

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**SHORTAGE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC CHAPLAINS: CAN IT BE FIXED?**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Almost every year since the end of the Vietnam War, the number of Roman Catholic priests serving in the Army has declined. Today, priests represent less than eight percent of the total active component Chaplaincy. At the same time that the real number of priests has gone down, the real number of Catholic soldiers and family members has increased. The Army is now 23.4 percent Catholic. The present ratio of priests-chaplains to Catholic soldiers/family members caused the Army Chief of Chaplains to designate Roman Catholicism a "critically short faith group." This shortage jeopardizes the Chaplaincy's ability to accomplish its mission: assisting the Commander in ensuring the right of free exercise of religion. As a result, Catholic soldiers can be sent into combat without adequate religious support. The Chief of Chaplains has vigorously addressed this problem but to date nothing has been fully successful. This Strategic Research Project examines the causes of the problem, analyzes the many efforts to correct it, and makes recommendations for future action.



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## SHORTAGE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC CHAPLAINS: CAN IT BE FIXED?

The simple answer to why the Army Chaplaincy is critically short of Roman Catholic priests is that the Roman Catholic Church in the United States is unable to supply sufficient priests. The question then becomes why the Catholic Church is unable to do this and what are the consequences of the shortage for the Army? A related question is whether this is an Army problem or solely a Church problem? Should the Army be concerned about it at all?

### A COMPLEX AND STRATEGIC QUESTION

The critical shortage of priests is both a Church problem and an Army problem. It is an Army problem because the Chaplaincy is completely dependent on civilian Churches to supply the clergy it needs to care for soldiers.

The American chaplaincy system today cannot be understood apart from its special civilian relationships and procedures, known as ecclesiastical endorsement. All chaplains are volunteers but they are not free-lance individuals. They represent recognized religious bodies which must certify to their fitness for the chaplaincy and their good standing in the communion granting their credentials to serve as ministers, priests or rabbis.<sup>1</sup>

These civilian ecclesiastical agencies must meet criteria established by the Armed Forces Chaplains' Board, under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy:

DOD Instruction #1330.7 defines an endorsing agency as a council, department, committee or organization charged by a church or denomination to represent that church or denomination in its relationship with the Armed Forces Chaplains Board and the DOD Components and given the responsibility for procuring, examining, and endorsing clergy to the Armed Forces as meeting the denominational standards and requirements to be chaplains of that church or denomination in the Armed Forces.<sup>2</sup>

Some of these agencies have as few as one chaplain on active duty, while others have many. The Archdiocese for the Military Services (AMS), the Roman Catholic endorsing agency, has the largest total number of chaplains representing one church. As of 30 September 2002, the AMS accounted for 104 Army chaplains. These 104 Roman Catholic priests are only eight percent of the 1310 chaplains who make up the active duty Chaplaincy.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Army is 23.4% Catholic.<sup>4</sup> This means that eight percent of the Chaplaincy is trying to care for almost a fourth of the Army. Why is there such a critical shortage of priests and what can be done about it?

Why should the Army be so concerned about this? The Army is responsible to care for the spiritual well-being of its soldiers and their families. Soldiers have a constitutional right to



the “free exercise” of religion. They do not give up this right when they enter upon active duty. The fact that the most substantially represented faith group in the Army, Roman Catholic, does not have sufficient clergy to care for its membership is, therefore, of critical importance to the Army. It is important for the obvious first amendment reason but also for a strategic reason. No one expressed this more clearly and powerfully than General George C. Marshall:

I look upon the spiritual life of the soldier as even more important than his physical equipment. The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul sustains him; if not he cannot be relied upon and he will fail himself, his commander, and his country in the end. It's morale and I mean spiritual morale, which wins the victory ultimately. And that type of morale can only come out of a soldier who knows God and who has the spirit of religious fervor in his soul.<sup>5</sup>

General Marshall, a great soldier-statesman, thus believed that the spiritual well-being of soldiers is critical to the Army's ability to accomplish its primary mission, fighting and winning the nation's wars. The Army provides for the spiritual well being of soldiers through its Chaplaincy. The mission of the Army and the mission of the Chaplaincy are interlocked. The Chaplaincy Strategic Plan articulates the Chaplaincy mission: “to provide religious support to America's Army across the full spectrum of operations . . . by assisting the Commander in ensuring the right of free exercise of religion.”<sup>6</sup> General Eric Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff, endorsed this plan and stressed its strategic importance: “This plan supports The Army Vision . . . (its) goals and objectives provide the Chaplaincy with a yardstick to measure its support of our People, Readiness, and Transformation over the next six years. (The Chaplaincy) mission . . . is critically important to achieving The Army's mission.”<sup>7</sup>

