

“Anyone wanting the facts about priestly self-understanding in the last four decades should read this book. Based on solid sociological research and filled with even-handed judgments, the book continues a long line of professional studies that demonstrate that the Catholic priesthood, though sorely tested, is hardly down and out. To the contrary, priests generally remain faithful, productive, and happy. CARA, NFPC, and the authors are to be congratulated for this useful and up-to-date study.”

— Ronald D. Witherup, SS, Superior General of the Sulpicians
and author of *Gold Tested in Fire: A New Pentecost for the
Catholic Priesthood*

“This thorough and thoughtful study compiles responses, by both diocesan and religious priests, to questions on the impact of such factors as changing demographics, collaboration patterns, and satisfaction levels on their ministry. The responses will confirm your intuitions, encourage you with some positive perspectives, challenge some of your presuppositions, unsettle you with implications, and offer you substantiated insights into generational differences. This readable and enlightening text deserves a reflective reading by laity, religious, priests, and bishops alike.”

— Fr. John Pavlik, Executive Director of the Conference of
Major Superiors of Men

“*Same Call, Different Men* is an important book. It describes a number of trends among priests (e.g., they are getting older), probes specific issues (the effects of the sexual abuse scandal on other priests), spots emerging concerns (the demands of serving multiple parishes), and suggests ways to address these challenges (training in collaborative ministry). The book clearly documents the complexities of the priesthood and the real-life experiences of priests, such as the personal satisfaction that can accompany a life of service in the Church and the working conditions that can limit that satisfaction. It offers readers a balanced interpretation of good news and bad news, an honest mixture of predictable findings and surprising results, and an even-handed inventory of problems and signs of renewal. The thoughtful reflections of Archbishop Gregory Aymond, Sr. Katarina Schuth, Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, and Dr. Dianne Traflet are a bonus. *Same Call, Different Men* proves, once again, that, when it is conducted by competent professionals, social research is a valuable resource for everyone who wants to understand and strengthen the Church.”

— James D. Davidson, Professor Emeritus, Department of
Sociology, Purdue University

Same Call, Different Men

The Evolution of the Priesthood
since Vatican II

*Mary L. Gautier, Paul M. Perl,
and Stephen J. Fichter*



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Foreword

This study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University continues the commissioned work of the National Federation of Priests' Councils (NFPC) as detailed in the book *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century* (Liturgical Press, 2003), by Dr. Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger. In the 1990s NFPC initiated a process of research that would become a "trends study" to provide the Church in the United States with data on the priests of the country over the last forty years. This is the third such research that NFPC commissioned, repeating portions of the initial 1970 landmark priests' survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.

These are important dates because they serve as benchmarks in the movement of the Church across the changing pastoral landscape. In this research, attention is given to the diminishing number and aging population of Catholic clergy, the implications of the sexual abuse scandal that has gripped our nation over the past ten years, the increased numbers of international clergy that now serve alongside native clergy, the burgeoning immigrant church, and the increased participation of laity as priests seek to maintain vibrant faith communities. All of these factors have implications for the shifting and changing pastoral landscape in which priests exercise their pastoral ministry.

For the purposes of the NFPC, the data presented here offer issues for the setting of an agenda. The clearly identified challenges that surface from this latest study and are reported here give the NFPC and the bishops a clear picture of what the priests are feeling and thinking, how they are disposed to lead local faith communities, and what specific problem areas need further research, clarification, and attention.

As in previous companion volumes, commentaries in this book provided by distinguished scholars and pastoral leaders will assist in furthering the discussion we hope this book will provoke.

I commend *Same Call, Different Men: The Evolution of the Priesthood since Vatican II* for your reflection and study. It is the wish of the NFPC that the findings of this work will further the research into and understanding of priestly life and ministry in the United States today.

The NFPC offers special thanks to Sr. Mary Bendyna, former CARA executive director, and Mary Gautier, senior research associate at CARA, for guiding the project when Dean Hoge's health no longer permitted him to continue journeying with us. We are also indebted to our anonymous donor, whose assistance has made this project possible.

Rev. Richard Vega

President, The National Federation of Priests' Councils

Introduction and Background

This book is the latest in a long line of research on priestly life and ministry in the United States that stretches back some forty years and involves five major surveys of priests. These surveys were all carefully designed and analyzed to track trends over time in the composition, ministry, attitudes, and behaviors of priests in the United States.

The first study in this series was called the *American Catholic Priesthood Study*. The study was undertaken in 1970, when the number of priests in the United States was close to its peak. Record numbers of men had entered seminaries in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, in the boom years following the Second World War. These were the sons and grandsons of hardworking Catholic immigrants, for whom having a cleric in the family was a real status symbol.

At the same time, 1970 was a time of turmoil, both for American society in general and for the Catholic Church in particular. Effects from the civil rights movement, the Kennedy assassination, the War on Poverty, the feminist movement, the hippies, and other rapid social and moral changes were rocking American society. The Catholic Church was grappling with the changes that emerged from the Second Vatican Council, which involved not just liturgy and language but also a fundamental change in the way clergy and laity interact. By 1970, seminary enrollments were falling off and large numbers of priests were leaving the priesthood.¹

Concerned about these rapid changes and their impact on both the clergy and the Church, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) commissioned a major study of priesthood. They engaged

¹ The *American Catholic Priesthood Study* would later report that 3 percent of diocesan priests in the United States were preparing in 1970 to leave the priesthood and another 10 percent were uncertain about their future.

Fathers Andrew Greeley and Richard Schoenherr of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago to survey a national sample of active and resigned priests. The purpose of the study was to learn the facts about priestly life and ministry—to understand priests’ satisfactions, dissatisfactions, motivations, and problems. The findings were published as *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Sociological Investigations* (Greeley, 1972).

Fifteen years later, in 1985, Professor Dean Hoge and colleagues replicated questions from the 1970 study and drew an equivalent sample to survey. They repeated the process in 1993, so that they could begin to track some trends among active priests. The findings from these studies were published by Dr. Hoge in a series of articles in academic journals. The findings were also described in a report titled *Project Future Directions*, published by the NFPC in 1994. In 2001, another eight years later, the NFPC again commissioned a study, this time funded by Duke Divinity School’s Pulpit & Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership Initiative. Findings from the 2001 study were published by Hoge and Wenger in *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* (2003).

