has taught them that family ministry is very important and that families are very diverse.

2: The difficult aspects of the Church's work with families are managed by Coordinators using a range of pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks (see pp. 54-56). These spring from the gospel of Jesus Christ which calls on us not to judge one another, to do our best with what we have, to expect God's loving, gratuitous, forgiveness when we fail and to trust that even the worst of circumstances contains both the promise of redemption, and the possibility of new life. Despite these practices, these tensions have remained a stumbling block to developments in family ministry. It remains to be seen whether Amoris Laetitia makes a difference here. I learned of the additional efforts that Coordinator A has to make to engage volunteers in working in family ministry, challenges that he doesn't feel apply to other areas of

the Church's work. Unless the Church is able to acknowledge openly that its discipline on family matters impedes its family ministry then it will continue to sabotage its best efforts and limit the transformative potential of family ministry. There is a further irony here in the revelation that the liberating impact of Coordinators' work is largely liberation from the painful implementation of Church discipline on marriage and family life.   While dioceses do not acknowledge in their documentation this aspect of the Coordinator's role their person specifications suggest they may be quietly supportive of it.

3: My third goal was to establish a broader context in which to reflect more deeply on experience by drawing on the body of literature emerging from the United States experiences of family ministry during the latter part of the 20th century. This body of work has been a revelation, both locating our Coordinators' experience within an established pattern of complexity that is the hallmark of family ministry and offering some important starting points for theological reflection in the light of our particular experience. I am especially convinced that Scripture offers a much stronger basis for family ministry in our Roman Catholic context than previously anticipated. The recommendations regarding knowledge, skills and understanding highlighted in the American texts are also important starting points for enhancing the formation of diocesan Coordinators and future volunteers in family ministry. I have described this literature in as much detail as possible in this thesis because I hope it will give rise to further research especially into the practices of family ministry.

4: My final goal was to develop a practical theology of family ministry as experienced in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales. I am mindful that this ambitious goal ought to be met as a result of a much broader theological reflection on practice that involves both theologians and practitioners. But some proposals have arisen from this research, both in the data gathered from diocesan Coordinators and from my own reflections in the light of that data and the data gathered from United States accounts of practice.

Practical Theological Insights into Family Ministry

Family ministry is first and foremost an opportunity to learn and appreciate both the diversity of family experience and the diversity of ways that God is at work in difficult situations, where families do not despair but find ways to adapt and remain faithful to their commitments. Family ministry is best experienced as a liberating transformative force in order that families can experience the abundant fullness of life promised by Christ, in and through their family relationships.

The practical theological roots of family ministry include a recognition that each person is made in the image of God and that the love of God continues to be made incarnate through the experience of healthily loving families. This love is both the purpose of family life and the power that sustains families. Without it a family is not a community of persons.

The practices of family ministry include listening, healing (comforting), educating (delivering training, organising events, explaining Church teaching), adapting (problem solving), discerning and respecting (being sensitive to individual needs, being non-judgmental, proclaiming forgiveness, practising mercy, accepting human weakness), affirming (organising events), deepening community life (communicating, respecting difference).

Family ministry has multiple and simultaneous benefits for persons, families, and communities including the parish, diocesan and school community. Articulating these benefits requires skill and confidence in the language used by each constituency and diocesan Coordinators are best placed for this role of translation.

Family ministry is sufficiently challenging in seeking to serve family life in all its complex dimensions of life-stages, structures, cultural influences and so forth, but the context of Church offer practitioners further obstacles, including inertia and resistance. To imagine that family lies on a faultline in the Church is actually a neat metaphor that recognises underlying issues that will continue to undermine pastoral care of marriage and family life until they are adequately resolved. It is possible that

the emphasis in AL on mercy and on not expecting families to be perfect signals the beginning of this resolution.

Baptism is the foundational sacrament of family life. Through baptism we become part of the family of God, and brother or sister to the whole Christian community. We first learn what it is to be brother or sister in Christ through our day to day experience of life in a family, whether as a child, a parent, a sibling or spouse. Baptism is a universal call to holiness and to service, of God and neighbour. We are all equal in the sight of God, all equally blessed and gifted. All subsequent sacraments add to our understanding of God's activity in our lives at home and in the wider world and church community.

The primary locus of family ministry is the parish. The primary focus of family ministry is the family. The parish operates as a family of families, providing accompaniment, friendship and support for family relationships, faith-sharing, celebrations and signposting. The focus of family ministry is enabling and supporting families to make faith-sense of all that they encounter in their family life, since it is genuine field of experience for religion and faith.

Family ministry is a threshold ministry where disinterested service of family relationships provides a credible and authentic Christian witness by the Church to people who may not have any other contact with the Church. Its evangelising importance should not be underestimated nor the fact that family ministry relies heavily on avoiding Church-speak for any success. Family ministry practitioners have an immense amount of practical wisdom to offer the Church when it comes to engaging with people on the periphery of its natural reach.

The diocesan role is to provide stimulus and resources for practices of family ministry within the parish where additional stimulus and resources are needed. These especially include the collaborative processes of listening, discerning, and affirming, so that parish families are equipped to collaboratively identify their needs and appropriate ways to meet those needs.

Family ministry is not a short-term enterprise, not for people who already shoulder other responsibilities within the Church, and not for those who are closed-minded or judgmental or who are unable to adapt or be flexible.

The practice of family ministry offers the Church a greater opportunity to learn about family ministry than either doctrine or theology or the magisterium can teach. The importance of recording practice and reflecting on it in the light of scripture and tradition is therefore a critical means of calling attention to discrepancies between teaching and practice and making meaning of these. Diocesan Coordinators are uniquely positioned for theological reflection on family ministry as they move between parishes, working with lay people and clergy to serve the self-determined needs of the People of God.

Recommendations Arising from the Research

There are two main recommendations I wish to make as a result of this research. This may seem inadequate to address the complexity of the issues that have emerged from this study but, if addressed, these strategies would considerably alter future assessments of the practice of family ministry whilst simultaneously consolidate family ministry as a field of practical theological enquiry.

My first recommendation is that the practices of family ministry should be recorded in more detail. I had hoped this would be an outcome of this enquiry but as it developed I appreciated that it would only be possible to scope the work of diocesan Coordinators rather than record in depth specific examples of practice. All the practices identified are important to explore in more detail. Listening, for example, is not a single kind of practice but has many forms, some of which might be more effective than others for family ministry in particular circumstances. Priority ought to be given to exploring the practices of liberation and hospitality. The first could illustrate further the moral frameworks and pragmatic approaches adopted by Coordinators which ameliorate the unmerciful application of Church discipline. These practices have something particularly important to say in conversations about mercy and doctrine, and yet remain mostly hidden, discretion being a necessity. Practices of hospitality would serve to illustrate the impact of family ministry as a threshold ministry reaching families who would not always be at Sunday Mass. If

there is a greater focus on synodality in future, as Pope Francis (2015) has suggested, practices of hospitality would seem to be an important part of families beginning to walk together, finding common ground and negotiating the art of accompaniment. Hospitality is an inclusive practice, which honours the common baptism of all believers. A further exploration of these two practices could also take into account the ways that families express or experience liberation and hospitality, so that the ecclesial identity of the home becomes part of this study.

My second recommendation is that ways are found to better equip Coordinators and their dioceses for developing a theological understanding of family ministry that will serve the complex and far-reaching ministry they are engaged in. A fuller appropriation of the theology of the domestic church is absolutely fundamental as part of this effort. Without this grounding it will simply be impossible to fully understand or address the challenges Coordinators experience, challenges which are, in part, intrinsic to family ministry yet which are compounded by a lack of informed reflective practice. As things stand diocesan Coordinators are attempting to achieve too much with too few resources, taking too much upon themselves without adequate safeguards. A broader understanding of their role in supporting participation in parish family ministry would not mitigate all of the challenges they currently experience but at least would be a step in the direction of change. A further benefit of becoming more theologically articulate in describing family ministry is the potential for extending and refining the translating role of the Coordinator to communicate more effectively with the academic world. McLoughlin and Simmonds (2010) point to the broad need for effective networks to sustain pastoral theological reflection "across colleges, seminaries and projects" (p.38) to become the "living memory of the pastoral life of the Catholic tradition". Such networks would certainly address the problem of 'losing' the family ministry story which I noted in Chapter 1, but would be more sustainable if Diocesan Coordinators possessed much greater self-confidence and skill in articulating the practical theology of family ministry for themselves.

In the course of this study I have also noted a need for diocesan structures of support to be reviewed and better use to be made of diocesan Commissions and working groups.

Contribution to Knowledge

Before concluding I want to note briefly the contribution that this study makes to the knowledge and understanding of family ministry. I do so as a practitioner with many years' experience of family ministry in different settings and as one who has, unusually, experienced Master's level studies on this topic. So it is with some certainty that I can identify that this research provides for the first time:

- A robust insight into the role of the diocesan Coordinator of family ministry in England and Wales, including day to day activities, challenges, joys and sorrows

- A list of recognised core practices of family ministry, and the skills and knowledge needed to be effective

- A list of recognised obstacles to family ministry

- A rich scriptural basis for family ministry as a Christian practice

- A record of tensions particular to Roman Catholic family ministry and the pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks adopted by Coordinators in response

- A reference list of core texts from the United States spanning more than 40 years of interdenominational practice

All of these achievements provide a good grounding for future formation initiatives and further research into family ministry.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of all preceding chapters, outlining the progress of this study and summarising all that it encompasses. Conceptual conclusions bring together the results of applying the conceptual framework to the data emerging in chapters 3-7. The goals of the research are revisited and some practical theological insights emerging from this study are noted. Finally two practical recommendations are made and the contribution to knowledge of this study is summarised. The

concluding chapter locates the relevance of this research for the Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

This study set out to be a naturalistic enquiry into the role of the diocesan coordinator of family ministry in England and Wales. It aimed to gather basic data relating to diocesan Coordinators, a group of practitioners who have not been studied before. Their experience on the frontline of the Church's pastoral care of marriage and family life was important for trying to further determine the factors that drive family ministry and the factors that inhibit it, issues which are essential to understand in my work at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. I also hoped to better understand why it is that a Church that holds family life in such high regard actually invests few resources in family ministry.

The analysis of this research was delayed because of a two year period of reflection by the Catholic Church on marriage and family life which has only recently concluded (April 2016). In October 2013 an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family was announced for 2014 which was followed by a larger, lengthier Ordinary Synod on the Family in 2015. Both Synods were preceded by consultations, one of which involved the distillation of 13,000 responses from ordinary family people in England and Wales.

The voice that was largely lacking in the Synodal process was that of the practitioner. The 1980 definition of family ministry provides no recognition for the role of the diocesan coordinator and this invisibility was perpetuated in the preparation documents for both synods. On one hand the laity were consulted, on the other the bishops deliberated. Many interventions spoke powerfully to the need for a change in practical if not doctrinal approaches to marriage and family life. Others, equally powerful, resisted such proposals. But the voice that was missing was that of the practitioner.

It may be the triumph of hope over adversity but the practitioner experience, especially as recorded here, has something to say to the topic of how best to serve families in their ecclesial role. Coordinators mediate the teaching and broker its reception. They find sensitive ways of ameliorating it when it is experienced harshly. They find language with which to imbue it with confidence. They persuade nervous volunteers to take their rightful place in family ministry. They understand as few others do the life-enhancing and the life-diminishing impact of the tension between

Church ideals and the reality of family life. As the Church turns its attention to absorbing the recent Papal Exhortation on the Family, I firmly believe that this study of the practice of diocesan Coordinators is an extraordinarily timely contribution to future conversations about how best to foster family's vocation and mission to one another, in the Church and in the contemporary world.

Postscript: Amoris Laetitia

The Pope's exhortation on marriage and family life published on April 8th 2016 contains a number of potential implications for the practice of diocesan Coordinators as reflected in this study. This postscript is based on an initial impression. The scope of the document, and the Pope's injunction not to rush its reading (#7), suggests that other implications may emerge in time with greater reflection.

Firstly, while the document does little to acknowledge diocesan structures of support for marriage and family life, it does reiterate the Church's understanding of family ministry, in that Christian families are the "principal agents" as a consequence of being domestic churches (#200). "Missionary conversion" on the part of the Church is necessary if families are to be enabled as active agents. This means being "not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems" (#201). The parish is reaffirmed as the base community for family ministry:

> "The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony". (#201)

More formation for "priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers" is needed (#202): "The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families" (#204). So the document supports the recommendation of this research that ways should be found to support Coordinators and their dioceses in developing a theological understanding of family ministry that will serve the complex reality in which they serve families.

Amoris Laetitia is a good starting point for this theological reflection because it addresses and resolves as neatly as it can the messy and complex task of reconciling the ideals of Church teaching with the reality of family life. It lays bare a process of pastoral discernment that has until now been hidden from plain sight and certainly to the average lay person. This of itself gives permission to individuals to seek out pastoral discernment of their specific situation in expectation of a warm welcome:

> "In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy." (#49)

This also gives permission to those working in pastoral ministry to be more confident in 'turning with love' to those "who are living together, or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried" (#78). It removes some of the risk for Coordinators in applying their pragmatic approaches and moral frameworks. It will be interesting to see how this impacts on the practice of diocesan Coordinators, whether they will still need to locate sympathetic priests in order to help people hurt by those more inclined to indoctrinate the Gospel message and turn it into "dead stones" (#49).

No longer is it necessary to be perfect to give an authentic witness to Christian marriage and family life (#218, 269, 297). This is a huge development not only for individuals in circumstances that have led to forms of exclusion from Church life but potentially also for the families on whom parishes rely to be active in family ministry. Amoris Laetitia holds the possibility that some of the barriers to family ministry can now be overcome.

Even more strongly, Pope Francis points to the past faults of the Church in its pastoral care: "We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism." (#36) "We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families." (#37) "Yet we have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness." (#38) Yet he is not deterred. "The situations that concern us are challenges", he continues. "We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity."

His final paragraph (#325) is a fitting conclusion to this study:

> "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed;
> families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love.

This is a never-ending vocation…
Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain
also allows us to see in proper perspective
the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to
stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection,
a purity of intentions and a consistency
which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come.
It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty.
All of us are called to keep striving
towards something greater than ourselves and our families,
and every family must feel this constant impulse.
Let us make this journey as families,
let us keep walking together.
What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine.
May we never lose heart because of our limitations,
or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion
which God holds out before us.

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Appendix 1: Responses to the Online Survey

The 29 questions of the online survey were divided into five sections addressing 1) the person of the diocesan coordinator, their experience and background, 2) their working practices, 3) their places of work, 4) financial resources and 5) day to day activities. This Appendix provides the data gathered in response to sections 1-4, since section 5 responses are reported in Chapter 3. The questionnaire was completed by 14 respondents, initially over a period of 3 months from February to May 2012 with the final response provided in December 2012. As reported in Chapter 2, 1 respondent came from the Cardiff province, 3 from the Westminster province, 4 from the Southwark province, 1 from the Birmingham province and 5 from the Liverpool province. This equates with the geographical incidence of these roles, there being far more diocesan coordinators located in the north and south-east than in the midlands and west.

Section 1: The Diocesan Coordinator

As well as representing the geographical spread of diocesan family ministry, the sample reflects a good sample of coordinators' years of experience in the role, from less than 1 year to 15+ years, as Figure 6 illustrates. Between them this sample possess a total of 89 years of experience in the role, calculated using the mean of each range. This gives an average of just over 6 years' experience each.

However, in terms of age rather than experience, the bulk of respondents were aged 51 and older (9 or 64%). Just 5 were aged 50 years or less and of these only 2 were aged 31-40 years. 5 (36%) of the older group were aged over 60 years. The retirement age in the UK is currently 65 years for men and women and even though this is non-compulsory, a significant section (just over one third) of this sample may not be in post for much longer. One of the volunteers admitted to being 70+ which had not been provided for in the survey design.

Twelve (86%) of the respondents indicated they were married; one identified as single, two had been divorced and one was ordained. That the total here exceeds 14 indicates that for some, more than one status applied simultaneously. The survey involved three male respondents and 11 females.
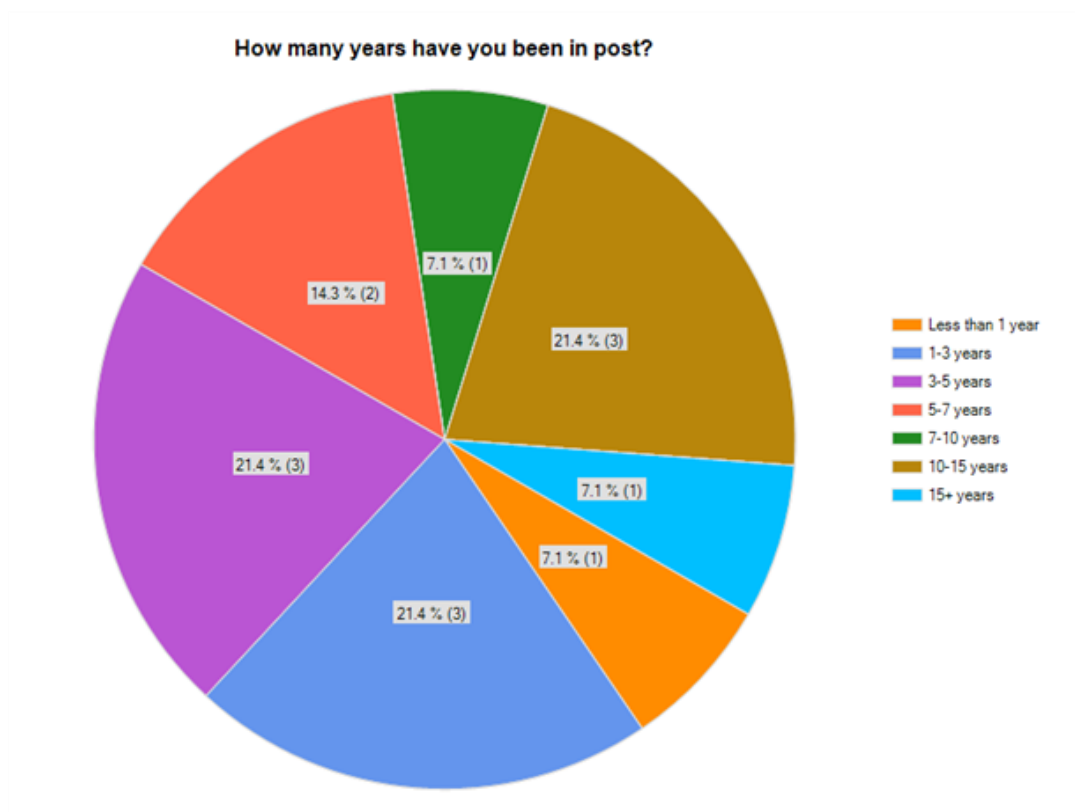
Figure 5: Years in post

Eleven (79%) of the respondents were employed by their dioceses and had formal job descriptions governing their work. Three operated as volunteers, with neither a role description nor other form of volunteer contract. Of those employed, eight had the job title of 'coordinator' of marriage and family life [ministry], four operated as 'advisor/adviser' for marriage and family life and two had 'director' responsibilities for offices with a broader brief but encompassing pastoral care of marriage and family life. Of the three volunteers, two used the job title 'coordinator' with one operating as Chair of a Diocesan Commission for Marriage and Family Life.

It is worth noting that the job title is commonly abbreviated so that the word 'ministry' is omitted. Semantically and theologically the notion of being a coordinator of family life is very different to being a coordinator of family life *ministry* and may be alarming to the uninitiated. By contrast the 'advisor/adviser' role seems not so prone to such confusion.