Since the mission of the Army and the mission of the Chaplaincy are interlocked and the Chaplaincy is dependent on civilian church endorsing agencies, the ability of these endorsing agencies to supply sufficient clergy becomes absolutely critical. This is especially true if the endorsing agency in question represents a church constituting one-fourth of the active duty Army population, the Roman Catholic Church.

The Chaplaincy Strategic Plan acknowledges the critical need to address denominational shortfalls: “Particularly challenging is the need to address diverse faith group representation in light of present and future Army demographics.”<sup>8</sup> The Plan also points out that

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 allows an agency to address likely issues, factors, or scenarios that could keep it from accomplishing its goals. . . . (For the Chaplaincy) the most important key external factors are . . . vocational shortages within selected faith groups (and) unanticipated withdrawal of personnel by endorsing agencies . . .<sup>9</sup>

According to Chaplain (Major General) G.T. Gunhus, Army Chief of Chaplains, the Army designates only one faith group with a “critical shortage” of chaplains, Roman Catholics.<sup>10</sup> Chaplain Gunhus, a Lutheran, pledged, on taking office in 1999, that “I have determined that the keystone mission of my tenure as Army Chief of Chaplains is the successful recruitment of shortage denomination clergy, and, in particular, Roman Catholic priests.”<sup>11</sup>

Why would Chaplain Gunhus make this his “keystone mission?” Some scholars suggest that the constitutionality of the Chaplaincy could be challenged on “free exercise” grounds if the critical shortage of Catholic priests is not resolved. Between 1979 and 1984, the constitutionality of the Chaplaincy indeed came under attack in the federal courts, *Katcoff v. Marsh*.

In July and August 1983, those fighting on behalf of the military chaplaincy learned that they might have another and unwanted opponent in their fight. During those months the Chaplains Research Committee, headed by a Roman Catholic priest who had been discharged from the Army, sought leave to file an *amicus curiae* brief in the *Katcoff* case. The committee argued that the “faith imbalance” created by the alleged under-representation of various groups within the Army chaplaincy denied members of those groups their right to the free exercise of religion. . . . Judge McLaughlin . . . denied the application to intervene. His basis was that the request was untimely, was not consented to by both parties, and was brought by a group acting as an advocate rather than *amicus curiae*.<sup>12</sup>

The point here is that there could be potential threats to the Chaplaincy over “free exercise/critical shortage” issues from those familiar with the inner workings of the institution. CH (COL) Terry Dempsey warned of this type of danger as recently as April 2000 when he aptly observed in Asymmetric Threats to the United States Army Chaplaincy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

A legal challenge brought by a chaplain, a group of chaplains, or even an endorsing agent would carry the weight of firsthand information only available to an insider. Such a challenge would be empowered by plaintiffs with a systems and operational understanding of both the Chaplaincy and the Army.<sup>13</sup>

The *Katcoff* case was eventually dismissed. But the issue of constitutionality was never fully resolved and the Court counseled the Chaplaincy that it must stay focused on its mission, “the free exercise of religion for soldiers.” Caring for Catholic soldiers, one-fourth of the Army, is a major part of that mission.

## **WHY THE SHORTAGE**

Why is the AMS unable to supply the Chaplaincy with enough priests? The AMS does not have the priests to give because almost all of the approximately 200 Catholic dioceses of the

United States do not have the priests to give. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University explains that

27% of U.S. parishes do not have a resident priest, an increase of 17% from 1996 estimates. Between 1950 and 2000 the Catholic population increased 107% while the total number of priests increased by only 6%. At the same time the average age of priests increased so that we now have more priests over 90 (433) than we do under 30 (298). . . Numbers of theologate seminarians have declined from 6,602 in 1970 to 3,474 in 2000.<sup>14</sup>

As the chart below illustrates, the ordination of priests in the American Catholic Church has not kept pace with deaths and losses over the past fifty years. Further, ordinations are not expected to keep pace in the future because of the aging priest population and the low number of seminarians. Consequently, there will be an ever-increasing net loss of priests for many years to come.

