

RESEARCH

**BISHOP
SPOUSE/PARTNER
RESEARCH PROJECT**

BISHOP SPOUSE PROJECT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methods overview

The Bishop Spouse Project is a multi-method study of role and career transitions, role adaptation/innovation and wellness in Episcopal bishops and their spouses or partners. Funded by the College for Bishops and the CREDO Institute, the research is being conducted at the University of Cincinnati by Therese Sprinkle, PhD Candidate with Dr. Elaine Hollensbe. This project encompasses three research methods, including focus groups, in-depth interviews and quantitative analysis across the population of active and semi-retired bishops and their spouses/partners. With the exception of the focus groups conducted at the 2008 New Bishop and Spouse/Partner Conference, response rates were approximately 43-48% for both the in-depth interviews and the quantitative survey.

This report will detail the data collected concerning bishop spouse/partner discretionary roles and the strategies used to manage those roles. Other reports may be forthcoming and may center on topics such as: socialization techniques, identity in the role, and career concerns of the spouses/partners.

Discretionary Roles of the Bishop Spouse/Partner

For the purposes of this research, a role is defined as the characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual; those behavioral or overt actions that may be observed (Biddle, 1979)¹. Drawing from the qualitative interviews and the quantitative survey, it was found that bishop spouses/partners perceive that they have roles which extend beyond that of *spouse, wife, parent, and/or career-holder*. These discretionary roles may be expected by the diocese, the bishop, or other community members in or outside the church as part of the voluntary position they hold because of their relationship to the bishop. We call these roles discretionary as spouses/partners may choose to participate in only a few, some, or all at some point during their tenure. Based on the interviews, the following role categories were created for the bishop spouse/partner. Individual roles may be found in the full report.

- **Symbol:** (S)he serves as a symbol of something higher, e.g., faithfulness, holiness.
- **Social:** (S)he serves as a hostess, entertainer, and organizer of events and others.
- **Support:** (S)he provides support to bishops and clergy spouses.
- **Status:** (S)he plays a public role, often asked to promote causes or serve as a spokesperson.
- **Shadow:** (S)he is sometimes in a background role, at times ignored, or viewed as an inconvenience.

In the quantitative survey, spouses/partners validated the accuracy of these five broad role categories. They suggested that the individual roles associated with the symbol, social, and

¹ Biddle, B. 1979. *Role theory: Expectations, identities and behaviors*. New York: Academic Press.

status roles were most accurate in describing the discretionary role of the spouse/partner. There were differences across the tenure groups in terms of role accuracy, suggesting that as one increased in tenure, certain roles (e.g., social) become less expected. Spouses/partners also suggested that while these roles may be accurate, some were of lesser importance to how they perform their role.

Bishops surveyed as part of the quantitative study provided a different perspective. In general, bishops perceived that the support and shadow roles were more accurate depictions of the spouse/partner role. Additionally, bishops emphasized that the support and symbol roles were of higher importance to how the spouses/partners enacted their role in the church.

Strategies Used to Manage Role

Bishop spouses/partners tell us that certain strategies have proven helpful in managing expectations of the role. That is, for a number of reasons, spouses/partners have found it necessary to manage expectations of diocese members, clergy, clergy spouses or other community members. These reasons may include family or career concerns, or physical or mental health. The following five strategies were suggested to be the most common for bishop spouses/partners, regardless of the role or role(s) being managed. (Examples of each strategy type may be found in the full report.):

- ***Distance self from role:*** The spouse/partner abdicates the role set, or major components of it – sometimes seeking professional permission to do so.
- ***Managing self to fit:*** Outward expressions of inward adjustments. That is, the spouse/partner inwardly adjusts so as to display the appropriate behavior.
- ***Role engagement:*** An inward strategy – that of managing self to occupy the role.
- ***Creating own path:*** Suggests a mindful strategy of crafting a place for self in a space separate from the bishop's identity.
- ***Looking out to manage in:*** Outward tactics of relying on others disassociated with the role to keep self balanced in the role.

APPENDIX 1 Sampling Frame

Focus Group

Population: Incoming class of bishops, bishop spouses/partners, 2008. Navasota, TX.

1-hour focus groups

Focus Group #1: 6 couples, consecrated within past year.

Focus Group #2: 3 couples, consecrations yet to be held.

In-depth Interviews

Population: Spouses/partners of active and semi-retired bishops as of March, 2008.

1-hour long in-depth interviews

*Participants structured by tenure**

Group #1: spouses/partners of bishops consecrated in 2004-2008.
-8 interviews of 30 possible
-participation rate of 27%

Group #2: spouses/partners of bishops consecrated in 1994-2003:
-16 out of 70 possible,
-participation rate of 23%

Group #3: spouses/partners of bishops consecrated in 1993, or earlier:
-6 of 25 possible,
-Participation rate of 24%

Total Females: 29

Total Males: 1

**Tenure breaks used in prior research with CREDO, College for Bishops*

Quantitative Survey*

Population: All active bishop and bishop spouses/partners as of November, 2010

Online or paper survey administered October - November 2010

*Spouses/partners: 133 offered survey, 63 participated.
-Completion rate of 47%*

*Bishops: 139 offered survey, 62 participated.
-Completion rate of 45%*

**see demographics next page*

APPENDIX 2
Demographics - Quantitative Survey

Bishop and Bishop Spouse/Partner Survey Demographics		
	Spouses/Partners	Bishops
Offered Survey	133	139
Completed Survey	63	62
<i>Completion Rate</i>	<i>47%</i>	<i>45%</i>
AGE	58.7	56.7
% 45 & Under	9	7
% 46-55	30	34
% 56 - 65	39	47
% 66 and older	22	12
Gender	91% Female	85% Male
Number of years married	32 yrs married	30 yrs married
% with Children	93%	95%
Number of children, on average	2.18 on avg	2.28 on avg
Have children under 18	14 with	10 with