

Total Ministry survey report

We have a clear understanding of what Total Ministry is. We stand on the shoulders of giants; the pioneers of Total Ministry laid solid groundwork. Right now, people are committed, dedicated, and very involved. We are concerned about succession and the long-term viability of our beloved congregations. Support for mentoring and ongoing formation would be welcome!

Introduction/Background: The data in this report originates from the results of a survey that was created in response to the desire of Bishop Barry Beisner to conduct a thorough assessment of the state of Total Ministry in our diocese at this time. Bishop Beisner and Canon Andrea McMillin met with the Rev. Dr. Susanna Singer, Associate Professor of Ministry Development at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, to design and direct the process that was followed. The survey was developed by members of the Total Ministry Development Group, members of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry, Bishop Barry Beisner, the Rev. Anne Clarke, Lifelong Christian Formation Coordinator, and the Rev. Betsey Monnot, Missioner for Leadership Development and Networking. Ninety-four surveys were returned, including:

- 30 from ordained or lay leaders of Total Ministry congregations
- 31 from other members of Total Ministry congregations
- 33 from members and leaders of congregations who considered Total Ministry and chose to go another way

The data were analyzed by a group that included laity and clergy from Total Ministry congregations as well as staff members of the Office of the Bishop. This final report has been created by the Rev. Betsey Monnot with input from that group.

First Theme: *We have a clear understanding of what Total Ministry is.*

Members of our diocese generally have a good understanding of Total Ministry.

Respondents from both Total Ministry congregations and non-Total Ministry congregations demonstrated clear understandings of Total Ministry. The following definitions were in response to the first question on the survey:

Total Ministry means . . .

“ . . . the empowerment of all members of a congregation to discover, be equipped for, and exercise the particular ministry or ministries to which they are called.”

“ . . . all baptized members of the body of Christ are using the gifts that God has given each of us. In total ministry, the congregation works together to bring out the best in all of us. We should also be guided by each other in recognizing each other's gifts.”

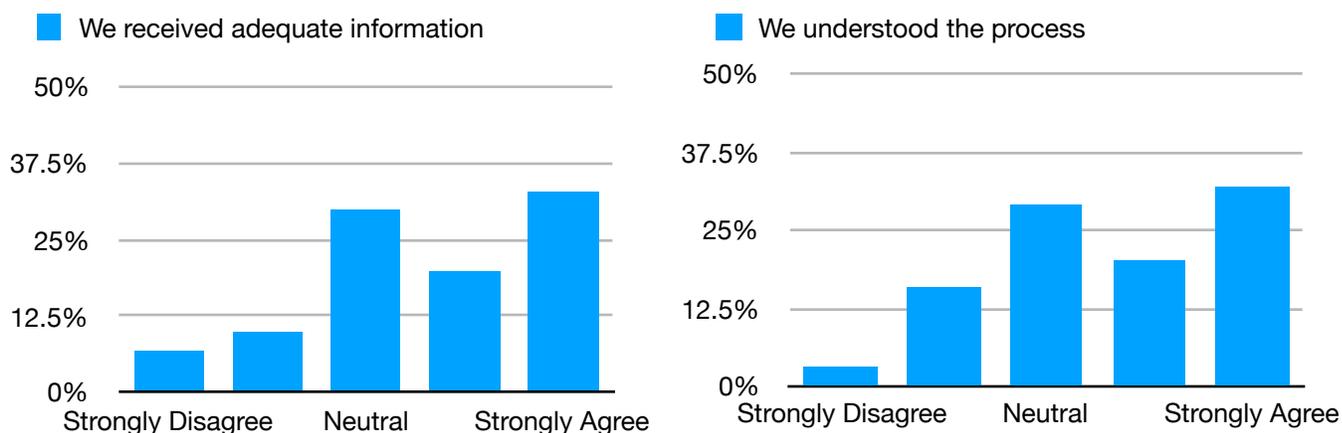
“ . . . a way to encourage and support the ministry and leadership of all baptized persons, not just the clergy. As Bishop Beisner said, ‘This is the model of the early church before the hierarchy was established.’”

What was noteworthy is that excellent definitions of Total Ministry came from both those directly involved in Total Ministry and those from congregations who considered Total Ministry but then decided to go another way. There is a good understanding of Total Ministry as a method of supporting and encouraging the ministry of all the baptized.