In 2009, the NFPC again sought funding, this time from an anonymous foundation, for a fifth study in the series. Due to the untimely death of Dr. Hoge shortly after the funding was announced, the NFPC contacted CARA at Georgetown University to conduct the research.² This current research replicates many of the questions that were on the original 1970 study, particularly those that were repeated in 1985, 1993, and 2001. Thus, we have valuable trend data on US priests that now extends nearly forty years.

Methodology

In the same collaborative spirit as the earlier studies, CARA drew on the expertise of others to ensure that the 2009 study would accurately track trends in the life and ministry of priests in the United States. CARA senior research associate Dr. Mary Gautier and representatives from NFPC examined all four previous questionnaires to develop the 2009

² CARA is a Catholic social science research center started by Church leaders in 1964. It compiles data and conducts surveys, demographic studies, and focus groups for Church organizations of all types. In a number of places, this book cites CARA findings from research projects other than this study for the NFPC. Among these findings are results from previous studies of priests, both national-level surveys and surveys conducted for individual dioceses.

questionnaire. The team developed a twelve-page questionnaire of approximately 150 items, with an open-ended question at the end that invited participants to reflect on any recommendations they would have for a young man who is discerning a vocation to priesthood.

The questionnaire was designed to replicate a number of important items from previous waves of the study. Where possible, tables in this book present the responses to these identical items from each wave of the study, so the reader may examine changes across time. In addition to the important demographic and current ministry questions, many items relating to priestly satisfaction, problems faced in ministry, and attitudes about specific aspects of ministry are also included from previous surveys. New questions were developed to address issues in priestly life and ministry that were unheard of in 1970, such as sharing ministry with laity, multicultural ministry, working with international priests, and ministry in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

The next step was selection of a sample. In the 1970 study, Greeley and Schoenherr determined that a mailing list of priests obtained from *The Official Catholic Directory* had too many inaccuracies to use as a sampling frame. Instead they stratified dioceses and religious communities into four size groups, according to the number of priests contained in them, and further divided them according to the four major US census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). They then selected 85 dioceses and 87 religious institutes by sampling within each size and geographic cluster. These 172 units were asked to provide a complete list of priests, from which priests were randomly selected and then mailed a printed questionnaire. The final data set was then weighted to compensate for this stratified sample. Hoge followed approximately the same methodology for the 1985, 1993, and 2001 versions of the survey.

For the 2009 survey, CARA already had in its possession a relatively clean mailing list of approximately 24,000 diocesan priests and more than 13,000 religious priests from every diocese and religious order in the United States. Rather than stratifying by size and geography and then weighting to ensure a nationally representative sample, CARA randomly selected 2,400 diocesan priests and 800 religious priests to receive a mailed copy of the questionnaire. CARA mailed a survey packet consisting of the twelve-page questionnaire booklet, a cover letter (on NFPC letterhead signed by its president Father Richard Vega for diocesan priests; on letterhead of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) signed by its executive director Father Paul Lininger, OFM Conv, for religious priests), and a return envelope addressed to CARA.

Each packet also contained a postcard addressed to CARA that was to be signed by the responding priest and returned by separate mail at the time he completed and returned his questionnaire, thus ensuring the confidentiality of the survey response and eliminating each responding priest from further follow-up mailings.

CARA mailed the survey packets in summer 2009 and randomly selected a replacement for any packets that were returned undeliverable or that had been mailed to a priest who was ineligible for the survey (through death, laicization, or infirmity). CARA conducted follow-up with nonrespondents throughout the fall of 2009 and cut off data collection at the end of 2009. When all collected surveys were entered into the database, the final data set consisted of 960 respondents, for a response rate of approximately 30 percent.³ Of these, 678 are diocesan priests and 282 are religious order priests, for a ratio of about seven-tenths diocesan priests and three-tenths religious priests—close to the same proportions that exist in the overall priest population in the United States.⁴ A sample of 960 from a population of approximately 37,000 priests yields an overall margin of sampling error of + or -3.1 percentage points, meaning that the characteristics of priests represented in the poll can be assumed to be within 3.1 percentage points of the characteristics of all Catholic priests in the United States.

In addition to the surveys, CARA researchers also conducted focus groups and interviews with priests, to obtain more detailed information about their ministry experiences. CARA research associate Father Stephen Fichter⁵ conducted three focus groups of approximately ten priests each,

³ This response rate of 30 percent is considerably lower than that attained by prior studies in this series (68 to 89 percent), all of which used two-stage sampling procedures in which dioceses and religious orders were sampled first. True national samples of priests have generally obtained relatively low response rates. For example, the 2002 *Los Angeles Times* mailed survey of priests and the 2002 CARA telephone poll of priests each obtained a response rate of 37 percent. Lower response rates may be caused in part by inaccuracy in national lists of priests. Additionally, in the case of two-stage sampling, researchers can typically appeal to diocesan and religious institute leaders to encourage participation among their clergy, but this was not an option for this survey.

⁴ Nevertheless, for all survey results presented in this book, we have weighted the data to match the exact national percentages (68 percent diocesan and 32 percent religious).

⁵ Father Fichter's grand uncle, Rev. Joseph Fichter, SJ, was a member of the US bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Study of the Life and Ministry of the Priest, the group that commissioned and collaborated in the design of the original 1970 study of priests. Both priests earned a PhD in sociology.

in winter and spring 2010. Each group consisted of both diocesan and religious priests. One group was in a medium-sized archdiocese in the Northeast, one was in a small diocese in the Southwest, and one was conducted at the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) annual conference in 2010, with priests from across the United States.

To obtain a broad spectrum of interviews, CARA randomly selected fifty names from all priests that had been mailed a copy of the survey and sent them a postcard inviting them to be interviewed by phone for the project. CARA research associate Paul Perl contacted priests to be interviewed from among those that returned the postcard and also contacted other priests that were known to have particular expertise or experiences of interest to the project. In all, thirty-one of the priests who were interviewed have been quoted in the book.

