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Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**THE SHORTAGE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS IN THE UNITED STATES  
NAVY CHAPLAIN CORPS: ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved*  
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>2009</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>The Shortage of Roman Catholic Priests in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps: Addressing the Problem</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
		12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>			
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>41</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

## Executive Summary

**Title:** The Shortage of Roman Catholic Priests in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps: Addressing the Problem

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**Thesis:** As the number of priests on active duty in the Navy Chaplain Corps declines, the Navy needs to make greater efforts to address this issue.

**Discussion:** In 2007 the United States Navy Chaplain Corps developed a strategic plan to address the ongoing and spiritual needs of people serving in the sea services. The Navy Chaplain Corps is responsible for providing chaplains for not only the Navy but also for the Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Recognizing the great diversity of religious affiliations that exist among members of the sea services, the Chaplain Corps is committed to providing for these needs. This commitment is especially challenging for denominations that have high representation within the sea services but low representation within the Chaplain Corps. This is certainly the case with the Roman Catholic faith. As the number of priests in the United States decreases, so too does the number of priests on active duty in the Navy Chaplain Corps. Currently, there are 97 priests on active duty in the Navy. And the ratio of priests to Catholics in the sea services is 1: 1052.

Addressing the long term solution to this concern is open to debate and beyond the capabilities of the Navy and the Chaplain Corps. But there are short term solutions that can be enacted in order to ensure that the Catholic men and women of the sea services are able to freely practice their faith. This includes greater emphasis on the retention of current active duty priests by recognizing their increased work load and therefore providing them greater support. This can be further addressed through increased efforts in recruiting priests for active duty service by instituting other models of recruiting. Finally, some of the present needs can be met through better utilization of priests in the Navy reserve component.

**Conclusion:** The Chaplain Corps and the larger Navy should look at some short term solutions in order to address the declining number of priests on active duty. These include issues of retention of current active duty priests, increased efforts in recruiting priests, and better utilization of priests in the reserve component.

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## *Preface*

In June of 1994 I became a Chaplain Candidate in the United States Navy. For me, it was realizing a desire to serve both God and country. This good was further realized in July, 1997 when I received a superseding appointment to the Chaplain Corps after my ordination as a Roman Catholic priest. In the 14 years that I have served in the Navy as a member of the active and reserve components, I have watched the number of priests in it steadily decline. At the same time, the number of Catholics in the sea services remains high and steady. The dilemma that is now faced is how to provide spiritual and religious support to Catholics in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard while the number of priests declines.

The response from the Chaplain Corps is that they would love to have more priests in the service but that it is up to the Catholic Church to provide them. This remains a challenge since the number of priests in the Catholic Church continues to decline. Furthermore, of the priests in the United States, only a small percentage of them are interested in serving in the military and physically qualified. A further complication is this small percentage is recruited by the Army and Air Force in competition with the Navy.

After an assignment in the Manpower Office at the Chief of Chaplains office at the Navy Annex in Washington DC, I became aware of the need to do more to address the problem of the declining number of priests in the Navy. I suggest that greater emphasis must be placed on the areas of retaining priests currently on active duty, increased recruiting efforts, and better utilization of reserve component priests for service as Navy Chaplains. While this challenge also exists for other denominations in the Chaplain Corps, for the purpose of this paper I am limiting the discussion to Roman Catholic priests. Future studies by others can focus on other high demand and low density denominational representation in the Chaplain Corps.

In order to begin this discussion and develop concrete proposals to address this need, I contacted a number of chaplains in the Navy Chaplain Corps for their input and suggestions. Through e-mail exchanges and telephone interviews I was able to gather appropriate information for this discussion. These chaplains were primarily Roman Catholic priests, but some chaplains of other denominations were also consulted. I also requested information from Army and Air Force chaplains who have addressed the issue of declining numbers of priests within their ranks as well. I am grateful to all of them for their input. The content of this paper is meant not to dictate policy but to facilitate discussion that might lead to policy changes in order to alleviate this concern for providing religious ministry to all personnel in the sea services.

I am indebted to the chaplains who assisted me by providing input for this discussion. I also owe special thanks to the chaplains who have gone before me in the sacred duty of caring for those entrusted to them for spiritual and religious care. Their example continues to inspire me. I am thankful to the members of Conference Group Twelve at the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College AY 08-09 for their ongoing support. And, finally, I owe special thanks to my faculty mentor, Donald F. Bittner, PhD, for his ongoing support and encouragement.



### **Note to the reader**

In writing on this subject, the author is cognizant that some issues and sources of information have not been addressed. These include the following:

1. Information on the denominations of all chaplains in the Navy Chaplain Corps, while compiled by the Navy, is not available to the general public. That information is maintained by the Chief of Navy Chaplains office for internal use only.
2. Another possible short term solution of providing priests for the Navy Chaplain Corps would be granting age waivers to priests currently on active duty. This issue was not addressed in this paper due to issues of current Navy policy that restrict age waivers. The Navy Chaplain Corps has a 94% retention rate. If age waivers were granted for current priests, who tend to be in the higher ranks, then promotion plans for the Chaplain Corps would be adversely affected.

“God knows that I am not, as a man, more courageous than others, nor did I in fact perform more deeds of courage than many others. There is no measuring rod for heroism, anyway. But what I did was done from Faith. I was conscious of my office as a priest and conscious of the tremendous graces that continually sustained me in fulfilling that office. Whatever I did was given to me to do. It was done from Faith, which is a gift.”

- Rev. Joseph T. O’Callahan, SJ

The above quote is from Fr. Joseph T. O Callahan, S.J. in response to his service aboard *USS Franklin* (CV-13) during World War II. The *USS Franklin* suffered severe damage after being hit by two bombs during the invasion of Okinawa. For his service on the *Franklin*, Fr. O’Callahan was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

## Introduction

The Chaplain Corps of the United States Navy is a diverse group of religious professionals who are charged with providing religious ministry in the sea services. In 2007, the Navy Chaplain Corps began developing a strategic plan to address the ongoing and emerging spiritual needs of naval personnel. As commissioned officers in the Navy, chaplains represent many different faith groups that serve the needs of members of the country's three sea services – Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Providing for the diversity of needs for these different faith groups becomes more challenging as each year passes. This is especially true for faith groups that have a high percentage of people in the sea services but have fewer chaplains of that faith group serving as chaplains on active duty.

