

CONTINUED...

Robes

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churches develop standards for what they ought to be paying their ministers."

Dean Hoge, a Presbyterian who is a researcher and professor of sociology at The Catholic University of America, isn't convinced of a clergy shortage, only a "perception" of a shortage in certain areas.

But Marcia Myers, associate director for churchwide personnel services for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) based in Louisville, Ky., begs to differ.

"Yes, I believe we are experiencing a shortage," she said. "With 14,000 ministers and 11,150 congregations, that would seem to be enough. But it isn't enough. Of those, 8,000 are serving as pastors; 9,100 were serving as pastors in 1990."

Nearly 4,000 Presbyterian congregations are without installed pastoral leadership, she said. "We have a shortage of ministers able and willing to serve in places we need them. ... They're married to someone establishing a career, staying near aging parents, don't want to uproot their children, or like a particular area."

Myers has a computer matching system that lists 1,350 available clergy. But 500 of them are willing to move only within one or two states.

It can be difficult to distinguish what factors actually point to a shortage. Of the 73 churches in the Presbytery of the Genesee, encompassing Monroe and Livingston counties and parts of Genesee, Orleans, Wyoming and Ontario counties, nearly one-third of 83 positions are open. That isn't what concerns Rev. Fowler, the presbytery's stated clerk, its chief executive.

"That's normal for my 11 years in the presbytery; it's a good turnover," he said, adding it takes a congregation from 14 to 24 months to call a new pastor.

But Rev. Fowler is concerned by what he termed a "rash" of baby-boomer lifelong and newly ordained clergy who are expected to retire within 15 to 20 years.

"I think we're heading toward a real clergy shortage," he said. "I think that's what a lot of denominational officials are worried about."

Mapping it out

Episcopalians and Lutherans can identify with the multi-faceted dilemma.

"We have a hard time in the Northeast convincing people to live here," said the Rev. Stephen Lane, canon for deployment and ministry development in the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester. It isn't unusual for the diocese to have 10 percent, or five, of its congregations seeking pastors, he said. In fact, the Palmyra church he left after 15

years to serve as canon 18 months ago is still searching for a pastor.

Clergy "tend to go where it's warmer and the economy is more robust," he said.

One way the Episcopal Diocese deals with competing needs for pastors has been to form clusters.

One pastor serves three parishes in Watkins Glen, Montour Falls and Catharine, for example.

That pastor rotates, serving two churches each Sunday, while laypeople lead morning prayer in the third. They only have Eucharist when a priest is present. Distribution of reserved sacrament is discouraged, Rev. Lane said.

"It's sort of a fact of life," Rev. Lane said, adding, however, that the diocese tries to find a pastor to fill in when possible.

In Allegany County, Episcopalians are experimenting with developing a team of lay ministers to work with one priest assigned to six congregations.

"We are beginning to look at Total Common Ministry," Rev. Lane said, explaining that involves licensing laypeople for specific functions, including celebrating the Eucharist and preaching, in specific locales.

Lutherans, meanwhile, have been studying their own difficulties and responses.

"As a result of the study, what's clear, at least in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is that there is a shortage but it's not a question of dire sets of circumstances," said Ken Inskeep, director for research and evaluation. "What we have is an increasing number of small congregations, with 50 or fewer worshippers and operating budgets of \$50,000 to \$60,000, and they are having a very difficult time finding pastors or paying them once they get them."

"Our problems are in rural synods," he said, such as in the mountains of Pennsylvania, and in Missouri and Nebraska.

So the Evangelical Lutheran Church is attempting to find ways to help ministers pay off their debts and to encourage them to serve where they are needed, as well as to address such other financial issues as equalization of pensions. Inskeep said the typical Lutheran pastor coming out of seminary is 38 years old with \$24,592 in educational and other debt.

The denomination also is sharing pastors with the Episcopal Church, he said.

About 40 or 50 congregations of Lutherans and Episcopalians have been served by either a Lutheran pastor or an Episcopal pastor.

Rev. Lane noted that the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester is considering such an arrangement for the first time. It has had an Episcopal and Presbyterian co-pastorate of a combined church in Rochester, but in the end only one pastor was affordable, and the congregation became Presbyterian.