Second Theme: *We stand on the shoulders of giants; pioneers of Total Ministry laid solid groundwork.*

The process that was created and followed to establish Total Ministry in this diocese did a good job in both its discernment and formation phases.

Over half of respondents from congregations that did not choose Total Ministry agreed or agreed strongly that they had received adequate information about what Total Ministry is and were given an adequate understanding of the process involved in becoming a Total Ministry congregation. When the “neutral” answer is included, that number rises to over 80%.



Two-thirds of respondents from congregations that did not choose Total Ministry in the past would consider Total Ministry in the future.

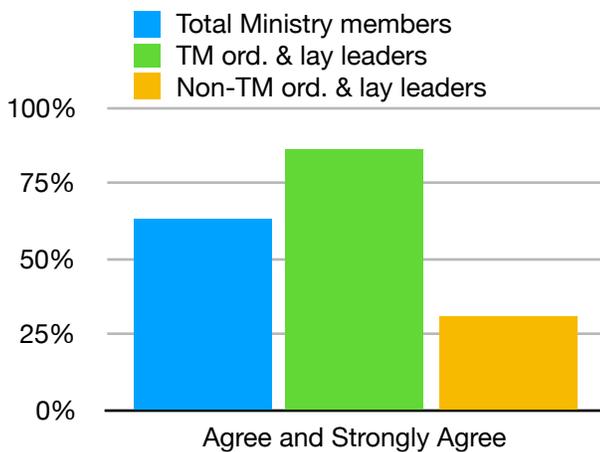
When it comes to formation in the context of a Total Ministry congregation, 82% of ordained or licensed Total Ministry members agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel prepared for my ministry.” Among Total Ministry clergy there is a strong sense of inclusion and support from other diocesan clergy.

In the early days of Total Ministry in the diocese, many people, lay and ordained, members of the Commission on Ministry and members of small congregations, as well as diocesan staff members, worked hard to learn and teach about the ministry of the baptized and the processes that could be used to support it, particularly in smaller congregations. They created a process for our diocese and then selected and trained facilitators to lead congregations in discernment about Total Ministry and whether God was calling them to formally become a Total

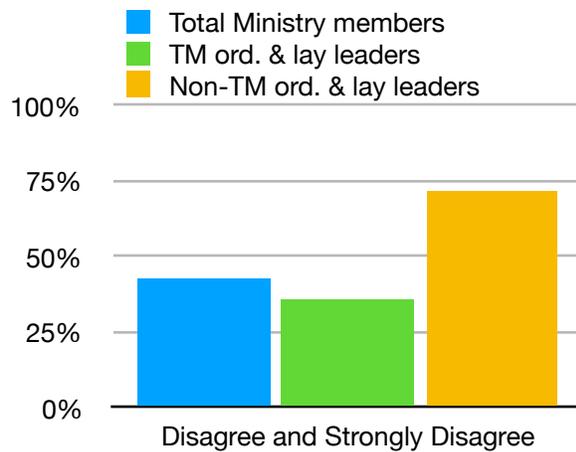
Ministry congregation. Many hundreds of hours and many thousands of prayers went into this work. The result is visible in this survey: a clear understanding of what Total Ministry is; an effective process to discern whether or not God was calling a congregation into Total Ministry; and leaders in Total Ministry congregations, both lay and ordained, who are well prepared and well supported by their peers and by the rest of the diocese.

The analysis team noticed something else that speaks to the strength of the Total Ministry process in forming leaders and members of congregations. There were significant differences in the responses from Total Ministry members or leaders compared with Non-Total Ministry members or leaders in the areas of financial strength and numerical growth.

“My congregation is financially strong.”



“My congregation is growing in size.”

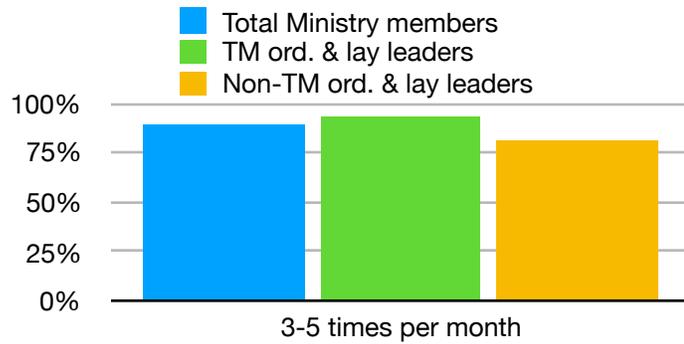


Despite the appearance of these graphs, a brief analysis of statistics available from the Episcopal Church website that graph Plate & Pledge (financial strength) and Average Sunday Attendance (numerical growth) showed that there were no significant differences between Total Ministry and Non-Total Ministry congregations. Both types of congregations had experienced similar increases and decreases in both Plate & Pledge and Average Sunday attendance.