Recognizing this concern, the Chaplain Corps lists as the first goal in its strategic plan that of meeting the religious ministry needs of the men and women of the sea services. This entails planning for current as well as future needs. The strategic plan states that, “the Chaplain Corps will strive to understand and articulate the current and future needs of individuals and communities it is directed to serve.”<sup>1</sup>

An important component of meeting the spiritual needs of the men and women of the sea services will be ensuring that the needs of Roman Catholics are met. This will continue to be a great challenge since the number of Catholics on active duty remains high while the number of Catholic Chaplains declines each year. In a recent study completed by the Chief of Navy Chaplains office, it was determined that the current ratio of Catholic Chaplains serving those who declare themselves as Roman Catholic is 1 : 1052.<sup>2</sup> This clearly is a concern since a relatively few number of Catholic priests are tasked to provide religious ministry to a large number of Catholics in the sea services. The long term solution to this concern is obviously

having more priests in the United States. But that concern is beyond the control of the Department of the Navy and the scope of this paper. There are however, some short term initiatives utilizing the current number of priests that can address the critical shortage of Roman Catholic chaplains in the Navy. These initiatives revolve around the areas of retention of current priests on active duty, increased recruiting efforts to bring more Roman Catholic priests into the Navy Chaplain Corps, and incorporating the services of Navy reserve component Catholic Chaplains for ongoing and emerging active component needs.

### Historical Background

On 13 October 1775 the Continental Congress agreed to the formation of a Continental Navy to counter the British forces on the eastern seaboard. On that day, the Congress “voted to dispatch two vessels to cruise eastward.”<sup>3</sup> With this vote, the U.S. Navy was born. As this new Continental Navy developed, attention was immediately given to administering and organizing the fledgling fleet. One of the first tasks in this development was the creation of rules and regulations to guide the new Navy. Since the colonists were already involved in the conflict with Britain, the regulations for the Navy were needed immediately. Faced with this immediate need, the Congress looked to the British Navy for a model to be used in the organization of its new Navy. While Britain was indeed the enemy, it was still considered the mother country and as such many of the customs and traditions of the British navy were adapted for the Continental Navy. Since the larger ships in the British Navy sailed with a clergyman on each voyage, this custom was quickly adopted by the Continental Navy. While not specifically mentioning the role of the Chaplain, the second article of the Navy regulations from 28 November 1775 states: “The Commanders of the ships of the thirteen United Colonies, are to take care that divine service be performed twice a day on board and a sermon preached on Sundays, unless bad

weather or other extraordinary accidents prevent.”<sup>4</sup> From these regulations, Congress approved the status of ordained clergyman on board naval ships to provide the required divine services.

A Congregationalist minister by the name of Benjamin Balch is the first Chaplain known to have served in the Continental Navy.<sup>5</sup> Reverend Balch served aboard the Continental ships *Boston* and *Alliance*. Upon leaving the *Alliance* and naval service, he was replaced by a Navy surgeon named James Geagan who served as chaplain for seven months. At this time in naval history, many clergyman also practiced basic medicine and at times served as physicians. Since Captain John Barry, the Commanding officer at the time, was a devout Catholic, it had been “assumed by some that Geagan was an Irish Catholic priest.”<sup>6</sup> This is the first indication that Catholic priests served as a part of the Colonial Navy.

Along with practicing basic medicine, education of young sailors, especially the midshipmen, seems to have been an important task delegated to the early Navy chaplains. Some of these clergymen were more suited to this task than others. For example, Rev. Adam Marshall S.J., “is listed as the schoolmaster aboard the *North Carolina* for the period beginning 22 December 1824.”<sup>7</sup> This was most appropriate since Rev. Marshall was a member of the Society of Jesus, an order of Catholic priests best known for their educational institutions throughout the world, especially in the United States. As such, Rev. Marshall is the first Roman Catholic priest actually known to have served in the Navy. While his primary role was that of schoolmaster, he would be the first of many Roman Catholic priests to provide Roman Catholic services for naval personnel.

It is interesting to note that until 1888, the Roman Catholic priests who served in the Navy did so primarily as surgeons or schoolmasters and secondarily as clergymen. It was not until 30 April 1888 that Roman Catholic priest Reverend Charles Henry Parks was

commissioned as a Navy Chaplain.<sup>8</sup> Soon the need for more priests in the Navy Chaplain Corps became apparent. This was especially noticeable after the Civil War when there was an increase in the number of Catholics serving in the armed forces. Up until this time, many people serving in the Navy were Episcopalian. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century approximately 40% of the Naval officers were Episcopalian and more than 40% of the Navy chaplains were from the Episcopal Church.<sup>9</sup> But with the increase of the Catholic population in the Navy came a recognizable need to increase the number of Catholic priests serving as chaplains in the service. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century three more priests were commissioned in the Navy, and by 1900 “six of the allotted twenty-four chaplains were Catholics.”<sup>10</sup> While there have never been denominational quotas established by the Chaplain Corps, the Navy has traditionally made an effort to recruit chaplains from the larger denominations on the basis of the national religious census.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman Catholic bishops of the United States quickly recognized the importance of providing qualified priests to serve in the armed services. Historically, every priest who wished to serve in the military had to obtain the permission of his local bishop in order to be endorsed for this service. In order to organize and facilitate this process, the Catholic bishops in the United States in 1905 “designated the Reverend Alexander P. Doyle, C.S.P., to act as their representative with the Government in the appointment of Catholic Chaplains.”<sup>12</sup> This administrative model of endorsing Catholic priests for service in the military was used until 1917. On 24 November of that year, “the Pope appointed the first Episcopus Castrensis, or Chaplain Bishop, in the United States in the person of Most Reverend Patrick J. Hayes, then Auxiliary Bishop and later Archbishop of New York.”<sup>13</sup> At this time the Military Ordinariate came under the Archdiocese of New York and endorsed all Roman Catholic Chaplains serving in the United States Armed Forces. It operated as a separate office in the Archdiocese of New York

Chancery offices. This arrangement was utilized until 1985. Then the Roman Catholic Church gave new canonical status to Military Ordinariates throughout the world. In the United States this change was promulgated on 25 March 1985 when the Military Ordinariate became its own archdiocese and moved its offices to Washington D.C.<sup>14</sup> Its official title became the Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A. And it is this Archdiocese for the Military Services that endorses all Roman Catholic priests in the military.

