

Bishop Kicanas: Church should make better use of research

Jerry Filteau | Mar. 26, 2010 NCR Today

WASHINGTON ? Bishops and other church leaders should rely on research and make better use of it, Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., said March 24 at the Catholic University of America.

Decision-making based on ?one?s instincts, hunches and untested opinions? rather than on sound research ?can lead to tragic results,? he said.

Bishop Kicanas, who is vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, delivered the inaugural Dean Hoge Memorial Lecture, sponsored by CUA?s Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies, formerly known as the Life Cycle Institute.

Hoge, who died in 2008, was one of the nation?s leading sociologists of religion. He taught at Catholic University for more than 30 years and headed the Life Cycle Institute from 1999 to 2004.

Kicanas focused his talk on Hoge?s extensive research on Catholic priests and its implications for bishops.

He said Hoge?s 1999 review of nine years of research on recently ordained priests pointed to overwork and over-responsibility as key areas of stress: ?Many recently ordained felt overwhelmed. ? They felt under-supervised. They lacked abilities in the areas of ?administration, management, finances, staff relationships, running meetings and dealing with conflict.? Hence, they felt frustrated, unequipped to do what was expected of them.?

Kicanas said that two years ago his vicar general, who was a corporate executive before entering the priesthood, started a program to train recently ordained priests of the Tucson Diocese in management and administration skills.

?I feared they might feel like they were going back to the seminary,? he said, but instead ?they embraced the program wholeheartedly? because it helped them deal with real issues they were facing in their parishes.

?Dioceses need to attend to the amount of work put upon priests and to find ways to assist them in acquiring the skills necessary to feel competent in what they are called to do in parish work,? he said.

He said Hoge?s research uncovering dissatisfaction among many recently ordained priests about their living situation should lead bishops to discuss that issue directly with their newly ordained, to surface concerns and work to resolve them.

He said Hoge?s research on priests? dissatisfaction with diocesan structures led him to initiate quarterly meetings with the recently ordained priests of his diocese.

?At first it was like pulling teeth. There was little trust among them,? he said, but after repeated efforts to seek their advice and draw them out, ?the group began to converse at a deeper level. I sense now that they look forward to this time to review their lives with their peers.?

Kicanas suggested further research on priests in a number of areas, among them, sexuality and celibacy, prayer and spirituality and the importance of affirmation, collaboration and a sense of belonging in priests' lives. And bishops would do well to make use of Hoge's findings on those issues by finding ways to help their priests live fuller, holier, happier lives, he said.

[Jerry Filteau is NCR Washington correspondent.]

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