

Here are the shocking
facts about the economic plight
of our spiritual leaders

Are We Starving Our Clergymen?

By AL OSTROW

SUPPOSE that you control a major organization with branches in every American community.

You own real estate valued at \$9 billion. You have more than 100 million regular customers who depend on your organization for inspiration and guidance. You set high standards for your 350,000 branch managers, insisting that each be a good organizer, administrator, program planner, financier, and public relations expert, as well as a keen Bible student, competent orator, and capable counselor on all human problems—on call 24 hours a day.

Would you be shocked if a nationwide survey disclosed that your branch managers are grossly underpaid, many living on or below the borderline of poverty?

Would it outrage you to learn that the wives of many of your key men must patch threadbare garments for their children and deny themselves most of the luxuries and many of the common conveniences you'd expect would accompany their husbands' professional status?

What would you do about it?

These questions are directed at you, the American people, because you *do* control such an organization. We're talking about the nation's 350,000 clergymen, serving all creeds and denominations.

Most of these dedicated servants of God are too embarrassed to complain that they and their families are among the hardest-hit victims of inflation. Congregations recognize that building costs have virtually doubled in the postwar period, and yet are willing to undertake about \$800 million a year in new church construction. But church trustees generally manage to "hold the line" on ministers' salaries. Their wages have gone up a little—but most of the gains have been wiped out by inflation.

A survey by one Protestant denomination showed that its average clergyman, despite pay increases, had actually *lost* \$348 a year in purchasing power over a five-year period.

J. B. Brewer of Rocky Mount, N. C., discovered that Presbyterian ministers in his area received smaller salaries than the local dog catchers.

The official organ of the United Lutheran Church in America reported that a successful manufacturer, noted for paying high wages to his skilled workmen, fought against paying a pastor more than \$3,600 a year. "What we save in salary," he contended, "we can put into the painting fund for the church."

A pension-board survey of 3,591 Lutheran ministers showed that 32 received less than \$2,000 a year. The pay of 178 was between \$2,000 and \$2,999. There were 1,509 in the next thousand-dollar



bracket. Only 130 got cash salaries of \$7,000 a year or more.

Latest available statistics indicate that the average American clergyman earns less than \$5,000 a year—including wedding fees, transportation allowances, and the cash value of rent-free housing.

Is this fair compensation for professional men, many of whom studied seven years beyond high school for their calling? It's a fraction of the average income of lawyers, doctors, architects, dentists, and business executives. In some communities, it's about equal to the pay of garbage collectors.

OF COURSE, no one enters the ministry in quest of wealth. But it costs money to feed and clothe a family and send children through college, even if you're engaged in "the Lord's work."

"The pay of clergymen in this country is pitiable," says the Rev. Dr. Samuel W. Blizzard, professor of Christianity at the Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Blizzard recently took a leave from Princeton to study ministerial pay scales for the National Council of the Churches of Christ, representing 30 Protestant denominations.

"I've found some spectacular salaries paid to a few ministers," Dr. Blizzard said, "but the average

clergyman is not compensated in keeping with his education and the demands of his profession.

"Ministers are somewhat sensitive on this matter. Their tradition is to be defensive on the question of their own remuneration. Most of them can obtain a substantial pay increase only by changing churches. There are some exceptions, but the chances of a clergyman having his compensation increased over a long period of service to one church is small."

Dr. Blizzard believes this problem definitely curtails the effectiveness of the nation's clergymen. A man concerned about money for his son's new shoes may have difficulty concentrating on the spiritual needs of his congregation.

The professor proposes setting up a nationwide citizens' committee, with local units in every area. These units would educate the public to the need for higher pay to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the ministry. In this troubled world, where religious faith is one of the few sanctuaries from turmoil, a decent wage for ministers seems a small price to pay for the spiritual security received.

But don't expect clergymen to go on strike or take any other drastic action to achieve this goal. Don't even expect them to be outspoken about it.

"The moment a minister begins to talk about his own inadequate salary, he loses his effectiveness," explains the Rev. J. Kenneth Miller, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of Garden City, N. Y.

Clergymen's wives usually shun the topic, too, except among intimate friends. "You know," one minister's wife confided, "this probably sounds awful, but our family was better off during the war, when David took a part-time job in a defense plant. The congregation considered it patriotic then, but wouldn't stand for it now."

Some people seem to believe that anyone who answers the call of the church should expect to be underpaid, and seek satisfaction in things less tangible than human comforts. The answer comes from Arthur S. Flemming, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and former president of Ohio Wesleyan University.

"Society," Flemming contends, "has no right to deliberately penalize a minister and his family because he is willing to devote his life to service through the church."

Will the salaries of clergymen always remain low, or will Americans awaken to their neglect?

To some extent, the continued power of the pulpit to build character and morality and to provide spiritual sanctuary from the storms of life depends on our answer to that question.

COVER

The charmer with the mischievous twinkle in her eyes is film star Debbie Reynolds, who avows, "My Life Has Just Begun," in the first of two revealing articles by her (see page 6).

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