For 10 respondents, the role of diocesan coordinator was their only diocesan role. Four coordinators had additional responsibilities, one as an auditor for the marriage

tribunal, one as a deacon, one as RCIA coordinator and one as a registered director of Rainbows. Interestingly 11 respondents indicated that they had a contract of employment; the remainder had neither a contract nor a volunteer agreement. 10 of the 14 declared that they were also required to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check as a condition of employment. Two of these were volunteers.

As already mentioned, at the time of completing the questionnaire, 11 of the 14 were employed by their diocese, just four of them as full-time employees. (Since then one full-time employee has since dropped to 0.8 FTE, one part-time employee has been made redundant and another part-time contract has expired.) With part-time coordinators being the most common, their salaries varied from £10,400-£18,000, with hours varying from 15-25 hours per week (see Figure 5). Full-time salaries varied from £24,000-£43,764.
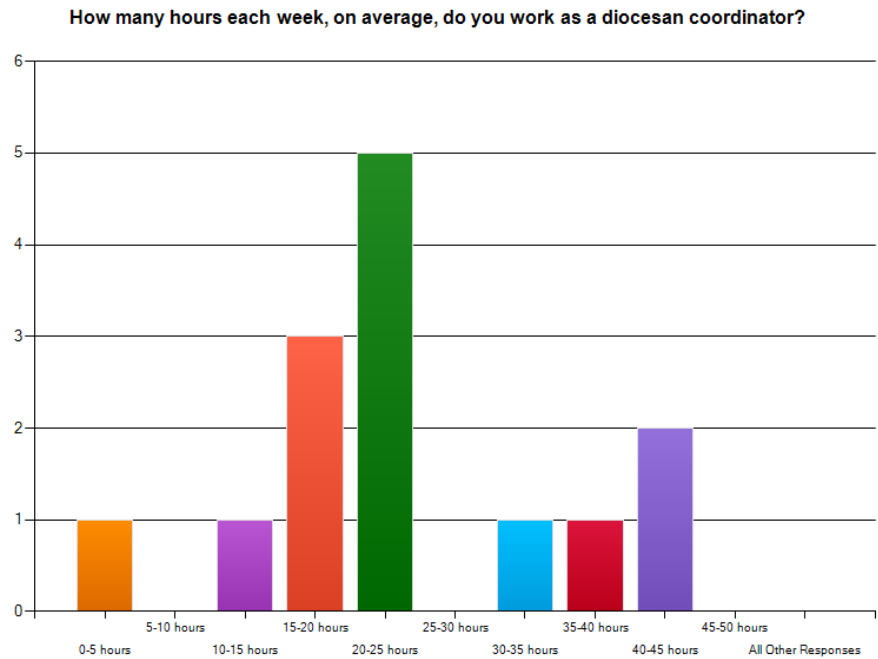

Figure 6: Hours worked weekly

One respondent mentioned that the working hours did not match the time covered by the salary. Another mentioned that working hours had been cut but not the requirements of the post.

182

In terms of their qualifications, 11 of the 14 respondents indicated they had completed secondary education to GCSE O and A level standard. Of the three who did not indicate this, two had formerly been teachers and the third held a foundation degree, so one assumes they had sufficient evidence of a secondary education in order to pursue those qualifications. Overall, 12 of the 14 were educated to at least foundation degree level. Seven held Bachelor's degrees and seven held post graduate qualifications. Five held Master's degrees and six held professional qualifications. None held research degrees. Respondents were not asked about specific family ministry qualifications, but three of those holding Master's degrees indicated that they had completed the MA in Leadership for Family Ministry and Faith Formation distance-learning degree offered by Dominican University in Illinois, sponsored by a grant from the Bishops' Conference. Two coordinators had completed an MA certificate programme in family ministry delivered by Ushaw College until around 2005.

Teaching was the most common previous occupation with six respondents indicating some form of educational practice before their current role; one person had been a counsellor, and three had worked in a church related context, respectively as a pastor, a retreat leader and in the curia with the Marriage Tribunal. Others had worked as a chartered surveyor, a local authority manager, and as a fraud investigator for a bank. Two mentioned that they had been caring for their own family before their appointment.

At this point in the survey the data indicates a cohort with much experience in the role but with only a third benefitting from post-graduate formation in family ministry made available some years ago or temporarily through a grant. With a third of the cohort due to retire in a few years, there are questions around preparing their potential replacements for this complex work. The range of backgrounds also raises questions. Teaching is not necessarily the best preparation for family ministry which primarily works with adults. Yet a teaching background is evident in a significant proportion of coordinators featured in this study.

Section 2: Work Practice

This section of the questionnaire was designed to clarify the organisational structures of support available to each diocesan coordinator and understand better their

working context. Immediately apparent was the wide range of diocesan offices within which the work of family life ministry is situated. The most common experience apparent is for the work of family ministry to be located within a department which has responsibility for a broader range of pastoral matters. However, this was the experience of just 5 (35.7%) of the respondents. The next most common departmental setting was an office for education or adult formation, the experience of 3 people. Two people indicated that they were located within their own family life department and one each indicated offices of discipleship, evangelisation, vocation and a diocesan Caritas agency. The breadth of locations reflects the variety of diocesan perspectives on their own mission but also the flexibility of family ministry in being able to fit authentically within a number of areas of the Church's life and mission.

Strategically, those coordinators sitting within departments of some influence at diocesan level might be assumed to enjoy more opportunities and support for their own work but the survey did not address perceptions of departmental status. However, within these structures, six of the 14 reported that they were line managed by an Episcopal Vicar, three by a vicar general and two by their bishop. One person was managed by a human resources (HR) manager and two by the chair of a diocesan Commission, presumably for Marriage and Family Life. In both cases these chairs were also priests so that in total 13 of the 14 respondents indicated that they were line managed by senior diocesan clergy. However, the situation in practice is not so clear. Some commented that although accountable to senior clergy, functional line management is sometimes provided by a more senior lay colleague. Four coordinators are supported in this way with a fifth responsible to a Board convened for the 2012/13 Year of Faith initiatives. One person also used the comment field to indicate that they had had limited contact with their Episcopal Vicar line manager and that the position was currently vacant.

Which of these structures of support for diocesan marriage and family life ministry are available to you in your work? Please tick all that apply.
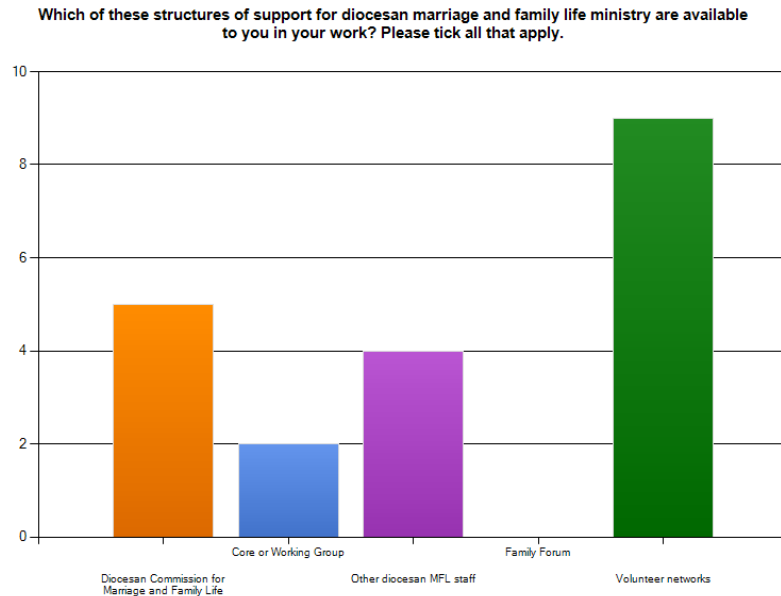
Figure 7 Diocesan Support Structures

In terms of other diocesan structures providing support for their work diocesan coordinators were invited to select from a list of five possible structures, as illustrated in Figure 6. Further analysis indicated that all respondents benefitted from at least one of these supports for their work, with 6 identifying two supports, the second in every case being a volunteer network. Seven (50%) benefitted from either a Diocesan Commission or a Core or Working group and 4 (29%) had the support of other diocesan family ministry staff. In the comments section of this question two respondents noted the inter-diocesan support available at twice-yearly meetings. Others used the comments section to qualify their volunteer networks: *'loose volunteer networks'; 'well, there are volunteers, they do not really function as networks, more occasional inter-personal peer support.'* The Archbishops' Council was mentioned by one respondent.

As well as identifying which structures of support they had access to, coordinators were invited to indicate the type of support provided, to try to illuminate the difference that these structures made to their work and wellbeing. They were specifically asked not to include in their response any external support received, that is, from outside the diocese, and were offered a range of options from which to select: administration, advice, advocacy, communications, counselling, direction,

185

encouragement, enthusiasm, financial support, interest, mentoring, prayer, supervision and training. Figure 7 indicates the prevalence of each type of support. What is interesting here is that the kind of support that requires a significant investment of energy such as counselling, advocacy, mentoring and even training feature low in the experience of this sample. In contrast the more common experiences of support in areas such as administration, advice, communication, encouragement and interest are all fairly low-investment activities.
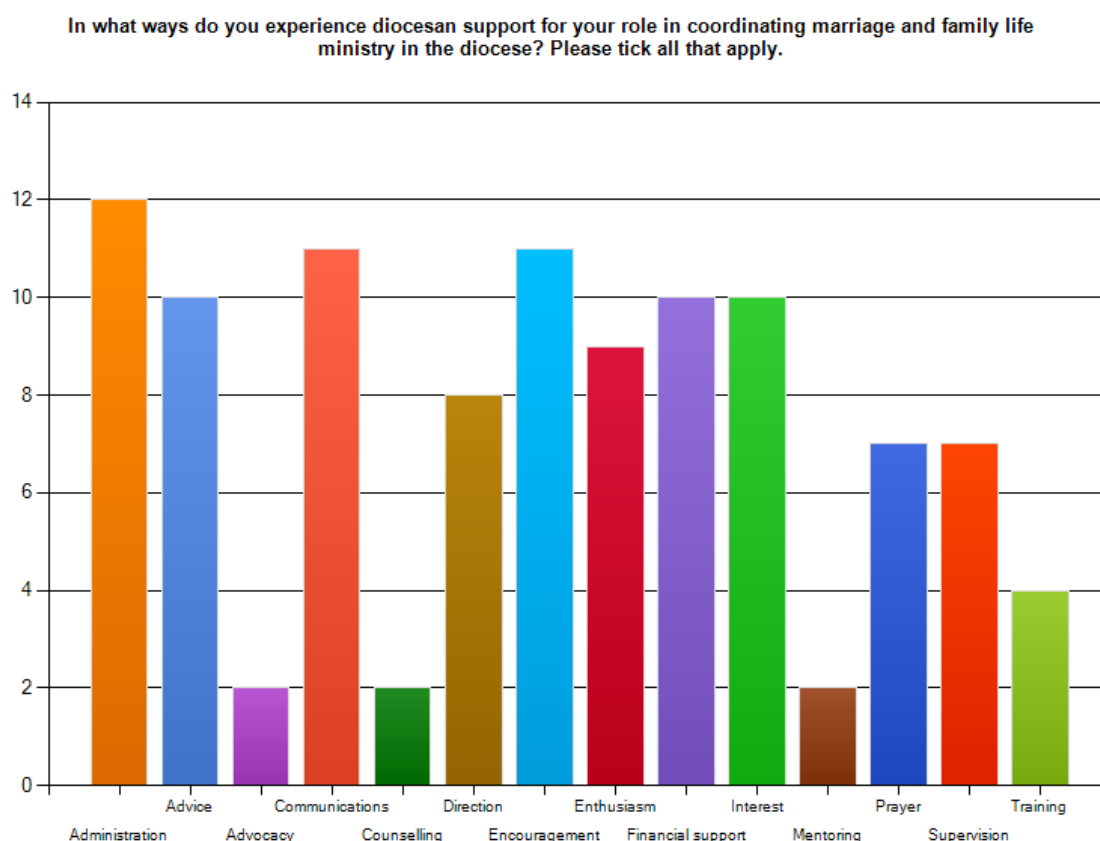
Figure 8 Types of diocesan support received

Three aspects of support were commented on by respondents:

> *"kind support from curial office reception, for administrative tasks (eg mail shots to parishes, photocopying"*

> *"Not sure what you mean exactly by 'diocesan' support. Most of the above, like 'enthusiasm' and 'encouragement', I receive from the people employed as*

part of the FLM team (some of the team are paid for by the Diocese, some by the Celebrating Family Fund). 'Financial support' is structural, in the sense that it is salaried and predates the current financial climate (where there is less and less scope for budgetary support for the development and maintenance of FLM). While I find people in the diocese personally supportive on a one to one level, FLM does not have the public recognition or structural or collaborative recognition it needs to be a fully functioning and integrated part of diocesan life mission, identity and service."

"Main support comes from the other members of the Commission who are vital in deciding on what aspects of our work should be developed, and in carrying out the work. Their contribution to the work continues to be outstanding. Their experience, expertise and willingness are invaluable."

Though all these types of support are important, responses regarding five elements were examined more closely: administration, communications, direction, financial support and training. Administrative and communications support facilitate the best use of a diocesan coordinator's time and skill by relieving them of mundane tasks. Direction enables responsibility for the focus of a coordinators work to be shared, particularly important when the choice of possible direction is so broad. Nothing can happen without some sort of a budget to cover costs of activities, resources and events. Training support suggests that a coordinator is seen as worthy of investment and further recognises the range of skills needed for the work. So these five factors are important practical benchmarks for measuring the extent of support given to coordinators.

Only two of the 14 respondents received support in all these tangible areas. Five people enjoyed support in 4 aspects, three of these did not benefit from training, one did not benefit from communications support and the other indicated no financial support, though she was employed. Responses to other questions showed that she had no information about the budget available for her work. Three received support only in 3 of these areas, none of them indicated support with direction or with training. Two received support in 2 areas, both in communications, but one with administrative and one with direction support. Finally two received support in only one area, one with administration and one with financial support.

When softer or less tangible (though often equally practical) types of support were examined the picture was slightly worse. For this analysis the assets of advocacy, encouragement, enthusiasm, interest and prayer were distilled. Again, only two respondents benefitted from support in all five areas, one of whom also benefitted from all the practical assets previously analysed. Two people enjoyed support in 4 of these areas, five in 3 and three in 1. One person sadly had no support in any of these areas. The most common form of 'soft' support was encouragement but two of those who went without this benefitted from an interest in their work. The sole person unable to tick any of these boxes made a comment about the kindness of the receptionist at the diocesan office.

A third question around the nature of diocesan support attempted to correlate the type of support provided with the source of that support. As the comment about the kindness of a receptionist illustrates, where there is little support to be had it will be received wherever it is offered. But from an organisational perspective, surely it has more impact on the diocesan coordinator and bodes better for the success of her work, if that encouragement comes from a clearly influential individual such as the bishop or episcopal vicar. As well as the existing list of supports available a list of supporters was provided so that a correlation could more easily be selected. The choice of supporter were chaplain, co-worker, commission member, core group member, counsellor, departmental colleagues, diocesan employees, episcopal vicars, line manager, trustee, or volunteer.

This was a challenging question as potentially, a wide range of people could be providing a wide range of support. The most statistically significant correlation was 6, that is, 6 coordinators identified a particular supporter providing a specific kind of support. This occurred five times in the responses, where diocesan employees provided administrative and communications support, where line managers provided supervision and where departmental colleagues provided interest and enthusiasm. Looking at responses that combined the contributions of departmental colleagues, diocesan employees, episcopal vicars for marriage and family life and line managers, the internal agents of support, 50-75% of respondents noted them as the primary sources of administrative and communications support and interest in their work (for 9 coordinators), of encouragement, enthusiasm and financial support (for 8 coordinators) and of supervision (for 7 coordinators). Combining the contributions

made by Core Working Groups, Commissions for Marriage and Family Life and other volunteers, their primary roles, although each was mentioned only by four respondents, are to advise and pray. Three coordinators mentioned the mentoring support of this group and two mentioned the support given by them in directing their work. No coordinators identified support received from a chaplain and only one mentioned financial support received from a diocesan trustee.

However, a comment made by a part-time volunteer coordinator underlines some of the challenges of responding to this question, in that there is great variation in terminology and structure across dioceses:

> *"Difficult often to categorise. I have used the title EV for MFL for the vicar general. Communications are helped by the communications commission which publishes the local Catholic newspaper. Photocopying, and mailshots are helped by the administrator of the Pastoral Resources Centre. Interest, enthusiasm and encouragement have been given at varying times by the Archbishop, deans, deacons, priests, sisters, and the laity who have participated in training and events we have presented. The commission members have been unfailing in their support."*

Two further comments made in this section were interesting:

> *"With changing structures and very little explicit support in the Diocese, it has been important to have vision and vitality and energy, and receive support /training from marriage and family life workers outside the diocese."*

> *"Most of my moral support comes from the people who work with me and from the occasional but tremendously encouraging satisfaction I get when I see lives change through FLM relationship education work. Practical support also comes mostly from the people I work with. My line manager is personally very supportive and also professionally challenging. It's difficult to be so categorical about who provides what, especially financial support which is standard structural diocesan support as part of my contract of employment for salary, admin and expenses. There is no single person who gives me 'direction' or 'mentoring' or 'counselling', I get all these from different people and at different times and in different ways (which may be*

another ways of saying I do not get them as I have to be glad of what I can find?). There is no extra financial assistance for these things (except admin) even though I think there should be a budget for staff development. I find the national FLM office very supportive, creative, imaginative and able to find goodness and treasure in the most unlikely places (thank you!) ....especially encouraging me to do the Masters in LMFLM at Dominican University Chicago.

Finally in this section, to clarify the extent of the financial support available respondents were asked a question about the size of their operating budgets. The meaning of an operating budget was not made explicit in the questionnaire though since an earlier question had been asked about their salary it was presumed, wrongly as it turned out, that responses would exclude those costs. That said it was surprising that six (43%) respondents were unable to answer this question. Comments made included:

> *"I managed the FLM budget up until 2004 (£34k per annum) but have not had a budget since 2005, when it was taken over by the new Episcopal Vicar and cut (as required by the financial circumstances of the time)."*
>
> *"unknown not a set amount"*
>
> *"?"*
>
> *"We do not have a budget. Any expenses of personnel are covered by arrangement with the Vicar General. We have always received any financial support we have requested for Archdiocesan events, national meetings etc."*
>
> *"Budget is negotiated on a yearly basis with the finance department."*
>
> *"Not known"*

Of the rest, answers varied from £3,000-£114,000. These responses were further analysed from the perspective of whether coordinators were volunteers or employed, part-time and full-time. Of the three volunteers, one did not have a set budget, another had a budget of £3,000 and the third a budget of nearly £12,000 per annum. Of those employed full-time (4 people), two were able to name a budget, and that was between £85-89,000 per annum. Of the 7 part-time employed coordinators, three did not know their budget and the budgets of the other four ranged from £6,000-114,000. It's possible that an additional 0 was added to the second figure by mistake. Two identified a budget in the region of £25,000 even though for one person this

figure matched her salary.   Taken as a whole the responses to this question were useful only insofar as they indicated a significant lack of knowledge around the financial resources at the disposal of diocesan coordinators. Given that the majority are paid by their dioceses or donating large chunks of their personal time to the good of the church, it seems odd that their efforts might be hampered by not knowing the extent of the resources available to them. Moreover, that they are accorded responsibility for a very critical area of the Church's mission but not for financial planning. However, it is also possible that individual coordinators may have been diffident in pursuing the matter of the budget at their disposal or that those controlling the budgets may have been less than forthcoming about its extent.

