



USING THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL TO EXPLORE RELIGIOUS MINISTRY: CATHOLIC DEACONS



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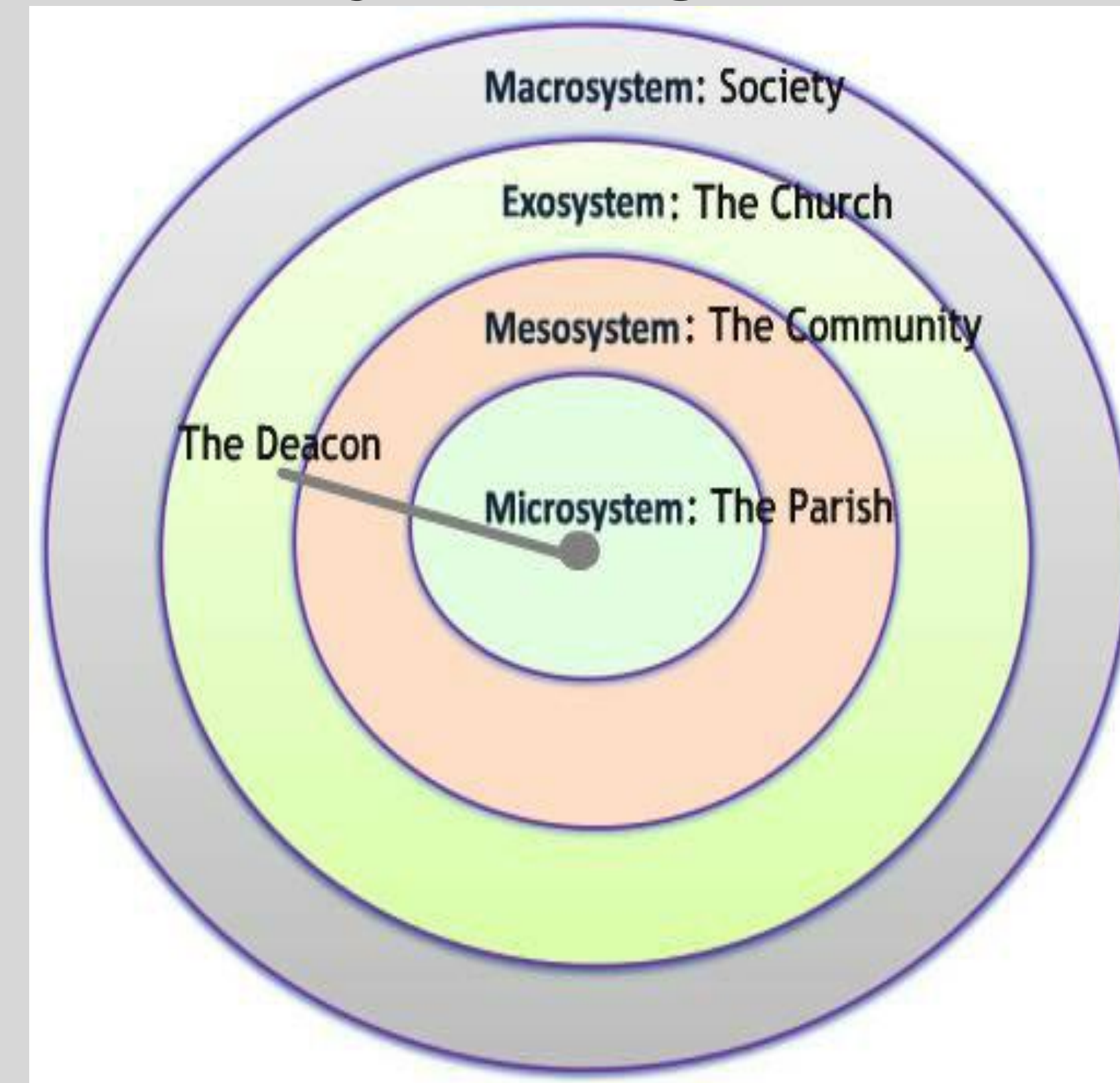
Background

In the 45 years since Vatican II, when the Catholic Church reinstated the role of the **permanent deacon**, over 17,000 men have been trained and ordained in the United States (46% of all Catholic permanent deacons worldwide). This drastic change in the prevalence of the deacon has raised many questions. How do deacons fit into the everyday workings of a parish? How can the Church best utilize their deacons? As researchers, we asked: what forces brought back the deacon and how are these influences still in play today? For answers, we turned to the ecological systems model.

