

Seminarian numbers decline; reversal seen

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — For the seventh straight year, the number of U.S. Catholic seminarians has dropped at all levels — high school, college and post-college theology studies.

New signs, however, are showing a possible reversal of the trend at the critical level of post-college theology students, according to data released in April by the Washington-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The center has been collecting yearly data on seminaries since 1968.

In the three academic levels combined there were 6,441 seminarians at the start of the current school year, down 562 or 8 percent from last year's total of 7,003.

If a steep decline in religious candidates going through their novitiate year were also counted, the overall drop would be 11 percent, but that decline — from 520 last year to 236 this year — was due to a change in counting methods, not in actual numbers.

The key sign of a possible change in trends came in the number of diocesan seminarians in the final years of post-college studies before ordination. The figure rose from 2,526 to 2,546.

That increase was more than offset by a drop of 150 in the number of religious-order students in theology, but Monsignor Edward Foster, executive director of the center, said the diocesan figure would bear watching in coming years.

"While the size of the increase — 0.8 percent — is not large, this fact could be significant if it represents a departure from the general trend of decreases over past years. However, it will take at least two or more years of increased numbers to confirm this

trend," he said.

The number of priesthood candidates in theological studies is a significant indicator of future ordinations.

The overall drop in that group was about 4 percent, from 3,609 last year to 3,467 this year.

While the number of diocesan theological students rose from 2,526 to 2,546, those in religious orders dropped from 1,036 to 886. Theology students who had not yet established an affiliation with a particular diocese or religious order numbered 47 last year and 35 this year.

C. Joseph O'Hara, the study's director, said there have been several previous reversals of one or two years in the general downward trend of diocesan theology students.

The last was in 1987, he said, when the number of diocesan students in theology rose to 2,740, up 15 from the previous year.

In 1983-85 there was a two-year upswing, he said, from 2,742 in 1983 to 2,796 in 1984 and 2,802 in 1985.

Other one-year increases in the diocesan theology student numbers occurred in 1980-1981 and in 1974-75, he said.

The new figures showed that at the collegiate level there was an overall decline of 154, or 8 percent, from 1,911 last year to 1,757 this year.

There were 1,328 diocesan candidates in college last year, 1,231 this year. There were 551 religious-order candidates last year and 474 this year, 32 unaffiliated last year and 52 this year.

At the high school level, the total number of seminarians continued its precipitous decline, down 18 percent from 1,483 last year to 1,217 this year.

Twenty-five years ago, when U.S. seminary enrollment hit a peak of



File photo
St. Bernard's Seminary, founded in 1893 by Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, boasted a post-World War II enrollment of well over 250.

42,767 students, more than 20,000 — nearly half the total — were high school seminarians. This year the number in high school represents less than one-fifth of all U.S. seminarians.

Despite the closing of two religious-order high school seminaries this year, the number of religious-order candidates in high school went up slightly, from 234 last year to 262 this year.

The figure for diocesan candidates in high school seminaries dropped nearly 42 percent, however, from 937 last year to 546 this year. O'Hara said the largest single factor in the diocesan high school losses was the closing of St. Louis Preparatory Seminary in St. Louis, which had 88 students in 1990-91.

The number of unaffiliated high school seminarians went up, from 312 last year to 409 this year.

The 1991-92 figure for religious-order seminarians taking their year of novitiate dropped to 236, compared with 520 last year, but O'Hara said the

change was due to a shift in counting methods.

For the first time, novices who had not yet declared themselves to be preparing for priesthood were not listed in the total. A footnote in the center's tabulation of figures said that novices not counted in the seminarian total included nine who were candidates for brotherhood and 278 who were "undetermined." Most if not all of the "undetermined" were previously incorporated into the seminarian total.

O'Hara said the counting change reflected a growing practice among religious orders to encourage their new members to go through the novitiate before they decide whether they wish to be in the order as brothers or as eventual priests.