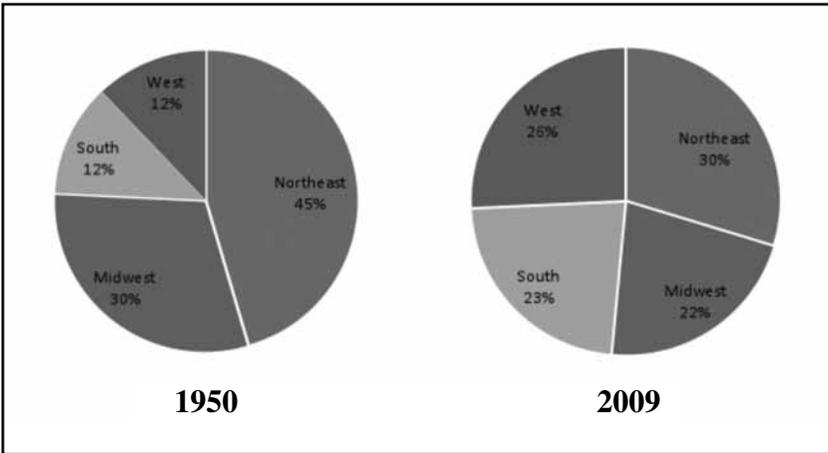
Organization of This Book

This book builds on the broad shoulders of the previous researchers described above, who have systematically tracked the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of priests in the United States since 1970. The historical context of the priesthood during this period of the last quarter of the twentieth century was laid out in some detail in *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* (Hoge and Wenger, 2003), the previous book on this subject. In chapter 1 of that book, Professor Hoge outlined some of the changes in priestly life that evolved out of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as a new emphasis on the role of the priest as a servant-leader in the community and the struggle to clarify the role of the priest in a changing ecclesiology that recognized emerging forms of leadership—permanent deacons and lay leaders.

In addition, Hoge described changes in Catholic culture and in American society that had an important impact on priestly life. Catholics in the final quarter of the twentieth century were fully assimilated into American society; they were no longer an immigrant subculture struggling to find a place in the broader society. As a result, they were no longer concentrated in the immigrant neighborhoods and villages of the Northeast and Upper Midwest but had followed jobs and opportunities to settle in the South and West, many of them in areas that were not traditionally Catholic. They took advantage of all the cultural and economic opportunities that were open to them in American society and, partly as a consequence, the numbers of Catholics responding to a call

to priesthood or religious life dropped precipitously. At the same time, Catholics were also affected by changes in the broader society, such as increasing cultural diversity, decreasing trust in institutions, increasing acceptance of discourse about sexuality in society, and a move away from hierarchical leadership and toward more collaborative decision making in organizations.

Figure 1
Catholic Population by Census Region



These trends have persisted into the twenty-first century and their influence continues to affect the priesthood in the United States. In addition, several other emerging factors have also had an impact on the priesthood:

- The number of seminarians has stabilized over the last twenty-five years, to about 3,500 seminarians enrolled in theology each year (Gautier, 2009). In the last decade, the United States has averaged about 450 ordinations to priesthood per year, with little variation from year to year. However, this number is still only about a third as many new priests as are needed to compensate for those who are retiring, dying, or otherwise absent from active priestly ministry. Bishops in many dioceses are struggling to find ways to stretch fewer priests to assume responsibility for more than one parish and are bringing in priests from outside the United States to help out as well. This puts additional pressure on newly ordained priests to

accept responsibility for a parish, even if they feel called to some other aspect of priestly ministry, and to become pastors before they have had the years of mentoring as a parochial vicar (associate pastor) that has been traditional (Bleichner, 2004).

- The number of Catholics continues to grow at a rate of about 1 to 2 percent a year, approximately keeping pace with the growth of the US population, but these Catholics now are increasingly located in the suburbs and cities of the South and Southwest, in areas that lack the Catholic infrastructure (parishes, schools, seminaries, and colleges and universities) and personnel (priests and religious) of the Northeast and Upper Midwest. The effect of this trend is that dioceses in the Northeast and Upper Midwest have to close parishes and schools that no longer have enough parishioners to sustain them, while dioceses in the South and Southwest are under increasing pressure to build more and larger parishes and schools to accommodate the demand. Priests in some parts of the Rust Belt are experiencing a Church in decline, while priests in the Sun Belt states more often serve a Church that seems to be “bursting at the seams.”
- In addition, the Catholic population, mirroring the US population, is becoming increasingly diverse as a result of immigration from Catholic population centers around the world. Latinos, in particular, are underrepresented in the priest population relative to their presence in the Catholic Church in the United States. For priests, this means that they are sometimes challenged to accommodate a variety of cultures and language groups within a single parish.
- Finally, the clergy sexual abuse crisis that erupted in the national media in 2002 and resulted in the US bishops issuing their Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in Dallas in June 2002 has had an impact on priestly life and ministry in recent years. Although research has shown that most of the allegations involved sexual abuse of minors that occurred from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, the repercussions continue to affect priestly life and ministry today.

With this most recent wave of data, collected in a national survey of priests in fall 2009, we explore some of these areas of change in the priesthood in the United States during the last forty years as well as ways

that priests today are remarkably similar to the generations before. Some of the questions on this survey were also asked on previous surveys of priests in 1970, 1985, 1993, and 2001. The 2009 wave gives us four national surveys of priests at eight-year intervals, plus a 1970 baseline survey from which to compare our findings.

The first chapter of this book explores demographic trends, such as the aging of priests in the United States, men entering seminary after college and getting ordained later in life, priests from other countries coming here for ministry, and the increasing diversity of men entering the priesthood. It also describes an emerging phenomenon of retirement from priestly ministry as well as other changes in priestly ministry. Chapter 2 describes some of the sources of satisfaction with priestly life and ministry and documents a trend of increasing satisfaction among priests with their chosen vocation. In counterpoint, chapter 3 discusses some of the major problems priests face in their life and ministry. It then tracks changes in those problems over time and discusses the relationship between problems and happiness in priestly life.

In chapters 4 and 5, we turn our attention to a couple of specific issues that are in some ways both a challenge to priestly ministry and an opportunity to minister more effectively in a rapidly changing Church. Chapter 4 deals with collaboration with others in ministry. It examines priests' attitudes about the emerging phenomena of permanent deacons and lay ecclesial ministers assuming more leadership in parishes. Priests also describe their attitudes related to working with international priests in ministry as well as attitudes about working with women. We conclude the chapter with a look at how priests' attitudes about the priesthood and the Church have changed over time. Chapter 5 examines the multicultural reality of priestly ministry in the United States today. The chapter first explores priests' attitudes about the challenges of expanding multicultural diversity in parish ministry as the US Catholic population grows increasingly diverse. We then turn to a discussion of the multicultural character of the priesthood and explore how priests born in the United States compare to their brother priests from other countries in their experiences and attitudes about priestly ministry.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the effects of the 2002 clergy sexual abuse scandal on priests and their attitudes about their life and ministry. Chapter 6 lays out a brief history of the scandal as well as the development and implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. It then describes some of the reactions of priests to the Charter as well as their attitudes about the scandal and the effects it has

had on their ministry. Chapter 7 presents the stories of nine priests in more depth and describes how their lives and ministry were affected by the scandal.

