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Our search for scientists and engineers has obscured the alarming scarcity of young men to provide the spiritual leadership of tomorrow.

by Jack Ryan

AN ATTRACTIVE CHURCH stands in the center of a "model" community near a major Midwestern city. The community is thriving; its supermarkets, shopping centers, and recreational fields are bustling. The church, though, is closed.

There is no lack of religious feeling in the community. In fact, civic leaders say the opposite is true. But there is a lack of clergy!

The Protestant congregation is only one of an estimated 15,000 unable to fill ministerial vacancies. At least another 10,000 young men are needed as missionaries and chaplains in institutions, colleges, and the armed services. Catholic and Jewish faiths, though affected differently by the shortage of clergy, also find demand far ahead of the supply of priests and rabbis.

Manpower shortages are not new to the United States, but the ministerial scarcity has one distinct aspect—it receives little publicity and less relief.

Take the case of one of our most respected theological seminaries. It is associated with a university which has grown immensely in postwar years because government and industry have pumped money into its schools to develop more scientists, engineers, and management executives.

Yet, the seminary's growth has been small; it is not graduating enough young men to fill vacancies in established congregations which have lost pastors through retirement or death. Therefore, the insistent demands of America's new communities must remain "on file."

The theological school is not an isolated case. Vernon L. Strempeke, a Protestant leader who has made an extensive study of the shortage, notes that the total number of graduates from seminaries in 1956 was 6,500—only about 300 more than in 1950. At least 7,000 graduates are needed solely as replacements.

Strempeke says all denominations "are showing disturbing signs of in-

fertility in recruiting men and women who will minister in the name of Christ and His church." The situation will be worse in coming years, observers say; as America demands more and more ministers—600,000 in the next two decades, according to Dr. Elmer G. Million, director of the department of the ministry of the National Council of Churches.

MOST DENOMINATIONS feel the answer to the shortage is not in high-pressure recruiting campaigns. True, foundations are providing money for bigger and better theological schools, and individuals are increasing contributions for religious training. But religious vocations themselves cannot be bought.

Vocations must be instilled in young people by their families and communities at an early age. Have we done this? Not if statistics tell the story.

Young people hear lip service paid to the importance of the local minister, but when they look around they see a sharp difference between words and actions. In most communities, the lowest paid professional is the pastor. Even with free housing and other benefits, census and spot surveys show he ranks below the teacher, baker, bus driver.

There are other factors, too. For example, in a Midwestern town last year, parishioners asked a pastor's wife and children not to use the public swimming pool—it was "improper" for them to appear in bathing suits, although perfectly proper for the church members themselves.

A youth considering the ministry expects financial sacrifice and rigid standards, but when faced with extremes of

both, he can hardly help wondering whether congregations appreciate their pastors as much as they say.

Church leaders fear that unless more congregations give their pastors the same standing as other professionals in the community, young people will tend to undervalue the minister's importance. If so, stepped-up ministerial recruitment drives and career meetings will be ineffectual.

The Catholic and Jewish faiths seem less troubled by the recruitment problem, but they too have been unable to graduate enough young men from seminaries to meet the demands of America's growing and shifting population in recent years.

For example, the Rabbinical Assembly of America, a national association of Conservative rabbis, reports as many as 200 congregations would elect members of the Assembly as their spiritual leaders if the men were available.

"The chief reason for this shortage," says Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive vice-president, "is the spectacular increase in the number of congregations, especially in the suburbs. Apparently it takes much longer to train rabbis (four to eight years after college) than to establish a new congregation."

Suburban growth also has surpassed the Catholic Church's capacity to educate new priests, leaving many parishes undermanned. An added complication for the Catholics is the increasing number of Spanish-speaking immigrants to metropolitan areas. These people rely on their church for social and educational help as well as spiritual guidance, and they need priests who speak their language.

While there are no official figures on

America's Shortage—the Ministry

Forgotten



the shortage of priests, the Very Rev. Clement Borchers, superior of the Glenmary Home Missioners, estimates the need at 30,000. About 5,000 priests are needed for current vacancies in es-

tablished parishes, chaplaincies, and chancery offices. Another 25,000 are needed to establish new parishes.

Whether a denomination's problem is in recruiting clergymen or educating

them, the solution remains the same—an active laity. Any church, seminary officers agree, depends on the family unit for inspiring vocations and also for supporting the theological schools

in which most faiths train their leaders. Until the laity accepts these basic responsibilities, the nation's most far-reaching manpower shortage may continue to be its most neglected one.



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