In this section on working practices a number of questions begin to surface. There are question marks around line management, where for the most part this is the responsibility of a senior priest or bishop. Do they have the time or the skills for this? Is it an open enough forum to express the frustrations of the work? A line manager who is also a senior priest can offer many advantages not least in providing regular access to a potentially important advocate or champion. Not so advantageous however is the likelihood that a senior member of the clergy is equally responsible for competing areas of work.

There are also questions arising from the different departmental perspectives in which diocesan family ministry is located. The variety and lack of uniformity across diocesan structures was noted by Grindell (2001) in a study of six English and Scottish dioceses for the Authority and Governance Project undertaken by the Queen's Ecumenical Foundation for Theological Education. Although structural frameworks across the six dioceses shared some common features, Grindell pointed to some 'striking dissimilarities'. A future study might explore the extent to which the focus and content of diocesan family ministry might differ according to its location within education, pastoral or evangelisation departments.

The importance of diocesan colleagues in sustaining diocesan family ministry also becomes more apparent in this section of survey responses. Where prayer, advice, encouragement, enthusiasm, advocacy and interest are available they are mostly provided by departmental colleagues. This raises concerns for those coordinators who are more isolated, perhaps working more at home, as volunteers or as part-time

employees in dioceses with few resources. How then will they obtain such important support?

Another concern rests with the apparently few resources for mentoring and training. This surely limits the potential for professional development of diocesan coordinators. Is this realistic for those addressing such a broad remit with such a diverse skill set?

Finally, this section flags up the possibility that structures such as core working groups and diocesan commissions for marriage and family life are insufficiently exploited by dioceses. Half the respondents had access to the support of a commission or a core working group but neither scored highly in terms of actual support offered. Further research would be needed to discover why this is and whether there are ways in which commissions and core groups might become more helpful to the work of diocesan coordination.

Section 3: Your Place of Work

The third section of the questionnaire gathered data about the places from which diocesan coordinators worked: their physical location and the facilities available to them. This section attempted to clarify the extent to which diocesan coordinators were integrated into curial life or potentially were disadvantaged in some way by not having access to essential equipment and logistical facilities. The responses to questions in the previous section certainly suggest that integration with diocesan infrastructure is valuable.

Coordinators were asked to identify their usual place of work and given three options: their own home, the diocesan curial office or another diocesan location. Of the 14 respondents, 9 identified their own home as their main place of work although four also identified working at the curial office and/or another diocesan location. This means that five (37.5%) are based entirely at home. Four coordinators are based entirely at the curial office and two entirely at another diocesan location. One coordinator identified all three options as her usual places of work. All the three volunteer coordinators worked from home though one worked also at the diocesan curial office.

Figure 8 illustrates the facilities that are provided to coordinators by their dioceses. Although there was opportunity for adding additional facilities not included in the questionnaire, nothing further was added. Comments made about facilities mostly clarified where the facilities were available and that motor expenses were provided if not a vehicle itself.

Looking at the data as it relates to the five coordinators working solely at home, only two were supplied with broadband or mobile internet access, two had computers and printers supplied, three were provided with email addresses, two were provided with mobile phones and two had access to a diocesan website. It is possible that some of the other equipment necessary to effective working was already available personally at home to the coordinator. However, it would seem essential for even home workers to be included in the diocesan email system and for them to have a dedicated mobile phone number that can be turned off out of hours in order to protect their home life.
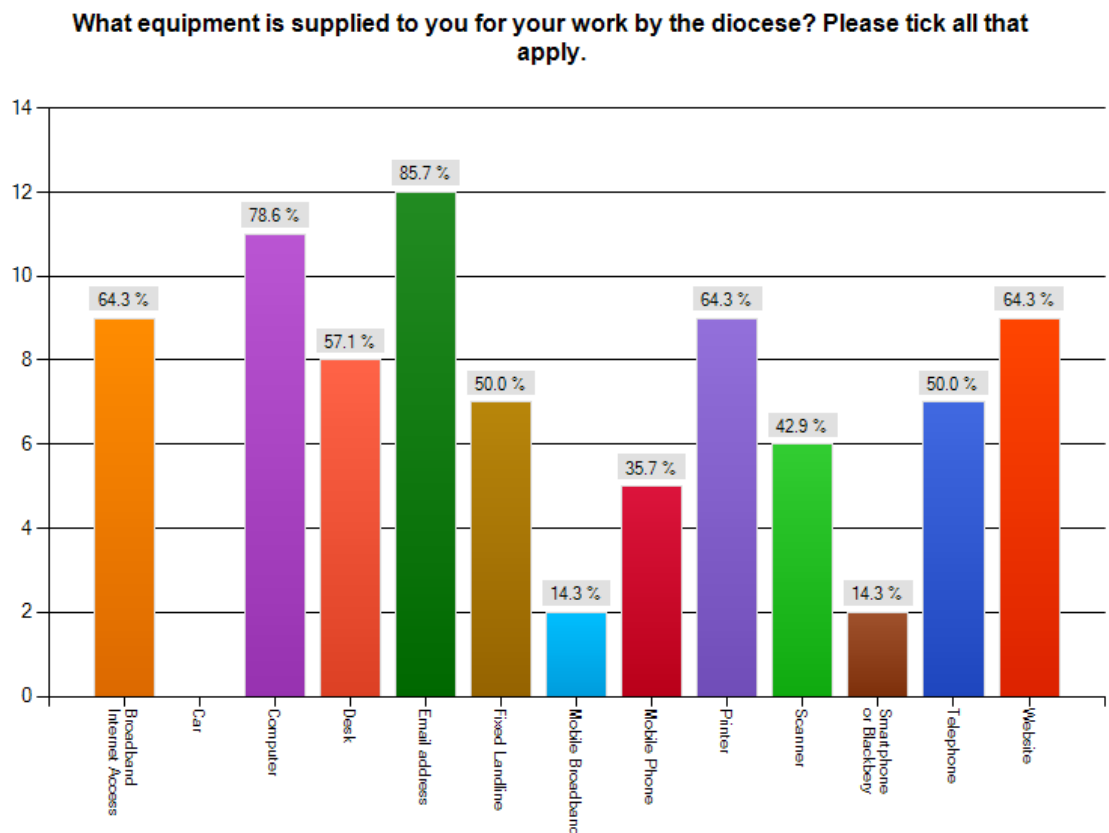

Figure 9: Equipment supplied by the diocese

The data poses similar concerns for the three volunteer coordinators. Mobile phones, mobile broadband, computers, and desks were each supplied to just one coordinator (not the same one), whilst two of these had an email address provided and access to the diocesan website.

The data generated in this section confirms the concern for home-based coordinators in accessing the support and the facilities they need for effective working. It also flags up a question about the visibility of this work if a good proportion of it is energised and enacted outside the main diocesan office.

Section 4: Finance

This section of the questionnaire requested details of the total budget for diocesan family ministry as a follow up to questions about annual salary in Section 1 and annual operating budget in Section 2. Questions of finance were intentionally scattered throughout the questionnaire to avoid too great an emphasis in any one section. In this section respondents were asked to indicate the total annual diocesan budget in 2011 for family ministry and whether any of this had been contributed by an external grant. (In some of these dioceses a three year capacity building grant for family ministry, provided by the Bishops' Conference, was still active during this year.) Given that each diocese is required by charity law to provide an annual report and accounts, this information should be verifiable within the public domain. However some of the diocesan accounts conflate the family ministry budget under broader budgetary headings so that it is difficult to see in the annual reports what is actually spent on diocesan family ministry work in any given year.

Not surprisingly given the muddled Section 2 responses regarding operating budgets, a good number of respondents were unable to quantify the total amount expended on diocesan family ministry in 2011. One said the overall budget came within the pastoral department budget. Another gave a salary amount and indicated they knew of nothing more than this. Other responses ranged from £6000-£40,000. Comments made included:

> *"I'll have to come back to you on this."*

> *"No diocesan budget set but income from grant."*

Eight of the 14 dioceses had been in receipt of major grants that year from the Bishops Conference for capacity building work in family ministry and one diocese had received a substantial grant from a private grant-making trust. So the lack of awareness on the part of those responsible for expending some of those grant monies is surprising.

Appendix 2: Analysis of Job Descriptions

This Appendix lists the responsibilities that featured in formal and informal job or role descriptions, together with an indication of the frequency with which they featured, and notes referring to specific (numbered) descriptions. Numbers in bold italics indicates that a task was found in an informal description. An additional list was made of the training areas indicated in job descriptions.

Network internally (7 is explicit on the strengthening of internal networks as is 6), Build effective relationships with internal agencies (7 is implicit on this) Liaison with other diocesan agencies (2 mentions a specific agency)	11
Organise training opportunities, train volunteers (9 & 2 mention specific training needs)	11
Supervise staff	6
Coordinate lay involvement, motivate volunteers	6
Coordinate implementation of the programme	6
Represent diocese at national/regional forums	5
Provide information and resources (5 mentions advice and range of constituents)	4
Organise events, conferences, publicity	4
Fundraising through grant application (grants not clear on 6)	4
Accountability meetings/reports (accountability is mentioned in 12 & 9 but no explicit tasks identified)	4
Incorporate FLM perspective within diocesan plan	3
Coordinate support	2
Ensure provision is cohesive and equitable across diocese (1 mentions deanery reps)	2
Work within available resources	2
Ensure compliance with diocesan policies (esp safeguarding & financial reporting for 2)	2
Administrative support	2
Develop policies and procedures	2
Raise awareness of family life/needs through communications strategy	*2*
Spokesperson for FLM within department/diocese	*2*
Analyse current provision of MFL support	1
Enable priests and catechists to offer training	1
Strengthen ecumenical links	1
Network with relevant external agencies	1

Maintain current awareness	1
Contribute to diocesan newspaper/create newsletters	1
Develop communication strategy	1
To undertake training oneself	1
Work well within team (others imply team work)	1
Develop pastoral database	1
Work within schools system	1
Convene Commission	*1*
Raise invoices and pay bills	*1*
Monitoring and ordering office supplies	*1*
To increase awareness of the issues around the dignity of the human person, particularly at the start and end of life.	*1*
Collate data on the current activities undertaken across the diocese within this area of marriage and family life.	*1*
To assist in the development of catechetical benchmarks for the preparation of the sacraments of marriage and baptism.	*1*
To research, evaluate and write suitable material and training programmes	*1*
To visit parishes to assess marriage and baptism preparation courses, recommending changes where appropriate.	*1*
To undertake any duties commensurate with the post and the needs of the diocese.	*1*
To build on and develop existing sacramental courses and ensure provision in all areas	1
Training Areas Marriage prep	10
Support for hurting families (dysfunctional families, bereavement & mental health, poor and marginalised, domestic abuse)	9
Home is a Holy Place/Family spirituality	9
Parenting education	8
Marriage enrichment	6
Everybody's Welcome	6
Passing on the Faith	4
Leadership skills	3
Relationship education for young people	2
Families with special needs	2
Families with non-Catholic members	1
Preventative care of the family	1
Adult learning processes	1

Relationship education per se	1
Communication skills	1
Group facilitation skills	1
Volunteer management skills	1
Presentation skills	1

Appendix 3: Telephone Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. As you may recall the purpose of my research is to *describe the professional context and practices of diocesan coordinators of family ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It addresses the absence of existing literature on this area of church ministry and will provide a foundation for further practitioner research and study in the future. The results of the study will facilitate a broader reflection on pastoral practices in support of marriage and family life which until now have been apparent only to those directly involved.*

There are two parts to this study: the first invited diocesan coordinators to provide their role descriptions and to describe their working conditions, resources, structures, and in general terms the focus of their work. This is the second part and aims to clarify via interviews more of the detail, purpose and value of particular family ministry practices.

I just want to confirm that you still have copies of the participant information papers and that you understand that you are free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice?

And that you are aware that the confidentiality of the information you provide will be safeguarded, and that you are free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study?

I'm hoping this will take no more than 90 minutes of your time. It will be recorded – is that ok - and you may have a copy of the recording if you wish. I will transcribe only the parts that I will use in my thesis and, as I said, will make every effort to protect your identity.

Please feel free to interrupt me, ask clarification of a question, criticise a line of questioning and so forth at any time… there are no right or wrong answers, I am only interested in your opinions and personal experiences.

You have seen the questions and had a little time to consider them. What I thought we would do is go through them in turn and then come back to anything that might need follow up – is that ok?

1. When someone asks you what do you do as an MFL coordinator, how do you describe it? Do you change your description depending on who is asking the question? If so, how? In your view, how well regarded generally is your role within the diocese?

   How do you understand family? ministry? How do you understand/what are your core values around family?

2. Why did you take this job? / What does family ministry mean to you?

   What is the primary goal of all that activity? And other more secondary goals?

   How does your work fit within the broader work of the church?

3. What aspects of your work do you find most satisfying? What aspects are most difficult? Why do you find them satisfying? Why do you think they are difficult?

   What's the worst thing about being an FLM coordinator? And the best?

   What's the most surprising part of your work?

4. Which basic Christian belief is most meaningful for you in your work in Family Ministry? / What inspires and sustains you in your work?

   Is there a favourite scripture passage, a line or thought from church teaching that sustains you? Is there anything that you do intentionally to sustain your energy for this work? What keeps you going when the going gets tough?

5. How do you manage/cope with the occasional tensions between the Catholic ideal and the reality of family life? Can you give an example of when such a tension has arisen for you and how you have addressed it?

6. What advice would you give to someone just starting out?

   Is there anything you wished you had known before you started?

   What have you learned about family ministry as a result of doing it?

7. If you could have one prayer answered in relation to your work what would it be?

Appendix 4: Professional Doctorate Stage 1 (Paper 1)

**The Under-Resourcing of Family Ministry within
the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.**

Stage One: Literature Review

July 2009

Elizabeth Davies

SID: 0817764

Anglia–Ruskin University

1. Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church, particularly since the Second Vatican Council has stressed the irreplaceable foundational significance of family life for the life of the Church and for the personal and faith lives of individuals[30]. This is exemplified by phrases such as "unique and irreplaceable contribution" (Familiaris Consortio, 1981, 5) and "almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute" (Gravissimum Educationii, 1965, 3). However, this expressed high regard for marriage and family life within Catholic teaching and beliefs stands in marked contrast to minimal levels of human and financial resources invested in structures of diocesan support for marriage and family life within the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Less than 1% of annual diocesan expenditure is devoted explicitly to family ministry with only one third of dioceses employing family ministry coordinators.

This situation has been perceived as something of an injustice by diocesan family ministry practitioners throughout the 15 years of my own professional practice, a fact that was taken up the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life in 1998[31]. However, more serious than the frustrations of a particular group of church leaders are the outcomes in practical terms of minimal investment in a ministry that nourishes the "the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations" (FC 53). The Catholic Church maintains that the psychological, emotional and spiritual health of society, of individuals and of the church relies to a large extent on the existence of healthy families. A number of recent, well-publicised, social studies suggest that the capacity of contemporary families to deliver this social capital is gradually being eroded. (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006; UNICEF, 2008; Layard & Dunn, 2009). Church families are not immune from these trends and it is possible that if they continue unabated, the future mission of the church will be seriously compromised. Since it is in the family that faith in God is "most effectively communicated and

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[30] "The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family." (Gaudium et Spes, 1965, 47)

[31] In 1998 the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life produced a short film called *The Family* to raise awareness of the benefits to a diocese of employing a Diocesan Coordinator of Marriage and Family Life Ministry.

nurtured" (Knights & Murray 2002, p.121), the Church evidently depends on healthy families.

1.1 Aims and Methodology

In this literature review I want to pursue two lines of enquiry that might explain the disproportionate imbalance between the Church's regard for family life and the allocation of resources to support it. The first relates to the meaning of family ministry. Over the years diocesan family ministry practitioners have developed vision statements in an attempt to explain what it is they do and hope to achieve. But perhaps these statements have not been strong or clear enough. Furthermore, in practice, the term 'family ministry' has proven problematic, particularly among those who prefer to limit the term ministry to describe the activity of ordained leaders.

The second area relates to the meaning of the word communion, particularly as reflected in the community or relational life of the church. Family ministry is primarily aimed at strengthening relationships: equipping people with the skills of relating effectively to others and supporting those in relationship difficulties so that families as "intimate communities of life and love" (FC 17) can both survive and thrive. An aspect of this work involves promoting the development of relationships of trust, acceptance and openness between parish families, so that the "mutual exchange of presence and help" that is identified as the "simplest, most effective and most accessible means" (FC 69) of family pastoral care can be realised.

My methodology in this review is inductive. I am drawing on 15 years of personal experience. I have been a practitioner since 1994 when I joined a network of parish volunteers engaged in family ministry in the diocese of Menevia in South West Wales, with the basic aim of strengthening relationships within and between the families in our parishes.[32] I subsequently worked as an unpaid volunteer for the diocese in a central coordinating role from 1996 until 2000. Since 2003 I have been employed part-time by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, working with diocesan coordinators in implementing national programmes of support for

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[32] In practical terms I was involved in recruiting a parish family ministry team, facilitating parenting programmes, introducing a mothers and toddlers group, children's liturgy and a youth club as well as organising deanery events and supporting the annual diocesan family fun day.

marriage and family life. This literature review has enabled me to begin to organise and reflect more deeply on this experience. While I have identified two particular areas of immediate concern I am by no means certain that these will provide all the answers I seek. But they are my starting point, selected because of their theological significance and because, in my experience, they relate directly to significant challenges in Catholic family ministry.

Another challenge has been the lack of available published literature on family ministry in the Catholic experience in England and Wales. Such 'texts' that are available reside primarily in the wisdom and experience of those involved and in the limited records available of meetings of diocesan and parish coordinators of family ministry. These limits mean that a portion of the evidence included in this review is anecdotal.

A final caveat: throughout this literature review I will be referring at various times to 'Church', meaning the formal structures of power, authority and responsibility, particularly ordained priesthood and to 'church', meaning the broader gathering of God's baptised people, particularly the lay faithful.

1.2 Rationale

My own career is evidence of an increasing willingness, at least at national level, to prioritise resources for family ministry. Nonetheless, even at national level, resources devoted to marriage and family life are still far less than resources devoted to, for example, evangelisation. For example, in 2007, the Catholic Bishops Conference spent £40,131 on the Marriage and Family Life Project Office compared to £143,302 on the Youth Office and £268,324 on the Agency to Support Evangelisation. (Catholic Trust for England and Wales, 2008)

Strategic investment of human and financial resources by dioceses in family ministry is also comparatively small. In a typical year (2000), just 8 out of 22 dioceses employed staff to coordinate family ministry, though 9 more appointed volunteers, ordained priests or permanent deacons to manage this role. Of those employed, only three were hired to work full-time; of the 5 part-time employees, one paid her own salary from funds raised through the marriage preparation courses she provided.

Diocesan accounts for 2007 show that less than 1% of total diocesan expenditure was recorded under marriage and family life headings. [33]

Even these small amounts are under threat. At diocesan level income is suffering not only from falling congregations donating less cash but also by falling interest rates. "Diocese hit by property-price crash' noted a headline in The Tablet, May 23rd 2009. All churches have to make hard decisions about where best to invest dwindling financial resources. So, the need to understand just why family ministry is a low budget priority is increasingly urgent.