Chapter 8 discusses what priests are saying about priestly ministry to young men who may be considering a vocation to priesthood. In light of all the changes and all the challenges, priests tell us what recommendations they have for someone discerning a vocation to priesthood today.

Finally, just as Hoge and Wenger did in the 2001 study, CARA and NFPC requested commentaries on the written chapters from a number of distinguished scholars and pastoral leaders who are familiar with the struggles and joys of priestly ministry in the United States. These commentaries are included at the end of this book in the hope that their insights will assist in furthering the discussion about these trends in priestly life and ministry.

Acknowledgments

The authors benefited from remarkable cooperation throughout this project. We would like to thank the National Federation of Priests' Councils for initiating the project and obtaining the funding from a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous. In particular, we thank NFPC president Rev. Richard Vega and executive director Vic Doucette for entrusting the project to CARA when it became clear that Dean Hoge was too ill to carry it out. We thank the late Dean Hoge, whose meticulous notes from previous waves of the survey were a valuable resource that guided the current project and we thank his wife, Josephine Hoge, who made those notes available to us.

We thank all the priests who participated in focus groups and shared their insights in interviews throughout the project. We especially thank all the priests who took the time to complete the survey and share their ministry experiences with us. We have tried to be faithful to the spirit of what they said to us. We thank Linda Ferrara and Eleanor Jetter of Sacred Heart Parish in Haworth, New Jersey, for transcribing the focus groups for us and C. Joseph O'Hara and M. Connie Neuman of CARA for compiling the index.

Finally, we are grateful to the commentators who read the manuscript and reflected on its findings for the benefit of all the Church. Their comments will help further the conversations that need to take place so that this research becomes a useful tool for those who are concerned about the future of priestly ministry.

Chapter 1

Demographic Changes and Changes in Priestly Ministry

Certainly, responsibility has its own crosses. Here I am, not even forty, and my goodness, who would have thought that I would be a pastor for ten years now? That's ridiculous! Who becomes a pastor when they're thirty?

—*Priest in an interview*

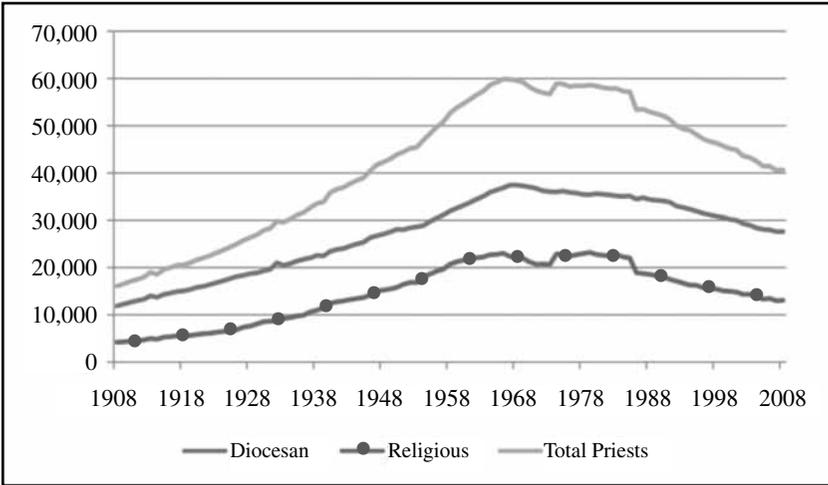
One area of the priesthood that has experienced significant change is in the demographics of the priesthood itself. In this chapter, we explore the demographic characteristics of priests today and show how those characteristics have changed over the last forty years. We also examine how priestly ministry has evolved to meet the changing needs of the Catholic population in the United States.

Age and Generation

By far the most striking trend to come from these data, and probably the one trend that is having the most immediate impact on priestly life in the United States, is the aging of the priesthood. The average age of priests in the United States has been increasing steadily over the last forty years, in large part because the total number of priests in the United States reached its peak in 1969. The figure here shows the rapid growth in the number of priests during the first half of the twentieth century as well as the marked decrease in numbers over the last forty years.

Far fewer men have been entering seminaries since the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and the men preparing for priesthood are entering seminary later in life, on average. The effect of this pattern is that the average priest in active ministry today is much older than his counterpart of forty years

Figure 1.1
Priests in the United States

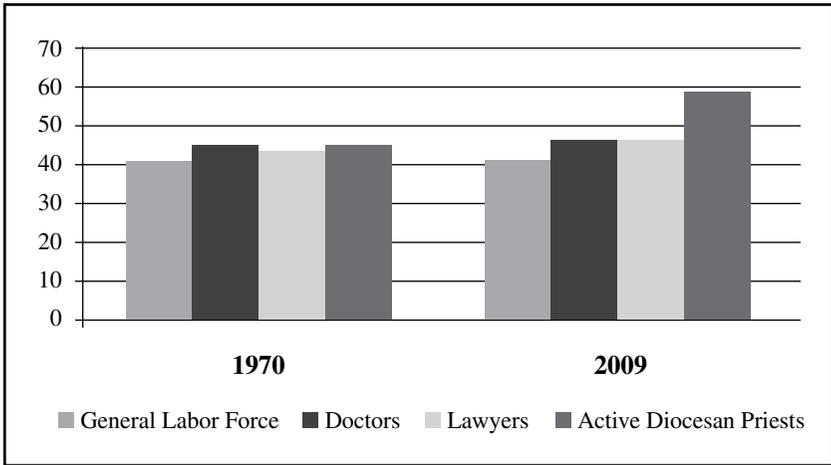


ago. In 1970, at the time of the first study in this series, the median age of active diocesan priests was 45 (Schoenherr and Young, 1993). Although slightly older than the general labor force, they were about the same age as other professionals, according to data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

By 2009, the median age of the general labor force increased just slightly (5 percent) from 39.8 to 41.8. Doctors and attorneys followed the same pattern, with their median ages increasing by 3 and 5 percent, respectively. Active diocesan priests, by contrast, have a median age in 2009 of 59, an increase of 31 percent from the 1970 figure. They are much older today than these comparable professionals with graduate degrees. This shrinking pool of increasingly older active diocesan priests is being experienced as a shortage of priests available to staff parishes in dioceses across the country.