Just like Bronfenbrenner's (1979) child, the deacon stands in the middle of his own ecological model with all his personal characteristics (Tudge et al., 2009). Surrounding him is his parish (*the Microsystem*) with all its needs and politics (Lumpkins, Greiner, Daley, Mabachi, & Neuhaus, 2013). The local community (or the *Mesosystem*) within which the parish is situated also exercises influence on the type of ministries a deacon may fill (Tudge et al., 2009). The Catholic Church (*the Exosystem*) exercises its influence over the deacon through diaconate training curriculum and Church policy. Finally, all other systems are influenced by society as a whole (*the Macrosystem*).

This modified model shows that, to understand the diaconate, we must understand the arena in which he ministers and serves. Is a deacon at a parish in a more affluent area more likely to be assigned ministry roles within his parish (parish-centered) or out in the community (community-outreach) when compared to a deacon from a less affluent area? Also, does a parish's size have an influence on the likelihood a deacon will be needed for parish-centered or community-outreach roles? Results and implications from these logistical regression analyses will be presented.

Ministry Ecological Model



Modified Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Model

IVs: Deacon Variables

Age
M = 45.48 SD = 7.04 Range = 18 - 53

Education	N	%
High School/GED	106	19.3
Associates	52	9.5
Bachelors	146	26.6
Masters	182	33.2
Ph.D.	58	10.6

Ethnicity	N	%
Asian	10	1.8
Black/African American	6	1.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.2
White/European American	477	87.0
Hispanic/Latino	35	6.4

Years at Current Parish
M = 14.78 SD = 10.26 Range = 1 - 31

Years Since Ordination
M = 12.88 SD = 10.18 Range = 1 - 41

IVs: Parish Variables

Parish SES	N	%
Working Poor	26	4.7
Lower Class	50	9.1
Middle Class	415	75.7
Affluent	43	7.8
Other/Mixed	13	2.4

Parish Size (# of families)
M = 1033.50 SD = 939.65 Range = 34-7,500

Parish Ethnicity	N	%
Asian	13	2.4
Black/African American	6	1.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.2
White/European American	455	83.0
Hispanic/Latino	61	11.1

DVs: Ministry Variables

n = 78 unique ministries were reported

Target Population	N	%
N(D)		
Parish-Centered	54	74.1
Community-Outreach	24	25.9

Ministry Theme	N	%
N(D)		
Spiritually Themed	47	76.3
Secularly Themed	31	23.5

Results: Regional

Target Population did not differ by:
Region $F(12,404) = 0.60, p = 0.84$
Diocese, $F(99,317) = 1.16, p = 0.18$

Theme did not differ by:
Region $F(12,404) = 0.69, p = 0.76,$
Diocese $F(99,317) = 0.97, p = 0.56$

Results: Parish Variables

Target population was not predicted by:
SES: $\chi^2(1) = 0.27, p = .60$
Size: $\chi^2(2) = 1.80, p = .18$

Theme was not predicted by:
SES: $\chi^2(1) = .77, p = 0.38$

Theme was predicted by parish size:
Size: $\chi^2(1) = 4.53, p = .04$

Results: Deacon Variables

Target population was predicted by:

	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
Age	-0.03	0.02	3.85	0.97
Education	-0.16	0.08	3.82	0.86
Ethnic Identity	-	-	-	-

note: $\chi^2(3) = 9.69, p = .02$

Theme was not predicted by:
Age, Education, Ethnicity $\chi^2(3) = 4.49, p = .22$

Target population was not predicted by:
Yrs at current parish $\chi^2(3) = 6.23, p = 0.10$
Yrs since ordination $\chi^2(3) = 7.61, p = 0.05$

Theme was not predicted by:
Yrs at current parish $\chi^2(3) = 3.06, p = 0.38$
Yrs since ordination $\chi^2(3) = 6.22, p = 0.10$

Discussion

Ministry theme was only predicted by parish size, and target population was only predicted by the age and education of the deacons. This lack of predicting power at the meso- and micro-levels suggests that the ability to predict ministry theme and target population may rest elsewhere on the ecological model. Future research might explore exo-level (Church policy) and individual-level (deacon demographics) variables.