

Pursuing the call: Church background and preparation

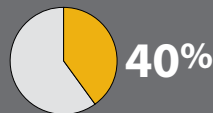
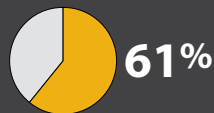
Comparing candidates for ministry and active ministers

Career



Candidates for ministry

Active ministers



Had a career before pursuing the ministry

17 years

9 years

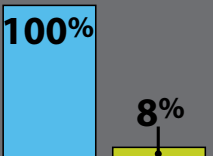
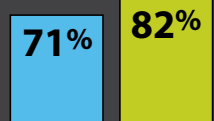
Median number of years in that career

Church background



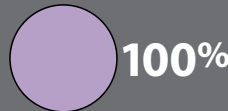
Grew up attending a PC(USA) congregation

Ministry preparation

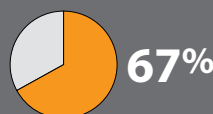


Have M.Div. degree Received degree in last 5 yrs

Have M.Div. degree Received degree in last 5 yrs



Passed all five ordination exams



Attended a PC(USA) seminary



What the research shows

As membership has dropped in recent decades and fewer congregations have been able to afford a full-time pastor, a mismatch has occurred between the supply of new ministers and demand for them. In recent years, the number of candidates has been as high as 1,400—it now stands at 1,177—yet only 350 have been ordained annually, on average.

Still, many Presbyterians continue to perceive a call to ministry. At best, even among candidates certified as ready to receive a call, many will have to wait several years for a call, and for some that day will never come. It doesn't help that there are 2,700 ministers without valid calls, some of whom are also searching among the same dwindling number of opportunities.

Yet it seems possible that the number of positions open to candidates may grow in the next few years, as more and more baby boomers reach retirement age. While that's limited consolation to those currently unable to find a call, it may provide some reassurance to those worried that massive retirements among ministers will soon result in a pastor shortage. Even though almost half (48 percent) of minister members of the Board of Pensions plan are age 55 or older, any vacancies created by increases in annual retirements can easily be filled by the large number of available candidates.

Jack Marcum is coordinator of Research Services of the General Assembly Mission Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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