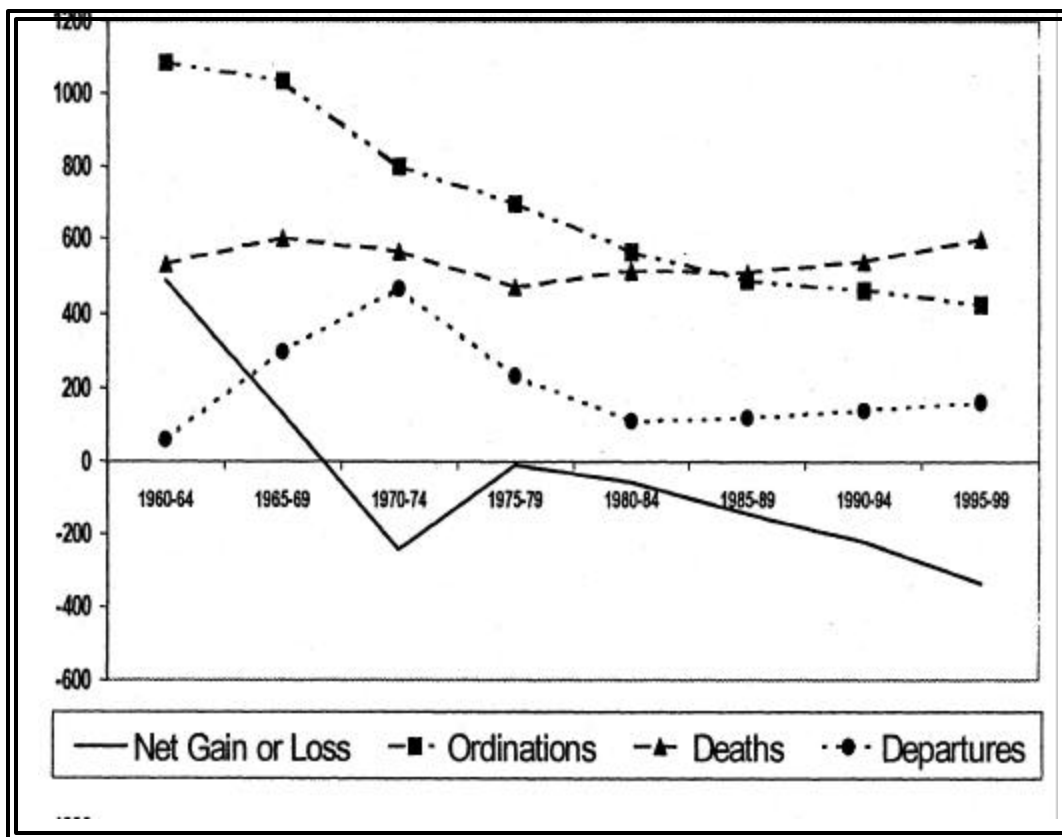


FIGURE 1<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that the number of priests and seminarians is declining relative to the Catholic population, that population is growing significantly. A recent survey indicates that “Catholics are the largest single denomination in the United States, as well as one of the fastest growing . . . (only three other churches) had larger (percentage) increases since 1990.”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, this problem for the American Catholic Church is not going to get better any time soon. As a result, it will continue to have difficulty supplying the Army with the number of priests the Chaplaincy needs.

Why is the Catholic Church in the United States so short of priests? There are many theories but few definitive answers:

Father Gregory Coiro, the spokesman for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles (the nation's largest diocese with 4.5 million faithful), said a number of factors are contributing to the situation. Fewer people are training to become priests because of the materialistic culture, the requirement of celibacy and people's reluctance to make any kind of life-long commitment.<sup>17</sup>

Jay P. Dolan, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Notre Dame, addresses this question in The American Catholic Experience:

Why was there such a massive exodus from religious life? Certainly the social and cultural changes of the 1960s had some influence, as did the new spirit of independence unleashed by Vatican II. Sociologists have probed the question in some detail and come up with fairly consistent answers. The reasons why priests left the active ministry are quite clear. “They left,” concluded a 1970 study commissioned by the bishops, “because they found difficulties with the structure of the Church and the work they were doing as priests and because they wanted to get married.”<sup>18</sup>