Evolving ministry

In a United Methodist study, Rev. Kohler was surprised to learn how many churches were being served by clergy who are full-time "local pastors." These pastors are licensed by the church but not ordained, although they are encouraged to go on to ordination. Western New York has a fairly high percentage of these non-ordained pastors, said Rev. Kohler, who is assistant general secretary of the Section on Elders and Local Pastors for the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

Local pastors have served the church since 1816; only in the past 40 years has seminary training become the norm. Yet it appears the pendulum is swinging back. In 1990 the denomination had 1,413 of these licensed pastors and by 2000 it had 2,096.

"Sure it's a concern," Rev. Kohler said. "We're very concerned we have a supply of seminary-trained pastors."

But when people express concern about using licensed pastors, he said, "My response to that is half of those licensed pastors would be in seminary — they have their college degrees. The problem is they are in their 50s and it just doesn't make sense to put three to four years into seminary for less than 10 years' ministerial experience."

Most also have experience in the military, teaching and other careers, and they relate to their communities, he added.

The denomination is also developing more ministry teams of ordained, licensed and laity, he said. So it is a rare church that could have a vacant pulpit, Rev. Kohler said.

But he told the United Methodist News Service this year, "We don't know if it is correct to assume that a pattern of keeping people in ministry 40 years will ever hap-

pen again."

A recent study by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York City, discussed concerns about the quality of theological students. The study found a "relative lack of selectivity" by theological schools in accepting students. Among its recommendations were not only that "special support" be given "very able older students," but also that schools recruit more recent college graduates. Younger students have higher grade-point averages than older students and majored in areas considered better for theological study than, for example, science or technical fields that many older students had studied.

"If more college students can be persuaded to take an interest in theological study, schools will have the opportunity to select and support those who combine the academic ability characteristic of younger theological students with qualities that are rarer in this age cohort, such as interest in the ministry and religious depth," the study stated.

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School is actively seeking younger students, according to Robert Jones, vice president for enrollment services.

He and the school's president, the Rev. G. Thomas Halbrooks, have been traveling to speak at colleges, and the school's application pool has doubled in a year, Jones said. The fall class should have about 40 students, up from a more recent average of classes in the 30s, including Bexley Hall.

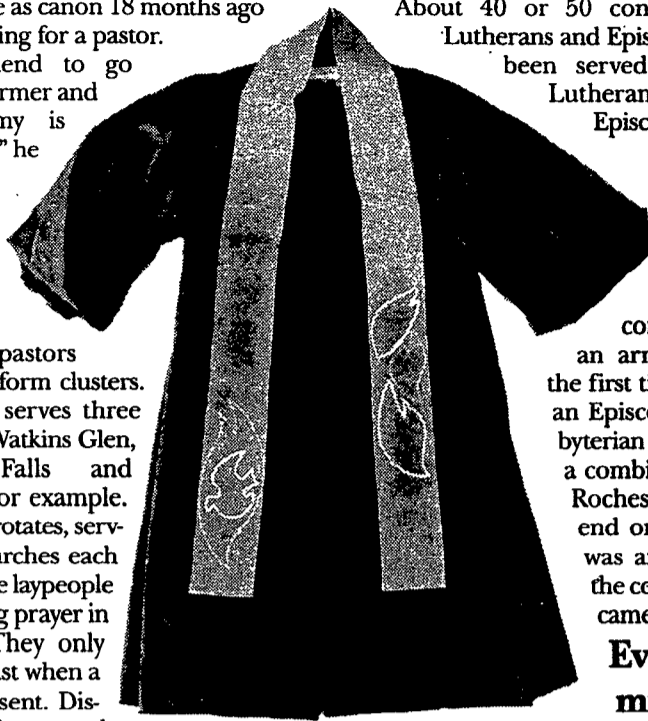
Jones is finding that college students say they want to serve God but generally have a lack of denominational loyalty and awareness of how they can serve. Divinity schools need to help the students understand their desire to serve, he said.

The school this year graduated 13 students with master's degrees and one with a doctorate, versus 40 graduates last year, he said. The average age of Colgate students is 44, Jones said, and "we are predominantly a second-career student body."

"The same thing that is happening in Catholicism is to some degree happening in Protestantism," said Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Seminary. "We are all part of a culture in which ministry is a hard sell. This is not a time when it is really easy to attract people to any altruistic profession."

"If we value ministry and what it does for us, we have to say so," Wheeler said, adding that part of saying so is paying adequately.

"Part of it is affirming this vocation and lifting it up," she added. "That's what many Catholic dioceses try to do, to say it's an important way to spend your life, and the greatest privilege there is, is to work for God."



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