



Where Have All The Clergy Gone? Not Only The Catholic Priesthood Is Affected

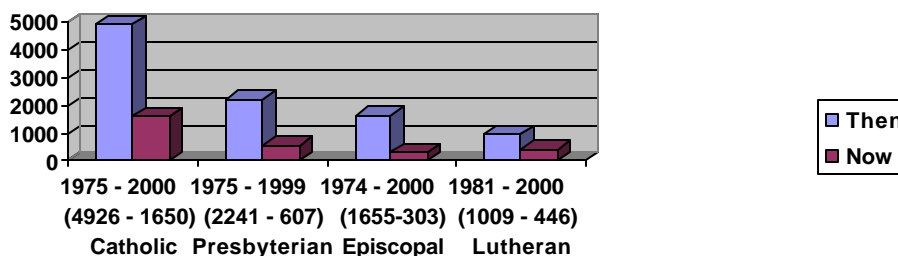
Then he said to his disciples, "The Harvest is abundant but the laborers are few, so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

As the diocesan-wide initiative *Vibrant Parish Life - Phase II* begins engaging all parishes in this process, one of our challenges is to better serve the mission of the Church through planning for the future staffing of our Churches through the sharing of priests, deacons, parish staff, and lay ecclesial ministers.

The reasons for the decline in ministerial vocations, to a great degree, are based in our culture. Our secular culture emphasizes material success, but not openness to God. The ministerial life is off the list of what many regard as 'meaningful, successful careers'. The family has changed with fewer children than in the past. In many cases there has been a loss of stable family life and religious practice where vocations were once encouraged. As we plan, it is important to know that as Catholics... **We are not alone** ...in addressing this challenge.

A May, 2002 article in *Christianity Today* magazine revealed that the National Council of Churches' 16 Protestant denominations contained **89,500 congregations**. At that time, only **71,000** clergy served those congregations, a shortage of **18,500**. More specifically, the 2.4 million member Presbyterian Church (USA) has about **4,000** of its **11,100** congregations without pastors, according to a Knight Ridder Newservice article from June, 2005.

The aging of our clergy affects all faiths; here is a sampling of clergy age **35 and under**---then and now:



The decline in the numbers of active priests in the United States is well-documented from more than **58,000 in 1965 to 42,528 in 2005**. Here in the Diocese of Cleveland a similar decline during nearly that same time period has resulted in a **27% decrease** in the number of active priests. **We estimate that by 2015 we will have fewer active priests than parishes.**

Going Deeper:

As we prepare to meet this staffing challenge, here are some questions to consider:

1. What parish responsibilities could someone other than a priest perform?
2. Is celibacy the real issue? How does one explain the shortage in the denominations which allow married and/or female clergy?
3. What steps as a Church do we need to take in order to address the demands on fewer active clergy?
4. How do we foster a parish and family culture in which vocations are encouraged?