#### Why Is There a Shortage of Priests in the Navy?

As stated above, the Archdiocese for the Military Services (AMS) is responsible for endorsing all Catholic priests serving in the United States Armed Forces. The Archdiocese does not have its own clergy; instead, it is dependent upon other archdioceses, dioceses, and religious orders to “lend” priests for service in the military chaplaincies. Once a diocese or religious order releases a priest for service in the military, he comes under the direction and jurisdiction of the Archdiocese for the Military Services. When the priest has finished his service in the military, he returns to his home diocese or religious order. As such, the AMS can only offer the services of the priests who have been graciously lent to them.

When there were many vocations to the priesthood, this arrangement and process seems to have worked well. But the current status with Roman Catholic Priests in the United States is one of declining numbers. For example, in 1965 there were 58,632 priests, in 1985 there were 57,317, in 2005 there were 42,839, and the latest statistics for 2008 list only 40,580 priests.<sup>15</sup> From the peak of priestly vocations in the United States in 1965 until the present day there has been a net decrease of 18,052 priests. Along with these statistics is the reality that not all priests are open to service in the military. And of those who are interested in this type of service, many are not physically able to serve or they do not meet maximum age requirements for service. The

sobering truth is that given the declining numbers of priests in the United States, most bishops and leaders of religious orders are reluctant to release one or more for service in the armed forces. They face the same dilemma as the AMS: increasing demands for priests but fewer priests to meet these demands. Furthermore, the ordination of priests in the American Catholic Church has not kept pace with the number of priests who either die or leave active priestly ministry. In the United States there were 994 priestly ordinations in 1965, 533 in 1985, 454 in 1980, and 480 in 2008.<sup>16</sup> An interesting aspect is that of the current priestly ordinations many of the new priests are coming in as “second careers;” this means that they are older upon ordination than the newly ordained were in 1965. As older candidates, they are also less likely to consider service in the military because of physical demands or age.

Given this situation, the Navy Chaplain Corps has seen the number of priests in service on active duty decline proportionally. In 2000 there were 172 priests on active duty, in 2005 there were 138, and currently in 2009 there are only 97 priests on active duty. Navy Chaplain Corps projections for priests on active duty expect 79 priests in 2010 and 56 priests in 2015.<sup>17</sup> This trend reflects the reality that each year fewer priests are available for active duty. Meanwhile, the number of priests leaving the Navy due to retirement or being recalled to home dioceses or religious orders increases. For example, in 2000, eight priests were accessed onto active duty while 18 priests left active service. In 2005, four priests came on active duty while 16 left active service. And in 2008, three priests came on active duty while 16 left active service.<sup>18</sup> These declining numbers make it increasingly difficult to adequately meet the spiritual needs of Roman Catholics serving in the sea services.



### Declining Numbers: Whose problem is it?

As demonstrated above, the number of priests available for active service in the Navy Chaplain Corps has been declining and will continue to do so. The question arises then: whose problem is it? Is it a United States Navy problem? Is it Roman Catholic Church problem? In reality, it is a problem for both the United States Navy and the Roman Catholic Church. It is a problem for the United States Navy because the Navy Chaplain Corps is totally dependent on civilian churches to provide the clergy needed to care for the spiritual needs of Sailors and Marines. Of the 801 chaplains serving in the Navy currently, 97 are Catholic priests.<sup>19</sup> Of these 97, 46 are in the rank of Commander and Captain which means that they are close to the end of their active duty careers.<sup>20</sup> The shortage of priests in the Navy Chaplain Corps is also a problem for the Roman Catholic Church because it cannot adequately provide for the ongoing sacramental needs of the Catholic men and women serving in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Catholics believe that the sacramental nature of the Church sustains its members.<sup>21</sup> Without the sacraments, Catholics on active duty are in danger of being unable to adequately practice their faith.

The issue of declining numbers of priests in the United States is an issue beyond the control of the Navy. However, there are some possible solutions to addressing the declining number of Roman Catholic Priests on active duty in the Navy. Most of these initiatives can be used for all denominations, but this paper is focused on Roman Catholic priests in the area of retention, recruiting, and better utilization of the reserve component Catholic priests in U.S. Navy.

## Retention of Active Component Chaplains

Recognizing the wonderful work done by all Navy Chaplains regardless of denomination, it must be understood that particular denominations have extra burdens placed on them because of the low representation in the Chaplain Corps. Included in this category are Roman Catholic priests. For example, on a Sunday during a deployment it is not uncommon for a priest to do five or more masses at as many locations. Along with the ongoing duties of a chaplain and division officer, a priest will also have to dedicate time to sacramental preparation, classes, and counseling. This would be more time consuming than responsibilities expected of chaplains from denominations not counted under the scarce religious resource category. And if the priest is a supervisory chaplain, he will also have the added responsibility of mentoring junior chaplains. In a recent deployment to Iraq there was one priest in each of the two regimental combat teams. In both cases the priest was the regimental chaplain. During this deployment “the priests needed to travel to the forward operating bases for all of their battalions, provide Sunday coverage at the base chapels, while at the same time functioning in supervisory roles for junior chaplains and advisory roles for their commanding officers.”<sup>22</sup> After a while, such a high operational tempo takes a toll on the human resources available to provide spiritual care.

It is also becoming very common that detailers will send priests to assignments that are not primarily centered on providing direct pastoral care and presume that the priests will also provide a full chapel program.<sup>23</sup> This can place the priest in an awkward position and can be demoralizing. Because of the demands placed on them, it can be very difficult to take leave or to attend necessary spiritual programs required for professional development. The danger in these scenarios is a work load that becomes impossible to manage. And if the chaplains lose their positive outlook because of overwork, they will lose interest in staying on active duty.

Furthermore, they will cease to provide a positive example to potential priest chaplains which will in turn have a negative impact on recruiting.

In other words, chaplains are human beings with particular needs and more emphasis must be placed on taking care of them so that they can take care of those entrusted to their spiritual care. The Department of the Navy and the Chaplain Corps has to take the lead in making sure that the Navy priests on active duty do not lose effectiveness by becoming burned out, disillusioned or embittered. Supervisory chaplains and commanding officers must be educated to the fact that Roman Catholic priests are a limited resource and as such are often tremendously overworked. As a result, special concern must be given to them so that they are able to have the down time necessary to recharge and re-engage.

