



The Polis Center

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on Religion and Urban Culture

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The Changing Role OF CLERGY

Several years ago, Rev. Michael Ross stepped down as pastor of a Nazarene church on the west side of Indianapolis after only a brief tenure. "It wasn't a good fit," Ross says. "There was a lot of tension and so I resigned—probably before I was kicked out." After that, he took time off to recover and "try to find my identity."

During this sabbatical, something odd happened. He began to get calls from pastors who wanted to leave the ministry themselves. "I was hoping they would call to empathize with me," he says, "but more called to congratulate me. And then I began to realize that some significant things are happening in the pastorate."

Three years ago, Ross started the Indianapolis-based Pastor's Institute to help clergy who have recently left the ministry. The Institute sponsors a series of gatherings in cities across the nation, where from 8 to 12 ex-ministers meet and share their stories. "Healing takes place," said Ross, who leads the sessions. "They leave with permission to make good choices about their future."



The Institute conducts an ongoing survey of former clergy to learn their reasons for leaving the ministry. (The survey is posted online at www.pastorsinfocentral.com.) More than 100 people have responded to date. From their responses, and from what he has learned at the gatherings of former clergy, Ross concludes that his original insight that "some significant things are happening in the pastorate" has been confirmed.

"The biggest response I get is that pastors feel like they're running a small nonprofit organization—they're managers, not shepherds," Ross said. The demand that clergy possess the skills of a corporate executive "puts the pastor in a mode of running a business and trying to make the business grow."

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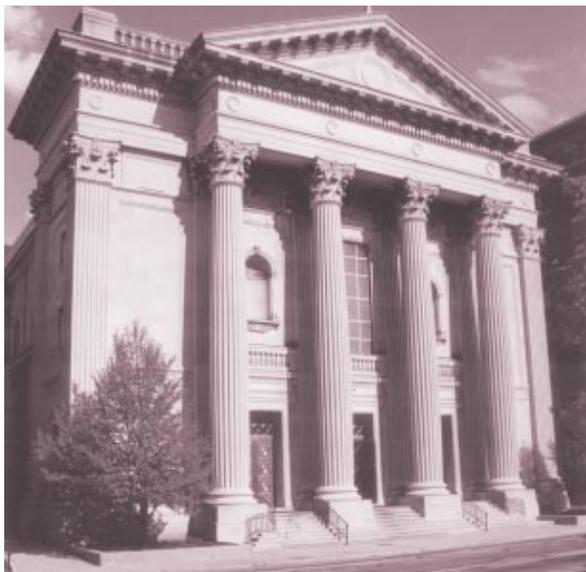
“The church has a counterpart to everything,” he said. “The world has bookstores, TV stations, entertainment, so we’ll have those things too. We’ll have a Christian Yellow Pages. It’s competition, and you get tired of it, so you just say no. Burnout isn’t the issue. It’s disillusionment. It’s the feeling that the role of clergy has changed, and you don’t buy into it anymore.”

For all of the discontent that Ross’s research has turned up, there is no looming shortage of clergy. In most denominations, there is an oversupply. Two sociologists at the University of Notre Dame, however, recently argued that the oversupply actually reflects a loss in the “occupational prestige” of the ministry.

In the 1970s, the nation’s social-service sector created millions of new jobs, and many people who once would have enrolled in seminary instead entered social-service work. The vacuum created by their absence was filled by a large number of “nontraditionals”—older students seeking to enter the ministry as a second career, and women, who now compose about 10 percent of the clerical ranks. In some seminaries, women students are now a majority. In the view of some, seminaries began admitting second and third-tier students because the first-tier students pursued other careers. These trends—the changing responsibilities of clergy and the rising number of nontraditional seminarians—have combined to create ferment and uncertainty within the ministry.

Both clergy and Americans in general say that clergy should serve as a prophetic presence in American culture. According to a recent survey conducted in Indianapolis by The Polis Center, more than three-fourths of residents believe clergy should have at least a moderate amount of influence on civic affairs. But other evidence suggests that clergy feel strong pressure to confine themselves to matters directly affecting their congregations.

In her dissertation, political scientist Sue Crawford reported that Indianapolis clergy are pulled in different directions regarding community activism: denominational leaders encourage it, while congregation members discourage it. Crawford said that the majority of congregational outreach consists of what she called “gapfilling” activity—for example, providing food and monetary assistance to the poor. Only a small minority of the clergy in her study were involved in activism that aimed to accomplish social reform or promote a legislative agenda.



Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral.

Courtesy Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Photo by Charles Schisla.