The median age of *all* priests in this study is 64, which means that half of those responding to the survey were at least within a year of eligibility for Social Security! Dioceses and religious institutes are facing increased financial pressure to provide for greater numbers of elderly and infirm clergy. In fact, diocesan priests average about five years younger than religious priests and this gap has been consistent over time. In the 1970 survey, the average age of diocesan priests was 34 and for religious priests it was 37. By 2001, the average age of diocesan priests

Figure 1.2
Median Ages Compared



was 59 and religious priests averaged 64 years of age; in 2009, diocesan priests average 62 years of age and religious priests average 66 years.

Table 1.1
Average Age of Priests¹

	1970	1985	1993	2001	2009
Mean age (in years):					
All priests	35*	52	57	61	63
Diocesan priests	34	51*	55	59	62
Religious priests	37	55*	60	64	66

* Imputed from data provided

¹ The 1970 data set from the *American Catholic Priesthood Study* is not publicly available. Therefore, the 1970 data reported in this book come from Greeley, 1972, and other published sources. In some cases, the sources have only reported separate percentages for diocesan and religious priests; when necessary we derived estimates for all 1970 priests by weighting based on the numbers of diocesan and religious priests. We obtained the data sets for the 1985, 1993, and 2001 studies from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) and employed the weights provided with those data sets. These numbers may vary by 1 or 2 percentage points from results reported elsewhere, due to the particular weighting variables employed.

Priests also came of age during different periods of time and were influenced by the prevailing culture of the times. The three generations described below will be used later as the basis for comparison.

- Priests of the pre–Vatican II generation were born prior to 1943 and most were ordained well before the Second Vatican Council. Priests of this generation are age 67 and over in 2009. They constitute more than half of all priests in the United States and remain a key reference group for priests. These priests, for the most part, grew up in ethnic Catholic neighborhoods where they were immersed in a supportive and nurturing Catholic culture. They typically received strong encouragement for their vocation from other family members, parishioners, neighbors, and friends who considered the local parish priest a respected and trusted leader of the local Catholic community. Most of these priests entered the seminary in high school or directly from high school and had little or no secular work experience. When they entered the priesthood, rectory life was a formal, hierarchical community of several priests with defined roles and a relatively light workload. As is true for their secular counterparts, institutional loyalty is a key value for members of this generation. Forty-four percent of priests in the 2009 survey are of the pre–Vatican II generation.
- Priests of the Vatican II generation were born between 1943 and 1960 and are between the ages of 49 and 66 in 2009. The Catholic neighborhoods in which these priests grew up tended to be more suburban and affluent, as the children and grandchildren of immigrant Catholics assimilated into American society and moved into the middle class. They were encouraged in their vocation by family members and communities who looked up to the priest as a “servant-leader” who is active in promoting social justice in society. These priests witnessed the impact of the Council during their formation years and were often directly affected by the resulting changes in seminary life and priestly ministry. Rectory life gradually became more communal and less hierarchical than it was for the previous generation. As part of the “baby boomer” generation, these priests tend to place greater value on change and questioning institutions and structures than other generations. Priests of this generation are 41 percent of those surveyed in 2009.

- The post–Vatican II generation, born after 1960, includes those who are age 48 or younger in 2009 and have come of age after the Second Vatican Council. For them, the Council is a historical fact, not something they personally experienced. These priests grew up with few of the experiences of the “Catholic subculture” that so influenced the generations before Vatican II. Immersed in American culture, they had to seek out their Catholic identity in parish life, Catholic schools, and Catholic organizations. Compared to previous generations, fewer of them attended high school seminary or college seminary. They are more likely to have completed college and held jobs before entering the seminary. Once ordained, though, they are more likely than the generations before them to be assigned to parishes immediately and to be made pastors in just a few years. Rectory life for this group is more likely to mean living alone. With many demands on their time and few opportunities for socializing with other priests, they tend to place greater value than the generations before them on priestly identity and fraternity. Priests of this age group make up 15 percent of the sample.

Age at Ordination and Ordination Cohort

As mentioned earlier, priests today are also entering the priesthood later in life and getting ordained at an older age than they were in 1970. In 1970, high school seminaries enrolled about 12,000 young men who were considering a vocation to priesthood, according to statistics reported by seminaries to CARA. The trajectory they followed typically included four years of college seminary and another four years of theology, culminating in ordination on average at age 27.

Table 1.2
Age at Ordination by Ordination Cohort

	Average age at ordination
Pre–Vatican II (ordained before 1964)	27
Vatican II (ordained 1964–77)	28
Post–Vatican II (ordained 1978–91)	31
Millennial (ordained 1992–present)	37

The average age at ordination for all priests in the 2009 survey is 30. This average is misleading, however, because we know from other research that priests are being ordained later in life. We can see this changing age at ordination even within this sample of priests by comparing the average age at ordination among priests who were ordained at different periods in history (see table 1.2). This same pattern of later average age at ordination has been reported in annual surveys of ordination classes for the last twelve years (see Bendyna and Gautier, 2010).

Just as we separated priests according to age into generational categories, we have also subdivided priests into analytically meaningful ordination cohorts. Priests who were ordained in a particular period in history often exhibit attitudes and behaviors that are similar to other priests who also shared similar formation experiences. The four ordination cohorts shown above in table 1.2 had the formation experiences described below.

