

Information for Your Present and Future Needs



## **Will There Be a Clergy Shortage?**

Analysis and Predictions

For Uncertain Times

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RESEARCH

# Introduction: Why All the Fuss?

## How Many Priests Are Enough?

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Around the Church a conversation concerning the topic of “the clergy shortage” is gaining momentum. As the *Living Church* pointed out in a recent article,

The warnings have been in circulation for a decade or so. There’s going to be a clergy shortage, the church has been told. Bishops, canons, the ordinary, and deployment officers have predicted a time when it would be difficult for churches to find clergy. That time may have arrived.<sup>1</sup>

How seriously should the church take these warnings? In a church that has declared itself committed to the ministry of all the baptized, in which the permanent diaconate is expanding, and in which lay professionals play an increasingly significant part in parish life, would a decline in the overall number of priests be of any great consequence? Perhaps not, but while

developments in the theology of ministry have been moving away from a priest centered model, the liturgical practices of the church are more than ever dependent upon the presence of the priest than ever before. According to the *Zacchaeus Report*, along with “the ministry of all baptized persons”, “the centrality of the Eucharist” has become one of “the core dimensions of our identity”<sup>2</sup> Because of the centrality of the Eucharistic sacrament in the worship life of the church, the Episcopal Church, like the Roman Catholic Church, has to have a supply of priests available to celebrate the Eucharist, or it will have to change its fundamental character.

Do we face a shortage of priests as severe as that seen now in the Roman

Catholic Church? This is certainly not the case. As of the year ending 2000, the Roman Catholic Church had roughly 45,000 priests for its 50 million adult adherents, a ratio of 1 to 1,100. By contrast the Episcopal Church had roughly 6,000 parish priests to serve 3.5 million adherents, a ratio of 1 to 583. Moreover, the 45,000 figure is for all priests of all types and of these priests, roughly a quarter of whom are over seventy years of age. By contrast, if we count *all* active priests, and all ordained, though *inactive*<sup>3</sup> priests under age sixty-five, the Episcopal Church has 9,500 priests for its 7,500 parishes. The Church can also call upon many “active retired clergy”, almost 2,000 of whom are between the ages of sixty-five and seventy and thus younger than many active Roman Catholic priests. The Episcopal Church would also be able to call upon Canon IX priests who can serve in rural communities. In addition there are

approximately 11,800 Lutheran clergy who, under the terms of the new Called to Common Mission agreement will soon be “sacramentally eligible” for at least temporary service within the Episcopal Church. Due to these factors, one can conclude the severity of the priest shortage in the Episcopal Church is nowhere near as serious as in the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, it is unlikely that Episcopalians will face the same moment of crisis, in which access to the celebration of communion is itself in doubt now afflicting Roman Catholics. In short the Episcopal Church has a problem, not a crisis.

Nevertheless, the lack of a crisis does not mean that the problems faced by the church are insignificant. Most Episcopalians are used to more than just a purely liturgical celebrant, whose sole point of contact with the congregation is a sacramental functionary. Despite the

increasing importance of lay ministry, the clergy have not reduced the number of roles they play within the life of the parish. Rather, the succession of models of ministry that have evolved since World War II have overlain, rather than displaced each other. Clergy are often expected to be civic leaders, efficient administrators and professionals, spiritual counselors with an understanding of mental health issues, and leading advocates on social justice.<sup>4</sup> Rightly or wrongly, the priest still stands at the center of parish life. The separation between the sacramental and communal leadership would be, to say the least, a difficult change. It is precisely this shortage of parish priests, rather than priests *per se*, that is the looming cloud on the clergy supply horizon.

The supply of parish priests creates a problem because the person and his/her role is so tightly bound to a geographically

defined place and many of those places where parish priests are needed are, for various reasons, not considered desirable by clergy. According to a recent study by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (henceforth ELCA)<sup>5</sup>, the principle reason why small or rural churches cannot attract pastors is due to employment related immobility of the cleric's spouse. The second reason most commonly stated was that such churches were too far away from the type of amenities and opportunities offered by a city. This is also the type of mis-match that the Rev. James Wilson of the Episcopal Church National Deployment Office points to as the main way in which the Church experiences the "clergy shortage."

Two other studies, by Episcopal sociologists offer further evidence as to why the sense of a shortage is even greater than the numbers suggest. Paula D. Nesbitt of

the Graduate Theological Union in her 1997 book, *The Feminization of the Clergy in America*, found a continuing mourning of the decline in the number of young males coming into the ministry and a refusal to accept and promote women and second career clergy. Adair Lummis of Hartford Theological Seminary in a recent study of search committees in a number of denominations, including the Episcopal Church, found that the committees were still stuck on the idea of “youth” as meaning growth and vitality and had their hearts set on a married male with children at home, with ten to fifteen years experience in ministry. It might be that while there is no absolute shortage now, a set of “mismatches,” both in terms of geography and in the expectations of churches and candidates, has created a “relative” clergy shortage, in that if a parish is unable, due to reasons of geography, to find a priest-- the

clergy shortage becomes very real to the individual parish and parishioners.