In the 19th century, Indianapolis preachers such as Henry Ward Beecher wielded great influence as pastors and as public figures.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, C5893.



Revival Meeting, Indianapolis.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, C5760.

Comparing the level of modern clergy activism with that of earlier eras is difficult, in the absence of hard data. The evidence from the decades of the social gospel movement (1890s - 1910s) and even from the civil rights movement (1950s - 1960s) is largely anecdotal. It can be misleading to generalize about the role of clergy based on examples of a few well-known activist clergy from earlier times.

Since the 1960s, the general trend within American religion has been toward conservatism. As Crawford notes, conservatives tend to invest their time and effort in programs that “target individual outcomes” rather than social reform. Clergy in Indianapolis today are less activist, probably, than clergy in previous generations. This decline is rooted in a variety of factors—among them, a theological emphasis on the individual over the social, the increasing amount of time clergy spend on administrative tasks, and a perceived demand by congregations that clergy focus on members and their needs. As well, the rise of other activists, such as lobbyists and community organizers, has reduced the need, perhaps, for clergy to be politically active.

But tending to their own congregations has been the primary focus of clergy for most of this city’s history.

“After all that I’ve read and seen from the data, I’m not convinced that the role of the clergy has shifted much,” said Bill Mirola, a sociologist at Marian College who conducted The Polis Center’s survey. “I don’t think Indianapolis ever had the kind of social gospel commitment that, say, Chicago had. This city does not have a significant community organizing tradition.”

Mirola said that in the past, “We looked to the clergy as a source of commentary on what was going on in the community—or at least we expected to hear from them as moral arbiters. Now that role is filled by politicians, community leaders, and academics. If there happen to be clergy among them, that’s fine. If not that’s fine. It depends on what the issue is.”

Ted Slutz

RESOURCES

Sue E.S. Crawford, *Clergy at Work in the Secular City* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1995).

Chang, Patricia M.Y. and Viviana Bompadre, “Crowded Pulpits: Observations and Explanations of the Clergy Oversupply in the Protestant Churches, 1950-1993,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, September 1999.

James L. Guth, et al., *The Bully Pulpit. The Politics of Protestant Clergy* (University Press of Kansas, 1997).

William A. Mirola, “Religious Attitudes in Indianapolis: A Survey,” *Research Notes* (The Polis Center), May 2000.

William A. Mirola, “Indianapolis Clergy: Private Ministries, Public Figures,” *Research Notes* (The Polis Center), November 2000.

Olson, Laura, Sue E.S. Crawford and James L. Guth, “Changing Issue Agendas of Women Clergy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, June 2000.

SUPPORTING THE CALL:

Foundations and the Clergy

The ministry is both alike and utterly unlike other professions. One may honorably and effectively pursue a career in other fields without having a vocation—a profound, felt calling—for the work. As a servant of God, a member of the clergy is presumed to have experienced a calling to that role.

Ministry is alike other professions in that it requires years of training and education—at the end of which the candidate enters into service that is unusually demanding, and often poorly rewarded. There are any number of practical reasons not to enter the ministry; though aspiring candidates may be uniquely dedicated, they require support and encouragement to get there. It is in recognition of the obstacles, and of the part played by religion in shaping society, that charitable foundations have come to play a major role in the cultivation and support of clergy.

“Religion is a critical part of American culture,” says Jan Shipps, professor emeritus of Religion at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. “A decline in the quality of the clergy is an issue that is bound to concern everyone.”

The Fund for Theological Education was founded in 1953 to address a perceived crisis in the recruitment of Protestant clergy. Nathan Pusey, president of Harvard University, and Henry Pitney Van Dusen, president of Union Theological Seminary, sought support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to underwrite a “trial year” of divinity school for promising but undecided candidates for the ministry. The program’s

purpose was and continues to be to identify, support, and develop fresh talent for Christian ministry. In 1959, the Fund established a second program called the Rockefeller Doctoral Fellowships, designed to support outstanding young scholars who might be lured to teach in schools of theology and divinity.

In recent years, the Fund for Theological Education fell on hard times, only to be revived by an infusion of funds from Lilly Endowment Inc. Based in Indianapolis, Lilly Endowment has become the foremost supporter of programs to enhance the recruitment, training, and support of clergy. (Other major contributors in the field include the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts.) Recently, Lilly Endowment announced that it would be granting \$90 million to colleges and universities around the country, “to examine how faith commitments can affect decisions young people make about their futures.”

The Endowment’s efforts in the area of religion have two main goals, says spokesperson Gretchen Wolfram: the calling, nurturing, educating, and supporting of clergy; and building vital congregations. “The two are very much intertwined,” says Wolfram.