### Recruiting

Along with addressing the issue of retention, greater emphasis must be placed on recruiting Roman Catholic priests for service as Navy Chaplains. Currently the Navy Chaplain Corps has six chaplains in various areas of the country who work with the general officer recruiters in recruiting districts to access new chaplains.<sup>24</sup> However, the recruiting policy does not emphasize recruiting for any particular denomination, although one of the chaplains is charged with focusing on national diversity issues. Specifically, this chaplain is focused on recruiting Jewish Rabbis, Muslim Imams, and Roman Catholic priests.<sup>25</sup> Despite these efforts, recruiting priests is still a glaring need. Traditionally, no emphasis has been placed on specifically recruiting priests. This is due in a large part to the litigation brought against the Navy Chaplain Corps with the accusation of discrimination against non-liturgical chaplains.<sup>26</sup> This class action suit, which is still being addressed in the court system, was brought by current and former Navy chaplains and alleges that liturgical chaplains, including Catholic Chaplains,

have been promoted in greater percentages than the non-liturgical chaplains.<sup>27</sup> While this litigation must be addressed by legal counsel, the Navy should not allow it to dictate how the spiritual needs of the men and women of the sea services will be met.

Therefore, the Navy as a body needs to make a conscious decision that it wants to recruit more priests. The United States Army Chaplaincy has made this a priority since 1999 when Major General G.T. Gunhus, Army Chief of Chaplains and a Lutheran Minister, recognized the shortage of Roman Catholic priests.<sup>28</sup> Upon taking office, Chaplain Gunhus determined that the keystone mission of his tenure as Army Chief of Chaplains was the successful recruitment of shortage denomination clergy, in particular Roman Catholic priests.<sup>29</sup> To address the issue of recruiting priests, the Army Chaplaincy has designated two Roman Catholic Chaplains specifically as priest recruiters. That is their sole responsibility. Furthermore, these priest recruiters are not limited to specific districts. Together they are responsible for recruiting priests to the Army Chaplain Corps throughout the United States.<sup>30</sup>

The Air Force has adopted a similar model for recruiting priests. The Air Force Chaplaincy also has two priest Chaplains specifically assigned to the duty of recruiting priests. Along with these two priests, the Air Force also has a Protestant Chaplain who focuses on recruiting Roman Catholic priests as well.<sup>31</sup> If the Army and the Air Force Chaplaincies are legally able to have this particular recruiting emphasis, it seems plausible that the Navy Chaplain Corps should be able to do likewise. Therefore, cannot the Navy task “2-3 priests specifically for recruiting efforts and to work at mentoring the priest recruits waiting to come on active duty?”<sup>32</sup> These additional priests serving as recruiters would at least give the Navy an opportunity to compete with the Army and the Air Force for the few available priests interested in military chaplaincy. Catholic leaders in dioceses and religious orders do see that the service

of their priests in the military does provide a service to the broader Church. However, the challenge is in determining if the greater good for a priest is in service to a local diocese or to the military.

Having priest specific recruiters makes sense since the primary role of the recruiter is to develop relationships to foster potential candidates for the Chaplain Corps. While priests are recruited at all stages before and after ordination, the reality is that the younger they are, the more likely they are to adapt to the physical demands of operational assignments. Therefore, the sooner that they can be accessed on active duty the better it is for the Navy because of age and physical requirements. If a recruiter is not bound by particular districts or overall quotas for chaplain recruits regardless of denomination, he can be freed up to make regular visits to Roman Catholic seminaries and houses of studies across the United States in order to develop these relationships. When a recruiter develops relationships with seminary faculty and staff, he is more likely to meet and potentially influence seminarians preparing for ordination to the Catholic priesthood. It is also important for the priest recruiters to establish relationships with the diocesan bishops and provincial superiors of religious orders. By appealing directly to the bishops and provincials, recruiters can clearly make the case for the need of Catholic Chaplains in the Navy.

To assist the recruiters in developing these relationships, the Roman Catholic priests on active and reserve duty in the Navy Chaplain Corps could be utilized. Maintaining personal contacts with bishops and provincials was and is seen as key for developing potential priest recruits. One suggestion for maintaining these contacts was simply having priests active in the sea services request that their Commanding Officers write a letter to the priest's bishop or provincial thanking them for the services of the priest and relating how important it was to have

a priest available to the Sailors or Marines. Also, many active duty priests suggest that bishops and provincials should be invited to Navy and Marine Corps bases; if done, they could see for themselves the good work that is being accomplished by priests and the critical needs for more of them to be released for this important work. Along with these initiatives to raise awareness and develop relationships, active duty priests should be asked by the priest recruiters to accompany them to seminaries that were attended before ordination. As one chaplain stated, “in 16 years of active duty I have never been asked by a chaplain recruiter to accompany them to the seminary that I attended. Since some classmates and friends are on the faculty, it might have helped open the door. I have never been asked to follow up following a recruiter’s visit to a seminary. I have never been asked to speak to my bishop about releasing more priests for active duty.”<sup>33</sup>

The personal visit of a Navy priest to the bishop or provincial superior also has the advantage of educating these Church leaders about the potential for developing vocations for their own concerns. By making these visits, Navy Chaplains can, “impress on the bishops the potential vocations that exist in the military; that this age group from 18-30 is a gold mine of potential vocations, but we need priests to form them in the faith.”<sup>34</sup> This initiative emphasizes the mutual benefits for both the Navy and the Church in having adequate numbers of priests to provide for the spiritual needs of Catholics in the sea services as well as in home dioceses. Thus, the personal relationship clearly demonstrates that “the primary recruiting tool is invitation and encouragement.”<sup>35</sup> Hence active duty priests could identify and target potential chaplains within their own diocese or religious order.” Again, by utilizing their friendships and contacts within their dioceses and religious orders, more potential Catholic Chaplains can be identified. It is important to note that while the Army, Air Force and Navy compete for available priests, dioceses and religious orders do not compete with the military for potential recruits. Instead, the

dioceses and religious orders provide the potential recruits for service in the military with the understanding that the priests in the military will return to their home dioceses and orders for service after their military obligations have been completed.