The shortage has been blamed on the “me generation;” on Catholic families having fewer children and not wanting to sacrifice a son to celibacy; on celibacy itself in the midst of a sexual revolution; on the availability of more educational opportunities; on economic prosperity; on disillusionment with organized religion; and, on changes in the Church itself since the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. No one has proven that any one of these factors is the main cause. Perhaps all have contributed to the decline in vocations to the priesthood. Certainly, the recent sexual abuse scandal is not helping. Dr. Mary Gautier of Georgetown University explains that the “why” question is very complex and cannot be explained by a single empirical study.<sup>19</sup>

The critical shortage of Catholic priests in the Army as opposed to the Air Force or the Navy is sometimes blamed on the aging priest population and the more physically demanding ministry in the Army. The average age of diocesan priests in the US is 60 and the average age of religious order priests is 63. The Army is a young man's game – the physical demands can be significant. An auxiliary bishop for the AMS, who served 30 years as an Army chaplain, put it

graphically: “The older you get the less willing you are to live in the mud.” This bishop believes that the most significant problem the Army Chaplaincy faces in recruiting an aging priest population is “mud,” i.e., the physical demands of Army ministry.<sup>20</sup> It is common knowledge that many priests chose the Navy or the Air Force because they felt more capable of meeting the challenges of these services. Air Force ministry is primarily “chapel based” and Navy ministry, with the exception of the Marine Corps, is “ship based.” In contrast, Army chaplains deploy and live in the mud with their troops.

Definitively addressing any of the issues above is beyond the scope of this paper. The Army Chaplaincy and the AMS must work within the rules of the Roman Catholic Church as those rules now exist (i.e., a celibate male priesthood) and the demographic realities. In order to understand what the Army Chaplaincy and the AMS can do about this problem it is essential to appreciate that the AMS, since its inception as an ordinariate on 24 November 1917, has followed a policy of not educating or ordaining its own priests. The AMS “borrows” priests from every diocese and religious order in the United States and then in turn “lends” them to the Army and to the other services. In a nation without a large standing Army this policy made sense. When the “great wars” came along, the nation would ramp up, go to war, and then, after the conflict, draw the Army down again. The Catholic dioceses/religious orders would lend the AMS the clergy needed for a particular conflict and at its conclusion, those clergy would return home to their civilian parishes. The rationale of the AMS policy for “borrowing” priests made sense even if the dioceses and religious orders did not send enough priests. As the Jesuit Donald Crosby points out in his superb book on the World War II Chaplaincy, “The Catholic Church’s hierarchy simply would not send its quota of chaplains, arguing that the needs of the home front took first priority.”<sup>21</sup>

#### **HOW THE CHAPLAINCY HAS ATTACKED THE PROBLEM**

Today, we have what could only be described as a large standing Army and it does not appear that it will soon draw down. Accepting this policy of “borrowing and lending” as a given, every Chief of Chaplains since the Vietnam War has worked with the AMS, the American Catholic hierarchy and the provincial superiors of religious congregations to stem the decline and to recruit enough priests for the Army. The list of programs and initiatives to recruit chaplains is extensive:

- creation of a Chaplain Candidate Program;
- support of AMS Co-sponsorship Program;

- appointment of two full time priest recruiters in the Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains (OCCH);
- yearly visits to Catholic seminaries;
- multiple ongoing meetings with Catholic bishops and provincial superiors, many attended by the Chief of Chaplains personally;
- regular advertising in major Catholic publications;
- continuous reporting of the shortage in the American media (press and television);
- going door to door in many dioceses asking priests to consider serving, Installation Recruiting Program 75
- “information days” and retreats on Army installations and in various dioceses;
- preaching at all religious services throughout the Army as part of “Vocation Sabbath”;
- direct mailings to seminarians, priests, bishops, and religious superiors;
- presentations at the Conference of Major Superiors’ annual meeting;
- short term commitment programs for priests;
- facilitation of permanent residency and citizenship for foreign born priests
- appeals to priests in the Reserves and Guard encouraging them to come on active duty;
- tuition assistance to chaplain candidates (seminarians);
- creation of a special task force and then a directorate to address the problem
- early release of soldiers to attend seminary;
- extensions and recalls of priests for active duty; and,
- production of recruiting videos for the Army and with the AMS for civilian and military distribution.<sup>22</sup>

Most of these programs are not exclusive to the Roman Catholic recruiting effort but are available to all denominations. Many of these programs have helped to slow the losses, or to offset the net loss every year. But they have failed to reverse the trend because ordinations in the American Catholic Church have not kept pace with departures, retirements, and deaths in the priesthood. The dioceses and religious orders simply cannot give the AMS and the Chaplaincy what they do not have. The AMS and the Chaplaincy cannot change the demographic reality.

