

**A National Qualitative Study on Catholic Campus Ministry:
A Report Prepared for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Secretariat of Catholic Education**

**Maureen K. Day, Ph.D., Franciscan School of Theology
Linda M. Kawentel, Ph.D., University of Notre Dame**

Contents:

1	Executive Summary
3	Interviews and Demographics
5	Section 1. Work: Vocation, Joys and Challenges
15	Section 2. Campus Ministry Culture and the Use of Language
25	Section 3. The Hybrid Context: Campus Ministries with Both Professionals and Missionaries
33	Section 4. Parish Involvement Post-Graduation
37	Conclusion
42	Detailed Methods
	Quantified Responses

**A National Qualitative Study on Catholic Campus Ministry:
A Report Prepared for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Secretariat of Catholic Education**

**Maureen K. Day, Ph.D., Franciscan School of Theology
Linda M. Kawentel, Ph.D., University of Notre Dame**

Executive Summary

The 2017 quantitative survey that examined the state of Catholic campus ministry in the United States shed light on many aspects of Catholic ministry within higher education. However, it also raised further questions. As is often the case with close-ended instruments like surveys, those examining the data at the 2017 Notre Dame symposium raised questions of underlying meaning, sought nuance, and wanted to better understand unexpected findings. It became clear that a follow-up qualitative study could more closely examine a smaller population of Catholic campus ministers through interviews, which would be extraordinarily helpful for a fuller understanding of the data from the original quantitative survey. Dr. Maureen Day (Principal Investigator, Franciscan School of Theology), Dr. Linda Kawentel (Co-Principal Investigator, University of Notre Dame) and Dr. Brian Starks (Kennesaw State University) formed a research team to interview 45 Catholic campus ministers in their respective geographic regions. The research team believed that open-ended interviews would help to better comprehend the findings from the 2017 quantitative survey, illuminate the deeper meaning within the quantitative survey responses and address the questions raised at the symposium. This qualitative study was financially supported through two funding agencies: the USCCB (Secretariat of Catholic Education) and the Religious Research Association (Constant H. Jacquet Research Award). The pages that follow highlight this study's methodology and some of the major findings as well as propose best practices given these findings.

This report discusses four major findings.

1) Work: Vocation, Joys and Challenges

The previous 2017 quantitative survey sought to understand job satisfaction among campus ministers. However, the quantitative survey could not describe how campus ministers understand the nature of their work and the various ways they find meaning in what they do. In interviewing campus ministers, the research team sought to understand how campus ministers perceive the significance and meaning of their work. They also wanted to let campus ministers say in their own words what they found most rewarding and most challenging about their work. Interview data collected as part of this qualitative study found that most campus ministers see their work as relating to their vocation, which in turn gives meaning to what they do. The qualitative study also found that campus ministers experience the greatest joy in their work when they are working directly with students and are able to accompany students on their faith journeys. Conversely, the

National Qualitative Study on Catholic Campus Ministry

most challenging aspects of campus ministry work involved long and erratic work hours, heavy administrative work and encounters with clericalism. These, and other challenges, are discussed in further detail in this report, along with suggestions to help improve the work lives of campus ministers.

2) Campus Ministry Cultures: Ministering to Students, Relationship with Jesus, Evangelization and Outreach

The 2017 quantitative survey suggested there may be important theological differences among today's campus ministers. Qualitative studies allow respondents to qualify, reframe or redefine the question in a way that reflects the depth or nuance of their beliefs. While the quantitative survey found much variation, and perhaps division, among some ideas central to campus ministry, these interviews demonstrated that when ministers were able to exercise a greater degree of agency in answering the questions, there was more room for agreement. Differences remained, but these had more to do with specific dimensions of a concept rather than an acceptance or rejection of it. An awareness of the campus ministry culture allows everyone to offer more reflective and responsible ministry.

3) Insights for Campuses Using Both Professional and Missionary Campus Ministers

The previous 2017 survey showed both pastoral differences and similarities among degree-educated and missionary-trained campus ministers.¹ In the survey report, the similarities were discussed as opportunities for cooperation and the distinctions provided opportunities for coordination (within or across campuses, depending upon staffing contexts). However, in interviewing ministers who are familiar with mixed professional/missionary settings (either through direct experiences or conversations with colleagues), the reality of collaboration, cooperation or coordination is far more complicated than the survey findings indicated. These interviews illuminated a range of experiences—both successful and challenging—with respect to collaboration and cooperation between missionary and professional campus ministers. This section outlines some of the principles that lead to better ministerial collaboration as well as provides points for consideration when determining a) whether missionaries would benefit an existing ministry and b) how to facilitate the integration with that ministry staff.

4) Preparing Students for Parish Life

The previous quantitative survey did not specifically investigate the preparation of students for parish life following graduation. However, many studies have pointed to the declining presence of young adults in parish life. To what extent does college campus ministry help to mitigate this

¹ Professional campus ministers (71% of quantitative survey respondents) tend to possess academic training and often expect to have a long-term career in campus ministry. Missionaries (24% of quantitative survey respondents) have a 5-6 week initial training, ongoing mentorship, regional training and regular team development; they typically serve Catholic college students for a limited period of time. For more on this distinction, see p. 8 of the quantitative survey report.

absence? How can campus ministry be even more effective? This section examines four ideas that emerged from the interviews: 1) challenge the students with greater responsibility and leadership, 2) facilitate students' transitions both into and out of campus ministry, 3) partner with nearby parishes and 4) provide mentor relationships for students and young adults.