Nevertheless, even if there is no absolute shortage at present it is possible that certain trends in ordination and retirement patterns could lead to an absolute shortage and significantly magnify the current relative clergy shortage. There are six factors that we believe should give cause for concern. They are:

- 1) A fall in the number of ordinations to the priesthood
- 2) A large proportion of the clergy who are within twenty years of retirement
- 3) A pattern of ordination that adds numbers to those older cohorts
- 4) Evidence of a generational effect in which Generation X'ers do not follow the pattern of Baby Boomers by opting for ordination at mid-life and decide to forgo ordination entirely
- 5) A gradual but sustained rise in the number of retirements from parishes
- 6) A significant gap between projected ordinations over retirements in the next ten years

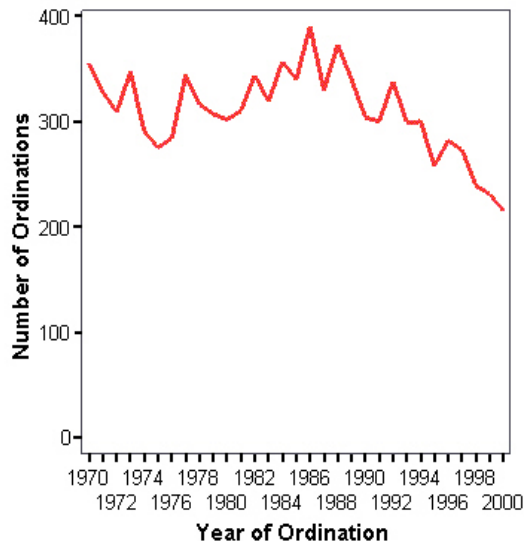


Chart 1

**Patterns of Ordination:**

Chart 1 shows the number of priests ordained, received or transferring to the Episcopal Church since 1970. The chart illustrates that while ordinations, receptions and transfers stayed around the 300 level from the seventies to the mid-nineties, after that point they have declined to around 250 each year. It is not clear if this downward trend will continue.

While the year 2000 figure of 243 is certainly lower than at anytime since 1950, the year-to-year numbers show enough volatility that this figure could certainly rise back up to the 250 level. Nevertheless,

Year of Ordination	
1950-1955	1627
1955-1960	1878
1960-1965	1950
1965-1970	1772
1970-1975	1458
1975-1980	1608
1980-1985	1683
1985-1990	1732
1990-1995	1526
1995-2000	1333
Total	17445

Chart 2

Chart 2 shows the five-year average for ordinations since 1950 where, interestingly, we can see that the last five years represent the lowest average in the group. A continuing set of numbers below 250 over the next three to five years would indicate a major shift in patterns.

We might also be seeing a reversion to the basic pattern of a gradual decline of ordinations which was altered by the entry of women into the ministry. The pent-up demand by women to achieve ordained status was released from the late 1970s through to the late 1980s, pushing up the overall ordination numbers, but only temporarily.

Year of Ordination	Female	Male
1945-1950		878
1950-1955		1627
1955-1960		1878
1960-1965		1950
1965-1970		1772
1970-1975		1458
1975-1980	348	1260
1980-1985	455	1227
1985-1990	598	1134
1990-1995	610	915
1995-2000	561	761

Chart 3

Chart 3 divides the ordination statistics into five year periods by gender. It can be seen that male ordinations have been declining steadily since 1970. Female ordinations, rose steadily from 1975 to 1995 have also now started to decline over the last five years.

If what we are seeing is an underlying trend toward fewer ordinations that was temporarily interrupted by the entry

of women into the ordained ministry, then we could expect a continuation of the gradual decline of priestly ordinations. While the number of those being ordained has fallen off somewhat, the same pattern occurred within the ELCA in the 1990s and yet the numbers rose again despite denominational expectations, illustrating the difficulty of predicting the future behavior on the basis of past actions. If the number of priestly ordinations went down to around 200, it would certainly be cause for concern.

### The Current Age Profile of the Priesthood and the Rising Average of Ordination

The average age of an active Episcopal parish priest is fifty-two, and as

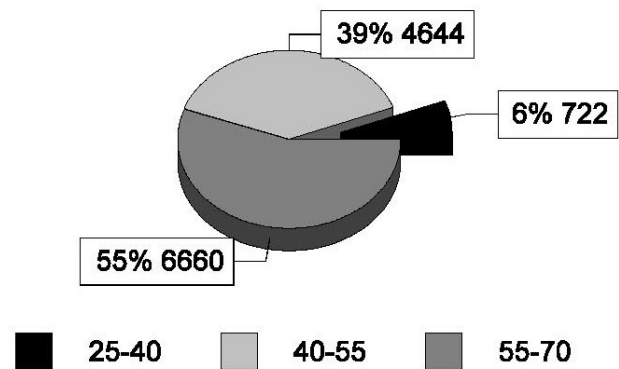


Chart 4

can be seen from Chart 4, the older cohorts are by far the largest. Moreover, as the chart makes clear, the Church's problem goes beyond the widely publicized problem of a lack of under thirty-five year olds, to even a lack of those under forty. Chart 5 illustrates that this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon with most ordinations in the 1990s adding to the older cohorts. This phenomenon is the result of steadily rising age of ordination. As can be seen in Chart 5, the average age of ordination has risen from thirty-two in 1970 to over forty-four in 2000.