While relationship building is essential, the basic understanding of “how to recruit” must be taught to those chaplains assigned to recruiting duty. Priest chaplain recruiters should be trained in programs dedicated to recruiting and advertising strategies. This need could be recognized by sending the chaplain recruiters to particular segments of military recruiter training courses. This follows from the premise that just because a man is a good Navy priest does not necessarily mean that he will be a good recruiter, or necessarily know and understand affective techniques for priest specific Chaplain Corps recruiting. Indeed, regardless of branch or service, that is why good soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines attend such recruiting and sales courses. Chaplains would be no exception. Training in advertising was also seen as a need for chaplains embarking on recruiting duty. One chaplain who recently finished recruiting duty believed that having the ability to personally work with advertising agencies contracted by the Navy specifically targeting priests and seminarians would have been helpful in recruiting more priests to the Navy Chaplain Corps.

#### Catholic Chaplain Candidate Program

A key tool for recruiting chaplains for all branches of military service has been the Chaplain Candidate Program Officer (CCPO). The purpose of the chaplain candidate program is “to familiarize graduate students of religion with religious support activities in the military environment and to aid in meeting future year accession requirements for chaplains on the Active Duty List and in the Reserve Component.”<sup>36</sup> Navy chaplain candidates are not yet ordained but receive a direct commission at the 0-1 pay grade level and are appointed to the Reserve

Component, staff designator 1945. As part of their training they complete the first cycle of instruction at the Navy Chaplain School. After their initial training, chaplain candidates may receive orders for Active Duty for Training (ADT) to provide them with the opportunity of on the job training (OJT) with active duty chaplains in the Navy and Marine Corps. This OJT is normally completed during the chaplain candidate's first summer in the program, but subsequent summer breaks before ordination can also be spent in OJT. During such periods of active duty OJT, chaplain candidates are exposed to the reality and variety of ministry in the sea services. An important element of this program is matching a chaplain candidate with a particular active duty chaplain. As part of a positive experience, the chaplain supervisor will mentor the candidate. For many chaplain candidates a positive experience of OJT was the key component in deciding to accept a superseding appointment to the Chaplain Corps in either the reserve or active components.

The current chaplain candidate program is designed to accommodate all potential chaplains, regardless of denomination. However, given the reality that the number of potential candidates for ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood declines each year and therefore offers the Navy fewer potential Roman Catholic candidates for the Chaplain Corps, there needs to be a particular Chaplain Candidate program designed for Roman Catholic seminarians. This is especially important given the structured formation programs for Roman Catholic seminarians. These formation programs utilize the academic year as well as the summer breaks from studies. Because of the length of seminarian formation programs, it is difficult for a Catholic seminarian to have a free summer in order to participate in the chaplain candidate program. Most Catholic seminarians will be required to have structured ministerial assignments in parishes during summer breaks. This could possibly be done at a Navy or Marine Corps base chapel, but this



would require cooperation with individual dioceses to ensure that it would meet their requirements. Recognizing this, it is important for the Navy chaplain candidate program to factor in these requirements in order to accommodate Catholic seminarians who are interested in being Navy Chaplains.

The model for such a program already exists in the Air Force. The Air Force Chaplain Candidate program attempts to work in close cooperation with diocesan formation directors in order to incorporate the objectives of seminary summer training into their chaplain candidate program. This chaplain candidate program “outlines the Air Force Chaplain Services commitment to actively participate in accomplishing seminary and diocesan formation.”<sup>37</sup> Through ongoing planning the Air Force cooperates with Catholic seminaries to design the Chaplain Candidate program in such a way that it also meets the requirements of the seminarian formation programs. Like the Navy, the Air Force Catholic chaplain candidates complete Commissioned Officer Training and a segment of the Chaplain Course. Following this initial training, the Catholic Chaplain Candidates spend their next four weeks at the seminary for the Archdiocese of Denver. Here, Catholic chaplain mentors are in residence “contributing directly to each candidate’s spiritual development and providing an introduction to priestly ministry in a military setting. Seminary, lay, and Air Force personnel serve as additional resources.”<sup>38</sup> This cooperation of Air Force priests and archdiocesan formations directors is essential to building relationships and fulfilling requirements for all parties.

During this time in Denver, the Catholic chaplain candidates are exposed to a variety of Air Force ministry settings in nearby Air Force Bases. Catholic Chaplains accompany and supervise the candidates throughout the program. At the conclusion of the first summer program, a priest mentor will complete the evaluation form used by each candidate’s seminary

program. Also, the Director of the Air Force Chaplain Candidate Program makes a personal contact with each Catholic Chaplain Candidate's bishop or provincial superior. After this initial training opportunity the following summers can also be used to work at Air Force installations under the supervision of an active duty Catholic chaplain. Why cannot the Navy Chaplain Corps develop a similar program for Roman Catholic seminarians?

A missing piece for all of the Chaplain Candidate programs is ongoing mentoring and support after the initial summer OJT. This ensuing contact is especially important if the Navy Chaplain Corps hopes to recruit Roman Catholic seminarians to the Chaplaincy upon their ordination to the priesthood. The reality is that a Catholic seminarian is faced with multiple ministry opportunities, primarily in a parish setting on many weekends. He will have ongoing mentoring and support to evaluate these ministry opportunities. In the midst of such service, the summer experience as a Chaplain Candidate can become lost or blurred. Since the Chaplain Candidates are spread out over the United States, this ongoing mentoring initially seems to be a challenge. But the answer to this is to connect seminarians near active duty Navy bases with Navy active duty priests. Seminarians who do not live near an active duty base could be matched with Navy priests in the reserve component. These Navy priests in the active and reserve components could then make monthly or quarterly contact with the Catholic chaplain candidates. While this suggestion is made in order to support Catholic seminarians, this personal contact and relationship building would be beneficial for use with all chaplain candidates regardless of denomination.

#### Reserve Component Priests

As the Navy Chaplain Corps addresses the shortage of Roman Catholic priests on active duty, they can look to the reserve component for support and cooperation. With a Navy total

force approach where reserve units often augment active duty needs, the same holds true for supporting ministry in the sea services. Currently, chaplains in the reserve component fall into three categories: Selective Reserve (SELRES) chaplains are in paid billets for reserve drill status, Volunteer Training Units (VTU) places chaplains in non-paid billets in reserve drill status, and Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) are chaplains in a non-drill status.