For the past half century, schools of theology have labored under the suspicion that they no longer attract the best and brightest students. The public realm has grown increasingly secular, and clergy no longer command the respect and authority they once did, neither as public figures nor as the leaders of their flocks. The average age of clergy is climbing, as is the age at which new candidates for the ministry are entering seminary.



Faced with an aging clergy, foundations are making special efforts to interest young people in the ministry.

“I hear people speak of a demographic shift,” says Michael Smith, director of field ministry at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. “We have more who are coming after a career change.” Smith says that the average age of incoming students at CTS is 40, with some students being in their 70s.

“Lilly’s major concern is the dearth of young people going into ministry,” Wolfram says. “Look at other professions: the percentage of lawyers under the age of 35 hasn’t changed. The percentage of clergy under 35 has dropped precipitously.”

No one doubts that talented and committed people of an older age are entering the clergy, Wolfram says. But there are some in this category who may view the profession as “undemanding.” She cites William H. Willimon, dean of the Duke University Chapel, who has spoken of seminary students who “appear to be attracted to the church as some kind of secure living. You know, someone who says, ‘After my third divorce, I thought about, well, why not seminary?’”

Shipps says that an emphasis on formal training has had the perhaps unintended conse-

quence of “professionalizing” the clergy. For this reason, some are calling for a rededication to “the culture of the call.” The importance of attracting the young to the ministry comes down to a matter of passion. According to the noted preacher and scholar Dr. Thomas G. Long, the need is to attract those who will view ministry as “a thrilling whitewater ride down the river of human experience.”

In a recent initiative, Lilly Endowment awarded \$14 million to theological schools to develop programs for high school youth. Calvin College, a Christian institution in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recruits high school juniors judged to be outstanding in academic and leadership abilities. The program invites the students to spend two weeks on the Calvin campus, and two weeks in Israel, with the aim of persuading them to consider the ministry as a career. Duke’s Willimon says this program gives the church a chance to say to talented young people, “God is telling us to tell you that we need you to become leaders.”

Robert Cole

Schools Offering

CLERGY TRAINING in Indianapolis

Indianapolis is home to a highly regarded seminary, and to a number of other colleges and universities offering religious education and training for clergy.

Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) offers eight graduate-level degree programs leading to the Master of Divinity degree, the Doctor of Ministry degree, and Master of Arts degrees in Christian education, church music, pastoral counseling, marriage & family therapy, theological studies, and sacred theology.

CTS originated as the College of Religion at Butler University in 1925, associated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In 1958, Christian Theological Seminary assumed its present name when it was reconstituted as an independent entity and relocated to its own campus in the Butler-Tarkington area. The school maintains its affiliation with the Disciples of Christ, but is ecumenical in orientation, with over 30 denominations represented among its students.

As is true of other seminaries around the country, CTS is experiencing a demographic shift in the students it attracts: they are older, and slightly more than half are women. The average age is 40. Many are second-career people coming from fields such as law, education, and the nonprofit sector, says Michael Smith, the school's director of field education. The majority of students intend to enter the ministry or related fields such as church music or mission work.

Indiana Bible College, located in the former University Heights Hospital on the south side of Indianapolis, is affiliated with Calvary Tabernacle Church, a United Pentecostal denomination. While it is not a seminary, Indiana Bible College offers a bachelor's degree in theology. Enrollment is 255 and climbing steadily, according to David Brown, dean of students. The students are generally young, just out of high school or in their early 20s. About half are female.

Crossroads Bible College, on the east side of Indianapolis, offers bachelor's degrees in pastoral studies, elementary education, international mission, urban ministries, Biblical counseling and youth ministries. Its background is Baptist, although it has no denominational affiliation. While the college was established to serve older, married, working students, the students are getting younger, according to President Charles Ware. About 40 percent are female. Enrollment is 223. The school started out predominately African-American, but is now 46 percent white. "Our desire is to have a multi-ethnic school," Ware says.

Heritage Baptist University in Greenwood is an Independent Baptist Bible college, established in 1955. In addition to undergraduate degrees in Biblical studies, pastoral studies, mission, education and sacred music, it offers the Master of Divinity



Chapel, Christian Theological Seminary.

degree. Enrollment this year is 120. Student demographics haven't changed much over the past several years, according to Jeremy Wilhelm, the school's registrar. About 60 percent are the students are full time, and they're seeing a few more middle-aged students.