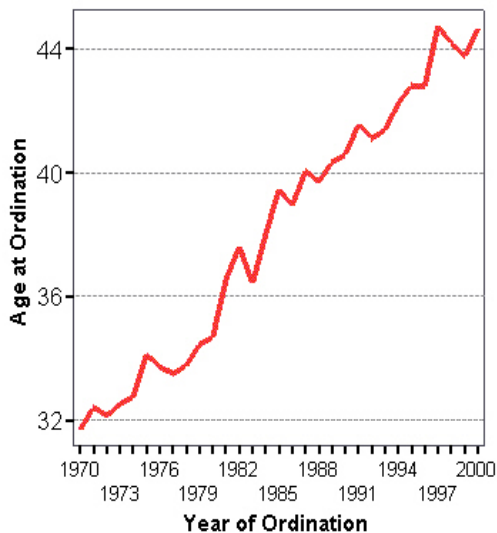


Chart 5

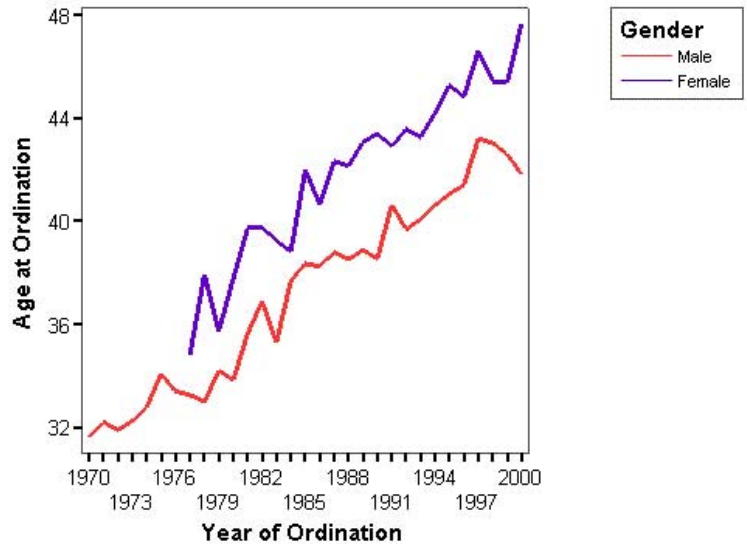


Chart 6

From Chart 6 one can see that while the average age of ordination is higher for women than for men, the rise for each is roughly similar; about ten years.

This rising age of ordination has been driven both by the entry of older ordinands into the priesthood, but also by a dramatic fall in the number of under thirty-five year olds as can be seen in Chart 7. The effects of this

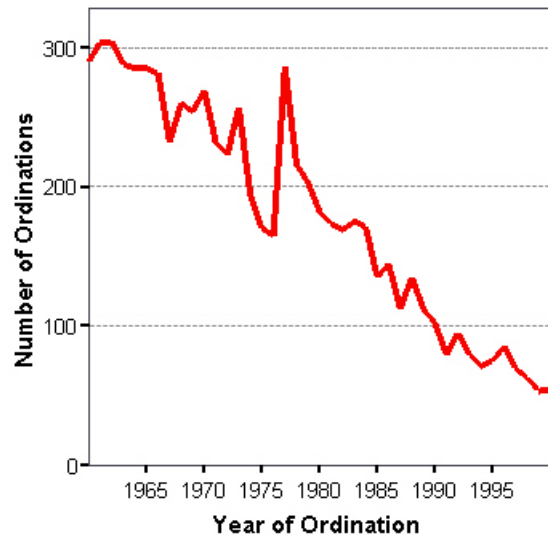
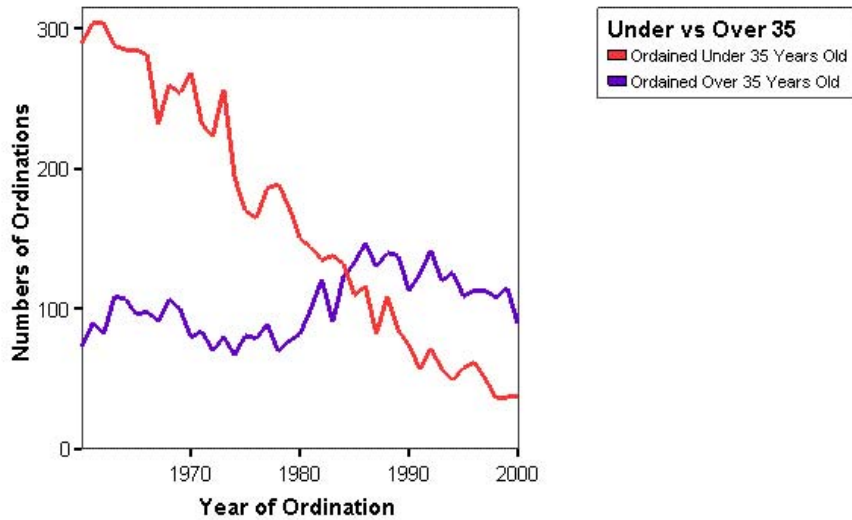