In addition to the above programs, the active component Chaplaincy has coaxed priests from the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve (USAR) to serve on active duty, so these

components are now worse off than the active component. The USAR is down to 35 Roman Catholic chaplains representing only 4.4 percent of its 782 chaplains.<sup>23</sup> The Army Guard is doing little better than the USAR with only 41 priests (seven percent) out of 545 chaplains. Thirty-three states do not have a priest, and the average age of Guard priests is 56.<sup>24</sup> Further complicating the situation, the Guard and the Reserve have experienced increased operational tempo (OPTEMPO) since 11 September 2002 and priests from these components are frequently deploying with their units. As a consequence, some bishops are now reluctant to allow their priests to serve in the Guard or the Reserve. Their reluctance is having a negative impact on recruiting and retention. Asked, "How is the USAR doing with recruiting and retention of priests?" CH (COL) Larry Racster, senior Reserve advisor to the Army Chief of Chaplains responded, "We are hurting!"<sup>25</sup>

The AMS and the Army Chaplaincy have attempted to mitigate the impact of the shortage with a variety of measures. For example, consider efforts to provide "joint" solutions to the shortage problem: Where proximity allows, Air Force or Navy priests provide ministry to Army personnel, or vice versa. In Kuwait, an Air Force priest visits the Kabal every Sunday, hears confessions and provides Mass to the soldiers there. He spends approximately three hours per week with the soldiers.<sup>26</sup> This joint approach, however, does not provide full time or even emergency access to priests. The Air Force priest who visits the Kabal is four hours away by ground transportation.<sup>27</sup> In addition, with the large number of deployments there is not always a priest of any service close enough to provide coverage. While laymen and other clergy can perform certain ministries, only a priest can administer last rites, hear confessions and consecrate the Eucharist.<sup>28</sup> These are the three sacraments essential to the spiritual well being of Catholic soldiers, especially when they are in harm's way. Catholic soldiers need a priest with them at all times on the battlefield and in dangerous operations other than war (OOTW).

In an effort to mitigate the shortage of priests, the Catholic chaplains are making excellent use of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist (EMEs). These are soldiers, non-clergy, trained to conduct communion services for their fellow soldiers. These lay ministers are doing an admirable job of extending the ministry of priest-chaplains but they cannot say Mass, hear confessions or administer last rites. They are dependent on the priests to supply them with consecrated hosts. Priests are still essential.

Some concerned Catholics have suggested that permanent married deacons should be allowed to serve as chaplains. Bishop John J. Kaising, Vicar of Chaplains for the AMS, made it clear, however, at a recent Convocation of the AMS that "most deaconate formation programs do not meet Department of Defense requirements" for the chaplaincy. He went on to explain

that deacons, like EMEs cannot say Mass, hear confessions or administer last rites.<sup>29</sup> Priests are essential in providing religious support to Catholic soldiers and their families.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

The Army Chaplaincy has done more than its share to help solve the shortage problem. It is time for the AMS to do more. The AMS has done an excellent job of presenting its case to the other dioceses and the religious congregations upon which it depends. In the future, however, these institutions will be less and less able or willing to provide the AMS with priests. Knowledgeable and concerned individuals, lay people and clergy, have encouraged the Archbishop for the AMS to consider redistributing the priests available to him. In other words, taking priests from the Air Force and Navy and asking them to serve in the Army. The Archbishop for the Military Services is charged by the Canon Law of the Catholic Church with the management of the priests entrusted to his care.<sup>30</sup> Technically, the Archbishop could revoke a priest's endorsement for one service and re-endorse him for another. He has repeatedly made it clear that the Army has the greatest need for priests but he has chosen not to redistribute clergy from the Navy or the Air Force to the Army. While the Army Chaplaincy is critically short of priests (eight percent of the total Chaplaincy), the Navy and the Air Force are in better shape. As of 30 September 2002, the Navy had 895 chaplains of which 171 were priests (19 percent).<sup>31</sup> The Air Force had 597 chaplains of which 105 were priests (18%).<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the Navy and the Air Force are also beginning to experience losses. The figures above represent a one percent loss for the Navy since 30 September 2001 and a two percent loss for the Air Force. In real numbers, the Navy had no net gain of priests and the Air Force lost 14 priests during this time period.

