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Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment

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Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment

Roy M. Oswald

Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1993
122pp. \$13.95 U.S.

At a recent meeting of the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada time was spent discussing vacancies and supply. Currently there are over forty vacant parishes in the ELCIC. Only fifteen persons will graduate this spring. Prospects for next year are not much different. Clergy recruitment has become a critical issue.

In a letter to church leaders, the national ELCIC bishop, Telmor G. Sartison, shared his concern and pointed to the need for lifting up candidates in the parish. "*It is the first line of contact*", he said. "*The experience there is formative in the development of people for ordained ministry. Are congregations conscious of need and possibilities? Are they aware of that formative role?*"

Current trends in most denominations indicate not only a decline in the number of clergy candidates, but a decline in the quality of those interested in ministry as well as a decline in the number of congregations that can afford a full-time pastor. In *Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment*, Roy M. Oswald addresses the problems in a provocative, thoroughly documented manner, and maps out possible ways for churches to become proactive in "*seeking the people they need instead of simply accepting those who self select*".

The demographic profile of the North American seminarian has changed more in the last twenty years than in the prior two hundred years. "*The Church*", says Oswald, "*is no longer attracting 'the brightest and the best'.*" The most significant decline is in language skills. In graduate record exams between 1981 and 1988 "*thirty-three percent of women, but only 19 percent of the men had verbal scores of six hundred or higher (out of eight hundred)*". Today's candidates are also "*less thoroughly grounded in their religious traditions*" than their predecessors, with fewer "*preacher's kids*" following the career path of their clergy parents. Only one in five is under the age of thirty. There is a heavy influx of second-career persons, and "*there has been a fivefold increase in women preparing for ordination*". More candidates than ever are married, separated, divorced or widowed, and most are financially stressed. Most people graduate from seminary "*fifteen to twenty thousand dollars in debt*".

The church's problems are formidable. But Bishop Sartison's focus on the local congregation as "*the first line of contact*" is supported by Roy Oswald. The arena for ministerial recruitment has largely shifted from high school and college to the local congregation and pastor, says Oswald. The local congregation is especially qualified to inspire and support potential candidates. Still, more than inspiration and support are called for. "*Discernment*" is crucial. Aspirants need to be helped to become clear about the nature of the call.

However, the congregation can't do it alone. And this is where *Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches* makes its greatest contribution. "With growing awareness that this new 'mission frontier' is in the local parish, it is time for all of us concerned about recruitment and screening to figure out how the values and wisdom of local congregations can be factored into the process." That will take new, more inclusive strategies and initiatives involving national judicatories and seminaries in support of congregations. Oswald proposes them in a chapter entitled *Responding Across Boundaries*. The ideas are multiple and varied: from Regional Consultants, Seminary-University Networks, Vocation Days, College Chaplains and Religion Departments, to Parish Identifiers, College and High School Internships and Trained Clergy Selectors. Are congregations aware of their formative roles? Give them this book.

Everyone interested in leadership for today's church will find something in it; candidates for ministry, parents whose children could be leaders, parishes who are seeking pastors, pastors who recognize themselves as role models, seminary professors who are preparing students for ordination or, synod councils who are involved in screening and supporting candidates. It is short and punchy, filled with facts, insights and practical ideas.

But reading it is not enough. Like any "idea..." book, its value lies in its stimulus to action. After all, recruitment is a task, not a topic.

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Dynamics of Marriage

Jack Dominionian

Mystic Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1993
167 pp. \$9.95 U.S.

This book is written with sincere concern for the woman and man involved in the intimacy of marriage. The reader is informed very clearly about the melding of procreation and spousal love.

The first concern that I had in reading this book was the qualifications of the author, and I was informed that he is a practicing psychiatrist and founder and director of the Marriage Research Center at the Middlesex Hospital in England. Jack Dominionian has more than thirty years experience as a lecturer on marriage.

Dominian states that his desire is to inform us in a down to earth manner about marriage from a theological stance. This is accomplished with concern for the institution of marriage as a viable and loving relationship.

Marriage is explained from the first glimmer of attraction through the passion of courtship, into the intimacy of the pitfalls and pleasures of ensuing years.