Chaplains in the drilling status as SELRES and VTU are assigned to particular billets and have the opportunity to do two weeks of Annual Training (AT) with their reserve units. During the year, they report to a local Naval Operational Support Center (NOSC) one weekend each month in order to complete their monthly reserve training and requirements.<sup>39</sup> For a priest in the SELRES and VTU, these weekend commitments can be difficult to maintain primarily because weekend parish duties are his busiest times in his week. With the declining number of priests in the United States, it is also becoming increasingly difficult for a parish priest in the reserve component to sustain his reserve drilling commitments. Another reality is that ministry in the Naval Operational Support Centers tends to be minimal at best. Since most local reservists already have their local worship centers, there is often very little for a chaplain to do on any given reserve weekend. Also, given the liturgical calendar in the Catholic Church and the demands of particular liturgical seasons, it is impossible for some priests to get away for reserve duty at particular times in the year such as the Christmas and Easter seasons. One suggestion is to explore the possibilities of different models of serving in the reserve component. Again, the Navy can look to the Air Force for two models of reserve component chaplain service.

The Air Force offers chaplains two programs for service in their reserve component. Their “Category A” program is similar to the traditional Navy reserve program. This includes service for one weekend a month and two weeks during the year. The Air Force also offers a

“Category B” program which has more flexibility. Chaplains in this program are listed as Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA) and may serve at active duty bases in the United States and overseas. As a participant in the IMA program, a chaplain is committed to “12 Inactive Duty Training (IDT) days per year and one Annual Tour (AT) of 12 days.”<sup>40</sup> Usually, the chaplain is attached to training at an active duty chapel on an installation near home.

This program is significant because it offers benefits to both the reserve and active component chaplains. It allows the reserve component chaplain to “save up” his drill periods and utilize them at one time for service at an active duty base where the needs are great and the ministry is meaningful.<sup>41</sup> This program allows a priest in the reserve component to schedule his reserve duty during times when his calendar can accommodate his being away from the parish. With enough lead time, the reserve component priest is able to organize and plan for visiting priests to cover the parish while he is away completing his reserve duty. This program is beneficial for the active component priests since it allows them the opportunity to take leave or schedule time for an annual retreat since the reserve component priests can cover for him. This also allows an active duty priest to rest, recharge, and avoid burn out. This type of program would work well in the Navy Chaplain Corps since it would utilize the reserve force for real needs while at the same time providing opportunities for active duty priests to take leave. As a result, retention issues would also be addressed since this would provide some assistance for overworked priests at active duty commands.

#### Mobilizations and Recalls to Active Duty

In peacetime, as well as in times of crisis or national emergency, units and individual members within the reserve component may be involuntarily mobilized to active duty in order to augment the active component. Each person in the reserve component, including all chaplains, is

aware of this commitment. This type of mobilization usually occurs when a declaration of national emergency has been declared by the President. The current declaration is Executive Order 13223 of January 16, 2002 which orders the Ready Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active duty to augment the existing active forces. President George W. Bush stated:

Based upon my determination under 10 U.S.C. 2201 (c) that it is necessary to increase (subject to limits imposed by law) the number of members of the armed forces on active duty for the Department of Defense beyond the number for which funds are provided in the appropriation Act for the Department of Defense.<sup>42</sup>

Since this Executive Order was promulgated, members of the reserve component for all sections of the armed forces have been mobilized to support the active component, some more than once. In order to coordinate the use of the reserve component for the emerging active component needs, current Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has developed a planned utilization of the Total Force. In his directives he states that involuntary mobilization for members of the Reserve Forces will be for a maximum one year at any one time and “the planning objective for involuntary mobilizations of Guard/Reserve units will remain a one year mobilized to five years demobilized ratio.”<sup>43</sup> Currently, chaplains are being mobilized as part of reserve units and as Individual Augmentees for one year.<sup>44</sup> However, this one year mobilization to five years demobilization policy provides some concerns when it comes to mobilizing reserve component priests. There are only 29 Roman Catholic priests in the Navy Reserve Component. Of those physically able, most have already been mobilized in the last five years for one year periods of service. Now they are being asked to mobilize again for another year before the five year demobilization limit has been fulfilled.

While each of these priests is patriotic and open to fulfilling responsibilities for mobilizations, more care and concern must be placed on the utilization of these declining

resources. The reality is that it is difficult for most priests to be away from his parish for a year, and it is even more difficult if he is asked to do this several times in a five year span. Also, as the number of priests in the United States steadily declines each year, parishes that once enjoyed the services of two or more priests now only have one. If this one priest is mobilized then the diocese scrambles to find adequate coverage in the absence of the pastor. The suggestion has been made by a number of priests in the reserve component that the mobilizations be for six months at a time, with the understanding that there would be more mobilizations over a shorter time period. This is suggested for the simple fact that it is easier to get priest coverage in a parish for six months than it is for a full year since local clergy can cover the parish for shorter time periods but would be reluctant to for longer periods given their own parish demands. Also, given the financial, communal, and sacramental concerns in a parish, the absence of a pastor can be tolerated for shorter periods, but his leadership is essential for the long term.

Flexibility in the utilization of these scarce religious resources in the reserve component can also lead to other solutions as well. For example, periodically a reserve component priest will be granted a one year sabbatical from parish and ministerial responsibilities. If he chose, could not a reserve chaplain choose to serve on active duty in the Navy? However, there might not be any mobilization needs or requests to the reserve component for a priest when these availabilities occur. Given this availability of priestly ministry for the Navy, a recall to active duty would seem prudent. But current Department of the Navy policy states that “officers recalled to active duty must agree to remain on active duty for a minimum of two years.”<sup>45</sup> A suggestion by some of the priests in the reserve component is that “consideration be given for voluntary full time support for a one year recall to active duty.”<sup>46</sup> This could be done by changing Navy policy to allow for one year recalls to active duty instead of the mandatory two

year minimum. Currently there are many Navy base chapels in the continental United States that are without Roman Catholic coverage because an active duty priest simply is not available and contracting a local Catholic priest has not been possible. While bringing on a reserve component priest for one year does not satisfy the long term needs of having more priestly vocations in the United States and in the military, it would provide more Roman Catholic coverage while the long term needs are addressed.