A further factor driving my enquiry is the success of the Bishops' national fundraising strategy which has raised substantial donations to support the development of family ministry within dioceses. I am now responsible for supporting 13 local projects which have been funded until 2010 with the expectation that they will become self-sustaining after that time. Given that dioceses evidently do have access to considerable sums of money each year, it is crucial that Celebrating Family[34] project managers start advocating as soon as possible for some of that money to be diverted to sustain their work. Understanding the reasons why this has not yet been successfully achieved is an essential part of that process.

1.3 Context

The work of diocesan family ministry coordinators varies greatly from diocese to diocese, the one constant being a commitment to marriage preparation. Where resources permit, diocesan coordinators also seek to deliver parenting programmes, bereavement care, support for divorced and separated, celebrations of family life and to develop networks of trained volunteers for this ministry. Diocesan marriage and family life ministries are located within a variety of different departments, for example, vocation, pastoral formation, evangelisation and Christian life and responsibility. Associated structures also vary widely. Some dioceses have established Commissions or Vicariates for Marriage and Family Life. Others have

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[33] To clarify the local picture I have examined, as part of this literature review, the audited 2007 accounts for the 22 Roman Catholic dioceses. A summary is included as Appendix 2 of this paper. The figures I have collated indicate that overall expenditure by dioceses that year exceeded £303 million. The money spent on central administration including diocesan staff exceeds £59.5 million. Contrast this with the money dedicated to explicit programmes of family life ministry: in 2007 12 dioceses spent a total of £243,691.

[34] *Celebrating Family: Blessed, Broken, Living Love* is the title of the Catholic Bishops' national strategy for marriage and family life.

created core or working groups for their coordinator; others simply report to a line manager. So the experience of diocesan family ministry varies greatly around England and Wales.

In 2001 I completed graduate studies in family ministry in the United States but this level of formation is unusual. Most of those involved in diocesan family ministry enter through involvement with a voluntary organisation such as Marriage Encounter and Catholic Marriage Care. Educational opportunities have been developed, such as an ecumenical Certificate course offered by Ushaw College, and a diploma/certificate course at Maryvale Institute. However, experience suggests that it is particularly difficulty to recruit students for marriage and family life programmes, quite possibly because budgets, career opportunities and awareness of family ministry are all so limited[35].

1.4 Key Voices

These limits also extend to the body of published literature on family ministry, which, in the UK at least, simply does not exist. For the purposes of this literature review therefore, I have turned to broader texts to explore my key questions. Principle among these is the papal exhortation document of 1981 Familiaris Consortio. This document, compiled following the World Synod on the Family in Rome in 1980, was described in 1997 by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Trujillo, as the "Magna Carta of the Ministry of the family" (Trujillo, 1997). It is clearly a primary source, but as I re-read it I realised that it fails to clarify adequately the meaning of family ministry and gives no clear guidance as to whether it can in fact be legitimately regarded as a ministry of the church. So I have also looked to the literature of ministry, in particular the work of Thomas F. O'Meara O.P., who is an acknowledged authority on ministry within the Roman Catholic Church. Thankfully, FC is clearer when it comes to considering the question of communion.

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[35] Ushaw Course Director Fr Chris Fallon wrote: "The module has not attracted enough applicants to be viable for the last two years (in fact last year we had no applicants at all)… We have the impression that the number of employed workers in this area has declined across the churches and we're wondering whether there is still a market for a module of this size and level" (Fallon, 2007)

2: Family Ministry

2.1 The Significance of Family in the Life of the Church

Roman Catholic teaching identifies many reasons why marriage and family life play a crucial role in the mission and life of the Church[36]. The family is "the basic cell of society" and "the primary social nucleus" (Christifideles Laici, 40). "The future of the human person, his happiness, his capacity for giving life meaning all depend on the family."[37] Parents are described as "the first heralds of the faith" (Lumen Gentium, 11), yet "from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 71). In England and Wales bishops have declared that "Parenthood is of immense significance theologically, personally and for society as a whole." (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2004, 118). Recent studies have shown that parents and family remain the biggest single factor in passing on faith in God (Knights & Murray, 2002).

Since the family is regarded as so crucial, it's not surprising that pastoral care of family life is also prioritised in church documents: "The care of the family always remains central, since it is the primary agent of an incarnate transmission of the faith." (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, 207) "No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family." (FC 71) "It is ... indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavour to save and foster the values and requirements of the family." (FC 86) There is therefore plenty of material on which to draw to affirm the Church's support and concern for family life and family ministry.

2.2 Origins of Family Ministry

Even so, family ministry, as an explicit expression of Roman Catholic ministry, is a relatively new phenomenon. Its development across the worldwide Roman Catholic community is not well documented. One of the earliest initiatives began in the United States, marked by the publication in 1978 of A Plan of Pastoral Action for

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[36] It is beyond the scope of this essay to do justice to the full extent of the Church's regard for marriage and family life. One of the most recent syntheses of the theology of the domestic church is Bourg's *Where Two or Three Are Gathered* (2004).

[37] The Holy Father's Message dated October 15, 2001, to Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar of Rome and President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of "Familiaris Consortio

Family Ministry: a Vision and Strategy, designed to launch "a new approach within the Church to pastoral service to families". (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1978) The Plan was comprehensive in identifying processes, structures and resources for family ministry and clarifying perhaps for the first time that family ministry is "a type of ministering not only *to* but *with* people through a particular participation of the family members themselves." (NCCB, 1978)

In 1980 a World Synod of Bishops took place in Rome on the family and as a result, the principle Roman Catholic document on the family, Familiaris Consortio (The Christian Family in the Modern World), was published in 1981. Without referring directly to family ministry, it includes a pertinent description of a process of family ministry:

> "Thus, within the ecclesial community - the great family made up of Christian families - there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace." (FC 69)

2.3 The Experience of Family Ministry in England and Wales

Within the Church in England and Wales family ministry has been formally acknowledged in a resolution agreed by the Bishops in 1994, to coincide with the International Year of the Family.[38] An English and Welsh Catholic network of diocesan family ministry coordinators has existed at least since 1993. Several dioceses, notably Arundel & Brighton, Leeds and Menevia, have implemented the peer ministry model outlined in FC, developing networks of parish contacts to work directly with families. This approach understands family ministry as a process of empowering, encouraging and supporting families in their mission "to witness justice, love and faith within the home, within the faith community and in society." (Theakston, 2007)

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[38] This resolution clarified and described the role of the diocesan coordinator for marriage and family life ministry, identifying five main tasks: 1: Caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life; offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family; 2: Providing information and resources in family matters for all parishioners and clergy; 3: Organizing training opportunities and coordinating lay involvement; 4: Acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need; 5: Strengthening ecumenical links, enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes.

This description is possibly too broad to serve either as a distinctive indicator of the value of family ministry or as a useful reference point for those new to family ministry. It is, after all, a mission that one could reasonably expect to be shared by anyone in a position of leadership in the church. Theakston's indicators, while laudable, fail to clarify the distinguishing characteristics of family ministry, without which it becomes more difficult to make a case for appropriate resources.

In my early years I struggled to understand the meaning and purpose of family ministry, with questions such as: who does this ministry? For whom do they do it? What is distinctive about family ministry? As a new parish volunteer I was informed that "Family Ministry is a service, which supports and encourages the growth of positive, loving relationships, in families, in local communities and in society at large." (Conway, 1994) But again, that objective might well apply to a range of other ministries in the church.

The parameters of family ministry can be equally indistinct. Letters written by Bishop Daniel Mullins of Menevia during 1994-5 to parish volunteers stress the inclusive nature of family ministry: "No family must feel marginalised or excluded. The Holy Father has constantly told us to reach out to families that have special needs and to families that have suffered break-down or division," he wrote (Mullins, 1995). Yet when the core group advertised a relationship course for married couples as also found to be useful to same-sex and cohabiting couples, the limits of this inclusive approach became clear. Priests complained that we were encouraging sinful relationships and refused to encourage any of 'their' people to take part. So the Bishop issued a letter specifying that the course was for 'Catholic couples' only, as if to say that Catholic couples would not be cohabiting or in same-sex relationships. It was hardly a satisfactory response.

During the last year I have assisted ten dioceses to appoint part-time marriage and family life workers and come to appreciate a wide variety of perspectives. Some areas view family ministry as child-focussed rather than inter-generational. Others are very marriage oriented, overlooking the needs of parents and the divorced and separated. In some places family ministry is perceived as a catechetical ministry to promote church teaching on family planning and sexual ethics. In others there seems to be a real hesitancy around the word family, a word that is loaded with emotion

and meaning. All this variety suggests to me that family ministry might be a term that is better described than defined, if it is to be appropriated more widely.

Nevertheless, even within a descriptive framework, sound theological principles must be applied to the practice of family ministry. It's particularly important that practitioners can feel confident in the significance of their work, since the Church's material investment in it is so low. But it is even more important that family ministry can be theologically validated as an authentic ministry of the Church. Only then can practitioners begin to negotiate for a fairer share of the Church's limited material resources.

3. Ministry

3.1 Ministry according to Familiaris Consortio

Despite its 'Magna Carta' status, this papal exhortation easily qualifies as one of John Paul II's least well-known publications. When in April 2005 the Tablet published a special John Paul II issue, a 12 page obituary of the late pope made no reference at all to this, the principle document of the Church that addresses the life and mission of the Christian family in the modern world (Anon, 2005). In their analysis of the work of the World Synod of 1980, including study of the *Lineamenta*, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the event, the propositions and the final text, Selling and Grootaers suggest a possible reason for this, when they lament the length of the final document, which runs to 30,000 words:

> "Almost none of the laity would attempt it and even very few of the clergy would take the time to study its content." (1983, p.303)

Whether the lack of critical appraisal of Familiaris Consortio is due to its length, its content or a combination of both is not however the main focus of this paper.

In 1981 FC explicitly applied the term 'ministry' for the first time in the documents of the Church to the activity of parents and married couples within the home. The Synod Bishops took their lead in this from the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, which, as O'Meara points out (1993, p.16) rediscovered and re-imagined the Church in terms of two fresh ecclesial identities: the 'People of God' and 'Universal Sacrament of Grace and Revelation for the World', both of which have been significant for recent developments in ministry, particularly in the area of lay

ministry. Yet, even as FC paved the way for the conjunction of the terms 'family' and 'ministry', it failed to clarify that which can legitimately be described as family ministry (particularly ministry exercised by parents, children, siblings and spouses) and that which remains the preserve of ordained clergy. The use of the term ministry within FC is restrained, inconsistent and numerically dwarfed by the use of the preferred term 'service', describing similar, and arguably more significant, domestic ecclesial activities.

Within FC there are four sections where *ministry* is used to describe family activity; these are all to be found within the third section of the document entitled *The Role of the Christian Family*. In sections 21 and 38 the term is framed by inverted commas.

> "...parents exercise their unrenounceable authority as a true and proper "ministry"" (FC 21).

> "The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a "ministry" of the Church" (FC 38)

According to section 21, ministry is a service by parents both to the human and to the Christian well-being of their children and to their development as responsibly autonomous adults. In concrete terms, this necessitates a wide range of physical, emotional and spiritual nurturing activities which implicitly must also be construed as ministerial activity. It's worth stressing here that the document accords the status of ministry to the service of *human* well-being, not just the service of *Christian* well-being.

In sections 39 and 53 however the term ministry is used without embellishment but again it is primarily connected with the evangelising activity of the home:

> "The Synod…presented the educational mission of the Christian family as a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated" (FC 39)

> "The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable." (FC 53)

These inconsistencies suggested that I take a closer look on the origins of ministry within the Christian tradition to enable me to clarify for myself whether or not family ministry, as a theological principle and pastoral practice, really rests on firm ground. So I turned to Thomas O'Meara's Theology of Ministry, valued as a reputable authority and source for subsequent writers on ministry since it was first published in

1983. I wanted to look at O'Meara's theology of ministry and integrate it with my reading of FC.

3.2. O'Meara's Theology of Ministry

In his introduction O'Meara, points out that not all human activity is ministry (1993, p5) and FC certainly seems to affirm this. Throughout parts three and four (Pastoral Care of the Family) families are described as *serving* rather than *ministering* through offering acts of mutual service that build family communion (FC 21 & 43), service to personal development (34, 37), service to life (36, 41, 69), service to other families (41, 69), service to society (44, 47, 50), service of the Kingdom of God (49), service of love (49, 63), service of the Church (50, 71), service of man (50, 63), service of the Gospel (53), service to human advancement (62, 64), and the service of God (74). Yet many of these services could be considered of equal, if not greater, significance to those activities described as ministry. It's hard to perceive why some of these services have been differentiated from the service to human wellbeing that section 21 dignifies as ministry. It suggests to me that the either the Church has not fully thought through the many ways in which ministry is enacted in different areas of the church or that the Church is itself, to some degree, ambivalent about extending the term ministry to include activities beyond the realm of ordained leaders.

However, given the origin of the term ministry as diakonia, which O'Meara points out is an ordinary Greek word for service, the implicit distinction between acts which are regarded as ministry and acts which are described as service appears at best dubious. Even so, there seems to be little support within Familiaris Consortio for extending the term ministry to describe that support which is provided by families to other families beyond the boundaries of the home – support which the document acknowledges in section 69 to be the most effective form of pastoral care of marriage and family life.

Here it is worth noting the term 'apostolate' which is still applied to the work of family ministry in some dioceses. Avery Dulles noted in 2006 that this term apostolate has largely been superseded by the term ministry. But he claims, in the documents of the Second Vatican Council the two words had more distinctive applications:

> "*Ministry* is used in particular for services intended to build up the Church from within, whereas *apostolate*, to the extent that it is still used, connotes activities directed outward to the world" (2006, p.7).

Given that the Council sought to dispel this notion of a distinction or separation between the Church and the world (see especially Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), it seems spurious to me to differentiate between services and activities in this way. Nevertheless, terminology adopted by the Pontifical Council for the Family still seems to prefer use of *apostolate* to that of *ministry*, as the Council's current explanatory text on the Vatican website illustrates (Anon 2005 (2)). This makes a clear distinction between pastoral ministry to the family and the apostolate of the family. Furthermore, in the index of the Enchiridion on the Family, issued by the Council in 2004, the term ministry is conspicuous by its absence, whilst a whole document is devoted to Diocesan Structures of the Family Apostolate (PCF, 2004). O'Meara clearly points out that continued use of this word is not good:

> 'The term 'apostolate of the laity' [adds] an incorrect ecclesiology that caritative functions alone were possible as services in the church and that the works of the laity derived from minor shares in the Episcopal office' (1993, p.31).

I really wonder why it is that the Pontifical Council for the Family persists in using terms that are practically anachronistic. I also wonder whether in so doing they are reflecting or creating a situation in which the authenticity of family ministry can be challenged.

O'Meara's historical analysis of the growth of ministry in the Church since the Second Vatican Council and the roots of ministry in the New Testament and early Church seek to bring about a continuity between what he calls *'primal'* (1993, p.35) ministry and a discontinuity with what he describes as *'incorrect ecclesiology'* (1993, p.31). A theology of ministry, he writes, is *'basically a meditation on the kingdom, a theology of the Holy Spirit, a contemplative analysis of grace'* (1993, p.38). To me this suggests that ministry possesses an inclusive, immediate, liberating and abundant character that is not easily contained within Church structures, but demands to be made manifest in the life of every believer, in order to realise its richness. By comparison, a distinction between ministry and an apostolate communicates measurement, containment, restriction and limit.

Jesus' own model of ministry, as we read in the Gospels, is exemplified by his washing his disciples' feet on the last full day of his human life on earth. Washing feet is a very practical, simple activity that has little to do with being chosen, ordained, prayerful, intelligent or educated. It's a straightforward but grubby, lowly and very physical act of loving kindness and care, certainly associated with human wellbeing. Although Jesus washed a good number of feet that day, for each of his followers it must have been an extraordinarily intimate and personal experience.

According to O'Meara, in preaching the kingdom of God, Jesus spoke in similes of *'a dynamic influence of God alive in our world, though only perceptible through belief'* (1993, p.37). This presence *'enables ministry, gives ministry its life and its freedom'* (1993, p.38). So in a very real sense ministry springs from God-with-us, calling us to become more fully the people God has created, through and in loving care and service of one another. Deeper awareness of God's influence and love in our lives implicitly gives rise to a deeper hunger to minister to others and deeper awareness of opportunities for ministry. If God's spirit calls us, then surely our first response must be to follow that spirit.

O'Meara makes another important point about Jesus' ministry as a model for our own: '*sacrifice and doctrine are removed from the temple ritual and exist in the open air as part of life*' (1993, p.39). This, I think, is an important corrective to our assumptions and indeed our ministerial practices. To follow Jesus fully certainly demands a move away from today's equivalent of the temple and its rituals, into the open air of workplaces, shopping centres, spontaneity, disorder and noise.

At Pentecost the Spirit of Jesus inflamed those who had gathered, frightened, to hide away in the upper room, and released them to effectively communicate the Kingdom of God, as Jesus had done when humanly alive in their midst. The Pentecost event, accordingly to O'Meara, is the key ministry event in the life of the Church. The depth of Jesus' call to his followers and disciples only became clear after Pentecost when "*slowly it dawned on Jesus' believers that following Jesus and his Spirit meant service, service for all and by all*" (1993, p.49). The Spirit proceeded to confirm this by gifting Jesus' followers with the charisms to minister in a wide variety of ways, which St Paul connected and unified in his letters to the Corinthians and the Romans.

> "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rom 12: 4-6).

The impact of Pentecost is described by O'Meara as *'a sovereign, surrounding presence'* becoming *'concrete in the sacramental mode: not as magic but as the presence of grace in creation and in the human'* (1993, p51). He then quotes a paragraph by Aidan Kavanagh which is of curious significance both for families and for family ministry. According to Kavanagh and therefore O'Meara, the experience of baptism, of being initiated into a whole new way of life within the Christian community is 'so new and different' that conventional social analogies are inadequate to describe it:

> "So radically incomparable is this transformation in Christ-become-life-giving-Spirit that only the most primal human experiences such as marriage, birth, death and dining together offer clues to it" (1993, p.51).

In Kavanagh's view, there is something very significant about these ordinary, and extraordinary, common, human experiences that provide an insight into the 'radically incomparable' transformation offered by the Spirit.

In a very real sense, the 'bath of initiation' or baptism is not a one time only event for each of us but a continuing activity and challenge. As we are received into and grow within the Body of Christ, the community of God's Kingdom, the most basic of our human experiences indicate, signpost or offer clues to the transformative experience of life in 'Christ-become-life-giving-Spirit'. Our awareness of being children of God is rooted in the ordinary just as ministry or diakonia is rooted in the ordinary.

O'Meara's work offers support for a deeper appreciation of family ministry as ministry. He highlights the example of Jesus who took ministry out of the temples and into homes, streets and fields. He stresses the role of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of the kingdom of God and the concretisation of grace in the ordinary. In pointing to incorrect ecclesiology he alerts us to discern whether a distinction between ministry to families and ministry by families is wholly appropriate. Despite the way in which the term apostolate has been applied, the Kingdom is not separate from the world; the world is the place in which the Kingdom must be realised. If the

Pentecost event is the key ministry event in the life of the church, it suggests that everyone is equipped by the Holy Spirit in some way to offer service to the building up of the Kingdom.