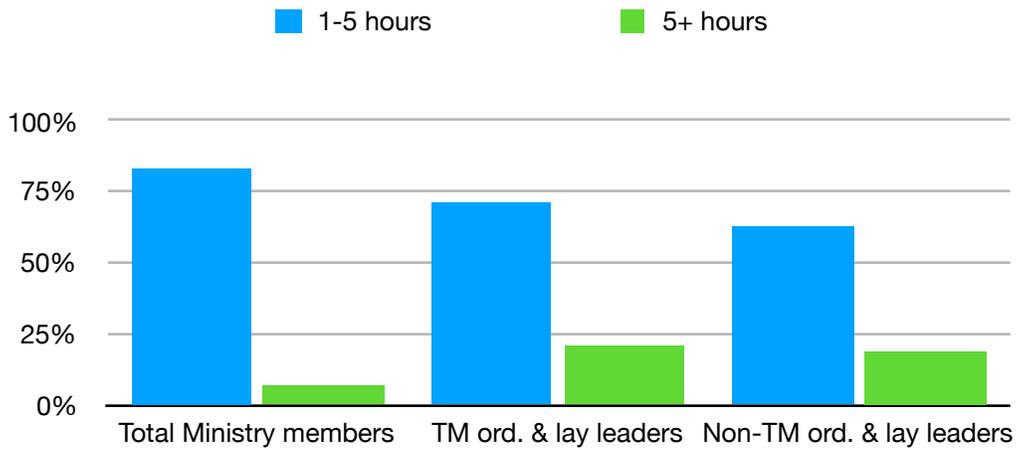
The graphs did not show that Total Ministry congregations were more financially or numerically strong than Non-Total Ministry congregations. Our conclusion, then, is that the members and leaders of Total Ministry congregations are generally more optimistic than the members and leaders of Non-Total Ministry congregations. This appears to be evidence of a shift in mindset that came about as a result of engaging in the Total Ministry process. This Total Ministry mindset appears to be more positive, open, and flexible about what the future may bring, even when coupled with clear-sighted understanding of the numbers.

Third Theme: *Right now, people are committed, dedicated, and very involved.*

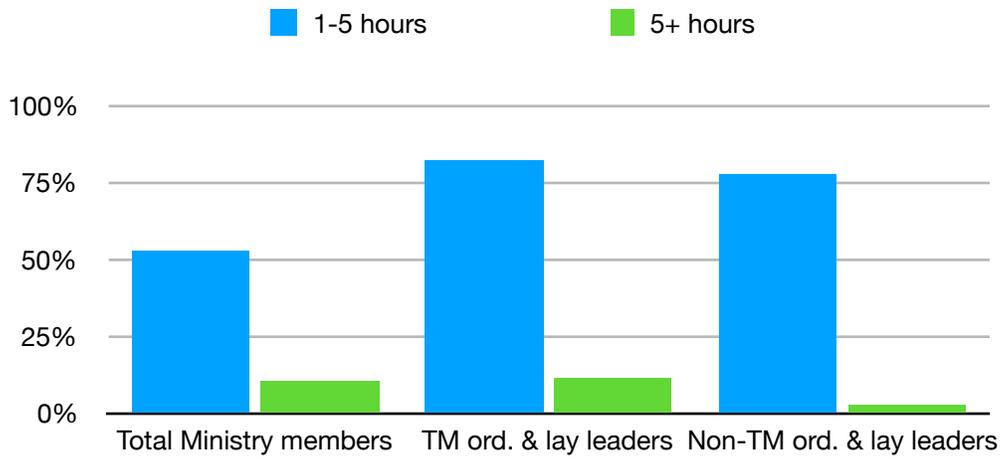
More than 80% of survey respondents in every category attend worship at their church three to five times per month.