- The pre-Vatican II ordination cohort is composed of priests who were ordained before 1964, the year that marked the midpoint of the Second Vatican Council. These men average 79 years of age and have been in priestly ministry for an average of more than 50 years. Their seminary formation often began at the high school or college seminary and followed a monastic tradition that included instruction in Latin, rigid separation from the secular world, and a formal hierarchy of priestly roles. Many, though certainly not all of them, tend to have a more hierarchical view of priesthood and see the priest as “a man set apart” from society by his ordination. Most of these men are white (98 percent) and were born in the United States (92 percent), and all are members of the pre-Vatican II generation. About a third of this cohort is still in active ministry, a fifth is semiretired from ministry, and almost half are currently retired from ministry. These priests are a quarter of all responding priests in 2009.
- The Vatican II ordination cohort is composed of priests who were ordained during the Second Vatican Council and in the turbulent years following. Like the pre-Vatican II ordination cohort, many of them entered seminary in high school or in college. Their seminary formation took place in a period of great flux in the Church, when the theological renewal engendered by the Second Vatican Council was being implemented, new models of being Church were

advanced (Dulles, 1974), and expectations of reform were high. Seminaries moved away somewhat from the traditional monastic model and toward a more academic model. Some seminaries began to include lay students alongside priesthood candidates in classes. Instruction was in English and seminarians were encouraged to see themselves as “servant-leaders” ministering within the world rather than as men set apart from the world by their ordination. Nearly all priests of this cohort are white (95 percent). Nine in ten were born in the United States and they are equally split between the Vatican II generation and the pre-Vatican II generation in terms of age. Most are still in active ministry (85 percent), although 7 percent are semi-retired and another 7 percent are retired from active ministry. A third of all responding priests in this study are members of this cohort.

- The post-Vatican II ordination cohort is composed of priests who were ordained during the first half of the pontificate of John Paul II (1978–91). Unlike the two cohorts before them, these men entered during a time of decline and reorganization for seminaries—there were half as many priesthood candidates studying in theologates in the mid-1980s as there were in the mid-1960s (Schuth, 1988). As the numbers of priesthood candidates declined, more and more seminaries opened their programs to lay students, who shared in the academic formation that was formerly reserved for priesthood candidates. These men were also older, on average—the first seminary experience for most of this cohort came after college, at the post-graduate level. Many of these men had college and work experience before entering the seminary. Priests of this cohort are nearly all US-born (91 percent) but are more diverse than previous cohorts. Nine in ten are white, but 5 percent are African or African American, 3 percent are Hispanic, and 2 percent are Asian or Asian American. Most of these are men of the Vatican II generation (82 percent), but 13 percent are post-Vatican II generation and 5 percent are men of the pre-Vatican II generation. These priests are nearly all in active ministry (97 percent), although 2 percent are retired. About a quarter of responding priests (23 percent) is in this cohort.
- The millennial ordination cohort is also sometimes referred to as the John Paul II priests. The entire lived experience of Church for most

of these men was during the post-Vatican II period. Many were just coming of age when John Paul II was elected pope in 1978. Seminaries during this period were reacting to the Vatican-mandated seminary visitations of the 1980s, an international synod on priestly formation in 1990 with the ensuing apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), and the fourth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF, 1993). Each of these emphasized preparing priesthood candidates in all areas of their formation apart from other students and focusing more attention on the norms for priestly formation as set out in the PPF. Thus, especially among those ordained in the latter half of this cohort, as seminarians they were more likely to define themselves as “a man set apart” than were the two cohorts that preceded them. A quarter of these priests were born outside the United States and they are much more diverse than previous cohorts. Three in four are white (76 percent), 12 percent are Hispanic, one in ten is Asian or Asian American, and 3 percent are African or African American. Two in three are members of the post-Vatican II generation (65 percent), but one in three is of the Vatican II generation (30 percent) and 5 percent are of the pre-Vatican II generation. About a fifth (18 percent) of responding priests in this study are in this cohort.

Nativity, Race, and Ethnicity

One demographic characteristic that is beginning to change among priests is their nativity and ethnic heritage. Most priests (89 percent of this sample) were born in the United States, although the proportion is gradually changing as more bishops bring in priests from outside the United States to compensate for the dwindling local supply. The 1970 survey only asked priests whether they were born in the United States. The question was not asked in the 1993 or 2001 surveys. Comparing the 1985 survey to the 2009 survey, one can begin to see the trend toward more priests serving in the United States who were born outside North America and Europe.

It is becoming more common for bishops in some US dioceses to develop relationships with bishops and seminary rectors in other countries to compensate for fewer indigenous vocations. Among priests in the 2009 survey that were born outside the United States, a little more than half (54 percent) were ordained for the diocese (or religious institute) in which they now serve. The remainder came to the United States after

Table 1.3
Nativity of Priests over Time
 (Percentage in each category, by year)

	1970	1985	1993	2001	2009
Born in the United States	90%	93%	n/a	n/a	89%
Born in Europe or Canada		6			6
Other international		1			5

ordination. About a quarter of all seminarians now studying in US theologates are foreign-born and three in ten newly ordained priests are born outside the United States (Bendyna and Gautier, 2010).

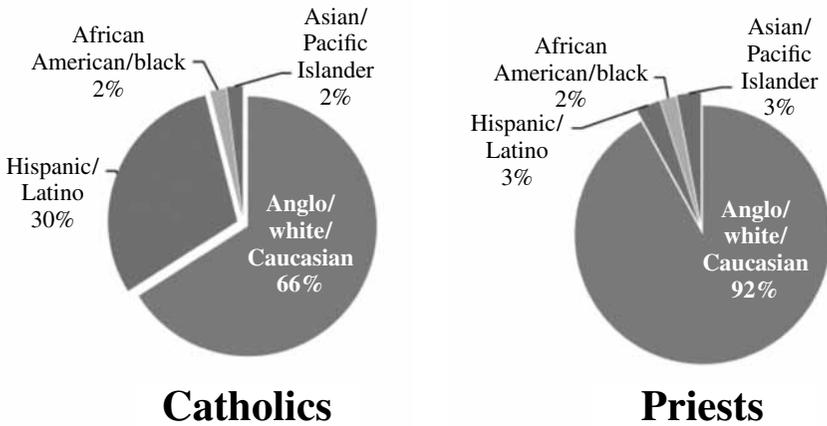
In the 2009 survey, this trend becomes clearer when we separate responding priests by age group. While more than nine in ten priests of the Vatican II and pre-Vatican II generations are born in the United States, the proportion drops to seven in ten among post-Vatican II priests.