4. Communion

4.1 Communion and Family Relationships

The second issue I wanted to look at is the area of relationships and especially the value that the Church places on relationship support because this is a major focus of the work of family ministry practitioners. A vision statement drafted by coordinators states: "In essence, this ministry is the ministry of Christian relationship" (Northern Coordinators Group, 2002). American Protestant theologian Dennis Guernsey defines family ministry as "the church's empowering the people of God to relate to one another as if they are family, especially if they are" (1990, p.5). Guernsey's definition of family ministry implicitly assumes that:

> "in terms of the New Testament, "family" is primarily a verb rather than a noun. The infinitive form would be "to family" one another. The focus is upon how we as the people of God relate to one another, in contrast with who we are when we relate" (1990, p.5).

An earlier attempt to describe the characteristics of diocesan family ministry noted the underlying theological focus as *communion* (Gandy, 1996). This guiding principle directly relates to one of the underlying theological premises of marriage and family life mentioned in Section 3:1 of FC, that of being a community of persons. However the term has a much wider importance in the Church: it is the foundational orientation of the Christian life and of mission:

> "Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is an indispensable condition for bearing fruit... communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.' (CL 1988, 32)

Communion is a word with a variety of meanings. The index to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 1994) refers the reader to the Eucharist and Eucharistic celebration. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines its primary meaning as a sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings. The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism

points out that communion is a translation from the Greek term *koinonia* "used by Paul to indicate sharing, fellowship, or close association." (McBrien 1995, p.336) It would be important to know which of these meanings has greater significance in the eyes of diocesan practitioners of family ministry and in the eyes of the Church.

The work of practitioners is designed to enhance the communion experienced in family relationships, which would certainly involve a sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings but would perhaps be primarily driven by the desire to support family unity: resolving differences, negotiating areas of conflict, making joint decisions, offering mutual support and so forth. For others in the Catholic Church the word communion would have similar connotations but might be more strongly associated with shared religious belief, practices and fellowship. This does not exclude the need to resolve differences or negotiate areas of conflict by any means, but it might be viewed more as an intellectual challenge than a relational task. Given that interpersonal family relationships are the means by which "each human person is introduced into …the "family of God," which is the Church" (FC 15) perhaps there is scope for more emphasis on the relational or affective elements of communion.

One way this might be done is to focus more on the Trinity as a model for family life. The Catechism points out that "the Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit." (CCC 1994, 2205) Such communion, rooted in and reflecting equality and mutuality, unity and diversity, autonomy and connectedness, is an important corrective for unhealthy family relationships.

Evidence that the Church generally has not adequately addressed the relational aspect of communion at parish level can be found in the responses of those who took part in a year-long participative research project in 2004. Listening 2004 set out to clarify what families need from their church, issuing an open invitation to them to describe the blessings, difficulties and hopes of life as a family at home, in society and in the church. The church-centred responses indicated an overwhelming sense of isolation within the community of the parish[39] as well as the absence of a family

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[39] Typical comments from the report on the findings include: "No one speaks if they don't know you." "We need more social activities so that we can get to know one another better." "In our parish you do not feel accepted if you are not wealthy." "In the village I've been able to have very good contacts but not in the church community; it has been my church for 4 years now. I have invited

perspective. One of the diocesan coordinators reported that it was clear from what families said in her diocese that "one person's warm and caring parish is another's clique. There are people coming to our churches faithfully every week who don't feel accepted by the parish community and remain on the margins. People want to find friendship and care in the parish."

Within Familiaris Consortio communion is acknowledged as the basis of the mission of the Christian family. Section 15 is devoted to a description of the family as a communion of persons. The first general task of the family, as described in Section 18, is to form a community of persons, sustained by 'an unceasing inner dynamism leading … to ever deeper and more intense communion'. The work of diocesan family ministry coordinators includes the provision of services to enhance family communion. Although communion is also an essential aspect of Church life, there has been comparatively little work undertaken to analyse the dynamics and processes of building, deepening and sustaining communion or the relatedness of individuals within the Church. The obvious exception to this would be found in the literature of collaborative ministry (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1991; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1995) which addresses the skills and processes of being in relationship[40]. Diocesan family ministry coordinators would strongly identify with "a way of working in which the quality of relationships developed is as important as the task in which we are engaged." (CBCEW, 1995) But that too is an approach to ministry which seems to have become less of a priority in recent years. It would be useful to explore why this might be the case and whether there are parallels in practice between the experiences of collaborative ministry and family ministry.

4.2 Questions around Family

Before I conclude this section on the importance of relationships to the Church I want to look more closely at the question of family. I wonder if family really is a

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people for Sunday lunch once.. no invitation back. ..My feeling is that the church is a place of worship and the morning coffee is something to do to appear to be a good Christian but no more. The church community is a place where we share our faith but not our life." "Many people feel marginalized and we need to do something about this: the key word here is welcome. Welcome them at the church door and after they have come through. …Young people said they felt left out of many things but they also felt that adults were left out too especially the divorced and separated. We felt it was important to create opportunities for dialogue within church and within parishes."

[40] "Collaborative ministry is a way of relating and working together in the life of the Church which expresses the communion which the Church is given and to which it is called." (CBCEW, 1995)

priority for the Church. Certainly a glance at the annual accounts would suggest very strongly that it is not that much of a priority. But is there a deep-seated unease or distaste or simply a hesitancy about *family* ministry that prevents it receiving greater investment? I wonder because one of my diocesan colleagues maintains that families lie on some kind of a fault-line in the church and there are certainly some intractable pastoral challenges in family ministry, especially around the area of divorce and remarriage but also around life issues such as contraception.[41] In 2007 I attended the National Conference of Priests to co-present a paper with Bishop John Hine on the theme of family spirituality. But the participants did not want to talk about that. They wanted to use the occasion to raise the obstacles of ministering to those affected by divorce and remarriage.

This particular challenge is rooted in scripture, which has not always served the family well. Jesus was pretty hard on family and tough on marriage. In her paper *The Open Family* Scottish feminist theologian Sara Parvis (2005) draws attention to his more disturbing remarks about family life:

> "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.." (Luke 12:51-53).

In Ireland the Bishops' Conference have sought and gained permission to cut certain scriptural passages from the lectionary because they might give licence to domestic abuse. The vocation to follow Christ is often expressed as a departure from family life[42] and as the INTAMS Chair of Marital Spirituality at Leuven University wrote recently:

> "Husbands and wives are first of all brother and sister in Jesus Christ before they are husband and wife. Sons and daughters are also brother and sister to their father and mother before they are sons and daughters." (Knieps-Port le Roi, 2008)

So perhaps it's not surprising that little attention has been paid over the centuries to the ecclesial identity of family as domestic church. This 4th century description by

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[41] In his book The Naked Parish Priest, Stephen Louden reports the results of the largest ever survey of Catholic priests in England and Wales, including clergy response to questions about contraception and remarriage after divorce. Around 19% of priests were undecided about the Church's ban on artificial methods, 39% supported it and 43% were against it. When asked if the Church should change its position on divorce and remarriage the figures were similar, but only 28% felt that the Eucharist should be withheld from those in 'irregular' unions. (Louden & Francis, 2003)

[42] In the words of a popular hymn: "Follow me, follow me. Leave your homes and families."

the Ss John Chrysostom and Augustine, found its way into the documents of the Second Vatican Council and has been taken up and explored by successive Popes, particularly Paul VI and John Paul II. In 1992 the United States Bishops' Conference sponsored a theological and pastoral colloquium to explore the value and meaning of domestic church. It concluded that though a useful starting point, concretising the church as a community of people in the world, as idealised language it can also discourage those who fall short of where they would like to be:

> "The strategic question for pastoral ministers is not how to move people from here to perfection, but how to help them take just the next step along the way." (Committee on Marriage and Family, 1992)

But taking the next step along the way may not be as straightforward as it sounds.

The net effect of all these difficulties is that many in the church might hesitate when it comes to pastoral care of marriage and family life. It's a very complex, very sensitive area of church life, one where angels might rightly fear to tread. Yet I worry about the impact of not attempting anything. One of the most alarming outcomes identified during Listening 2004 was the reported difficulty with the question about how the local parish church supported family life. Responses to this question were the lowest of any of the areas of enquiry. Equally worrying was the absence of any broad understanding of the ordinary holiness of Christian family life. Yet as baptised Christians we are regularly gathered together much more often in God's name as church at home, than in the parish.

5: Conclusions

My purpose in this literature review was to explore why diocesan family ministry is relatively poorly resourced within the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales. But after looking at the areas of ministry and communion I feel that the challenge is possibly even more complex than I have described here. In theological terms, despite some equivocation by the Church, there is a strong enough case to both affirm family ministry and argue for additional investment in supporting the growth of loving family relationships to deepen family communion. If there is an issue here it is one of formation and communication: diocesan coordinators simply need to become more familiar with and confident in articulating family theology in order to make the case for a greater share of the available resources. It is, I think, a

case of setting family ministry more clearly within the broader context of the mission of the church, so that it is not viewed as a ministry of private practice, but as a critical element in the common good.

Confidence takes time to develop and as I said at the start of section 2:2 of this paper, family ministry is a relatively new phenomenon in England and Wales. Experience is patchy and limited: the first paid diocesan coordinator was not appointed until the mid 1980's and few dioceses have been able to follow suit until additional funding became available to them through the Catholic Bishops' Conference in 2008. It takes time to build up evidence of effective practice; the practice itself is complex and time-consuming. I feel sure that the relative immaturity of this ministry is a significant factor in the apportioning of resources. I visited a diocese recently to advise on a family ministry grant application. The staff had requested £6,000 per year for three years to pay the expenses of a volunteer. Yet the same department had just advertised for a full-time youth worker at a cost in excess of £20,000 per annum. They told me that historically there was money in the budget for the youth worker but nothing for family ministry. This raises a huge question about how dioceses manage their money to the best effect and liberate themselves from past decisions. It would also be useful to explore this question with those who control the budgets. A former member of the diocesan family ministry network once said that every budget is a theological statement. In the case of family ministry in England and Wales that is only too true, but I believe it is time for a fresh theological approach.

It might be possible to argue that long term investment in the preventative care of family relationships is an increasingly cost effective option for the church. The operating costs of marriage tribunals are currently at least twice that of diocesan family ministry offices. Preventative approaches increasingly find support in the political and therapeutic worlds where interventions with families are now taking account of the neurological evidence of the lifelong importance of the first few days and weeks of a person's life (Wylie, 2004; Gerhardt, 2004; Allen & Smith, 2008.) A good case could be made for a more effective, preventative approach to ministry that incorporates a family perspective by taking into particular account developmental stages and needs from the earliest days of life.

That said, I think there will always be a few significant obstacles to family ministry. The Church's idealised language can repel even those whose family lives have been relatively comfortable. The Church's moral theology, especially in the area of sexual ethics, can create painful dilemmas for those in pastoral ministry. The nature of family life itself is complex, changeable and impacted by multiple factors that are often beyond the control of families or of the church. But those challenges aside, I'm convinced that committed and experienced family ministry practitioners should be reflecting more deeply on that experience, recording effective strategies and building up both an evidence base and a value base for good family ministry practice. There is, as I said in my introduction, very little literature on the practice of family ministry in England and Wales. A survey of practitioners, accompanied by publication of the findings, might begin to fill this gap.

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7: Appendices

VISION AND AIMS OF FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY

We see Marriage and Family Life Ministry as a significant and transforming movement in the Church and a catalyst for the renewal of Christian community and the world. In essence, this ministry is the ministry of Christian relationship. Its theological foundation is: "Love one another as I have loved you." We recognise that family - how ever family is defined - is where we learn to relate, whether well or poorly, to self, to others, to God and so we place pro-active, pastoral care of the family at the heart of this ministry.

VISION STATEMENT

> *Family Life Ministry is at the service of all families, supporting the growth of loving, life-enhancing relationships.*

AIMS OF FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY

1. To raise awareness of the sacramental nature and mission of Christian marriage and the importance of the "domestic church" as the basic cell of Christian community
2. To raise awareness of the realities now facing families and seek appropriate pastoral response
3. To help family members develop their potential for nurturing and healing Christian relationships and for witnessing the good news of family in their homes and in the wider community
4. To call families to active ministry in the service of marriage and family life and thereby in the service of evangelisation and to see that this is adequately supported and formed
5. To promote structures at all levels of church life to facilitate marriage and family life ministry

Marriage and Family Life Ministry

- is essentially collaborative in character.
- invites appropriate and responsible lay participation and leadership in ministry,
  thus helping to redress the burdensome imbalance of clerical leadership/lay followership, with its damaging consequences for both groups.
- fosters respect for every person and calls people to identify, acknowledge and share their unique gifts in ministry to others.

- thrives on like-to-like ministry.

"The future of the world and of the church passes through the family." *F.C.75*

Now is a particularly opportune time for the Church:

- to adopt a very public role as Christian advocate for the family
- to raise awareness of the realities now facing families
- to proffer highly identifiable and solid pastoral care centred on the importance of family, "centre and heart of the civilisation of love"
- to foster collaborative action to promote a pro-marriage, pro-parent and pro-family culture.

This is what we are about.   This is what Marriage and Family Life Ministry is about.

Appendix 2: Diocesan Expenditure on Family Ministry 2007

	Diocesan FLM Structure	Vicariate or Department[1]	Annual Diocesan Expenditure[2]	Annual Curial Expenditure[3]	Marriage Tribunal[4]	Family Ministry Budget[5]
Arundel & Brighton	P/T Paid Coordinator	Pastoral	£ 20,076,000	£ 2,598,000	£ -	£ 20,000
Birmingham	None	n/a	£ 20,761,000	?	£ -	£ -
Brentwood	Coordinator (Priest)	Justice & Social Responsibility	£ 10,112,344	£ 2,054,271	£ -	£ 8,000
Cardiff	Commission[6]	Pastoral	£ 5,186,000	£ 1,344,000	£ -	£ -
Clifton	None	n/a	£ 8,198,000	£ 1,888,000	£ 44,000	£ 16,000
East Anglia	Commission	Evangelisation	£ 4,697,000	?	£ -	£ -
Hallam	P/T Paid Coordinator	Caring Services	£ 6,032,624	£ 2,825,000	£ 29,644	£ 25,000
Hexham & Newcastle	Coordinator (Deacon)	n/a	£ 17,455,000	£ 2,349,000	£ 25,000	£ 10,000
Lancaster	Commission	n/a	£ 8,906,000	?	£ -	£ -
Leeds	F/T Paid Coordinator	Christian Life	£ 11,145,000	£ 3,632,000	£ -	£ 35,000
Liverpool	F/T Paid Coordinator	Pastoral	£ 47,784,000	£ 5,270,000	£ 80,000	£ 30,000
Menevia	Coordinator (Deacon)	n/a	£ 4,809,941	£ 2,450,058	£ -	£ -
Middlesbrough	None	n/a	£ 5,586,267	£ 1,758,387	£ -	£ -
Northampton	None	n/a	£ 7,801,691	£ 1,530,753	£ 23,418	£ -
Nottingham	Commission	n/a	£ 8,110,000	£ 1,689,000	£ 3,000	£ 11,000
Plymouth	None	n/a	£ 1,643,000	£ 1,463,000	£ 32,000	£ 3,000
Portsmouth	None	n/a	£ 12,515,686	£ 3,254,189	£ -	£ -
Salford	Director (Priest)	Vocation	£ 25,467,606	£ 1,740,126	£ -	£ -
Shrewsbury	P/T Paid Coordinator	Pastoral	£ 13,621,000	£ 2,825,000	£ 36,000	£ 22,191
Southwark	P/T Paid worker	Christian Responsibility	£ 27,772,288	£ 9,728,763	£ 142,090	£ -
Westminster	Director	Pastoral	£ 31,642,000	£ 11,000,000	£ 147,000	£ 59,000
Wrexham	Commission	Pastoral	£ 2,217,167	?	£ -	£ 4,500
			£ 301,539,614	£ 59,399,547	£ 562,152	£ 243,691

Notes

[1] The variety of diocesan departments within which family ministry falls is noted because it possibly indicates how dioceses view the primary role of the family.

[2] This is the total overall expenditure by dioceses in their financial year beginning 2007. Financial accountability varies from diocese to diocese: some use the calendar year, some the financial year and some run on an academic year.

[3] Curial spend is the figure spent by the curia or central administration ie office costs, departmental work, staff salaries and travel etc. Not all diocesan accounts record expenditure by parishes as distinct from curial expenditure, hence three question marks.

[4] Similarly, not all dioceses provide accounts specifically for Marriage Tribunal work. Every diocese is required to have a Tribunal. The Archdiocesan Tribunals would normally act to ratify decisions made in the First Instance by provincial Tribunals and so their administrative costs could reasonably be expected to be more significant. Only ten sets of accounts provided costs for Tribunal work.

[5] These figures include donations to local Marriage Care Centres; but yet again diocesan accounts are not always helpful eg in Leeds the expenditure on Family Ministry is recorded within the total Vicariate expenditure. In conversation, the Coordinator implies that she spends until she is told to stop by her line manager. The figure in this chart would cover her salary, employment costs and a annual budget of around £5000.

[6] A Diocesan Commission for Marriage and Family Life is usually formed of volunteers appointed by the Bishop and includes a priest or deacon; in the absence of a paid worker the Chair would take on the main coordinating role.

Appendix 5: Professional Doctorate Stage 1 (Paper 2)

The Priority of Family Ministry
within the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales

Stage One Unit 2: Presentation and Publication of Research

September 2010

Elizabeth Davies

SID: 0817764

Anglia–Ruskin University

Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church has highlighted and stressed the significance of a healthy family life for individual personal, and faith, development and therefore for the life and mission of the whole Church. A series of major Church documents over the last fifty years have stated and restated the irreplaceable and essential role of families, flagging up an absolute priority within the Church for pastoral action on their behalf[43]. However, those who practice family ministry in the Church, at least in England and Wales, are poorly supported in terms of human, educational and financial resources; disproportionately so in terms of total Church investment in mission. In this paper I propose to explore why this should be so, reflecting on some specific obstacles and challenges that I have identified over the course of 16 years' experience in family ministry within and across Catholic parishes and dioceses. My current role supporting diocesan coordinators of family ministry, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, further drives my need to better understand how families, and family ministry, are appreciated or not by those who allocate resources. The bishops have recently fundraised substantial sums to expand, in the short term, capacity for diocesan based family ministry, yet if internal challenges are not clarified, articulated and addressed, further investment is likely to be unsustainable.

This paper describes the context of my concerns, contrasting the documents of the Church with concrete evidence of current resources devoted to family ministry. I then describe a range of possible reasons for this contradiction, with some critical reflection on their proximity to the root of the problem. In doing so I draw on the proceedings of an international conference on the domestic church held in Leuven, Belgium in March 2010 and the reflections of a small group from England and Wales who were sponsored to attend the conference. Throughout this paper my intention is to stimulate a wider reflection on why the Church finds it so hard to support family life by matching its words with adequate resources and to challenge those who are in a position to address this injustice.