Chart 7





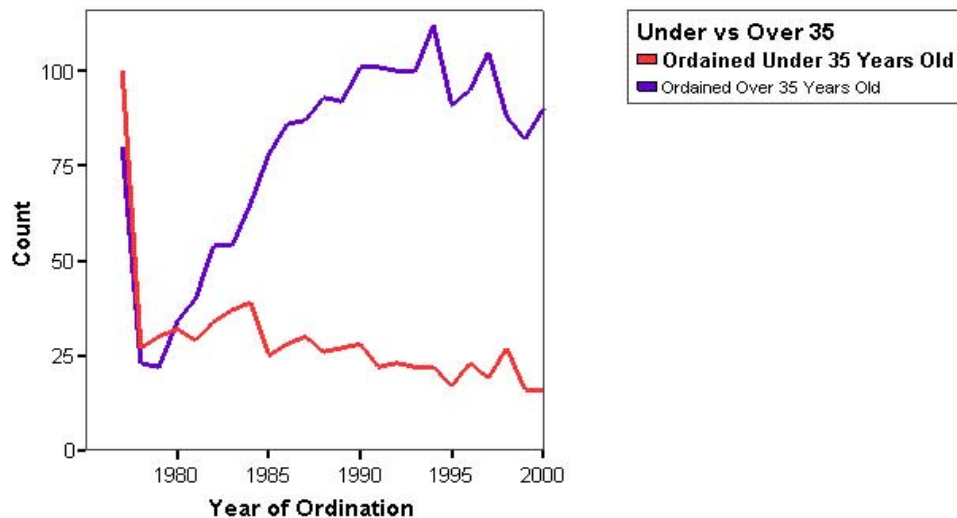
**Chart 8**

decline differ in their effects on the male and female averages.

As can be seen in Chart 8, the number of males being ordained over age thirty-five has remained fairly steady since 1970 with a slight rise in the 1990s, but what has really

caused the average age of ordination to rise is the 87% fall in the number of under thirty-five year old males seeking ordination.

The pattern is reversed in female ordinations, illustrated by Chart 9. In this case there has been relatively little change in



**Chart 9**

the number of women under thirty-five years old becoming ordained, if anything there has been a gradual decline since 1977, but rather it is the substantial rise in the ordination of women over thirty-five that has driven the overall average up.

One might conclude from examining Chart 5 that, while the average age of ordination has risen sharply since 1970, this does not mean that there will be a shortage of priests even if the average age of the priests has changed. But an older age at ordination means the total number of ordinations needs to increase; with a shortened career priests will have to be replaced more quickly. Thus although the fall in the number of ordinations is not enormous, when combined with a rising age of ordination and thereby a faster turnover of active priests, we need a rising number of ordinations, as opposed to falling, in order to keep the number of active priests at the same

level. Beyond any concern about raw numbers, the paucity of young people entering the ministry should certainly be a cause of concern. While the criteria set by Commissions on Ministry made the entry of young persons into the priesthood more difficult, the fall in the number of young persons being ordained has been a general phenomenon across denominations, and so the Church may need to examine what it is about the priesthood that is failing to attract young people.

### **An Age Change or a Generational Cohort Change?**

While the combination of a fall in ordinations and a rising age of ordination is cause for concern, it is possible that even the supply of older ordinands will decrease in the next ten years. If the rising age of ordinands is simply driven by a change in the point in life that people consider ordination, then we would expect a

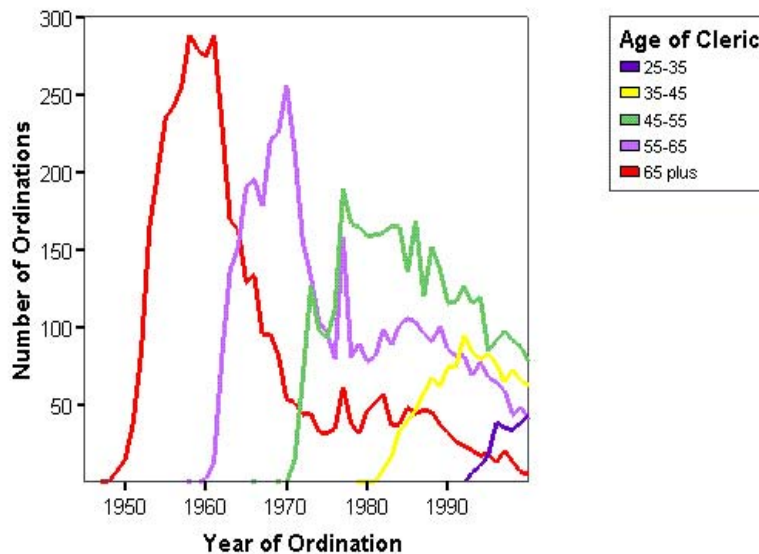
		Age at Ordination/Reception										
		Age 25-30	Age 30-35	Age 35-40	Age 40-45	Age 45-50	Age 50-55	Age 55-60	Age 60-65	Age 65+		
Current Age of Cleric	Age 25-30	30										30
	Age 30-35	133	62									195
	Age 35-40	153	184	62								399
	Age 40-45	253	234	176	70							733
	Age 45-50	530	373	262	219	88						1472
	Age 50-55	796	349	329	286	229	84					2073
	Age 55-60	896	302	253	277	229	184	44				2185
	Age 60-65	1304	239	191	169	169	168	94	23			2357
	Age 65+	2270	793	420	241	203	212	169	96	40		4444
Total		6095	2536	1693	1262	918	648	305	119	40	13616	

**Chart 10**

continuing supply of older ordinands. But supposing what we are seeing is a change in the behavior of generational cohorts, rather than a generalized change in behavior? Such a change could further depress ordination numbers. Chart 10 shows the current age of cleric by year of ordination for those up to age seventy.