This issue of "redistribution" is a difficult one. Most clergy regardless of denomination have a service preference before they come on active duty. This preference is motivated by a variety of factors: family, ministry style, physical limitations, age, etc. If a person had a parent, sibling, or other relative in a particular service, he may be more inclined to choose that service. If a person grew up on or near a particular military installation, he may be influenced by that experience. If a person had prior military service, he would naturally be inclined to select the service in which he served.<sup>33</sup> Another factor that makes "redistribution" difficult is that once a clergy person is trained for a particular service and begins a career path, switching services is not easy. Each service has its own unique culture. Chaplains who switch from one service to another often find that it is more difficult to be promoted to the next rank. Initially, they tend not



be competitive with their new service peers.<sup>34</sup> In an “up or out” system, this makes officers reluctant to switch services.

Another problem with “redistribution” is that the Navy and Air Force simply do not want to give up priests. An Air Force advertisement proclaims, “Currently there is a *critical* (italics added) shortage of Roman Catholic priests, which sadly means some airmen are going without spiritual leadership.”<sup>35</sup> The Navy Chaplaincy is experiencing the same kind of recruiting challenges because of the national shortage of priests and the low number of men studying for the priesthood. In addition, the Navy Chaplaincy is presently under attack in the federal courts for discrimination against its non-liturgical chaplains.<sup>36</sup> This class action suit has interestingly been brought by a church endorsing agent. Chaplain Dempsey, cited earlier, was indeed prescient, if not prophetic. Pending the outcome of this suit, the negative publicity may cause the Navy to be even more reluctant to lose priests. The few priests who might be able to secure their bishop’s permission to serve will think twice about joining a Chaplaincy under attack by its own. The Air Force and the Navy are not going to give up priests without a fight. For all of the above reasons, the AMS is very reluctant, and the other services would oppose any attempt, to “redistribute” priests to the Army. If there is to be any kind of redistribution it will have to be accomplished prior to a man committing himself to a particular service, i.e., during his seminary formation. Even then, if a man is prior service, no doubt it would be difficult for the AMS to convince him to switch allegiance to another service.

This brings us to what perhaps is the only viable option for the AMS. The AMS should start to educate its own seminarians and ordain its own priests. The Army has a larger pool of priesthood eligible young men than any other single institution in the United States. “The Army returns approximately 25,000 men and women to civilian life every year. Of these, roughly six thousand, two hundred and fifty (6,250) are Roman Catholic and two thousand, three hundred and eighty (2,380) are single males.”<sup>37</sup> If only one percent (24) of these eligible young men entered seminary each year and eventually became chaplains, it would not take long to solve the shortage problem. Most of these men tend to be idealistic, conservative, and service oriented. They are often searching for a vocation and asking, “What should I do with my life?” In the past ten years, there has been a marked increase in vocations to the priesthood among Catholic officers, enlisted soldiers, and military family members.<sup>38</sup>

Typically, these men leave the Army, select a diocese, enter the seminary, are ordained, and, in some cases, return to the Army as chaplains. Unfortunately, because the AMS does not have its own formation program for seminarians and chooses not to ordain its own priests, it loses “control” of these men and they often are not permitted to return to the Army. In military

language, the AMS has a “command and control” problem. When a man is ordained for the priesthood, he must promise his bishop and the bishop’s successors “obedience and respect.”<sup>39</sup> If the Archbishop for the AMS chose to ordain his own priests they would promise him “obedience and respect.”

Many dioceses are happy to accept these “Army generated vocations” into their seminaries. But when it comes time for the newly ordained priests to return to the Army, the dioceses are reluctant to let them go. “Our needs are greater” is their response, echoing their excuse in World War II as noted by Donald Crosby above. If they would not provide their quota of priests for the most popular war of the last century, when there was no national shortage of priests, it is unlikely they will do so now. In fact, they are not doing so. Ultimately, if the AMS is going to see its number of available chaplains swell, it must assume control of its own destiny and have more influence over its supply of priests. To do so, it must educate and ordain its own.