Table 1.4
Nativity by Generation
 (Percentage in each category)

	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II
Born in the United States	91%	93%	70%
Born in Europe or Canada	7	2	9
Other international	2	5	21

This trend to look beyond national borders for priests to serve in the United States is having another effect as well—it is gradually increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of priests in the United States. Generations ago, the German, Italian, and Irish Catholics who immigrated to the United States more often than not brought their own priests with them and petitioned the local bishop for permission to build a “national church” to serve their ethnic group (Morris, 1997). This practice of establishing national parishes for ethnic groups gradually declined, though, in favor of multicultural territorial parishes. And while the Catholic population in the United States has grown increasingly diverse, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, the priest population has not kept

Figure 1.3
Race/Ethnicity of Catholics and Priests



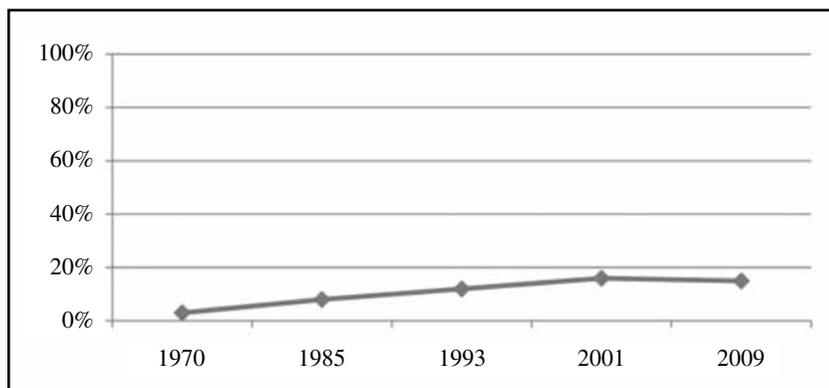
pace. Among the adult Catholic population in the United States, about two-thirds identify as white, one in three is Hispanic/Latino, and 2 percent each are Asian/Pacific Islander, black/African American, or other (*U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2007*). More than nine in ten priests in the 2009 survey (92 percent) are white, 3 percent are Hispanic/Latino, another 3 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2 percent identify as black, African American, or African.

Once again, if we compare the priests in the 2009 survey according to their age group, we can show how priests are also gradually becoming more diverse. Younger priests, who are more likely than older priests to be born in a country other than the United States, are also more racially and ethnically diverse than the previous generations.

Table 1.5
Race and Ethnicity by Age Group
(Percentage in each category)

	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II
Anglo/white/Caucasian	97%	91%	75%
Hispanic/Latino	<1	2	15
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	3	8
African American/black/African	<1	4	2

Figure 1.4
Percentage Retired, by Year



Retirement

Retirement is another factor that is affecting priestly life and ministry today more than it did forty years ago. In 1970, only 3 percent of responding priests were retired. By 2001 the proportion had grown to 16 percent. More than a fifth of the priests responding to the 2009 survey (22 percent) are either retired or semiretired from active ministry (15 percent are retired and 7 percent say they are semiretired).

Table 1.6
Ministry Status
 (Percentage in each category)

	All	Diocesan	Religious
What best describes your current ministry status?			
In active ministry	78%	79%	75%
Semiretired (receiving at least partial retirement)	7	4	14
Retired (receiving full retirement benefits)	15	17	11

As figure 1.4 shows, priests that responded to the survey in 2009 are no more likely to say they are retired than they were in 2001. However, the reality is more complex than this simple figure can show. First, none of the surveys before 2001 asked priests about semiretirement; they only offered “retired” as a category in a question about their current ministry

position. It is likely that the clarification in question wording in 2009 may have affected this distribution. Second, many dioceses are increasing the age of retirement for priests in response to the reality of fewer priests available for active ministry. Increasingly, bishops are also asking priests who are eligible for retirement to continue in ministry for a number of years, as “senior priests” to relieve the burden on active priests. These conditions are likely suppressing the number of priests who might otherwise be retired.

Retirement is still a concept that is more common in the secular world than it is among priests. More than half of diocesan priests who are of retirement age (66 or older in the secular world) are still active in ministry (52 percent). Likewise, nearly six in ten religious priests of that age (58 percent) are still active in ministry. In a recent CARA study of diocesan priest retirement issues (Gautier and Bendyna, 2009), one active priest described the practice in his diocese as follows:

Currently, our diocese has no set age for retirement. We are able to receive our full pension at age 68. Many of our number are then elevated to “senior priest” at that time and continue working three to five more years. “Retirement” is a slippery word in our diocese.

Two other priests, now retired, took some offense at the use of the word “retired” to describe priestly life:

Do not use the term “retired priest”! Use “senior priest,” active or inactive.

I think that many diocesan priests have adopted the attitude that we are members of a professional elite, like lawyers and academics, to the virtual exclusion of the truth that we were called to companion a suffering and despised Savior and privileged to die for him.

Yet another priest noted the difficulty of retiring from priestly ministry because one’s identity as a priest is so intertwined with priestly ministry:

Too often priestly identity is formed by particular assignments, but to understand more the inner meaning of priesthood without assignment is a great challenge.

In contrast, a priest who is still active in ministry noted his frustration with the administrative responsibilities of running a parish and expressed

his desire to retire from that burden so that he could devote more time to the pastoral aspects of his ministry:

By “retire” I mean leave behind administrative duties and return to full-time ministry. If I win the lotto I’d “retire” tomorrow—and do ministry until I dropped dead.

In fact, 78 percent of the priests who described their ministry status as semiretired agreed at least “somewhat” with the statement, “I would be happy to attend primarily to the sacramental life and let the laity assume responsibility for most other functions.” Although canon law stipulates that the bishop must provide suitable housing and support for pastors upon their retirement from active ministry, most continue in ministry for years after they become eligible for Social Security. These semiretired priests often serve as “supply priests” who assist active priests in parishes or take over assignments temporarily while others are on vacation or on retreat. CARA surveys of diocesan priests found that semiretired priests typically work five days a week, averaging thirty hours a week, and retired priests still work an average of four days a week, averaging fourteen hours a week.

Ministry

Most priests today are assigned to a parish as their primary ministry. Three in four diocesan priests and 38 percent of religious priests are currently assigned to at least one parish.