Interviews and Demographics

The 45 interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, exploring five main themes that emerged from the symposium: vocation, student concerns, personal formation, language, and mission. The *vocation* section examined the extent to which ministers feel a sense of call to their ministry and, importantly, what exactly does “calling” mean. It also looked at the practical aspects of vocation, such as the types of job duties that fall to campus ministers as well as their job satisfaction; some of these findings are discussed in the first section of this report. The *student concerns* segment of the interview asked campus ministers to weigh in on two issues found in the student survey data of the previous 2017 survey: mental health and student prayer life. The quantitative survey found that students reported a higher concern with mental health issues than anticipated as well as struggles within their prayer life; campus ministers were able to share their experiences on these points, some of which inform the third section to this report. The *personal formation* section asked the ministers to describe the most significant aspects of their formation and the subjective or intangible fruits these bear, such as confidence or proficiency with particular tasks. It also asked what types of continuing education, formation and professional support they would find most helpful; some of these questions informed the first, second, and third sections. The *language* segment looked more deeply at some of the words and phrases used in the quantitative survey that, upon further reflection, were ambiguous, such as evangelization, relationship with Christ, conversion, piety, and holiness; some of these are discussed in the second section. The section on *mission* examined the primary “target audience” of the campus minister, paying special attention to the ways Catholic campus ministry does or does not reach beyond Catholic students, such as charitable outreach or hosting campus-wide events (i.e., including pastoral care and engagement with university faculty and staff as well as non-Catholic students); some of these findings are discussed in the second and fourth sections.

As is often the case with studies that employ open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, the team provided some direction to the interviews, but also wanted the conversations to be driven by the interviewees themselves. Some unexpected but important topics emerged and comprise the third and fourth sections of this report: discussing mixed ministries and the post-graduation university-to-parish transition, respectively. These sections both generated helpful pastoral insights from those in the field. With the exception of one interview in which the recording device stopped recording unbeknownst to the interviewer, interviews lasted 34-110 minutes, with a mean of 72 minutes. Quotes were not altered unless conventional punctuation indicates otherwise.

This qualitative study was able to closely approximate the national demographics of the previous survey data, indicating that the participants of this study are representative of those who

National Qualitative Study on Catholic Campus Ministry

took the 2017 survey (see Table 1). These populations were very similar to one another on measures of gender and ordination/religious status, but more diverse on ethnic identity. Education levels were modestly higher among those interviewed in comparison to the survey population. Ministerial models—discussed as office-based, parish-based, center-based, diocesan and missionary in the survey report—were very similar between these two studies, as well.

Table 1. Comparing Interviewees with Survey Respondents

	Interviewees (N=45)	Survey respondents (N=1,117)
Male	62%	57%
Female	38%	43%
Laypersons	69%	69%
Religious or ordained men	27%	26%
Women religious	4%	5%
Identify as white	73%	86%
Identify solely as white	67%	
Highest degree - four-year	24%	33%
Highest degree - master's	66%	47%
Highest degree - doctorate	7%	8%
Some type of graduate degree	73%	65%
Ministry-related degree	69%	60%
On-campus, office-based model	44%	31%
Parish-based model	11%	14%
Center-based model	16%	20%
Diocesan model	9%	6%
Missionary model	20%	24%

As the demographics of the interviewees approximate those who took the quantitative survey, the findings within this report provide elaboration and clarification of many of the themes in the previous survey as well as offering readers additional insights. However, the

National Qualitative Study on Catholic Campus Ministry

sample size prevents the research team from making clear comparisons within the groups outlined above. It is not methodologically sound to compare even larger subgroups, such as men and women, due to important differences within those subgroups. For example, in comparing men and women, there is actually a significant difference in religious status within those groups. Among the seventeen women in this qualitative study, two are women religious. However, among the twenty-eight men in this study, twelve are ordained. Therefore, it is difficult to know whether the differences one observes between men and women are truly attributable to gender or if these have more to do with religious status. Whereas comparisons within subgroups are best left to the larger, quantitative survey dataset, interview data is most effective for exploring open-ended themes, experiences and understandings in the lives of Catholic campus ministers broadly. The number of times a specific theme arose is noted in the appendix.

Before proceeding, it is important to mention a drawback to both the campus ministry quantitative survey and the qualitative interview study, namely the methods utilized in both studies only permit the study of campus ministers' *perceptions* of ministry. This is not the same as the *reality* of ministry. For example, if campus ministers claim that they are finding students more interested in Eucharistic adoration than previously, there is no way to empirically verify this. Even if a campus does keep numbers on these things, this would not provide *national* numbers that would illuminate the bigger picture. Additionally, campus numbers could not say whether the campus ministry attracts a certain type of Catholic (and not others), nor is there another survey or interview study from a decade back that would allow this project's research team to track national perceptions longitudinally. In short, when campus ministers perceive changes, readers need to take those perceptions for what they are: perceptions. This does not mean that they are irrelevant, but perceptions are more helpful in understanding attitudes about reality than reality itself. This qualitative study, coupled with the 2017 quantitative survey, provides readers with a clear snapshot of the concerns, strategies and theological moorings of Catholic campus ministers in the United States today.

Section 1. Work: Vocation, Joys and Challenges

The previous 2017 survey primarily addressed the issue of work by asking campus ministers about their satisfaction with different aspects of their ministry. Campus ministers were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the following: relationships with students, relationships with colleagues, student participation, opportunities for professional development and ministerial formation, workload, availability of sabbaticals and leaves, physical facilities, compensation package, their program budget, the process of program evaluation, and their reporting and accountability structures. Understanding how satisfied campus ministers are with their work was important for the USCCB and campus ministry organizations to know, as employee satisfaction levels are indicative of the health of an organization. However, the study of work encompasses more than just assessing job satisfaction. This section of the report will discuss what the interview team learned about how campus ministers understand the nature of their work and where they find meaning in it. This section also outlines what campus ministers