

# **SOMEONE IS LISTENING (THE CLERGY SHORTAGE)**

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No! This is not about pastors being vertically challenged. It is not about the younger generation being raised in a materialistic society and developing an expectation of entitlement.

I suggest that the growing ratio of pastoral vacancies has little to do with society and everything to do with the congregation. It has everything to do with the congregation's attitude, self-indulgence and short sightedness. Someone is listening!

Congregations don't think much about a shortage of clergy, "We have ours." Many of our congregations see themselves as very independent, "We don't need the synod, they just want our money." Further, many congregations are not in love with their pastor. Congregations publicly debate the qualities, abilities and actions of the pastor: "He doesn't use the pulpit." "She moved the flags." "I'd rather have a pastor who could sing." "She has too many ideas." "He isn't friendly." "I didn't get a raise. Why should we give one to the pastor?" How long should I make the list ... you get my point. Someone is listening!

People in our churches have a full range of comments about being a pastor. "Why would anyone want to do that?" "They only work one day a week." "They're on call 24 hours a day." "I feel sorry for her children ." "It's a hard life, you always have to move." Someone is listening!

Someone has been listening! Someone is listening ... and it has been our children and our young people. It has been our members who are

gifted for ministry, but who have been listening to what the congregation has had to say. And we wonder why the bishops are talking about a clergy shortage.

Many pastors that we interview indicate that a formative experience in their consideration to be a pastor came from a time at camp. That is wonderful and I thank God for our camps. Where would the church be today without those places of Christian experience that helped so many pastors discern their sense of call?

On the other hand- that is incredibly sad. I would hope that the congregations would be a primary place for identifying the gifts of people for ministry and encouraging them. I would hope it would be the congregation that understands the needs of the church and assists students as they attend college and seminary. I would hope that children would be listening and hear the congregation celebrate ministry as their pastor is honored and uplifted.

God doesn't just create pastors. God grows pastors. They are grown in the soil of the attitude of the congregation. One way to check the condition of the soil ought be to list the number of people from your congregation who have gone into the ministry. What is the attitude of your congregation? Why is there a clergy shortage? Someone is listening ... and it is our children.

Are you going to need a pastor in the next four to, say, 27 years? How fast can you grow one?