Some dioceses are not even willing to accept men into their seminaries who express an interest in military ministry. More than a few young men have given up the search for a diocese because of this roadblock.<sup>40</sup> The AMS must provide an alternative for these young men—a place and a program. Cardinal Edward Egan of New York, when he was still the Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut, said that you must have a concrete place, a solid program, and lots of prayer to attract and retain these men who feel called to the priesthood.<sup>41</sup> The very few Catholic dioceses presently attracting vocations are those, like Denver, Colorado, where a solid program of formation is being offered, in a brand new seminary, with a vibrant prayer life.<sup>42</sup>

There is one major problem standing in the way of the AMS having its own place and program – money!<sup>43</sup> The AMS is “poor.” Significant funding is required to educate young men for the priesthood. The AMS does not have parishes like other dioceses have parishes. It cannot “tax” its flock as other dioceses do. Military personnel generally do not understand this problem. But if they were made aware of the problem they no doubt would respond. Conversations with soldiers and military families on twenty-nine installations have confirmed this.<sup>44</sup> Recently, the Military Council of Catholic Women, an Army wide organization, collected \$20,000 for the AMS Seminarian Education Fund.<sup>45</sup> Other organizations would be able and willing to assist: The Knights of Columbus, The Serra Club International, and the Military Chaplains’ Association to name just a few. In 2001, the Knights of Columbus donated \$36 million to “church support” which included tuition for seminarians and funding for vocation projects.<sup>46</sup> The Serra International Foundation awarded grants of \$232,000 in 2001 to

seminaries, seminarians and vocation programs.<sup>47</sup> The Military Chaplains Association gives annual tuition assistance grants to chaplain candidates in graduate seminary programs.<sup>48</sup>

The AMS should be encouraged to create a Financial Board of Trustees composed of retired Catholic flag officers. This board would then raise and manage an endowment for an AMS House of Studies in Washington, DC. The seminarians, depending on their educational background, would complete their studies in a variety of schools in and around The Catholic University of America (CUA). The AMS Chancery Offices are directly across the street from CUA. In five years or less, the AMS could begin ordaining its own priests. Under the present policy, if a soldier leaves the Army and is co-sponsored by the AMS and his home diocese, it takes roughly nine years for him to return to active duty. If he already has an undergraduate degree, he usually spends two years in a Pre-Theology course, four years in graduate Theology, and then three years in parish ministry after ordination.

Under this proposed solution, the seminarians would receive their pastoral field experience on military installations in military parishes. This formation could take place during the school year in the Washington area, where there are multiple military parishes. It would continue throughout the Army during the summer recess with the seminarians serving as Army "chaplain candidates." In the candidate program, graduate level seminarians are commissioned as second lieutenants and paid accordingly. This program trains them to become chaplains and allows them to earn money to help defray the cost of their civilian education. Some of the seminarians may also be eligible for the GI Bill or the College Fund.

Establishing a House of Studies and ordaining its own priests would ensure the AMS the "command and control" it now lacks. It would provide the place and the program. It would eliminate the need for a soldier to search for a diocese to sponsor him. It would eliminate the proverbial "middle man." It would eventually all but guarantee a steady flow of priests to the Army and the other services. It would give the AMS' Archbishop the management of his priests and seminarians that he now lacks. He could "redistribute" according to the needs of the services before ordinations and prior to a seminarian making a binding service commitment. Military folks around the world would supply the prayers and help with the funding.

This new AMS formation program and the ordination of its own priests should reduce the number of priests having adjustment problems to military service, since the majority would have prior service and/or come from military families. This should also have a positive impact on retention and recruiting. Priests with prior service and/or from military families will know what they are getting into and will understand soldiers and soldier family problems. Throughout their seminary formation, they will be working in military parishes. This will be an enormous help to

overworked chaplains and lay ministers. They should be happier men and better able to attract other young men to consider a call to the priesthood and the Chaplaincy. The presence of soldier-seminarians in various programs in and around CUA will expose civilian-seminarians to the possibility of military ministry.

This new approach would be supported by a number of Army programs already in place which were mentioned above: "information days" and retreats on Army installations; the chaplain candidate program; tuition assistance to chaplain candidates; early release of soldiers to attend the seminary; and, production of recruiting videos with the AMS. The Army will need to increase its advertising on military installations and facilitate programs to encourage vocations among all faith groups. As the Chief of Chaplains has said on many occasions, "We need to grow our own." Edwin F. O'Brien, the Catholic Archbishop for the Military Services, shares this vision: "There's no doubt that we'll have to find priests to serve the military. It's about time we look within the military and not just outside for vocations."<sup>49</sup> This conclusion on the part of the Chief of Chaplains and the Roman Catholic endorsing agent is supported by the fact that "sixty-three percent of (all) Army chaplains have prior service."<sup>50</sup> This percentage is for the entire Chaplaincy, which is composed of more than 120 different faith groups. Focusing efforts within the Army, therefore, to supply Catholic chaplains for the future makes a lot of sense. What better place is there to recruit quality chaplains than from Army pews?