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[43] See Lumen Gentium (1964), Gaudium et Spes (1965), Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965), Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), Catechesi Tradendae (1979) Familiaris Consortio (1981), Christifideles Laici (1988), Redemptoris Missio (1990), General Directory for Catechesis (1997), Novo Millennio Ineunte (2001)

Before proceeding further I need to clarify my use of a few recurring terms. I use the capitalised word *Church* to refer to the formal structures of power, authority and responsibility, particularly ordained priesthood and the episcopate. I use the lower case *church* to refer primarily to the baptised people of God, ordinarily found, but not always, in the pews on Sundays. I will leave the term *family* intentionally undefined, notwithstanding the Church's teaching, with a caveat to the reader not to assume that I have in mind only families of a particular structure and stability. In my experience, the Church's teaching on marriage and family life too easily alienates and discourages families, including those who appear to be 'traditional', 'normative' or 'ordinary'. I therefore adopt the practice of referring individuals to their own experience when seeking identity and meaning around the term family*: what does family mean to you?*

In this paper *family ministry* has two meanings: ministry by the Church to families and ministry within the church as families. As a practitioner I am committed to the latter: family ministry as an expression of the ministry of the lay faithful to each other in their local and family communities. Professionally, however, I appreciate that this may be more fully realised through a ministry of the Church on behalf of families, equipping them with skills, self-esteem and working strategies for implementing family ministry in their area.

A: Family Ministry in the Catholic Church: the Rhetoric and the Resources

Roman Catholic teaching, particularly since the Second Vatican Council, has repeatedly proclaimed the critical role that marriage and family life play in the life and mission of the Church. The Council particularly emphasised the family's social and evangelising roles. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, published 1964, notes that the Church itself is generated through the family "in which new citizens of human society are born ... so that the people of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries" (Lumen Gentium, 11). The Dogmatic Constitution further asserts that parents, by word and example are "the first preachers of the faith to their children". This teaching was reaffirmed a year later in the Council's Declaration on Christian Education which described parents' role in educating their children as "so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking" (Gravissimum Educationis, 3). The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, also

published in 1965, states that "the well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family" (Gaudium et Spes, 47). This was reinforced in the same year in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity which declared that the family had received from God its mission "to be the first and vital cell of society" (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11).

After the Council, successive Popes took up the theme of family life in their writings. In 1975 Paul VI expanded the ancient notion of the family as domestic church: "This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 71). Documents published during the pontificate of John Paul II evidence a growing and much more explicit family perspective, a 1981 post-synodal document on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World being the prime example. This document, described by a former President of the Pontifical Council for the Family as the 'magna carta' for families in the Church, concluded that since "the future of humanity passes by way of the family", it was therefore "indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavour to save and foster the values and requirements of the family". The document called for "particular effort in this field from the sons and daughters of the Church" (i.e. ordained and professed priests and religious), maintaining that this special love for families should show itself in "concrete action" (Familiaris Consortio, 86). Other documents from John Paul II's pontificate with a family perspective include Catechesi Tradendae (1979) Christifideles Laici (1988), Redemptoris Missio (1990) and Novo Millenio Innuente (2001).

Alongside this growing emphasis on marriage and family life in the Church's teaching documents, concerted pastoral efforts to support marriage and families have increased. Within England and Wales Catholic dioceses have, at least since 1993, attempted to coordinate the provision of explicit pastoral programmes which typically would include the delivery of marriage preparation and enrichment, parenting skills training, bereavement care, care of divorced and separated persons, celebrations of family life and the development of volunteer networks, trained and equipped to offer all or some of these programmes within parishes, deaneries or pastoral areas.

In 1994 the role of the diocesan family ministry coordinator was acknowledged in a resolution passed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to mark the International Year of the Family. This resolution identified five main diocesan responsibilities:

> 1: Caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life; offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family;

> 2: Providing information and resources in family matters for all parishioners and clergy;

> 3: Organizing training opportunities and coordinating lay involvement;

> 4: Acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need;

> 5: Strengthening ecumenical links, enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes.

By the turn of the new millennium, eight of the 22 Catholic dioceses in England and Wales had appointed paid diocesan family ministry coordinators, four of them full-time.

However, despite all the authoritative support for family and family ministry, diocesan coordination of family ministry has struggled to establish itself. By the end of 2007 the number of dioceses employing coordinators had shrunk to five, with only two appointments being full-time. In 12 other dioceses, the coordinating responsibility was born by priests and volunteers, four of whom were permanent deacons. Somewhat inevitably, in these dioceses, coordinating family ministry has been very much a part-time occupation, fitted in around other responsibilities. Consequently most diocesan coordinators have had to limit the scope and ambition of family ministry within their diocese, focussing on what is possible to do well rather than achieving a coordinated programme of care across the family life cycle.

It is worth reiterating at this point that the bishops involved in the world synod on family in 1980 identified the constituent components of family ministry as including:

> "preparation for marriage; help given to married couples at all stages of married life; catechetical and liturgical programs directed to the family; help given to childless couples, single-parent families, the widowed, separated and divorced and in particular to families and couples labouring under burdens

like poverty, emotional and psychological tensions, physical and mental handicaps, alcohol and drug abuse and the problems associated with migration and other circumstances which strain family stability."[44]

Furthermore, they specifically clarified their understanding of family ministry as "efforts made by the *whole* people of God through *local* communities, *especially through* the help of pastors and lay people devoted to pastoral work for families" (My emphases). I believe this definition has a meaning and a significance that has been somewhat overlooked by the Church in the last thirty years. This understanding of family ministry, agreed 30 years ago by a cross section of Catholic bishops from all over the world, is broad, complex, locally based and reliant on dedicated personnel. It has implications for the kind of resources necessary for an effective family ministry, which do not appear ever to have been taken into account by the Church in England and Wales.

Alongside the tendency to use volunteer labour, operating costs of diocesan family ministry in England and Wales have been minimal. Diocesan accounts for 2007 demonstrate that less than 1% of overall annual Church expenditure in that year was explicitly devoted to family ministry. In real terms this amounts to a sum of just under £244,000 out of a total annual expenditure across all dioceses of £301.5 million. Most of the Church's expenditure (£240 million) is devoted to parish activity and while it might reasonably be assumed that families' pastoral needs were being met within this budget heading, the findings from the *Listening 2004: My Family My Church* participative research project strongly suggest otherwise. Families expressed a distinct unease with the lack of warmth, acceptance and understanding of their lives evident in parish practice and were largely unable to articulate how the Church was or might be of help to them in living their family life. I see this as clear evidence of the absence of explicit and intentional programmes of pastoral care for family life.

A growing sense of frustration at the lack of appreciation and resources for their work has been evident among Catholic diocesan family ministry practitioners throughout the 15 years of my professional involvement. The Church meets families at critical times in their lives, at the birth of a new child, at marriage, at the death of a beloved, and through its educational and social ministries. Diocesan coordinators

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[44] Synod 1980.The Message to Christian Families. Origins November 6, 1980 10: 21, pp.321-325

have at their disposal resources which can be transformative, not just in the short-term or just for individuals but across generations and within communities. Yet capacity to offer these, to adopt a universal approach to preventative care of families, has been extremely limited, even despite increasing concerns about the impact of the perceived breakdown of contemporary family life. (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006; UNICEF, 2008; Layard & Dunn, 2009).

B: Broadening the Conversation

In reflecting on the problem of why it has been so hard for family ministry to attract more resources, I have deliberately avoided consideration of the current challenges facing all Churches as the economic recession impacts investment and offertory income. The apportioning of resources that I have outlined above occurred in pre-recession times. So I believe that the problem is rooted not so much in the size of available budget as in how priorities for the Church's mission are identified and worked out in practice. The Church has assets that are less tangible than money but equally of benefit for family ministry, such as authority, collaboration, theological reflection, liturgical development, good will and words of encouragement. Sometimes these too have been less than forthcoming, as in the planning for the Papal Visit of 2010. To date this has yet to demonstrate a family perspective, unlike the last visit in 1982 when family-centred preparation materials resources were produced. My concern in this paper is to identify the practical and theological issues which in my view have contributed historically to the status quo of family ministry within the Church.

Whilst I have given these issues a great deal of thought I want also to draw on the reflections of a small group of practitioners and academics who were sponsored by the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life to take part in an international conference on the domestic church. The *Household of God and Local Households: Revisiting the Domestic Church* conference took place at the Catholic University of Leuven in March 2010, under the auspices of the International Academy for the Study of Marital Spirituality (INTAMS) in Leuven. The Committee subsidised attendance costs in order to encourage greater attendance from students and practitioners of family ministry and theology in England and Wales and to deepen their awareness of issues around the domestic church. Bursaries were awarded on

the proviso that applicants described the value of the conference to their work and were prepared to provide a publishable summary of key learning and/or proposals for future action within the Church in England and Wales to extend awareness of and support for the domestic church.

The *Household of God and Local Households* conference was the first major conference on the topic of the domestic church in some years[45]. It was to be expected that the keynote presentations[46] would offer significant and new insights into the theology of domestic church. In fact, the presentations greatly assisted my own enquiry. Furthermore, by creating a focus group to receive, reflect and respond to these insights, the Committee stimulated a broader critical analysis of the conference, at least on a small scale. It was anticipated that the focus group papers, taken together, would better communicate both the richness and diversity of the conference papers as well as the contexts within which practitioners and academics operate. What questions would they bring to the conference? What insights would resonate with their experiences?   The Committee's eagerness to encourage participation and receive feedback resembled a form of collaborative action research. Though the group were self-selecting and could not choose the conditions of their bursary, they were given a lot of scope within those conditions to identify issues that mattered to them, in their ministry and in their professional and personal experience.

The group sponsored by the Committee eventually comprised three diocesan coordinators: Ball, Dollard and Theakston, (two of whom are also students in the bishops' Leadership for Family Ministry programme); Crosby, a parish pastoral

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[45] The last most recent being (to the best of my knowledge) The Christian Family: A Domestic Church, a theological and pastoral colloquium organised by the Committee of Marriage and Family of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 1992 in Notre Dame, Indiana.

[46] Over three days 15 main presentations took place: Michael A. Fahey (Boston College) outlined the development of the concept of domestic church, identifying some of the key contributors to current thought; Bernd-Jochen Hilberath (Tubingen) and Mary McClintock Fulkerson (Duke Divinity School) addressed the question *Household of God and Human Relations – what kind of human relations do we need in the Church?* David Hunter (Kentucky) and Warren Zev Harvey (Jerusalem) spoken under the theme *Family and Religion in Judaism and Christianity* Henk Witte (Tilburg) and Francis Appiah-Kube (Cape Coast, Ghana) addressed *Church of Churches, Family of Families – Contextual and Ecumenical Considerations* Brent Waters (Garrett-Evangelical, Evanston IL) and Jana M. Bennett (Dayton) explored *What Type of Family is needed for the (Domestic) Church?* Stephanie Klein (Lucerne) and Andrea Grillo (Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselm, Rome) considered *What Kind of Church do Families Need?* Antoine Arjakovsky (Kiev) and Richard Gaillardetz (Toledo) explored *Universal Church and Local Communities.* Thomas Knieps-Porte Le Roi (INTAMS) and Gerard Mannion (Leuven) respectively introduced and concluded the conference

assistant; Hughes, a marriage counsellor and trainer; Hawksley, a doctoral student and Corbari, a research fellow. All are women. Six papers were received in total, one of which comprised a set of bullet points and chart. Of the remaining five, two (Crosby and Hughes) summarised their key learning during the conference, two (Ball and Hawksley) made recommendations for future practical action and one (Dollard) reflected on the connections between the Church's role during the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the parental role of raising children.

The focus group papers are therefore an eclectic collection. There are relatively few areas of intersection between them, perhaps unsurprisingly with such a small and diverse group. Recurring themes are scarcely apparent and would have little statistical validity in any case. However, the papers do provide important clues to the ways in which those in ministry articulate and respond to some of the trickier realities of serving families in the Church: failed marriages, cultural changes, an apparent lack of appreciation for family life in the practices of the Church. It is from this perspective that I have drawn on the collection. Each discussion of a factor that I have identified as contributing to the lack of resources invested in family ministry, is prefaced with an extract that further illustrates my point.

C: Some Thoughts on Factors Inhibiting Investment in Family Ministry

1. Family: The 'F' word

> "On an average weekday, between wiping noses, sorting out quarrels, making packed lunches, finding socks and all the other frantic activities that characterise family life, parents are more likely to marvel at the mystery of how they manage to get their children to school on time than they are to marvel at the mystical union between Christ and the church. The mystery is there, of course, but …exalted language is perhaps not as helpful as it might be. The real family as laypeople experience it is full of compromise, conflict and struggle and, with increasing numbers of mixed marriages, divorces and single parent families, often far from the ideal nuclear family which magisterial teaching praises."(Hawksley)

I have already alluded to some of the problems surrounding the term *family* in the context of Catholic ministry and culture. That I needed to begin this paper by doing so is recognition that for many people, *family* has not been, and is not, the loving, supportive, life-giving and comfortable environment that might be imagined. Nor is *family*, even when loving, supportive, life-giving and

comfortable, always a structure that conforms to the Catholic ideal of married man, woman and their children, biological or adopted. Furthermore, questions of power, authority, patriarchy and feminism rear their heads wherever and whenever the *family* word is employed. Though the experience of *family* is mostly universal, the diversity of *family* forms, structures and values is immense and without definition – even non-definition – suspicions about family ministry prevail. The term begs a number of questions: what is the purpose of family ministry? Is it aimed at shoring up the ideals of the Church? What are the underlying assumptions and prejudices of those involved? What business is the family of the Church?

There is sufficient evidence to warrant such concern. Historically Catholic families have been assumed as numerically larger than the norm and so family ministry could easily become a means to foster larger families. Typically in Church documents, *family* is articulated as springing from sacramental Christian marriage; so where does this leave those families who live well enough together without a sacramental marriage? Increasingly, loyal (to the magisterium) Catholic rhetoric lays responsibility for many social ills at the doorstep of a 'contraceptive mentality' within families; family ministry might easily therefore be regarded with suspicion, as a 'corrective' tool of the Church. Neither can gender and sexual orientation issues be ignored.

I tend to avoid engaging with these questions so as to avoid alienating those whose family life doesn't revolve around the conjugal settings envisaged in Church documents. Yet without some definition, ministry to families runs the risk of fudging some very tangible and quintessential 'goods' of family life. A recent example of such a risk can be found in Tina Beattie's Tablet article of August 7th 2010, *More Wistful Than Wise,* where she proposes that "a holy family is surely any domestic grouping in which adult relationships of commitment, love and respect form an environment within which the vulnerable and the dependant might find a space of welcome and nurture." In my view Beattie underestimates here the intergenerational richness of family, the graces of adult-child and child-child relationships, the repetitive and confining nature of family life (always these parents, always these siblings, always these children, always these four walls) as creative of a kind of desert in which God can be

encountered in ways beyond the other-centred practices of welcome and nurture. Moreover Beattie's definition shores up the Church's assumption that there should always be more than one adult in a family.

I wonder if something more than a definitive approach is needed here. Fulkerson took pains to describe the necessity of a *disruption* if domestic life is truly to be reconciled with having eccclesial value; the home historically and contemporaneously represents too many class, gender and race inequalities, not to mention domestic abuse, to go unchallenged. She called for a more realistic discourse that resists romantic-sentimental definitions of family and not only permits but actively encourages the acknowledgement and addressing of harmful home-centred practices. Ecclesial discourse on family, which makes great use of the language of grace when it names homes as places of welcome, nurture, inclusion, is often open to idolatrous interpretation, the corrective being to take account of activity that is far from than ideal. Fulkerson was not the only theologian at the conference to make this appeal; Hilberath and Grillo also identified something of an obligation for the Church to balance its tendency to employ idealistic language by attending to areas where homes are in need of redemption.

I perceived Fulkerson's insistence on the acknowledgement of domestic harm not only as indicative of the extent to which there is resistance to ideal notions of family but also as confirmation that idealistic family rhetoric is a factor which inhibits confidence in family ministry. Though as Hawksley identified, the exalted language employed by the Church is not as helpful as it might be even for families whose main preoccupations are "*wiping noses, sorting out quarrels, making packed lunches, finding socks.*" However, I struggle to reconcile this imperative with the need also to affirm families in what they achieve, often not without struggle. As Hughes expressed immediately after the conference:

> "The question I will continue to reflect on is how to balance ideal language about the church, which we need in order to talk about our hopes, with language that takes into account the reality of ecclesial life as far from perfect."

I also wonder whether diocesan coordinators are able to preface their appeals for a greater share of resources with a litany of domestic dysfunction, even though in

one sense it highlights a need for intervention. Most adopt an affirmative approach to ministry as respectful of the struggle that many families face, often in circumstances beyond their control.

2. Issues around ministry

> "Formation for laypeople as catechists, chaplains, and counselors is now a necessity, given the current demographic profile of the clergy and of religious orders. Family ministry is a comparatively new area which is at present by and large under-resourced, yet has enormous potential in the overall mission of the Church. At the same time, more has to be done to train and support permanent deacons to encourage their participation also in family ministry, and to value the priesthood, which also means paying more attention to their leisure time, their emotional welfare, and their general health if they are to serve as pastors well into their 70s and 80s. Marriage and Family ministry also needs to be given much more prominence in the curriculum for those preparing for priesthood and the permanent diaconate." (Ball)

In 1981 Familiaris Consortio explicitly applied the term 'ministry' for the first time in the documents of the Church to the activity of parents and married couples within the home. The Synod Bishops took their lead in this from the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, which, as O'Meara points out (1993, p.16) rediscovered and re-imagined the Church in terms of two fresh ecclesial identities: the 'People of God' and 'Universal Sacrament of Grace and Revelation for the World', both of which have been significant for recent developments in ministry, particularly in the area of lay ministry. Yet, even as FC paved the way for the conjunction of the terms 'family' and 'ministry', it failed to clarify that which can legitimately be described as family ministry (particularly ministry exercised by parents, children, siblings and spouses) and that which remains the preserve of ordained clergy. The use of the term ministry within FC is restrained, inconsistent and numerically dwarfed by the use of the preferred term 'service', describing similar, and arguably more significant, domestic ecclesial activities.

The term 'apostolate' is still applied to the work of family ministry in some dioceses. Avery Dulles noted in 2006 that this term apostolate has largely been superseded by the term ministry. But, he claims, in the documents of the Second Vatican Council the two words had more distinctive applications:

> "*Ministry* is used in particular for services intended to build up the Church from within, whereas *apostolate*, to the extent that it is still used, connotes activities directed outward to the world" (2006, p.7).

Given that the Council sought to dispel this notion of a distinction or separation between the Church and the world (see especially Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), I'm not sure why the term 'apostolate' is retained in some dioceses. However, terminology adopted by the Pontifical Council for the Family also still seems to prefer use of *apostolate* to that of *ministry,* as the Council's current explanatory text on the Vatican website illustrates. This makes a clear distinction between pastoral ministry to the family and the apostolate of the family. Furthermore, in the index of the Enchiridion on the Family, issued by the Council in 2004, the term ministry is conspicuous by its absence, whilst a whole document is devoted to Diocesan Structures of the Family Apostolate (PCF, 2004). O'Meara clearly points out that continued use of this use is not good:

> "The term 'apostolate of the laity' [adds] an incorrect ecclesiology that caritative functions alone were possible as services in the church and that the works of the laity derived from minor shares in the Episcopal office" (1993, p.31).

I really wonder why it is that the Pontifical Council for the Family persists with the paradigm that the Church and the world are two separate entities. But the implications for family ministry are clear: firstly it muddies the understanding of family ministry. I began this paper by explaining that family ministry contains a dual implication: ministry by the Church to families and ministry within the church as families. An apostolate paradigm would exclude the latter understanding and only inadequately embrace the former. Furthermore it risks excluding all those aspects of family ministry that, as O'Meara highlights, fall outside the caritative function, such as reflecting on family spirituality, offering family catechesis and affirming the participation of families in the threefold mission of the Church as outlined in sections 51-64 of Familiaris Consortio. This in itself undermines the ecclesial identity of the Christian family. Thirdly an apostolate paradigm diminishes the integrity of lay people who take the lead in family ministry; it suggests a subservient role whereas the Church's teaching elsewhere makes it clear that the laity have an inherent authority and

responsibility, "a unique place"[47] in this area of the life and mission of the Church.

