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Opinion: There's an antidote to age bias, and you can find it in a Connecticut diocese

By William F. Baker March 12, 2026



Bishop Frank Caggiano waves to the faithful after delivering a rooftop mass at St. James Church in Stratford April 18, 2021.

Brian A. Pounds/Hearst Connecticut Media

Corporate America talks endlessly about innovation, disruption, and youth. Meanwhile, it is quietly pushing aside one of its greatest untapped assets: experienced professionals who

are not yet finished contributing. Ironically, one place that has begun to harness this overlooked resource is the Catholic Church.

When I became president of [New York Public Media](#), I quickly learned that running a complex nonprofit requires far more than vision. The nonprofit realm — with its many missions, sometimes conflicting — was unfamiliar terrain. There was no simple bottom line; there were constituents, communities, expectations of service, fundraising goals and stewardship demands. My second-grade daughter once described what I did as “Daddy goes to meetings and brings home the money!” It was amusing. But behind the joke was a truth: leadership in complex nonprofit organizations demands far more than volunteers or vision. It demands solid management skills and a great deal of creativity and flexibility.

Early on, I made one of the smartest decisions of my career. I hired a “number two” — a recently retired, highly respected head of another public station. I needed not only guidance, but credibility and someone with hands-on experience. This person saved me from many pitfalls, clarified processes I didn’t know, and gave the office a gravitas I hadn’t yet earned in that sector. His guidance helped us avoid costly mistakes and strengthened the entire organization.

Today I see something similar — and even more compelling — unfolding in the Church.

In Fairfield County, [Bishop Frank J. Caggiano of the Diocese of Bridgeport](#) has intentionally built a leadership structure that draws on the gifts of experienced lay professionals and an enviable cohort of permanent deacons. Many are very seasoned executives, lawyers, financial officers and organizational leaders who bring decades of experience to diocesan administration.

They oversee areas such as finance, compliance, operations and strategic planning — responsibilities that require professional expertise. Their service allows the bishop to devote greater energy to preaching, evangelization, priestly formation and pastoral leadership.

The results are striking.

The Diocese of Bridgeport currently has 38 seminarians preparing for the priesthood, among the strongest totals in the Northeast. Mass attendance has risen more than 22% since 2022, now exceeding pre-pandemic levels. While many dioceses across the country have struggled to sustain their Catholic schools, Bridgeport continues to operate 31 schools supported by a strong scholarship program for students who have financial need.

These signs of vitality are not accidental.

They reflect a leadership model that recognizes the gifts of the entire Church — clergy, religious and laity working together.

Seasoned professionals bring decades of judgment, financial expertise, crisis management and organizational discipline. Their credibility strengthens trust among clergy, parishioners and external partners alike. When experienced lay leaders and deacons help shoulder administrative responsibilities, priests can devote more of their time to pastoral care, sacramental life and evangelization. Younger clergy and lay staff benefit as well. They receive mentorship from seasoned professionals and can grow into leadership roles without becoming overwhelmed by administrative burdens.

In short, the model reflects something deeply Catholic: the idea that every vocation and every stage of life can serve the mission of the Church.

America today faces a massive demographic shift as millions of Baby Boomers retire. Too often our institutions treat this as a loss. But it can also be an opportunity.

Retired executives do not suddenly lose their competence at 65. Lawyers do not forget how to negotiate. Financial leaders do not forget how to manage complex organizations.

What they often lose is simply the invitation to keep serving.

Instead of sidelining experience, we should see it as a bridge — connecting institutional memory with new ideas and linking seasoned judgment with emerging leadership.

The Church model emerging in Bridgeport offers a lesson worth considering far beyond one diocese. By embracing the gifts of experienced lay professionals and permanent deacons, the Church strengthens both its governance and its evangelizing mission.

Age is not the problem.

Wasted experience is.

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