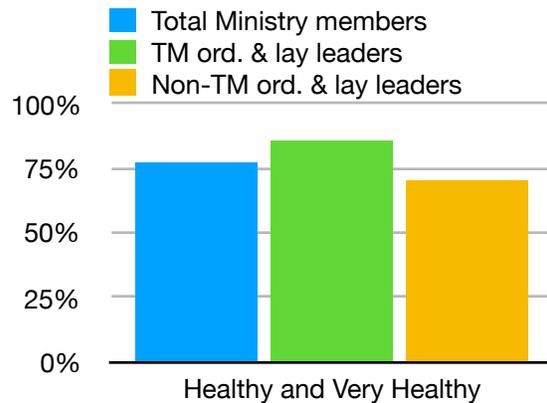
Respondents report spending many hours each week engaged in internal congregational life, such as vestry, altar guild, and so on:



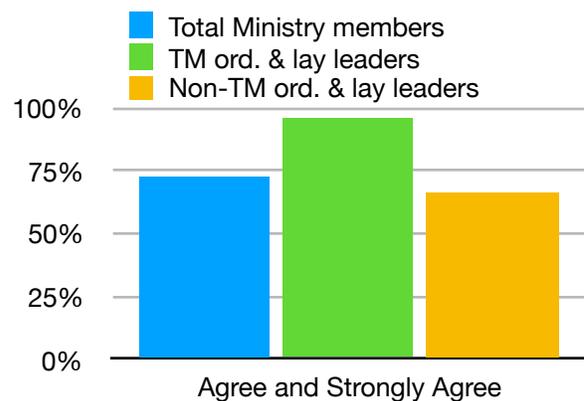
Respondents report spending many hours each week engaged in education and formation:



Most survey respondents say their congregation is either Healthy or Very Healthy.



More than 65% of survey respondents in every category Agree or Strongly Agree with the statement “My congregation’s members are living lives of Christian discipleship.”



Here are some of the ways that survey respondents from each category report that their congregations help them to live out their baptismal ministries:

“My congregation helps by offering a range of opportunities to worship, study and serve and by praying and supporting me as I explore my personal mission.”

“We all work together. No judgement. We embrace our strengths and ask for prayer for our weaknesses.”

“Practically everyone in our congregation is involved in some sort of ministry to serve our church and community. Opportunities are presented when there is a need. Baptismal promises are frequently discussed and incorporated into sermons, liturgy and conversations.”

Fourth Theme: *We are concerned about succession and the long-term viability of our beloved congregations.*

Very few respondents report that their congregations are growing in size, and responses about financial health are in graphs above. Respondents in all three categories commented about the need to attract more and younger members, about the increasing average age of their members, and about the difficulties encountered as lay and clergy leaders continue to age and are no longer able to do as much as they used to. When asked specifically about succession, many respondents mentioned aging, finances, and time commitments:

“We are with one or two exceptions 70+ and we all are the leadership.”

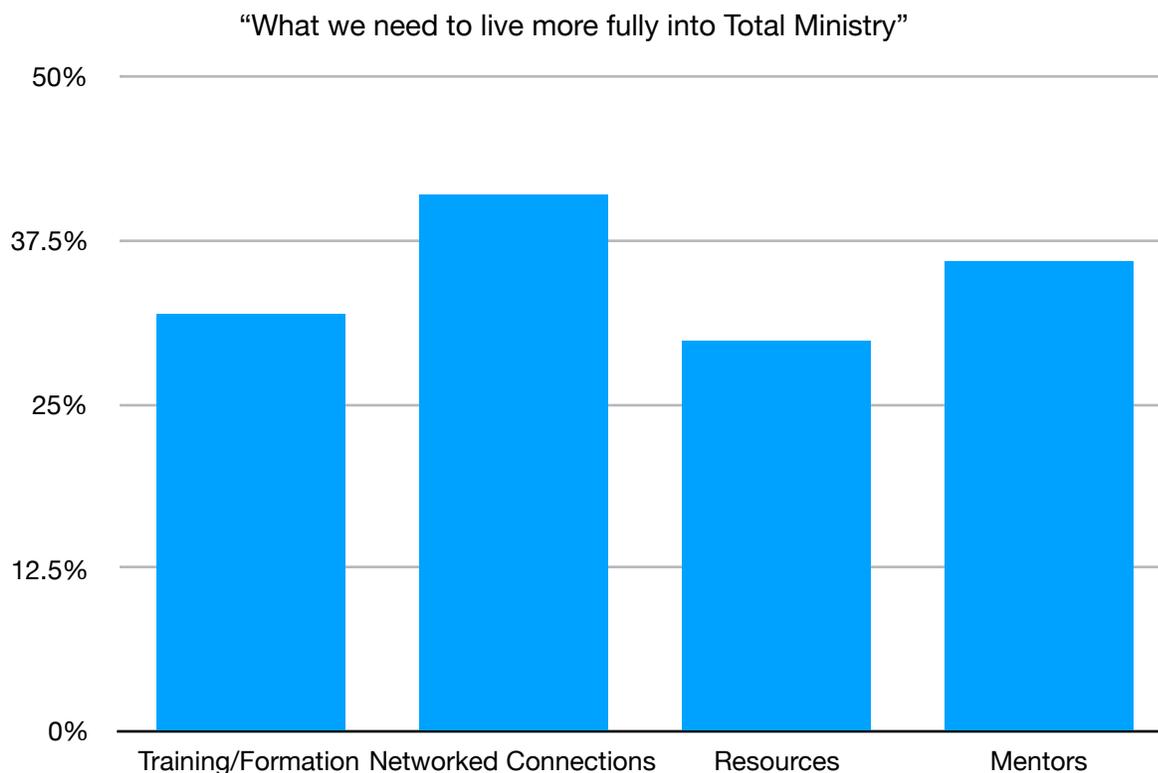
“ . . . no plan for succession for the lay leaders themselves or much thought to clergy involvement in the future.”