Chart 11 shows the number of ordinations by year for each cohort. As can be seen from the table and the

accompanying graphs, almost half of those currently aged over fifty-five, the so-called “Silent Generation”, were ordained by age thirty. With the Baby Boomers, who are now in their forties and fifties, ordination numbers of those under thirty certainly declined; about one-third of all those ordained did so before thirty years of age, while many more were subsequently ordained in their thirties, forties and fifties. For those in the Generation X cohort, those



**Chart 11**

between twenty-five and forty years of age, the decline in younger ordinations has continued, but it is not clear what will happen in the future.

The generational pattern of the “Silent Generation” is mainly to have been first career clergy, while that of the Baby Boomers has been to be both first career and second career clergy. With Generation X it might be that the pattern is that they are only second career clergy, or it might be this generation will pass over ordination completely. The question becomes: When

the Baby Boomers retire who will be behind them? Moreover, while the addition of more Baby Boomers to the priesthood will help replace the now retiring “Silent Generation”, it will only delay an even more significant shortfall when the Baby Boomers retire *en masse* if in the coming years the Generation X’ers and the Millennials do not enter the priesthood.

### Projecting Future Ordination Numbers

The affect that this might have on future clergy numbers can be seen in Chart

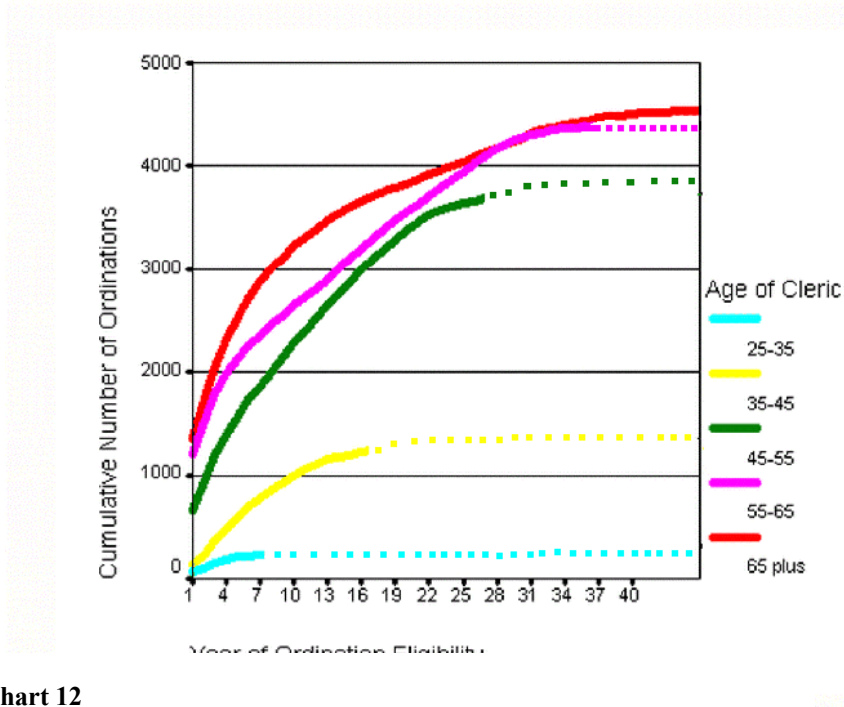


Chart 12

Age at Ordination/Reception	Year of Ordination													
	1945-1950	1950-1955	1955-1960	1960-1965	1965-1970	1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1985	1985-1990	1990-1995	1995-2000	Total	2000-2005	2005-2010
25-30	491	1061	1070	1038	967	811	626	389	192	149	127	6921	?	?
30-35	237	311	390	365	276	268	326	370	342	216	162	3263	?	?
35-40	87	133	200	249	209	155	213	307	340	247	171	2311	?	?
40-45	38	61	102	144	151	95	132	223	317	296	204	1763	?	?
45-50	4	26	56	88	80	77	87	165	221	251	225	1280	?	?
50-55	3	4	27	24	50	59	70	106	151	198	212	904	?	?
55-60	1	5	11	19	21	31	38	59	103	88	113	489	?	?
60-65	1	4	6	5	11	24	16	38	35	53	56	249	?	?
65 plus	16	22	16	19	12	20	8	25	31	27	52	248	?	?

Chart 13

12. As one projects the uncompleted lines for the twenty-five to thirty-five year old cohorts the question has to be asked as to whether these cohorts could ever replace those in the fifty-five to sixty-five year old group who will probably retire within the next ten years. Projecting ordination trends is very difficult. The decision to enter, or not to enter, the ordination process is made by thousands of autonomous individuals and

the process is governed not by one central authority, but by 100 separate dioceses. Thus, instead of giving a single projection, we have provided a set of scenarios and the ordination figures that emerge over the next three years will act as leading indicators as to which scenario is most likely to unfold.