Table 1.7
Parish Ministry
 (Percentage in each category)

	All	Diocesan	Religious
Are you currently assigned to a parish?			
Yes, one parish (with or without a mission church)	53%	63%	33%
Yes, more than one parish (e.g., clustered parishes)	10	12	5
No, but I help out in a parish	21	18	29
No, not engaged in parish ministry at this time	16	7	33

It is also becoming more common for priests to be assigned to more than one parish as the Catholic population continues to grow while the population of priests keeps declining. Ten percent of the priests responding to this survey are assigned to more than one parish in a situation that is most often referred to as clustered, paired, twinned, yoked, or linked parishes. In these arrangements, which can be short-term or long-term, a priest is assigned administrative and pastoral responsibility for more than one parish. This is a relatively recent accommodation that many bishops are using to forestall having to close parishes; the question was not even asked on previous waves of this survey. While we do not have trend data on this yet, we are confident that this proportion will increase in the next twenty-five years (see Gray, 2010).

Even priests that are not assigned to parishes regularly help out in parishes. One in five priests in this survey say they are not currently assigned to a parish but they help out, most often by providing daily Mass or by celebrating one or more weekend Masses at a nearby parish. Among semiretired priests, almost one in four report that they are assigned to one or more parishes and another half say that they help out in a parish. Only about a quarter of semiretired priests say that they are not engaged in parish ministry. Even among the retired priests, one in ten responded that they are assigned to a parish and more than half (54 percent) say that they help out in a parish.

Just one priest out of six in this sample is not engaged in parish ministry at this time. Religious priests are much more likely than diocesan priests to say that they are not engaged in parish ministry. Many of these religious priests are involved in leadership in their religious community, teaching, writing, retreat work, formation work, or spiritual direction. The diocesan priests who are not engaged in parish ministry are most typically involved in campus ministry or chaplaincy at a nursing home or hospital.

Removing retired and semiretired priests from the analysis and examining only active priests, table 1.8 further reinforces the point that most active diocesan priests are engaged in parish ministry. In fact, close to nine in ten active diocesan priests are involved in a parish in some way as their primary ministry and almost three in four are pastors—47 percent are pastors who are serving in a parish with no other priests assigned to help them. Very few diocesan priests have assignments outside of parish ministry.

Religious priests are much less likely than diocesan priests to be involved in parish ministry. More than half of religious priests are involved

Table 1.8
Current Primary Ministry (among active priests only)
 (Percentage in each category)

	All	Diocesan	Religious
What best describes your current ministry?			
Pastor without a parochial vicar (associate pastor)	37%	47%	14%
Pastor with a parochial vicar (associate pastor)	25	29	16
Educational apostolate	9	3	21
Full-time parochial vicar (associate pastor)	7	7	8
Other nonparish ministry	7	2	17
Full-time diocesan or religious community administration	6	3	12
Other parish ministry (e.g., helping out in a parish)	5	5	6
Hospital chaplaincy	2	2	<1
Parochial vicar with special work outside parish	2	1	1
Social service apostolate	1	<1	3
Prison chaplaincy	<1	<1	<1

in education, administration within their religious community, or some other nonparish ministry. Nevertheless, three in ten active religious priests are pastors in parishes and another sixth are associate pastors or help out in parishes in some other way. We would expect that the proportion involved in parish ministry is substantially higher than it would have been in 1970.

These changes mean that priests are less likely to be seen in settings other than parishes, such as teaching in schools or serving as campus ministers, serving as prison or hospital chaplains, working in soup kitchens, shelters, or social service agencies, or working in diocesan or other church-related administrative positions. Among the diocesan priests still active in ministry who responded to this study, 89 percent are in parish ministry, 8 percent are engaged in some type of social service outside of parish ministry, and just 4 percent are involved in some type of nonparish

administrative position (such as a vicar for clergy in a diocese or executive director of a Catholic nonprofit organization). For religious priests in this study, 45 percent are in parish ministry, 43 percent are in social service outside of a parish setting (including positions such as retreat director, writer, and spiritual director), and 12 percent are in administration (most often within their religious community).

Another effect of the changing demographics among Catholics in the United States is that priests today are being made pastors, with primary administrative and pastoral responsibility for parishes, much earlier than had been the case in earlier generations. In the 1970s, a newly ordained priest commonly served as a parochial vicar (associate pastor) under the supervision of a pastor in one or more assignments for a number of years, to gain practical experience before receiving a parish of his own.

Table 1.9
Pastor by Ordination Cohort (among active diocesan priests only)
(Percentage in each category)

	Pastor without a Parochial Vicar	Pastor with a Parochial Vicar
Pre-Vatican II (ordained before 1964)	56%	22%
Vatican II (ordained 1964–77)	49	32
Post-Vatican II (ordained 1978–91)	46	32
Millennial (ordained 1992–present)	42	20

Today's newly ordained priests have little time to "learn the ropes" as parochial vicars before taking on the responsibilities of pastors. Many of them will have five years or less as parochial vicars in parishes with pastors before they are placed as pastors. About three-fifths (62 percent) of the diocesan priests who have been ordained since 1992 (the millennial ordination cohort) are already pastors. As recently as 1993, the equivalent proportion was only about two-fifths (39 percent). Even if we restrict the 2009 sample further and look only at those who have been ordained in the last ten years (after 1998), more than half of these diocesan priests (55 percent) are already pastors (compared to 29 percent in 1993). Almost all of them (96 percent) are in parish ministry in some capacity and one in ten already has responsibility for more than one parish!

Conclusion

Priests that responded to the survey in 2009 differ in several important respects from priests who responded in 1970 and in each of the three surveys in between. On average, priests in the United States are older and they are getting ordained later in life. This means that they are more likely to bring life experience with them into priesthood, but it also means that they may be less likely to celebrate their golden jubilee of fifty years of priesthood than priests who were ordained at age 25 in 1970. More priests today are retired from active ministry, although most stay involved in ministry to some extent, often serving as “supply priests” for priests in parish ministry.

Priests today are also somewhat more diverse in their race and ethnic background, although they do not represent the diversity that is the Catholic Church in the United States. More of them were born outside the United States, too, particularly among the youngest generation of priests.

Finally, diocesan priests today are engaged in parish ministry to the exclusion of nearly everything else. Even among priests in religious orders, who have traditionally been more involved in other apostolates such as education, hospitals, and social service, almost half of those responding to this survey are involved primarily in parish ministry at some level.

In the next three chapters we will explore how these demographic changes are playing out in the lives and attitudes of priests today. Chapter 2 examines satisfaction among priests and finds that priests remain very happy in their lives and ministry despite these changes.