#### Database for Reserve Component Chaplain Requests and Availability

While the Navy speaks to a Total Force approach in carrying out the duties of the sea services, the reality is that there still is more cooperation needed between the active and reserve components. This is especially noticeable within the ranks of the Chaplain Corps. For example, at various times throughout the year combatant commands and major claimant chaplains will identify shortfalls in their needs for chaplain support for adequate coverage in denominational specific needs. Or there might be gapped billets within geographical areas that are waiting to be filled. In any case, particular denominations do not have coverage for Sunday services or for high holy days. This is especially true for many Roman Catholic communities. In many cases, because chaplains and commands know that there is a shortage of Roman Catholic priests in the Navy reserve, they often do not make the request for reserve component assistance. However, with enough lead time many of these needs could be accommodated. For example, since several of the Roman Catholic Chaplains in the SELRES and VTU reserve component are assigned to educational institutions and not parishes, they could be available during times of great need such as the Easter and Christmas liturgical seasons. If they do not hear of needs from the Navy, they may make themselves available to local parishes. If the Navy were to alert them to possible needs, then these priests could provide necessary assistance to active duty commands during

peak times. With 21<sup>st</sup> century technology available, it is clear that there is a lack of coordination among the reserve and active component Navy chaplains.

In order match the needs for Roman Catholic support to possible times of reserve priest availabilities, there needs to be a central depository and data base to coordinate this use of the Total Force.<sup>47</sup> This can be done by utilizing the reserve component system that is already in place. The reserve component in the continental United States has been restructured along the lines of the active component regions. There are six regions: Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic (which includes the geographical northeast), Southeast, and Naval District Washington. Each of these regional commands reports to the Commander of Naval Installations Command (CNIC). And each of these regions has a regional active duty chaplain. This regional chaplain is assisted by a deputy regional chaplain who is drawn from the reserve component. The goal in this structure is better coordination of the resources that are available in both the reserve and active components of the Chaplain Corps. Since a deputy regional chaplain is in regular contact with the reserve component chaplains assigned or residing in his/her particular region, he/she could maintain a data base with the dates when reserve component chaplains would be available to support active duty needs. The deputy regional chaplains could forward the data to the deputy chaplain for CNIC who would then combine the chaplain availabilities for all districts. Since the deputy regional chaplain for CNIC would manage the combined reserve chaplain availability list, he/she could then be contacted by active duty commands to inquire if there would be available reserve component support. Or he could alert active duty commands when reserve component chaplains could be available for service. This data base would match emerging active duty needs with available reserve component support thereby providing another



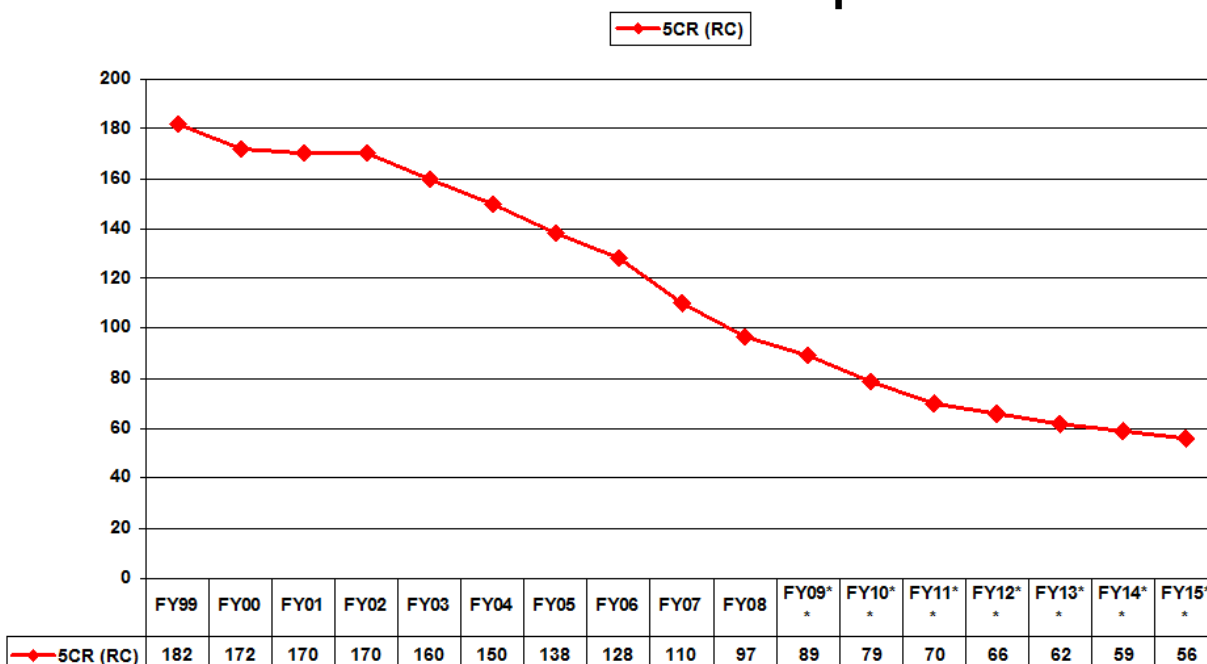
resource for religious ministry in the sea services. This would be especially helpful to provide for the needs of the Roman Catholic communities.

### Conclusion

As the Chaplain Corps of the United States carries out the strategic plan for providing ministry in the sea services, its members recognize that they must continuously evolve to ensure that they are meeting the religious ministry needs of the men and women who serve in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. A key component of meeting these spiritual needs will be ensuring that ministry will be provided for denominations that have large numbers on active duty but small representation in the Chaplain Corps. This is especially true for the Roman Catholic denomination since the number of priests on active duty declines each year. While the long term concerns of increasing the number of priests in the United States and therefore in the Chaplain Corps is beyond the scope of the Department of the Navy, there are some short term initiatives that can be enacted now to address this growing concern. These include the retention of current Catholic Chaplains, recruiting potential Catholic Chaplains, and utilizing the reserve component priests. With some creative thinking and flexibility, the ministry to Roman Catholics in the sea services can be better accommodated and supported. This paper attempted to suggest some of those possibilities.