Chart 13, which lays out ordination trends by age group for each five year period since 1945, is the starting point for our

Worst Case			Midcase			Best Case		
	2000-2005	2005-2010		2000-2005	2005-2010		2000-2005	2005-2010
	105	83		138	138		140	154
	108	54		189	189		178	196
	95	19		209	209		188	207
	112	20		250	250		224	247
	199	173		238	238		248	272
	226	240		205	205		233	257
	138	163		101	101		124	137
	59	62		55	55		62	68
	77	102		40	40		57	63
Total	1119	916	Total	1424	1424	Total	1454	1600

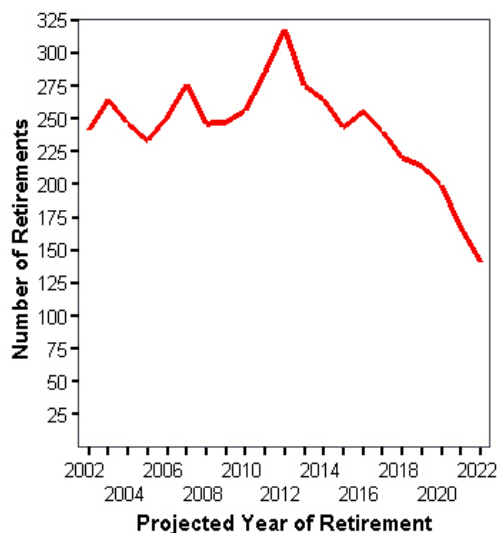
Chart 14

attempt to predict future ordination patterns and fill in the question marks that occupy the cells for the years 2000 to 2010. Chart 14 gives three possible scenarios as to what may happen with ordinations to the priesthood over the next ten years. In the pessimistic scenario present trends continue so that while there is some increase in numbers of ordinands at the top of the age range, this does not offset the continuing dropping ordinations in the younger age groups. The second, mid-range scenario, assumes that the ordination numbers will stabilize at their current levels. The third, optimistic scenario, assumes that there is a successful drive to recruit more people to the priesthood and that ordinations will increase by 30% over the next ten years for those under thirty-five, by 20% for those who are thirty-five to forty-five, and 10% for all other age categories. Having attempted to ascertain the forces that are

determining the supply of clergy, we shall now look at the chief factor that will determine the demand for clergy over the next ten years, namely the projected number of retirements from parishes.

### **How Many Vacancies? Projecting the Number of Retirements.**

Chart 15 gives a projection of probable retirements from parishes over the next twenty years. As can be seen from the table, retirements climb steadily and reach a level of about 300 per year in ten years' time. The drop-off in retirements after that point is because the number of clergy reaching retirement age starts to decline, but



**Chart 15**

by that point, the Church will have to replace approximately 2,500 parish priests.

This is certainly a large number representing approximately 40% of the regularly employed parish priests, but the question arises as to the nature of the positions that will be opened up by these retirements. In the 2000 ELCA report, *Ministry Needs and Resources in the 21st Century*, Lutheran researchers pointed out that while there was a high demand for clergy and thus seemingly a shortage, in fact much of this demand came from small congregations who paid low salaries and were unable to attract a pastor. If bodies within the Episcopal Church wish to have a recruitment drive in order to increase the supply of clergy, we should, like the Lutherans, be clear about the positions to which we are recruiting these candidates.

Charts 16,17 and 18 show a set of basic characteristics of parishes from which retirements are projected over the next ten years and places in comparison with all other parishes. The parishes from which retirements are expected are generally slightly smaller, pay fractionally less, and have somewhat smaller budgets than the population of parishes as a whole. Looking at the statistics it seems that approximately 20% of those parishes from which we can expect retirements pay below \$40,000 in total compensation, have fewer than 100 communicants, and have a total annual revenue of less than \$100,000. Even with a good supply of clergy, the Lutheran experience points to the possibility that these churches might struggle to attract and retain clergy.

**Parishes From Which Clergy are Expected to Retire**

	Total Revenue	Communicants	Clergy Compensation
<b>Median</b>	\$ 181,296	207	\$ 51,502
<b>Percentiles 25</b>	\$ 101,782	109	\$ 40,526
<b>50</b>	\$ 181,296	207	\$ 51,502
<b>75</b>	\$ 343,404	403	\$ 63,983

**Parishes That Pay Assessments to the Church Pension Fund**

	Total Revenue	Communicants	Clergy Compensation
<b>Median</b>	\$ 198,336	220	\$ 52,070
<b>Percentiles 25</b>	\$ 111,956	122	\$ 42,473
<b>50</b>	\$ 198,336	220	\$ 52,070
<b>75</b>	\$ 384,990	411	\$ 63,599

Chart 16

**Churches From Which Retirements Are Expected**

Average Attendance	Percent		Average Attendance	Percent
Family 0-50	19.2		Family 0-50	15.3
Pastoral 50-150	48.6		Pastoral 50-150	50
Program 150-350	26.2		Program 150-350	28.3
Corporate 350 Plus	61		Corporate 350 Plus	64
Total	100		Total	100

**All Churches**

Chart 17 Category I

**Churches From Which Retirements Are Expected**

Average Attendance	Percent		Average Attendance	Percent
Family 0-75	34.1		Family 0-75	29.5
Pastoral 75-140	30.4		Pastoral 75-140	32.1
Transitional 140-225	19.3		Transitional 140-225	21
Program 225-400	11.3		Program 225-400	12.6
Resource 400 Plus	4.9		Resource 400 Plus	4.8
Total	100		Total	100

**All Churches**

Chart 18 Category II



## Retirements Versus Priestly Ordinations: Possible Shortfalls in the Clergy Numbers

A comparison of the data on projected retirements with the three scenarios for projected ordinations provides a set of possible answers to the “clergy shortage” question. A straight comparison of projected retirements against the three scenarios can be seen in Chart 19. As can be seen, only in the worst case scenario is there a shortage.