“We will certainly never be able to afford a paid priest . . . “

“We have few folks who have the time for the preparation required for ordination.”

Fifth Theme: *Support through mentoring and ongoing formation would be welcome!*

43% of respondents from Total Ministry congregations reported “Ongoing Formation” as a factor that gets in the way of their congregations more fully realizing Total Ministry.



Conclusions and Vision for the Future

We have a clear understanding of what Total Ministry is. We stand on the shoulders of giants; the pioneers of Total Ministry laid solid groundwork. Right now, people are committed, dedicated, and very involved. We are concerned about succession and the long-term viability of our beloved congregations. Support for mentoring and ongoing formation would be welcome!

We stand at the threshold of a unique opportunity.

The Episcopal Church has spent a generation living into the centrality of the ministry of the baptized as expressed in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. While Total Ministry was one outgrowth of the recognition of baptismal ministry as central to God’s work, other expressions have also found root and been able to thrive here in the Diocese of Northern California. Baptismal ministry is at the heart of what it means to be the church today, and baptismal ministry in all its variety must be supported at all levels of the church.

At the same time, the possibilities for alternative formation for ordained leaders have opened up into areas that were never imagined forty years ago. What has been called “local formation” has become mixed with what has been called “reading for orders,” and, in our diocese, we have created flexible “Alternative Paths” to ordination through the use of individual Formation Plans designed by the Commission on Ministry and approved by the Bishop. Online coursework has become an essential part of formation for those not attending a traditional residential seminary or the School for Deacons.

For the Episcopal Church to thrive in Northern California as we continue to move more deeply into a post-christendom society, we will need to be flexible, networked, and adaptive. Members of congregations, whatever their organizational form, need opportunities to discern and experiment with their spiritual gifts and deepen their baptismal ministries and vocations. Congregational leaders need opportunities to reflect on models of ministry and on which model might work best for their context based on current logistical needs. Everyone needs ongoing opportunities for study and learning.

We also need to give ourselves permission to experiment, and permission to fail. In a rapidly changing culture, experimentation, reflection, and revision will need to become a regular feature of our congregational and diocesan life. Renewal can only come through ongoing adaptation to changing circumstances.

We imagine . . .

. . . a network of mentors and those skilled in formation, members of local congregations who travel to other congregations to offer support and opportunities for reflection, formation, and consultation

. . . continuing flexible formation opportunities for both baptismal and ordained ministry

. . . ongoing conversion to a culture of baptismal ministry throughout the diocese in which baptismal ministry is discerned, supported, and upheld in every congregation

. . . a culture of experimentation and flexibility, under the oversight of the Bishop, in which congregations and individuals are encouraged to take risks at the growing edges of their abilities, in which successes are celebrated and failures mined for their learning opportunities

. . . a broad understanding that Christ is present wherever two or three are gathered, whether or not one of them happens to be ordained, and that Christ calls us out into the world to transform it

What do you imagine?