Martin University offers a bachelor's degree in religious studies, and graduate programs in urban ministry, pastoral counseling, religious education, parish ministry, and advanced Biblical studies. About 25 percent of students in the graduate programs are active clergy seeking an advanced degree. Sixty percent are female; 70 percent are African-American. Total school enrollment is 650. Enrollment is up, according to Wayne Smith, chair of the graduate program for urban ministry, and the student population is getting younger. Because the school has a mission to reach out to the poor, he says,

"many students have unresolved issues," such as the death of loved ones or witnessing violence. "We are focusing more intentionally on healing," says Smith. "Because we have smaller classes—15 to 25 per class—we can take a more personalized approach."

Kathy Whyde Jesse

FRESH CURRENTS

TAUGHT BY CONGREGATIONS: How Clergy are Being Trained on the Job

We expect our clergy to be educated, both in the general sense and in ways specific to their calling. Their charge is to teach as well as counsel and lead by moral example. This expectation is common to all great religions. *Rabbi* means teacher—Jesus was called *rabbi*—and *imam* connotes a scholar. The great universities of Europe were founded by or regarded as being in service to the Catholic Church. In America, the Puritan preachers who led the first English settlements came with degrees from Oxford or Cambridge and they founded our first universities; the original mission of Harvard and Yale, among others, was for the education of clergy.

Among mainline denominations, a pattern developed for the education of clergy similar to that of other professions, such as medicine or law: an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts; followed by graduate training in a seminary or school of theology; then ordination and posting to a congregation as pastor. This is still the model, though increasingly clergy are receiving training within the congregations they serve.



Dan Moseley's preaching class at Christian Theological Seminary.

Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal denominations—the most rapidly growing segment among Christian churches—have traditionally allowed ordination by individual congregations, without requiring formal seminary training for clergy. As these denominations mature, however, they are moving toward more formal structures and requirements, while continuing to train their clergy within congregations.

Some mainline churches, meanwhile, are moving to identify, nurture, and support potential candidates for the ministry within their congregations. Whether mainline or not, the more ambitious programs for in-house clergy training tend to be located in large congregations having significant resources.

Debra Peoples-White is associate pastor of Christian education and programs at Light of the World Christian Church. A predominantly African-American congregation of the mainline Disciples of Christ denomination, Light of the World is one of the largest churches in Indianapolis. The church's Ecumenical Covenant Christian Fellowship program, she says, attracts lay people “who think they may have a calling.”

Participants in the program range in age from high schoolers to at least one octogenarian. The fellowship meets twice a month for training in prison ministry, youth ministry, and other outreach and service programs. There is a separate “seminary track” for those who intend to go into regular ministry. The training is practical and hands-on.

“We don't question people's calling,” says White. “Through exposure to the real world of ministry—visiting the sick or prisoners, or academic study—the fellowship tends to weed out those who discover that it wasn't what they thought.”

There are currently about 50 people in the fellowship; most are from the congregation. The success of the program may be judged by the number of people from Light of the World now in seminary or serving in the ministry. In addition to those attending other seminaries, there are currently 10 from the congregation studying at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. White says she doesn't know the exact figure, but there are “more than 20” currently active clergy who came from the congregation of Light of the World.

The rapid growth of independent, evangelical churches has had a profound effect on the training of clergy. Historically, evangelicals have not followed the traditional path of college and divinity school to ordination. The Pentecostal movement that originated early in the 20th century placed a premium on direct apprehension of the Holy Spirit, rather than formal learning.

As the evangelical movement has matured, however, it too has moved in the direction of providing more training and education for its clergy, by developing its own institutions and innovative programs.

Brian Peters is pastor of education at Community Church of Greenwood, a large independent congregation in a suburb of Indianapolis. As with



Catholic and mainline denominations have emphasized formal academic training for clergy.

many evangelical congregations, Community Church “grows its own,” with a variety of training and educational programs.

Community Church serves as one of six satellite campuses for Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a fully-accredited institution in Illinois. “The TEDS program is aimed at those who are currently full-time pastors,” says Peters. Most of the students come from outside the congregation, mainly from independent churches in the area.

“These pastors have been ordained by their congregations or denominations,” Peters says, “though they have not received a degree from a school of divinity. This program allows them to receive a masters degree while continuing to work as pastors.”

Students can take all required courses for the Master of Divinity degree at Community Church, but for one three hour course which much be taken at the Chicago campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

“There is a growing recognition that lay people bring life experience to ministry that can’t be learned in school,” says Peters. “People in the congregation can relate better to someone who has worked in business and dealt with life issues, just as they have—rather than someone who has spent his whole life inside the church.”

Peters says that while he is pastor of education, he doesn’t have a divinity degree. “I was trained as a lawyer, and practiced law for ten years.” He will, he says, be taking courses in theology and ministry through the TEDS program.