Nevertheless, this assumes that 100% of those entering the priesthood will serve in parishes. In fact only just under 70% of those ordained to the priesthood in the 1990s have ended up serving in parishes. In Chart 19 one can see that in every

scenario there is a deficit of ordinations compared to retirements. Chart 20 decreases the number of vacant parishes by 20% in order to gain a figure for the number of parishes that can comfortably pay a full-time salary.

Under these conditions there is a perfect match under the mid-range scenario, and surplus of positions for ordinands. This looks at the situation from the position of the ordinand and artificially creates a “match” between candidates and positions, while obviously, from the point of view of the parishes, there would still be a marked shortage. In conclusion I would argue that this points to a magnification of the current

	Projected Ordinations	Projected Retirements	Difference
Best Case	3100	2567	533
Mid Range	2800	2567	233
Worst Case	2000	2567	-567

	Projected into Parishes	Projected Retirements	Difference
Best Case	2170	2567	-397
Mid Range	1960	2567	-607
Worst Case	1400	2567	-1167

Chart 19

	Projected into Parishes	Projected Demand	Difference
Best Case	2170	2054	116
Mid Range	1960	2054	-94
Worst Case	1400	2054	-654

**Chart 20**

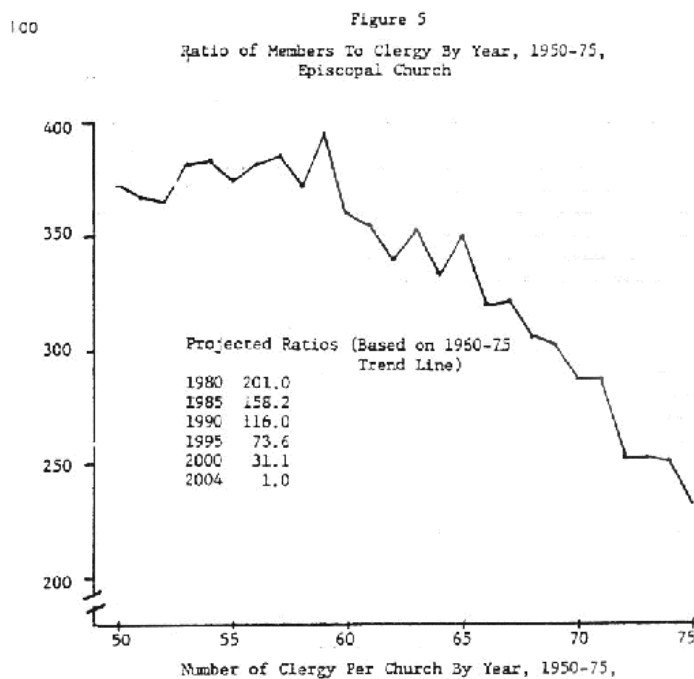
problem in which smaller and less desirable parishes will struggle to find clergy, although not the drastic Roman Catholic problem of many empty alters.

### **Unknowable Factors in the Projection of a Clergy Shortage**

As mentioned above, predicting ordination patterns is extremely hazardous. In 1978 Jackson Carroll and Robert Wilson in the book "The Clergy Job Market," produced Chart 21, which predicted a 1:1 ratio of clergy to members in the Episcopal

Church by 2004.

Obviously, these predictions turned out to be incorrect. What the Carroll and Wilson analysis mainly shows is that it is difficult to predict is the trajectory of church membership. In fact, while membership has remained stable, attendance has increased. While Carroll and Wilson's predictions of a clergy glut were based on a continuing contraction of church membership, ours are based on stagnation, and use the same basic assumption that present trends will continue



**Chart 21**

and are thus equally subject to error due to change. What this analysis does not include is a net increase in the number of parishes and a growth in existing parishes that would create more positions for associates. Such an expansion could lead to the clergy shortage problem becoming more acute.

As well as some developments leading to a more acute shortage, others developments may mitigate the issue. While the church may grow, if the growth is in larger congregations that make use of lay professionals for such specialized ministries as Christian Education and communications, then the impact on demand for new clergy will be much less than were the growth to occur among the “pastoral” size churches. Moreover, as vacancies open up due to retirements many will be in the metropolitan areas with a significant number of non-parochial clergy who, with the position closer to home, might re-enter the parish

priesthood. Were this “reserve army” of priests to step back into the parish priesthood in the major metropolitan areas the “clergy shortage” would remain, as it is now, a problem of matching persons to places.

Finally, we have to stress that the Episcopal Church is not a centralized structure that can manipulate the major variables that affect demand and supply. On the supply side, there are hundreds of individual decisions made each year by persons who decide for and against pursuing religious vocations, there are 100 dioceses each with their own version of the ordination process and no central coordination of how many and of what type of candidate should advance through the process. The seminaries are also relatively autonomous actors within this process. On the “demand” side thousands of parishes, and within them hundreds of thousands of

ordinary parishioners have to make the decision as to whether the increased salaries that may be necessary to retain clergy in a tight clergy labor market are worth paying. There is evidence of both the encroachment of market norms into the religious world, but also of a laity that feels less dependent upon the clergy and thus may decide that the value full-time clergy bring to the congregation is simply not worth the cost of a higher salary. Only time and further study will show how each of these contingencies will evolve and interact with each other.