Ball's recommendations for more training in family ministry illustrate the effects of this duality only too well. Although she recognises the significance of family ministry, its potential for the church and the current lack of resources devoted to it, a large part of her argument for more training for laypeople is rooted in "the current demographic profile of the clergy and religious orders". Ball rests her case for lay formation on the need to fill a clerical gap rather than to equip the priesthood of all believers. It may be that she desires the development of a clergy sufficiently well formed to participate in family ministry but, without an equal fostering of lay leadership, family ministry will remain vulnerable to clerical priorities and vision.

3. Communio, communion, community

> "Practical responses for and from families could be encouraged through sharing based on the four pillars of the catechumenal process: Word of God: making Scripture accessible for families, as one of the keys in recognising and celebrating their relationship with God, and then listening to and affirming their responses to the Word: 'Ah! Yes, now I see, God is with us in the messiness of our lives!' Secondly, affirming family life as rich soil for 'becoming' disciples of Christ. Thirdly, to welcome and invite families to participate and offer service in wider community life, supporting one another, but also reaching out to others in need.   Practically, this mutual support might include parenting courses and discussion groups, and practical support. Fourthly, providing liturgical catechesis and resources for families on prayer and engaging in Liturgy, and also giving excellent experiences of Liturgy of the Word with children." (Dollard)

The variety of meanings of *communion* creates difficulties in my view for diocesan family ministry coordinators who articulate a large part of their purpose as offering practical support for strengthening the communion of the family. Since the publications of Gaudium et Spes in 1965, and Familiaris Consortio in 1981, Catholic family ministry has embraced the definition of family and marriage as rooted in "an intimate community of life and love" (GS 48; FC 17). This seed-text is further explored in section 17 of Familiaris Consortio where John Paul II writes:

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[47] Familiaris Consortio #71

> "(The family's) first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons."

In practice, family ministry offers practical skills for deepening interpersonal relationships as well as research-based information for deepening interpersonal awareness so that the communion of marriage and family life can be enhanced, deepened and more hopefully realised. A vision statement drafted by diocesan family ministry coordinators states: "In essence, this ministry is the ministry of Christian relationship" (Northern Coordinators Group, 2002). Theologian Dennis Guernsey defines family ministry as "the church's empowering the people of God to relate to one another as if they are family, especially if they are" (1990, p.5). The term also has a much wider importance in the Church: it is the foundational orientation of the Christian life and of mission:

> "Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is an indispensable condition for bearing fruit... communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.' (CL 1988, 32)

However, within the broader Church the term *communion* is a word more often applied liturgically and doctrinally than relationally, and is strongly associated with shared religious beliefs, practices and fellowship. This sense that communion is a ritual or a creed of conformity obscures the relational perspective and therefore, I suggest, potentially disrupts investment in relationship-centred, community-building ministries, such as that to marriage and family life.

In his paper *Household of God and Human Relations – What Type of Relations Do We need in the Church?* Bernd-Jochen Hilberath sharpened my awareness of the significance of this ambiguity around meanings of communion. He drew on the Trinity as a framework for exploring issues of relatedness, community, communio, communio ecclesiology and communicative theology and he pointed to something more than ambivalence surrounding the meaning of communio:

> "The Extraordinary Roman Bishops' Synod of 1985 discovered the notion of "communio" and claimed that it was the leading idea of the Second Vatican Council. Seven years later, in 1992, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) expressed strong reservations about the communio notion, and

in 2001, its declaration Dominus Jesus further accentuated the one-sided interpretation of communio, asserting that it means first and foremost unity under the Pope."

It would appear that disagreements over the proper emphasis on communion occur right at the heart of the Church.

Associated with this I have observed family ministry practitioners who exercise their role as primarily catechetical/evangelical. Their objective seems primarily to bring families' lives into conformity with the teaching and practices of the Church. This contrasts with practitioners who focus more on equipping families with relationship skills and spirituality practices for the home. These approaches point to a philosophical tension among practitioners between a priority for the family or a priority for the Church: whose needs are we ultimately here to serve? Dollard's essay is a particularly subtle expression of this tension. Her exploration of the connections between the family life cycle and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults brings her to recommend a set of family ministry practices rooted in the natural life of the Church rather than the natural life of the home.

4. Scriptural Heritage

> "[Hunter] argued that both the critique of the family and the families themselves were the basis of early Christianity in Roman society. Additionally, radical cultural sexual abstinence within marriage was linked with early Christianity. There are many stories about wives denying their husbands; to break the spell of the bed signified to break the spell of the existing social structure. St Peter, in Colossians, affirmed the hierarchical relations in relation to household management. The Roman pater familias was endorsed, the household was described as capable of being Christianised, and the husband in Ephesians was likened to Christ as the Head of the Church. … His conclusion was that early Christian writings on this topic are diverse and have been the subject of much misreading, especially those of St Augustine. So no clear cut answers there!" (Hughes)

Jesus 'hard sayings' about family are well documented; in the gospels, kinship relationships are subordinated to the spiritual bonds of discipleship. As Lisa Sowle Cahill points out:

> "In a few notorious instances Jesus seems to indicate that family bonds are incompatible with discipleship. The adolescent Jesus is depicted by Luke as acting in complete disregard for parental feelings (Luke 2:41-51)… Mark portrays Jesus' uncomprehending relatives as believing him to have gone mad and… Jesus repudiates his family's responsibility for him and his kin

ties to them (Mark 3:28-30)…Luke shows us a Jesus who deflects praise of his own mother from her role in giving birth and nursing him (Luke 11:27-28)."[48]

Jesus not only declares that anyone who does the will of his father is part of his family, but that leaving, even hating, family in order to follow Jesus is an integral part of a disciple's response to his gospel. Family rituals and responsibilities are rejected as Jesus declares 'Let the dead bury the dead'. Even his affection for his mother is brought into question.

The early Church continued to struggle with the tension between church and family as Paul advised his followers to remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:7) for the sake of the kingdom. This emphasis on the single, celibate state as being spiritually superior to the married, family state continues to this day and is well documented in the writings of Peter Brown and Jack Dominian among others.

It is not surprising therefore that some have read the New Testament as heralding the demise of the human family in favour of a new family, the family of God. William Willimon, Professor of Christian Ministry at Duke University, North Caroline expressed it thus:

> "Therefore as Christians we do not believe in the family, at least in the sense that the word is used today. We do not believe in the family; we believe in the Family of God, Church."[49]

Further difficulties arise from a tendency to draw uncritically on Scripture for modes and models of family life and this has led in some cases to a patriarchal envisioning of family life inspired by the household codes of the early Church. As Rosemary Ruether (1996) points out:

> "Conservative American Christians are very concerned about the need to restore what they say is the biblical view of the family: a male-dominated nuclear family consisting of a working husband, a nonworking wife who is a full-time mother, and several dependent children."[50]

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[48] Cahill, Lisa Sowle (2000) *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p29

[49] Willimon, William H. (2001) Why "Family Values" is not a good idea. *Family Ministry : Empowering Through Faith* Vol 15: 1 Spring 2001. p11-15

[50] Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1996. An Unrealised Revolution: Searching scripture for a model of the family. (in) Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender, edited by Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart. Leominster: Gracewing. pp442-450

With so little valuing of family ties apparent in the gospels and letters of the New Testament, and with such potential to see oppressive models of family supported in Scripture, it would be surprising if family ministry was not regarded either as superfluous to the needs of the new family of the Church or as supportive of an ill-conceived set of family values. In exploring the reasons why, in his view, there is such a 'lacuna' in theological literature on domestic church, Richard Gaillardetz also drew attention to the impact of the New Testament treatment of the family.

> "The gospel of Jesus Christ stresses the creation of a new family, a new household—the household of believers. Our truest identity is discovered in the recognition that God is our Father and Mother and that we are children of God. All other relations are subordinated to this one. This teaching of Jesus need not be understood as the renunciation of the family (though Jesus apparently envisioned that some might do so "for the sake of the kingdom"). However, it does suggest that the theological and ecclesiological significance of the family must be reinterpreted in the light of the call to discipleship."

The challenges of this kind of reinterpretation are highlighted by Stephen Barton (1996) in his critical analysis of three approaches in his essay '*Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family*'. In his conclusion he draws attention to the challenge of interpreting the Bible in an era where intellectual and moral horizons are very different. In the context of theological reflection on the family, he argues, we should read the Bible with "a view to discerning more clearly how the biblical testimony to the love and justice of God is reflected and ought to be reflected in our life together in our families."[51] Amy-Jill Levine (2003) echoes Barton's concerns in arguing for far greater awareness about the cultural, social and material settings of early Christianity: "greater understanding of Jesus' earliest followers in their own settings and their own idiom helps prevent ministers from spewing either incomprehensible or injurious remarks from the pulpit."[52] For Hughes, the greater awareness of the cultural and social context of early Christian family life that she gained from David Hunter's presentation, confirmed for her the futility of using Scripture to affirm any particular model of family structure. This seemed to be an encouraging realisation:

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[51] Barton, Stephen C. 1996 Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family in The Family in Theological Perspective. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Pp3-23.
[52] Levine, Amy-Jill. 2003 Theological Education, the Bible and History: Detente in the Culture Wars in Balch, David J. and Osiek, Carolyn J. Early Christian Families in Context: an interdisciplinary dialogue. Grand-Rapids, Michigan. William Eerdmans.

> "This collection of papers emphasised for me what I already experience as a counsellor; the enormous range and diversity of so-called 'family life' in the U.K. today, and the difficulty of offering the traditional nuclear family as the only possible model."

5. Practical challenges

> "If we are going to deepen lay spirituality and share the wisdom and experience of families with the wider church, how do we do it…. What we need to do is encourage laypeople to reflect on their experience, and to share their experience. Reflecting on the experience of family life will help people to realise its spiritual significance. Sharing experiences of family life as Christian discipleship will enrich the life of the church, helping us to realise that the Spirit speaks not only through those in ecclesiastical authority, but through all the baptised. … I will suggest that we might deepen lay spirituality and share lay experience through engaging in three sets of practices: practices of welcome, practices of reflection, and practices of sharing." (Hawksley)

There are I think a number of very practical issues which hamper diocesan coordinators access to greater financial support for their work, some of which are a direct result of the lack of resources but which also come about, in my view, as a result of aforementioned contributory factors. It is at this point that we enter 'chicken and egg' territory.

Diocesan marriage and family life ministries are located within a variety of different departments, for example, vocation, pastoral formation, evangelisation and Christian life and responsibility. This reflects not so much a lack of clarity about family ministry but rather the sense, articulated by Pope Paul VI, that the entire life of the Church can be found reflected in the family. Location of family ministry offices within dioceses reflects local priorities, which can be a positive, especially if family ministry is for example, located within the office for evangelisation at a time of great emphasis within the diocese on evangelisation. However the variety of possible offices into which family ministry can be incorporated is not always helpful for the development of an overall vision and purpose or for integrating family ministry into the life and mission of the whole Church as envisaged by the bishops at the world synod on family.

Another practical issue is the lack of opportunities for formation in, and information about, family ministry at both parish and diocesan level. Without good formation and opportunities to critically reflect on practice, it is harder for

practitioners to articulate, and therefore advocate, family ministry. In 2001 I completed graduate studies in family ministry in the United States but this level of formation is unusual. Most of those involved in diocesan family ministry enter through involvement with a voluntary organisation such as Marriage Encounter and Catholic Marriage Care. Educational opportunities have been developed, such as an ecumenical Certificate course offered by Ushaw College, and a diploma/certificate course at Maryvale Institute. However, experience suggests that it is particularly difficulty to recruit students for marriage and family life programmes, quite possibly because budgets, career opportunities and awareness of family ministry are all so limited[53].

Literature and media coverage describing the practice of family ministry, at least within an English and Welsh Roman Catholic context, is thin. It mostly falls within the 'grey' category, comprising minutes of meetings, internal reports, in-house leaflets and handbooks of an ephemeral nature. Although the bishops made family a priority at national level in 2003 and launched a national strategy to support families in 2006, other national initiatives such as the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation 2003-2009, the Live Simply campaign in 2007 and plans for the papal visit in 2010 have simply failed to take this into account. A prime example of the lack of media awareness of, or interest in, family issues is the Tablet's 12 page obituary of John Paul II in 2005, which contained no reference to his sustained advocacy on behalf of families or to Familiaris Consortio. This lack of awareness or attention to family is reflected in most of the participant papers, in a variety of ways:

> "How many people realise that this important conference is happening?" (Crosby)

> "From the Church, I would hope for a revival of interest in family life" (Dollard)

> "In many ways we represent the bottom of the hierarchical model, working largely silently 'on the ground' with real-life situations." (Hughes)

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[53] Ushaw Course Director Fr Chris Fallon wrote: "The module has not attracted enough applicants to be viable for the last two years (in fact last year we had no applicants at all)… We have the impression that the number of employed workers in this area has declined across the churches and we're wondering whether there is still a market for a module of this size and level" (Fallon, 2007)

"The domestic church needs to be rediscovered, re-imagined and resourced for its vocation" (Theakston)

However, perhaps the most telling aspect of all this is illustrated in the three suggestions offered by Hawksley in an effort to achieve the priorities, as she identifies them, of deepening lay spirituality and sharing the wisdom and experience of families with the wider church. Hawksley names these as practices of welcome, practices of reflection and practices of sharing. The irony lies in the fact that since 2006 family ministry in England and Wales has been prioritising the promotion of exactly those practices, yet Hawksley seems completely unaware of this.

D: Some conclusions

In this paper I have outlined the situation of family ministry in England and Wales and illustrated ways in which I perceive a discrepancy between the rhetorical value of family within Catholic teaching and ecclesial practices on one hand and the level of resources devoted to practical support for family life on the other. I have also proposed some thoughts as to why this gap has developed; as I see it, the discrepancy arises from difficulties with the term family, loaded as it is with so many diverse meaning, difficulties with the terms ministry and communion, which both are open to almost opposite interpretations, difficulties with our Scriptural heritage, which seems to call for a dilution of kinship in favour of a single universal family, and finally some very practical problems that arise largely, in my view from all of the aforementioned difficulties. So what to do with all this? I propose some areas for further investigation and reflection:

1. A more focussed and structured enquiry into the experiences of diocesan marriage and family life coordinators in an attempt to get to the heart of their practice. How do they articulate family ministry for themselves, for co-workers, for those in authority around them and for the families they serve? From what value-base do they operate? What are the joys, and frustrations of their work? How aware or interested are they in any of the factors I have identified as inhibiting the development of family ministry? Are there other factors to be taken into consideration?

2. A comparative enquiry with those less directly involved with diocesan family ministry but whose decisions impact its development and direction. How do they perceive and articulate the value of this area of the Church's life and mission? What inhibits them from allocating more resources to family ministry?

3. A continued dialogue between practitioners, Scripture scholars and theologians to raise awareness, deepen mutual understanding, share practical experiences, increase reflective practice and fill some of the gap in the theological exploration of family life. As Hughes put it:

> "Although the question of the domestic church is a topic of equal academic and pastoral concern, the academics and practitioners appear to be working in isolation rather than cooperation. I would suggest that both disciplines have much to gain from listening to each other… The Church, academics, and practitioners have much to learn from each other and together have much to learn from and much to offer those who are daily actualising the domestic church and have lived knowledge of their own personal experience of the sacred."

It seems to me that until there is greater clarity and more data to inform theological reflection on practice, that the challenge of sustaining and developing family ministry within local communities, supported by dedicated lay people and pastors, as a responsibility of the whole people of God will always remain out of reach. It may well be that success in this area, however it is measured, will be the task of successive generations. Nevertheless the foundations for whatever fruitfulness will unfold can now be laid and deserves to be attended to.

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Appendix 6: Professional Doctorate Stage 1 (Paper 3)

The Practice of Family Ministry
within the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales

Stage One Unit 3: Establishing Advanced Research Practice in Practical Theology

January 2011

Elizabeth Davies

SID: 0817764

Anglia-Ruskin University

Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church has stressed the significance of healthy family life for its life and mission. Major Church documents have restated the irreplaceable and essential role of families, flagging up an absolute priority within the Church for pastoral action on their behalf[54]. However, those who hold leadership positions in diocesan family ministry in the Church in England and Wales have few resources with which to progress their work; disproportionately so in terms of total Church investment in mission. In earlier papers I explored reasons for this, reflecting on obstacles and challenges experienced first-hand in 16 years of family ministry practice within Catholic parishes and dioceses.

My current role supporting diocesan coordinators of family ministry, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' of England and Wales, is a critical driver of my need to better understand how family ministry is appreciated, or not, by those allocating resources. The bishops have fundraised substantial sums to expand short term capacity for diocesan family ministry. If internal challenges are not clarified, articulated and addressed, this investment is unlikely to be sustainable.

In exploring factors inhibiting family ministry, I have increasingly noted the absence of literature defining, describing and clarifying the purpose, processes, pitfalls and positive outcomes of diocesan family ministry. Practitioners in England and Wales have rarely recorded, described or reflected on their role. This has hampered my engagement with voices other than my own; I have necessarily relied on personal observation, minutes of meetings and anecdotal evidence. Although these sources have value, they do not provide a complete context within which to consider the low esteem in which family ministry appears to be held. Moreover the absence of practice-based literature surely sustains the status-quo.

Research Context

Theological framework: Family as Foundational

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[54] See Lumen Gentium (1964), Gaudium et Spes (1965), Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965), Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), Catechesi Tradendae (1979) Familiaris Consortio (1981), Christifideles Laici (1988), Redemptoris Missio (1990), General Directory for Catechesis (1997), Novo Millennio Ineunte (2001)

Roman Catholic teaching since the Second Vatican Council has repeatedly proclaimed the critical role that marriage and family life play in the life and mission of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, published 1964, notes that the Church itself is generated through the family "in which new citizens of human society are born ... so that the people of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries" (Lumen Gentium, 11). It further asserts that parents are "the first preachers of the faith to their children", a role described in the Council's Declaration on Christian Education as "so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking" (Gravissimum Educationis, 3). The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965, states that "the well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family" (Gaudium et Spes, 47). The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity notes that the family has received from God its mission "to be the first and vital cell of society" (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11).

Successive Popes have reaffirmed the importance of family. In 1975 Paul VI highlighted the family's identity as domestic church: "This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 71). John Paul II adopted an explicit family perspective in his writings, primarily in the 1981 post-synodal document on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio). Described as the 'magna carta' for families in the Church (Trujillo, 1997), this document concluded that since "the future of humanity passes by way of the family", it was "indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavour to save and foster the values and requirements of the family".[55]

The Church's Theology of Family Ministry

Family ministry is a relatively recent expression of Roman Catholic ministry. The term has two meanings: ministry by the Church *to* families and ministry within the church *as* families. As a practitioner I am committed to the latter: family ministry as an expression of the ministry of the lay faithful to each other in their local and family

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[55] For further examples of John Paul II's perspective on family see Catechesi Tradendae (1979), Christifideles Laici (1988), Redemptoris Missio (1990) and Novo Millenio Innuente (2001)

communities. Professionally, however, I appreciate that this may be more fully realised through a ministry of the Church on behalf of families, equipping them with sufficient skills, self-esteem and workable strategies to implement family ministry.