When the grand totals of all priesthood candidates, including novices, are compared for the past two years, the figures are 7,523 for 1990-91 and 6,677 for 1991-92 — a total drop of 846, or 11.25 percent.

Priest: Diaconate a 'ministry of presence with people'

By Steve Peter
Catholic News Service

TEANECK, N.J. — Deacons and others involved in ministry must "warm it up, touch lives, touch people," a Chicago priest told a national meeting of permanent diaconate directors.

Father Patrick Brennan, director of the Office of Evangelization for the Chicago Archdiocese, said at the 16th annual convention of the National Association of Permanent Diaconate Directors in Teaneck that most fallen-

away Catholics are out of the church not because of doctrinal disputes but because of "human-relations issues."

The April 22-26 convention, with the theme "Evangelization: Go Forth and Teach All Nations," drew more than 160 permanent diaconate directors and representatives from throughout the United States and Canada.

Pope Paul VI, in his 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stressed that "we have the antidote to the depression and dejection of the world," Father Brennan said. The anti-

dote is the good news, but "Christ has no voice except your voice and my voice," he said.

The essence of evangelization and conversion "is calling people to place Christ at the center of their lives," he added.

"We are being called to use pastoral imagination to re-imagine the church of the future," said Father Brennan. "It cannot look like it does now, a church of 47 years of age plus, attending 50-minute Eucharists."

A "new image of parish" is needed with the larger structures being broken down into sections and small Christian communities, Father Brennan said. "Let deacons and diaconal couples be the heads of the sections," he suggested.

Father Brian Joyce, pastor of Christ the King Parish in Pleasant Hill, Calif., and director of personnel for the Diocese of Oakland, spoke of the difficulties of evangelizing in the dominant American "culture of individualism."

"*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" said evangelization involves "transforming humanity from within and making it new," said Father Joyce. That view of evangelization "demands fidelity to the Gospel but also sensitivity to both the expressions of faith and the values embodied by cultures ... including our dominant American culture."

It also demands that "we become a church that welcomes, enables and attracts," that we "provide models of alternate ways to live our lives" and that we "become a public church" that

"engages in public dialogue on major issues," he said.

While evangelizing in the dominant American culture is important, deacons also must answer the question of "cultural relevance" in terms of minority cultures, such as Hispanics and African-Americans, said Father Rosendo Urrabazo, president of the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio.

Permanent deacons must be "linguistically and culturally sensitive" to all the different ethnic groups they may encounter in their ministry, he said. Deacons should work to "foster greater communication" among various cultures, with a "sensitivity to cultural expressions of faith," he said.

Father Urrabazo said his father, who is a deacon in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, told him to remind the diaconate directors that the permanent diaconate is a "ministry of presence with people."

When ministering at baptisms and funerals, deacons must "be present" with those either celebrating or mourning and relate to them personally.

During the convention, Father Frank Silva, diaconate director for the Archdiocese of Boston, was installed as the new president of the permanent diaconate directors' association. Ann Healey from the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas, was elected president-elect and Maury Reed, a permanent deacon from the Diocese of Green Bay, Wis., was elected treasurer.



Meet LAMP Ministers Jim and Maure Rupp. Jim is an accountant by profession, and Maure a Home Economist. They left their jobs, home and friends because they had a dream of serving with the materially poor as lay missionaries with LAMP.

DID YOU EVER DREAM OF BEING A LAY MISSIONARY? IT'S POSSIBLE!

- Catholic Evangelizing Ministries
- Open to couples, singles, religious
- Serve for a year or more among the poor / homeless in NY area
- On-going training / community support

**LAMP
MINISTRIES**

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring GOOD NEWS to the POOR..." (Lk 4:19)

2704 Schurz Avenue
Throgs Neck, Bronx, NY 10465
(212) 409-5062
Tom & Lyn Scheuring, Ph. D.s, Directors
Marybeth Mutmansky Greene, Assoc. Director