**Appendix - A**

# End Strength Overview of Active Duty Roman Catholic Chaplains

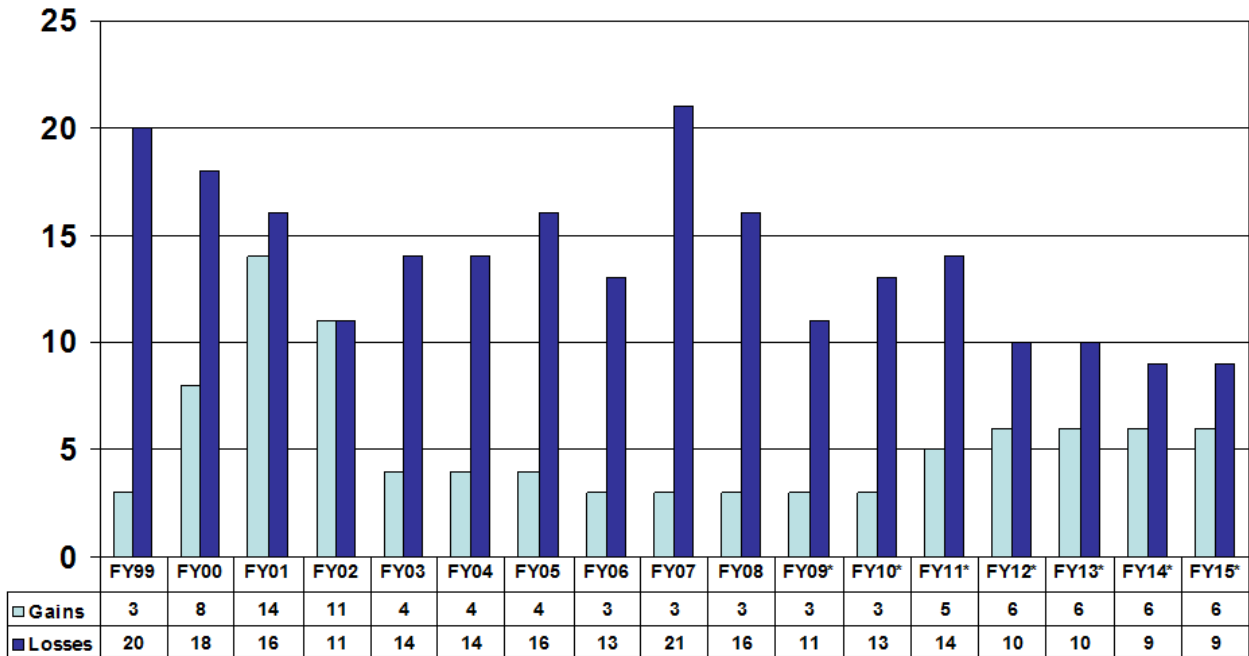


Provided by Mrs. Veronica Berto, Community Manager,  
Chief of Navy Chaplains Office, 11/18/08

**\*Projected**

**Figure 1- End Strength Overview of Active Duty Roman Catholic Chaplains**

# Overview of Active Duty Roman Catholic Chaplain Gains/Losses

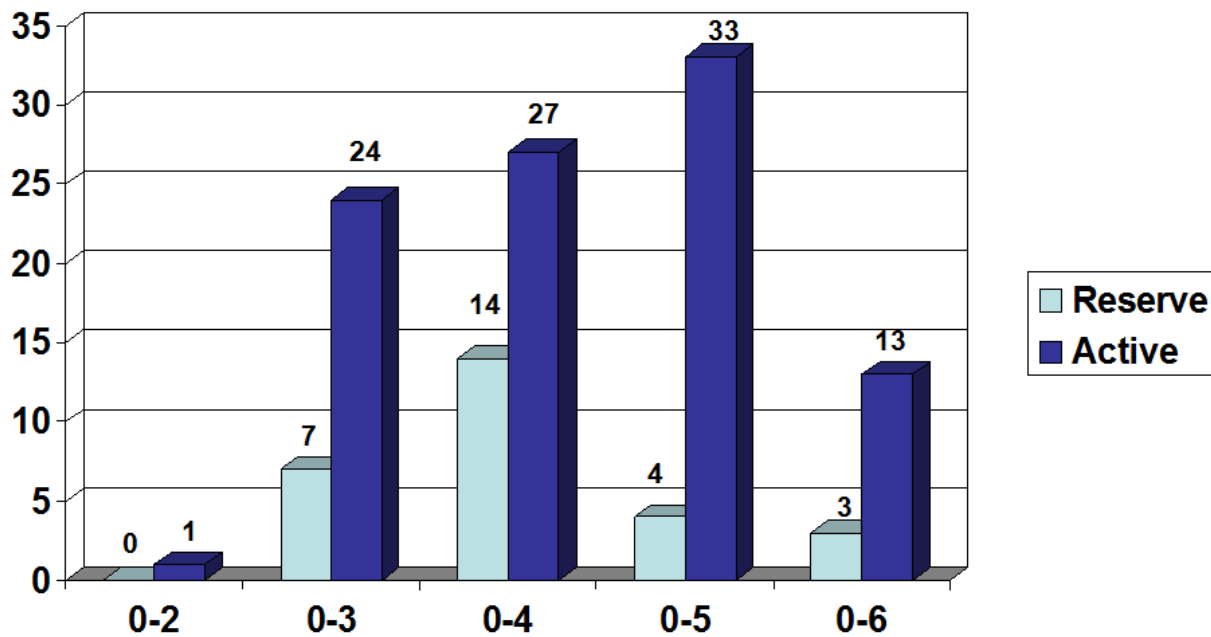


Provided by Mrs. Veronica Berto, Community Manager,  
Chief of Navy Chaplains Office, 11/18/2008

\*Projected

**Figure 2 - Overview of Active Duty Roman Catholic Chaplain Gains/ Losses**

# Priests Serving in the Navy Active and Reserve Components



Provided by Mrs. Veronica Berto, Community Manager,  
Chief of Navy Chaplains Office 08 JAN 2009

Figure 3 - Priests Serving in the Navy Active and Reserve Components

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### **Interviews**

The challenges in doing the research for this paper revolved around gathering information from primary sources in order to offer suggestions for possible solutions to the shortage of Roman Catholic priests in the Navy. Through e-mail, telephone conversations, and personal interviews, information was gathered on this topic from military chaplains as well as non-chaplains who are associated with the Navy Chaplain Corps. Copies of e-mails and notes from telephone interviews are in the author's possession. While there are specific quotes in the paper, most of this paper focuses on a composite of the information that was gathered.

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