The development of family ministry in Roman Catholicism is not well documented. Possibly the earliest publication is the United States bishops' *Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry: a Vision and Strategy* (1978), explicitly designed to launch "a new approach within the Church to pastoral service to families". (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1978) The Plan comprehensively identified processes, structures and resources for family ministry and clarified that family ministry is "a type of ministering not only *to* but *with* people through a particular participation of the family members themselves." (NCCB, 1978)

Within Familiaris Consortio (1981) there is no direct reference to family ministry, yet a peer ministry model is implied:

> "Thus, within the ecclesial community - the great family made up of Christian families - there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace." (FC 69)

Yet at the close of the Synod that preceded the document's publication, the bishops wrote to Christian families identifying the constituent components, or the *what*, of family ministry. This included:

> "preparation for marriage; help given to married couples at all stages of married life; catechetical and liturgical programs directed to the family; help given to childless couples, single-parent families, the widowed, separated and divorced and in particular to families and couples labouring under burdens like poverty, emotional and psychological tensions, physical and mental handicaps, alcohol and drug abuse and the problems associated with migration and other circumstances which strain family stability." (Synod, 1980)

Furthermore, they specifically clarified their understanding of family ministry as "efforts made by the *whole* people of God through *local* communities, *especially through* the help of pastors and lay people devoted to pastoral work for families." (My emphases) In my view this important definition has been overlooked by the Church. As a definition drawn up by a cross section of the Catholic bishops of the world it potentially has great authority. Moreover, the statement's explicit emphasis

on the *who*, *where*, and *how* of family ministry offers an important clarity of structure and process for both practitioners and researchers.

Professional Context

Roman Catholic Diocesan Family Ministry in England and Wales

An English and Welsh Catholic network of diocesan family ministry coordinators has existed at least since 1993. Several dioceses have implemented a peer ministry model, developing networks of volunteers to work alongside families in parishes. This has been described as a process of empowering, encouraging and supporting families in their mission "to witness justice, love and faith within the home, within the faith community and in society." (Theakston, 2007)

In 1994 the role of the diocesan family ministry coordinator was acknowledged in a resolution of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Five main responsibilities were identified:

> 1: Caring for, supporting and promoting all areas of family life; offering pastoral support to all - clergy and laity - involved in the work of affirming marriage, family life and the parish family;
> 2: Providing information and resources in family matters for all parishioners and clergy;
> 3: Organizing training opportunities and coordinating lay involvement;
> 4: Acting as a link with existing diocesan agencies to support families with a particular need;
> 5: Strengthening ecumenical links, enabling cooperation with other Christian Churches at appropriate diocesan and parish level and where possible offering joint programmes (Committee for Marriage & Family Life, 1999)

In practice the work of diocesan coordinators varies greatly from diocese to diocese. A commitment to marriage preparation appears common. Where resources permit, diocesan coordinators also seek to deliver parenting programmes, bereavement care, support for divorced and separated, celebrations of family life and to develop networks of trained volunteers. Diocesan family life ministries are structurally located within a variety of departments, such as vocation, pastoral formation, evangelisation and Christian life and responsibility. Some dioceses have established Commissions or Vicariates for Marriage and Family Life; others have core or working groups to support their coordinator.

In 2001 I completed graduate studies in family ministry (in the United States) but this level of formation is unusual. Most of those involved in diocesan family ministry have entered as a result of volunteering with organisations such as Marriage Encounter and Catholic Marriage Care. Educational opportunities have been developed in England and Wales; however, experience shows it is particularly difficult to recruit for marriage and family life programmes[56].

Until recently, investment of diocesan resources in family ministry was low. In a typical year (2000), just 8 out of 22 dioceses had paid staff coordinating family ministry; 9 dioceses appointed volunteers, ordained priests or permanent deacons to this role. Of the employed, three worked full-time; of the 5 part-time employees, one covered her own salary from charging course fees. Diocesan accounts in 2007 showed less than 1% of total diocesan expenditure was recorded under marriage and family life headings.

My Background & Experience

My experience in Roman Catholic family ministry began in 1994 when I became part of a network of parish volunteers engaged with the basic aim of strengthening relationships within and between the families in our parishes.[57] I subsequently worked as an unpaid volunteer in a diocesan coordinating role from 1996 until 2000, and studied for an MA in Family Ministry from 1998-2001. In 2000 I established, with a colleague, an independent resource to support those working in family ministry called Bethany Family Institute, publishing a regular quarterly newsletter until 2003 when I took up my current position.

Since 2003 I have been employed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales as their Marriage and Family Life Project Officer. The project conceived in 2003 was the organisation of a national year-long participative research project with families, conducted through the schools and parishes of the Catholic Church in

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[56] Ushaw Course Director Fr Chris Fallon wrote: "The module has not attracted enough applicants to be viable for the last two years (in fact last year we had no applicants at all)… We have the impression that the number of employed workers in this area has declined across the churches and we're wondering whether there is still a market for a module of this size and level" (Fallon, 2007)

[57] In practical terms I was involved in recruiting a parish family ministry team, facilitating parenting programmes, introducing a mothers and toddlers group, children's liturgy and a youth club as well as organising deanery events and supporting the annual diocesan family fun day.

England and Wales. It is estimated that 15,000 families took part in *Listening 2004* with the aim of clarifying the difficulties, joy and hopes of family life at home, in their neighbourhoods and in the Church. Since then my project work has focussed on responding to the three priorities identified through the research.

 Since 2007 I have had additional professional responsibility for supporting the 13 capacity building family ministry projects in dioceses, funded through the Celebrating Family Fund. These projects have not only attempted the development of diocesan family ministry through an injection of financial and therefore also, in most cases, human resources but perhaps more importantly from a research perspective, have provided a relatively well documented and measurable testing-ground for recording and evaluating effective practices.

Focus and Boundaries of the Research

The Research Challenge

While completing my Stage 1 papers I have become very aware of the absence of literature describing the practice of Roman Catholic family ministry in England and Wales. The scope for my research is therefore broad. Rather than needing to identify specific gaps, I have a lot of scope for contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this area.

In determining my research question, I have taken into account a number of strategic issues that have repeatedly nagged at me during my attempts to understand the apparent low regard for family ministry:

- **Message**: how is family ministry articulated by practitioners? What descriptions and definitions are used? How do these relate to broader Church (and societal) perceptions of the meaning of *family* and *ministry?* Does the way in which diocesan coordinators articulate family ministry enable and engage or disable and disengage understanding and support for their work? How do the practices of family ministry relate to the theology of family ministry? What does family ministry look like in practice and what message does this communicate?

- **Management:** how do diocesan coordinators manage the tensions between the Church's theology of marriage and family life on one hand and the Church's apparently inclusive approach to family ministry on the other hand? Is it possible

to minister comfortably with families where there is no intact marriage or where there is remarriage or a civil partnership, when Church leaders insistently maintain family life springs from a happy, lifelong, sacramental marriage? Some dioceses work only with organisations who explicitly espouse particular aspects of Roman Catholic family theology. How widespread are these approaches, are they justified theologically and how do they relate to the practices of family ministry?

- **Structure:** is diocesan family ministry sufficiently well-conceived at the strategic level, within a broader diocesan pastoral plan? Do practitioners feel fully supported professionally and confident of success? Those who work alone appear to find it harder to maintain momentum. Issues of accountability and balance arise if one person has to prioritise, deliver and evaluate diocesan programmes. Yet collaborative groups also experience leadership challenges particularly in terms of developing a common vision.

The Conceptual Framework

1: The Diocesan Leader

A major part of the conceptual framework of my research is the emphasis on the diocesan coordinator role. There are a number of significant reasons why I want to focus on the role played by these particular individuals:

- Diocesan coordinators are charged by their bishop with the responsibility for family ministry. They fit clearly within an existing structure of authority and accountability and are potentially well placed to influence, form and develop family ministry within other church structures.

- My professional role is to work as directed by the bishops to support their diocesan representatives and staff and these individuals comprise my primary network of responsibility and collaboration.

- The diocesan structure offers the most evidently accessible route into local structures of family ministry within pastoral areas, parishes and deaneries. Alternative structures such as lay associations and the 'new movements' do not currently enjoy the responsibility or potential reach of diocesan coordinators.

- In terms of available experience and hard data, the diocesan coordinator is the most straightforward role for me to research. Although there is little literature available on Roman Catholic family ministry in England and Wales, what exists is linked to their practice.

2. Parish or Local Pastoral Area as Normative Focus

Another factor underpinning my conceptual framework is the universal approach to family ministry that seeks to involve the whole people of God, as described by the synod of bishops in 1980. I believe in family ministry as an expression of the ministry of the lay faithful to each other in their local and family communities. The parish or local pastoral area is the basic context of church ministry and is therefore the normative context within which I wish to frame the work of a diocesan coordinator: how do they engage, communicate and work with parishes and parish contacts to animate and facilitate effective family ministry.

3. Recording Practice

The third piece in my conceptual framework is the recording of practice. The value of examining practices of family ministry is important to me for two reasons:

1. This research is for a professional doctorate in practical theology, partly to enhance my own professional practice but also to contribute to enhancing the professional practice of my diocesan colleagues. Without overstating the obvious, a practice-based approach seems to be a very pragmatic way to meeting both needs. Throughout my nagging questions of message, management and structure, I am concerned to know what do these look like in practice? How do we walk the talk and what does this tell us about both the talk and the walk?

2. Through this research I intend to develop a practical theology of family ministry. Within the literature of practical theology, much has been written about practice and practices and I anticipate drawing on this to conceptualise my findings, for example, Bass (2001), Volf and Bass (2002), and Rubio (2010). This will enable me to situate family ministry within a wider academic body of literature and contribute to addressing the deficit that I

have encountered thus far. It will also facilitate the appropriation of my research findings by scholars in the future.

According to Cahalan and Nieman (Bass and Dykstra, 2008, p69), practical theology seeks to understand what is essential to the practice of faith, how Christians practise their faith and the ways in which identity, agency and belief take form in and through an embodied way of life. I find this an exciting presupposition because I suspect that through their practice, diocesan coordinators will have added enormously, if unconsciously, to the understanding of what family ministry is. The Church's definition of family ministry is one perspective, but recording the perspective of practice, particularly in developing belief, is important to me.

Cahalan and Neiman point out that practices have five basic features: what (*actions*), who (*common*), why (*meaningful*), how (*strategic*) and where (*purposive*). A practice-oriented approach to my research questions will, I anticipate, facilitate the creation of a framework which will hold together the activity of diocesan coordinators (*what*), the supporting structures and target families (*who*), the communication of purpose and goals of family ministry (*why*), the processes and techniques that have found to be effective (*strategies*) and the locus of their efforts (*where*).

Methodology

One of my challenges is access to a good number of diocesan practitioners. The core network comprises around 35 individuals. If members of diocesan commissions and working groups were included that number would double. I need to keep the scope of my research sufficiently inclusive to capture the diversity of experience yet narrow enough to facilitate a deeper enquiry into particular practices. I have concluded that I need to adopt at least two different methodologies to meet my research aims, principally written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Written Questionnaire

Written questionnaires addressed to the 19 diocesan coordinators in post in 2010 will enable me to gather a breadth of information about diocesan family ministry

structures, mission statements, roles, goals, routines, internal relationships and networks as well as an initial indication of practices. Written questionnaires will also enable all coordinators to participate in my research. I appreciate that for practitioners who are often over-worked, time-poor and stressed, the quality of reflective response can be impaired. However, the purpose of this phase of the research is essentially to provide a broad overview of diocesan family ministry.

To address my three areas of concern I will be using the questionnaire to obtain quantitative information to clarify:

1. The coordinator's role description, terms and conditions of service, working hours and budget
2. The existence of structures of accountability and communication: working groups, teams, line-management, commissions, networks, their composition and role description
3. The existence of diocesan mission statements and pastoral plans relating to family ministry

I will also use the written questionnaire to collect qualitative data by inviting coordinators to consider these questions:

a) What or whose guidelines do you follow when seeking direction in your work?
b) How would you describe your role to those who don't know what you do?
c) Please list the activities you undertake that enable you to fulfil your role, no matter how insignificant.
d) What part of your work matters most to those who appointed you?
e) What aspect of your work matters most to you?
f) What challenges do you experience in your work?
g) Can you give an example of when your work has made a difference to someone?

This written questionnaire will provide a clear baseline from which I can plan a narrower, more defined, but deeper study within three dioceses. At present I anticipate that this will take the form of semi-structured interviews designed to explore and record family ministry practices in greater detail.

Semi-structured interviews

Swinton and Mowat's research with a group of ministry professionals in a specific context suggested my methodology (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p171). They gathered information using a variety of methods, to crystalize what they hoped would be a true picture of practice, because it was arrived at from a variety of perspectives. So, stage 1 comprised telephone interviews with 44 practitioners, stage 2 comprised collecting case studies using a mix of informal interview and observation techniques, stage 3 involved a re-interview by telephone of practitioners.

In my situation, as a part-time researcher, it would not be practical to interview so many people nor observe practice first-hand. My written questionnaire is an alternative to stage 1 of Swinton and Mowat's enquiry, and for my stage 2, I am anticipating that semi-structured interviews will have to suffice. I expect that the results of the written questionnaire will inform which dioceses will become the focus of case-study collection or in my case, the drawing out of practices. Where it seems useful I would consider conducting semi-structured interviews with colleagues of diocesan coordinators, such as mentors and volunteers, in order to build up a more complete picture of practice.

There are various ways I might refine the original sample for the purposes of a more detailed study. It might be politic to extract a sample based on three existing regions: north, south east and south west. However, it might also be valid to base the sample on structures of diocesan family ministry eg volunteer, clergy and employed coordinators; those who work in teams or alone. A further option is to research dioceses who have experimented with family ministry as a result of the Celebrating Family Fund. However, at this point it is difficult to make a firm decision on where to focus the Stage 2 enquiry without having completed Stage 1. My conceptual framework, particularly the element that prioritises a universal approach, may be the deciding factor.

Describing Practices

In describing family ministry practices (similar in research terms to the creation of case studies) it will be important to draw on both the quantitative, documentary information gathered as well as on the qualitative data gathered during semi-

structured interviews. It will also be important to subject the descriptions to a process of verification, involving the original subject and perhaps a number of those who witness or participate in the practice described. At this point, I will need to consider action research techniques, perhaps inviting the diocesan coordinator whose practice is being recorded, to act as a partner in the research. Since the aim is to record the practice accurately, the impact of relinquishing some control, albeit temporarily, would be minimal. Furthermore their involvement would assure greater accuracy and foster their own reflection on practice.

A further strategy to guard against inaccurate or incomplete descriptions of practices is the involvement of fellow practitioners in a review process. It's feasible to do this either with the help of an on-going practitioner support group or a group convened just for this purpose. But in order to reach the point of peer review, the account of practice needs to be acceptable to the practitioner concerned. So although I have not fully articulated a process for Stage 3 in my research, the verification of practice descriptions will be included as an essential part of the process prior to my own critical analysis.

Ethical Issues

The main risks to this study are a poor quality of response, due to a range of factors:

a) Low interest on the part of diocesan coordinators
b) Low energy and little time on the part of diocesan coordinators
c) Reluctance to disclose due to low self-esteem or worries about role performance
d) Reluctance to disclose due to issues of diocesan confidentiality
e) Fear of publication

Knowing the target group for the written questionnaire (19 individuals), I have a reasonable expectation of complete positive responses from 8-9 (50%) and partial responses from 4-5. Fortunately, I have job descriptions and a good amount of documentation relating to some of these diocesan positions already in my files. I can also follow up those who don't respond fully to a written questionnaire by using the telephone. In this way I would hope to overcome issues related to lack of time, interest and energy.

The other risks are mostly fear-related. If views are expressed that might bring a diocesan coordinator into conflict with her employers, this could create a very difficult situation for all concerned. Ultimately, the reporting of practice in such cases may need to be presented completely out of context and in such a way that identification is virtually impossible. Even within small groups of practitioners, I believe that discrete ways can be found to do this and I will need to assure complete anonymity to my research subjects from the outset. Another safeguard for participants would be to avoid narrowing the Stage 2 enquiry too rigorously or obviously. Taking a random sample or a sample without too many identifying characteristics could reduce the likelihood of those involved being identified.

Permission will need to be sought in the first instance to gather information and to publish it further with steps taken to avoid identification of individuals as far as possible. There are therefore three levels of permission to be sought and guarantees given in the gathering of data.

a) All identities and identifying information will be protected.
b) The information provided will be used in the first instance to address my research questions and in the second instance to facilitate reflection. Practice descriptions will be created in collaboration with practitioners and not offered for critical review until the originators of the practice are satisfied with the description.
c) In the event of wider publication of particular data relating to the practice of diocesan family ministry, particular care will be taken to safeguard identity of individuals involved, where sensitive issues are concerned.

All potential subjects of my research are competent to give consent. The work of diocesan coordinators of family ministry is targeted at adults not children; only rarely are they sufficiently engaged in work with vulnerable adults to warrant a CRB check.

Timetable

Stage 1 of my enquiry will take approximately 3-6 months to complete. Stage 2 will take a further 3-6 months. Stage 3 with its writing up of practices and checks will take place after completion of these two stages and will take a further 6-9 months.

Regional meetings of diocesan coordinators would be good opportunities to engage practitioners in critical review. These take place in Spring (April or May) and Autumn (November) so ideally Spring 2012 would be a good target for Stage 3 of my research.

Questions of Value, Usefulness and Contribution to Scholarship

I am aware that one of the limitations of this research proposal is the methodology I have described. Essentially the practice of those in diocesan positions of responsibility feels a little remote from the families they aim to serve. I have chosen the methodologies that I think will work in terms of my capacity to gather data effectively and relatively simply. Since the field of family ministry is hardly described at all yet, it seems wise to work with those who have at least some experience on which to reflect. I already know that this group has relevant experience and to ignore this would be imprudent. I suspect that whatever is gleaned from diocesan practitioners will point the way to further useful areas in which to research. But this is where I begin.

The results of my research can be used in several ways. Firstly as I have already stressed, the process and the findings will facilitate greater reflection on their practice by practitioners. The focus is on the way they communicate family ministry, the way they manage the tensions inherent in Church teaching on family and family ministry and on the structures that facilitate effective practices. These are all very practical areas of great relevance to practitioners. These areas suggest significant potential pathways in which practitioners can realise more effectively the *who, what, why, where* and *how* of their practice and of its significance for the life and mission of the wider Church.

Conclusion

This research proposal outlines a method for addressing the absence of academic literature on the practice of family ministry, within Roman Catholic experience in England and Wales. With such a lacuna, the opportunities for research are broad. However, diocesan coordinators of family ministry are my primary group of reference. I have narrowed the scope of my proposal by focussing on three questions:

   a) how do diocesan coordinators communicate family ministry?

b) how do they manage the tensions between the Church's theology of family life and it's inclusive understanding of family ministry?

c) how do diocesan structures support and sustain family ministry or not?

I propose to employ a variety of methodologies to carry out this research: a mix of written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, followed up by a verification of practice descriptions in collaboration with practitioners. Critical reflection on practice descriptions by groups of practitioners will be included as part of the analysis of findings. This complex methodology is designed to ensure that data can be both collected and analysed in collaboration with the peers who ought to benefit most from my research, without overlooking the possibility of negative impact. Confidentiality will be ensured and steps taken to safeguard the identity of practitioners.

This research will contribute to scholarship by filling a noticeable gap in the literature of family ministry. It will enhance current and future practice, increase knowledge and enable family ministry to be more clearly situated within the wider context of Church mission.

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