

William A. Clark and Daniel Gast, eds. *Collaborative Parish Leadership: Contexts, Models, Theology*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. 232 pp. \$78.72. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781498533683.

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**C**ollaborative Parish Leadership is an intentionally collaborative effort that pulls together various practical theologians, institutions of higher education, and seasoned ministers in multiple international contexts to focus on strengthening and supporting the leadership of local church communities. As the editors state in their introduction, local church communities “are under great stress in many parts of the world, and are in need of careful, thoughtful reform” (1). This work offers a next step in congregational studies with a focus on what makes successful local communities flourish.

The chapters offer a balance of contextual analysis, and they draw attention to creative models and theological reflection that reimagine how the wider church can support local communities by strengthening the ways their leadership teams collaborate with one another. The research includes sobering data on the demands on and attitudes of today’s parish leaders and the accompanying opportunities these issues present. There are also detailed notes on the efforts of Loyola University’s Project INSPIRE and its focus on parish consulting as a way of reinforcing successful parish leadership teams in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

After the chapters on contextual analysis, the volume next evaluates communities and styles of leadership in the midst of stressors such as parish reorganization and changing demographics. The chapter written by Mary and Bryan Froehle offers helpful highlights about the efforts of Project INSPIRE and elements that surfaced as critical pieces for successful parish leadership. Brett Hoover also offers an excellent chapter on leadership practices in multicultural parishes. Hoover states that the role of leadership is critical in “managing the harmonious coexistence of distinct racial, cultural, and ethnic groups” (107).

There are a variety of international models offered from Mexico, Germany, and France. The chapter on the Archdiocese of Poitiers, France, by Reinhard Feiter offers a particularly inspiring model of church reimaged that is based on the truth that “community (*communio*) and mission (*missio*) belong together” (166). This creative approach to mission, call, and response rooted in the local church community but completely supported and even fiercely defended by their local archbishop is an exceptionally refreshing vision worth the read.

Marti Jewel provides a solid reflection on the theology of collaboration that invites those in leadership to take a critical look at the roots of their ministerial authority and find in it the context of collaborative leadership so necessary today. William Clark’s final chapter builds on this reflection, expanding the theology of collaborative leadership to touch on some of the most central themes of the Christian faith.

There are a myriad of resources found throughout the pages of this volume, which make it a great resource for parish leadership teams. However, as a layperson, I found myself a bit discouraged, not by the book, but by the reality of leadership today. Time and again, the writers point out how critical it is for the pastor of the parish to be

on board for any collaboration efforts to be fruitful. Examples of this are found when Project INSPIRE participants point out that “the role of the pastor emerged as a critically necessary... factor in INSPIRE’s success” (55), and when Brett Hoover acknowledges that “research shows that effective, collaborative pastoral leadership depends on the pastor (or on an equivalent key leader, in some cases) and the pastoral vision he articulates for the parish” (111). Even the incredible work of the Archdiocese of Poitiers would not have been effective if Archbishop Albert Rouet had not had the commitment to see it succeed.

What became clear throughout is that the church will flourish if its leaders, both lay and ordained, understand the importance of collaboration on the local level. Those in positions of authority have the most ground to cover to meet in a collaborative center. This book is a great resource for those who have already decided to try collaborative leadership. It might also be an important argument for those who need to be convinced that shared authority is theologically critical.