### **Implications, Solutions and Recommendations**

While our conclusions are necessarily tentative there are a number of important implications to these findings:

1) At present we have a relative shortage of clergy caused by a mismatch of persons and the parishes that need them. But it is possible, given current trends in recruitment

and retirement, that this relative shortage could become an absolute shortage. The behavior of a set of “leading indicators” over the next three years, chiefly the number of those being ordained as priests, the number entering the ordination process and the age breakdown of each, will give a stronger signal as to whether we will continue to have a relative -- or develop an absolute-- shortage of priests.

2) The main cause of an absolute shortage will be a change in behavior from one generation to the next, one in which Generation X’ers decide to forgo ordination, then the retirement of the Baby Boomers will create a significant and widespread priest shortage making it imperative that the Church step up its efforts to recruit more young persons to the ministry.

a. If we move towards an absolute shortage of priests a significant number of parishes that currently have a full-time clergy person will have to reevaluate whether they want to

continue with this pattern.

- b. Regardless of whether there is an absolute shortage, the Church still needs to ask why young people find the priesthood so unattractive.
- c. Clergy wellness is a critical element in recruitment. According to the report of Alan Klass on the Clergy Shortage in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, a demoralized parish clergy who are seeking other options beyond the parish will send a powerful message to those considering the ministry. The morale of the current clergy may also have some effect on the recruitment of younger people to the priesthood because a demoralized clergy will be hardly enthusiastic recruiters of the next generation of priests.
- d. Clergy shortages tend to intensify due to their own internal dynamics. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, the attempt to spread priests over a number of parishes in an attempt

to preserve the model of a primary sacramental leader has led to a worsening of the priest shortage problem. In a research study on Roman Catholic Priests in multiple parish situations, the policy of progressively extending parish responsibilities across more parishes exacerbated problems of exhaustion, burnout, and isolation. Moreover, these policies were being pursued with an aging clergy, many of whom were struggling with the travel and time commitments entailed by multi-parish responsibilities. When a priest is unable to continue, an increased burden tends to fall on those remaining, and the downward spiral of the priest shortage takes another turn.

### **What Are the Solutions to Our Current Problem?**

There are a number of ways to approach the problem of the relative clergy shortage and the future absolute clergy shortage. Each solution has both

advantages and limitations.

- 1) Do we need more Seminarians? Attendance at seminary is certainly a pre-requisite of ordination, but not all of those who go into seminary will then go onto ordination in the priesthood. Moreover, while the Presbyterians have some extremely well endowed seminaries, the high levels of financial support for students has not borne fruit in terms of the supply of new ministers.
- 2) Should we encourage more people to seek ordination? This is a necessary, but not sufficient step. Again, only two-thirds of those in the ordination process will end up in as parish priests, and the current issue revolves around the need for parish priests. Moreover adding to the cohorts that will retire in the next fifteen years will only solve the problem temporarily. The question becomes whether the Church should or could discern a call to the priesthood based on the current needs of the Church, over and above the individual's calling.
- 3) Could the Church try and persuade

the non-parochial clergy to re-enter parish life on a full-time basis? This will work well for those who left parish ministry because of lack of opportunities, but will be less successful with those who left because of bad experiences. Moreover, because most of those who decided to step outside the parish priesthood are in the same generational cohorts as those who are about to retire, this would also tend to be a short-term measure that would help the church in the next ten to fifteen years, but not beyond.

- 4) Could the Church make much greater use of clergy ordained under Canon IX, bi-vocational or tent-maker clergy and, on a temporary basis, clergy from the ELCA? Success in this will depend on the sentiments of parishes and the "regular" clergy. If current initiatives in the field of "total ministry" bear significant fruit, then there could be much greater willingness to move away from the traditional "one priest - one parish" model.

## Recommendations

- 1) In cooperation with the Office of Ministry Development and through the Office of the Recorder, the Church Pension Fund will keep a close watch on the “leading indicators” of the future supply of clergy. They will communicate the state of these leading indicators annually to the church at large.
- 2) An opportunity be given to young persons to experience the life of ordained ministry through an exemplary internship program for college students. Professor Barbara Wheeler in her influential report “Do we have a Problem?” argues that churches need to compete with the other professions that recruit students. Building on this principle, an internship program would give students an exposure to ministry when they are taking some of their most critical decisions about their future.
- 3) The Presiding Bishop set up a blue riband commission on young people and the ministry that will act as forum for the church at large to

strategize about how the Church can bring young persons into the ministry.

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<sup>1</sup>David Kalvelage, 2002 “Clergy Wanted: Smaller Congregations Are Having Greater Difficulty Finding Clergy” *The Living Church*.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas P. Holland and William L. Sachs, 1999 *The Zacchaeus Project: Discerning Episcopal Identity at The Dawn of The New Millennium*, The Episcopal Church Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> The term *inactive* does not imply that the cleric is not active within the Church, but is a technical status that means that the cleric is not paying assessments into the Church Pension Fund, which means that they are not in regular paid work within the Church.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew J. Price, 2002 “After the Revolution: A Review of Mainline Protestant Clergy Leadership” *Theology Today* Vol. 59 No. 3

<sup>5</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2000 “Ministry Needs and Resources in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” [www.elca.org/dm/candidacy/resource.html](http://www.elca.org/dm/candidacy/resource.html).