Community Church doesn’t just train new clergy—in some cases, it provides them with a congregation.

“We have a program where we grow new churches within this congregation,” says Peters. “We have 12 daughter churches and several granddaughter churches. It’s not formalized, but it’s a very intentional effort.”

He says that the church generally has at all times a church “planter” on staff. “They work here for a year or two before starting their own church.” Typically the planter comes from outside the congregation.

“Pastor Charles Lake tries to keep our membership at around 2,000,” Peters says. “We don’t want to be any bigger than that. The planter is identified as such to our people, and at the right time we will say, ‘Here is the location of the new church, and you know who the pastor will be—pray about it.’ Every two or three years, 50 to 100 of our members will leave with the planter to found a new congregation.”

Jim Mathias is pastor of Midtown Vineyard Community Church, an independent congregation that he planted after serving a three year apprenticeship at Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Indianapolis. Mathias previously worked in business. He has taken courses through Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, but doesn’t hold a divinity degree.

The general route to ordination in Vineyard churches, he says, is to be licensed as a lay minister, then to serve three years in a congregation in an assistant capacity. At the end of that period, the candidate is examined by ordained ministers, after which he may be ordained by the congregation.

“Vineyard is a church planting movement,” he notes. “Eventually, I will be looking to train someone.”



Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal congregations have traditionally “grown their own” clergy.

Dan Moseley, professor of practical parish ministry at Christian Theological Seminary, had a full career as a working pastor—which makes him somewhat of an anomaly in the academic world of the seminary.

“I occupy a chair created to bring actual preachers into the seminary,” he says. “Generally, Ph.D.s in specific academic fields teach in seminaries. I have a Doctorate of Ministry rather than a Ph.D.”

He says that many clergy today are “like deer caught in the headlights. They have a stunned look.” Ministry, he says, is “the only profession where you get your degree and are then supposed to be able to do it without apprenticeship. It’s almost like a hazing process.”

Moseley says that judicatories are beginning to recognize that seminaries alone can’t create effective pastors. “The churches abdicated to the seminaries, at a time when the seminaries were an arm of the church,” he says. “Now seminaries are part of the

academy. The churches are going to have to reclaim their role, and find new ways of training their pastors, with the seminaries supplanting that training.

“I was a pastor for 30 years,” he concludes. “I was taught by congregations.”

Robert Cole

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PRODUCTS

From the Project on Religion and Urban Culture

Books

The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis
Falling Toward Grace: Images of Religion and Culture from the Heartland
Voices of Faith: Making a Difference in Urban Neighborhoods

Forthcoming Books

Atlas of Indianapolis Religion
Urban Tapestry
Sacred Circles and Public Squares
See You in Church?: Religion and Culture in Urban America
Rising Expectations: Urban Congregations, Welfare Reform, and Civic Life
A Public Charity: Religion and Social Welfare in Indianapolis
Souls of the City: Metropolitan Growth and Religious Change in America

Exhibits

Falling Toward Grace (an expanded selection of photographs from the book, exhibited at the Indianapolis Museum of Art; also at the Indianapolis Art Center.)

Forthcoming Exhibits

Covenant: Living in the Presence of God, at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Fall 2002.

Curriculum

Religion and American Community: Teaching the Role of Religion in American History (published on The Polis Center Web site)

Occasional Publications

Ten Good Questions About Faith-based Partnerships and Welfare Reform
Faith & Community: A Historic Walking Tour

Neighborhood Timelines (4 issues)

Prologue: The Role of Religion in Shaping 20th Century Indianapolis (6 issues, published on The Polis Center Web site)

Newsletters

Religion & Community (7 issues)
Responsive Communities (19 issues)
Research Notes (12 issues)
Clergy Notes (26 issues)

Database

The Project has produced a rich database, with information on over 400 of the 1,200 congregations in Marion County; the database is now being prepared for use by outside researchers.

Videos

Religion as a Window on Culture (six-part series)
Faith and Community in Broadripple

Forthcoming Video

Religion and Public Life will be an 11-part series examining three main themes: The Indianapolis Religious Landscape; Private Faith and Public Lives; and Religion's Place in the City. The videos will constitute a basic curriculum on the role of religion in public life.

Spirit and Place Festival

In partnership with other local institutions, The Polis Center initiated and sponsors the Spirit and Place Festival each November. The festival features nationally known authors as well as local artists, writers, dancers, and performers who creatively explore the links between spirituality, creativity, and community in Indianapolis.

RELIGION & COMMUNITY

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