

Business management by the Bible

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The Villanova University School of Business can teach you many interesting things — how to run a Fortune 500 company, how to finance a multibillion-dollar acquisition, how to audit complex balance sheets.

Add to that now how to run your own Roman Catholic parish.

Starting this summer, the school will offer a master's degree in something called "Church Management."

Villanova, a Catholic school, says it is the first graduate-level business school program in the nation tailored exclusively to the needs of the lay staff who run churches and the pastors who supervise them.

"Things have gotten such that in most churches, the pastors have gotten so overwhelmed with their spiritual duties that really it's unfair to ask them to also take over temporal duties," said Economics Professor Chuck Zech, head of the school's Center for the Study of Church Management. "So more and more, these are being assigned to laypeople who sometimes lack the training in what it's like to be a manager in faith-based organizations."

Dwindling numbers of priests, widespread cases of embezzlement, and growing demands for transparency from parishioners are prompting a greater emphasis on practical business training for church managers.

The courses will examine regular business concepts but with a focus on ethics, theology and church law and practice.

Barbara Purnell-Small, one of the 28 members of the inaugural church management class, is the sort of person the program was designed to help, Zech said.

Purnell-Small serves as director of religious education at St. Francis of Assisi, a small parish in the Germantown section of Philadelphia.

Although she has some religious training, she has no experience running a business. Yet the parish is so small, she said, that she is in effect assistant to the pastor.

The two struggle constantly to manage the books and maintain the parish.

"We have extremely large church buildings," Small said. "Now, I'm not going to get a plumbing degree or learn how to do the heating, but there are a lot of issues ... that come up through the course of the day, and you need a good, solid foundation — beyond theology — to be able to answer 'how do you do this?' Or 'what do we do next for the church?'"

Although the classes are targeted largely at Catholic churches, seven of the 28 stu-



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Chuck Zech of the Center for the Study of Church Management at Villanova.

dents are Protestant, as is at least one instructor, Zech said, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia plans to send over some graduate students in the fall.

"All churches have the same problems, but every church has different solutions," Zech said.

Students spend a week on campus at the start of the program and complete the rest online.

The initial class has American students from as far away as California and Idaho and even a priest from Hong Kong.

A number of trends are putting a spotlight on the need to educate church managers.

First, lay staff is becoming increasingly important as the number of priests and nuns dwindle.

"For years, you could have had people who had no skills, no training, running \$2, \$3 million operations," said Monsignor Louis Marucci, the pastor of the Church of St. Vincent Pallotti in Haddon Township, N.J., and one of the inaugural students. "You'd never see that in the corporate sector, but it's been allowed to develop in the church because ... the tradition was that the Father did it all. We're moving into a whole different type of management model in the church."

Priest sex abuse scandals have also led to greater demands for transparency by parishioners, particularly on financial matters, Marucci said.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has not yet sent any priests to the Villanova program, but it has used other nonbusiness school programs, such as classes by the Philadelphia-based Catholic Leadership Institute.

Monsignor Timothy Senior, the archdiocese's Vicar of Clergy, said the archdiocese is interested in "strengthening the secular skills" of its priests as they find themselves in charge of an ever-larger collection of professional and volunteer lay employees.



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Jim Klingler, teaching Leadership in Religious Organizations. The course is team taught with two other professors each covering management, ethics and theology.

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Church of St. Vincent
Pallotti



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The inaugural class attracted Catholics, Protestants and a priest from Hong Kong.

"A priest is more frequently alone or the only priest where there is a large lay staff," Senior said. "So he has to be a leader among all the other leaders within the group. And that is a unique skill set."

Meanwhile, Zech said, awareness is growing that churches are as vulnerable to theft and mismanagement as any secular business.

A survey last year by Zech's center found that 85 percent of all U.S. dioceses had experienced embezzlement sometimes running into the multimillions of dollars.

"It's not enough to run this as a mom-

and-pop shop any more," Zech said. "We need some people with a professional background."

The two-year program costs \$23,400 per student, with a substantial discount for anyone whose church steps up to pay at least a quarter of the cost.

Half of the first class received the 33 percent discount.

"We want to encourage churches to realize that this is an important ministry," he said. "If you're to survive, you have to start supporting finance like you support the other ministries you have." ■