



## The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative Survey of Participant Project Directors

### Statistics Report #1

Dear Colleagues,

Attached please find **Statistics Report #1**, the responses of SPE Project Directors. This is the first in a series of reports on the SPE Surveys of Project Directors and Participants. The next report will be produced in November. That report will present the overall statistics for the participant survey, which includes several hundred items on the content, structure, and process of peer groups, the current ministry context of participants, their health, approaches to faith and life, and information on their personal, faith, and family backgrounds.

#### Background and Sponsorship

Among the 31 participating SPE projects with small, ongoing groups of ministers or pastoral leaders, about a third are sponsored by seminaries or divinity schools, a third are judicatory-related, and the remainder are partnerships between groups, retreat centers, counseling agencies, or other church-related nonprofits. The denominational affiliations of sponsor organizations are about one-fifth conservative Protestant, one-fifth liberal Protestant, one-fifth interdenominational, one-third moderate Protestant, and a little over one-tenth Roman Catholic. Over the past five years, about half of the projects have begun 25 or fewer groups while almost a third having begun 40 or more. Twenty-five percent of the total of 1,390 groups have officially ended and no longer meet. Ten percent of the total are no longer sponsored but continue to meet on their own. Close to a third of the programs do their work based on an annual budget of \$150,000 or less. The average cost of SPE peer group programs is \$284,000. The majority of funding comes from grants, including the Lilly Endowment grant.

#### Content and Structure

The content and structure of SPE peer group programs are diverse and include group spiritual direction, pastoral education, cultural immersion, reflective practice, action-reflection, and peer learning approaches. However, “peer learning” is the program content and structure that best describes the approach of the majority of SPE peer group programs. Pastoral education, group spiritual direction, and creative combinations account for thirty percent of most utilized strategies. At least half of the projects support gatherings of all SPE groups. As far as reported group characteristics: about forty percent of projects report that their groups select their own members, about seventy percent say that groups determine their own direction whereas the sponsoring organization provides curriculum for about thirty percent; about half of projects report that their groups include persons of different denominations or faith traditions whereas forty percent include persons of different races or ethnicities; and forty percent of projects say that groups travel, with half of these reporting travel outside of the continental U.S. and the remainder, inside the U.S.

The key ingredients that Project Directors report are “necessary for effective SPE groups” include trained leaders or coaches, trust and vulnerability, and commitment and accountability. Three-quarters of the projects report that SPE groups have a formal covenant or written group guidelines. Nearly ninety percent of projects report that their groups have a designated leader or leaders. The description that best fits their group leaders is “a trained group facilitator,” followed closely by “a minister peer with special training for group leadership.” Other kinds of group leaders include a denominational leader with responsibility for group leadership, a credentialed professional such as a pastoral counselor, faculty mentors or facilitators, and members selected by (and sometimes rotated within) the group itself. Nearly seventy percent of group leaders receive some form of training including initial training and ongoing supervision.

### Participation and Impact

The most important incentives for successful group member recruitment reported by project directors include: the opportunity for interaction with other ministers, money to fund group activities, a chance to do something new or creative, the promise of “practical help” for ministry, and exposure to recognized experts. Projects also say that the impact of the SPE group program has been very positive for their organizations (81%) and for group members themselves (94%). All Project Directors agreed that SPE group participation is an important part of a member’s ongoing education in ministry. The top three reasons cited include the fact that participation in an SPE group provides an accountable, safe community; delivers specific educational benefits; and provides emotional support, empathy, and fellowship.

SPE Project Directors are “satisfied” to “very satisfied” with their current evaluation strategies (74%). The majority report regular evaluations including multi-method designs with qualitative and quantitative components. Importantly, fifty-five percent say that their SPE group programs are either “very likely” or “certain” to continue beyond the Lilly Endowment grant period.

We hope this information is both helpful and “tantalizing” to you. A number of these key variables on SPE program content and structure will be included in the overall survey of group members. This will allow us to compare and contrast the impact of programmatic features on group process and content as well as participants’ ministry contexts and functions, health and well-being, and approaches to faith and life.

We are currently completing the task of tabulating the responses to participant surveys. The survey process was extended for some participants through the end of September to ensure the best response rate possible. About 50% of the 4,856 surveys disseminated were completed and returned. In addition to this statistical report from the Project Director survey, in November you will receive the statistical report for all participants. If at least twenty percent of your potential respondents completed the survey (or, at a minimum, 40 persons), you will also receive a separate statistical report of the aggregated responses specifically for your project. Smaller numbers of respondents, of course, mean less in terms of interpretation, and, we have some concern for the confidentiality of all respondents.

That is why these minimums are necessary for separate reports. These separate reports will follow in December and January.

We have commissioned a series of questions from our survey for inclusion in two national surveys of clergy. This will enable us to compare ministers who have participated in peer groups with those who have not. The results from those surveys will also be reported. Finally, a longer analytical report that includes all survey data will be produced. It will analyze the impact of peer groups across denominations, regions, program types and structures, etc. All of you will receive these reports as they are completed. As soon as the data files are ready, you may request these for your own analysis—although, all names, addresses, and other identifying information have been removed to protect the promised confidentiality of respondents.

Thank you again, for your participation. We look forward to sharing more information from this important project in the future.

Sincerely,

Penny Long Marler

Research Coordinator