The AMS would not have to abandon its present policy of borrowing priests from other dioceses and religious congregations. This proposal would complement the old policy. There will undoubtedly continue to be a few priests from civilian dioceses and religious orders who may want to serve in military ministry and are able to obtain the necessary permission. There may also be soldiers who wish to study for a particular diocese or join a particular religious congregation rather than being ordained for the AMS. They should have this option.

With both policies operative, the AMS would enjoy the best of both methods. Eventually, it can be argued, the AMS could become a source of priests for other dioceses. In so doing, the AMS could become part of the Catholic Church's solution to the shortage rather than continuing to be part of the problem, i.e., a drain on scarce resources. When priests of the AMS retire and/or depart the military, they could be employed in Veterans' Administration (VA) hospitals (Catholic chaplains in the VA are already under the AMS); or, as civilian contract clergy on military installations; or, in the AMS chancery; or, they could be loaned to dioceses around the country. Eight percent of all diocesan priests presently minister in a diocese other than their own.<sup>51</sup>

Ordaining its own priests would ensure the loyalty of those priests to the AMS. Presently, because priests are only “on loan,” their commitment to the AMS is not usually the same as it is to their home diocese or religious congregation. The AMS has difficulty, for example, getting active duty Catholic chaplains to financially support its “Annual Appeal to Priests.”<sup>52</sup> Religious order priests must often send a substantial monthly assessment to their respective congregations. Some priests, for various reasons, do not take up the AMS’ requested four “designated offerings” per year from their military parishioners. If the majority of priests serving in the military were ordained for the AMS, then the AMS would be their first priority. In accordance with the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, they would owe the Archbishop “obedience and respect.” He would have “command and control.”

## **CONCLUSION**

The Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, has undergone an evolution over the past century. It began on 24 November 1917 when the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes was appointed “Bishop Ordinary of U.S. Army and Navy Chaplains.” On 11 December 1939, Francis Cardinal Spellman was appointed “Military Vicar for the Armed Forces of the U.S.” The Military Ordinariate remained a vicariate within the Archdiocese of New York until March 25, 1985, when it became an archdiocese in its own right and Joseph T. Ryan became its first Archbishop.<sup>53</sup> Through all of these years to the present, this institution never educated or ordained its own priests. It is now time for the AMS to truly become an archdiocese in the fullest sense and take this next step in its evolution.

Consider the specific advantages of the AMS educating and ordaining its own priests:

- The AMS maintains jurisdiction over its seminarians and priests.
- The seminarians live, pray, and study together with men who share their history as soldiers or military family members and their sense of calling to the priesthood/military chaplaincy.
- The seminarians receive their pastoral training on Army installations throughout their formation.
- The time from discernment of one’s vocation to ordination and return to active duty is significantly shortened.
- Priests are younger when they enter or reenter active duty.
- The Army receives priests who are less likely to have problems adjusting to military life and are less likely to violate the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

- Priests are more likely to stay for 20+ years.
- The priests' connection to the AMS is enhanced thereby increasing their loyalty and obedience to the Archbishop.
- Younger priests would tend to be more adaptive and happier and, therefore, more likely to attract other soldiers/family members to answer the call to the priesthood and the chaplaincy.
- The AMS does not have to abandon its present policy of borrowing priests.
- The AMS eventually becomes a potential source of priests for other dioceses and is not dependent on other dioceses to supply it with priests.
- If all goes well, eventually the Army Chaplaincy will have enough priests to care for its Catholic population.

The AMS should adopt this strategic plan and execute it immediately if Catholic soldiers are to receive the quality ministry they require and deserve. Bold, creative, and well-reasoned planning is a sine qua non of effective leadership. The AMS must lead now or the future will become increasingly bleak for Catholic soldiers and their families. The AMS must take the financial risk now to educate its own priests and to insure ministry for America's Catholic soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen, and veterans.

The Army Chief of Chaplains' ultimate objective is to create and sustain a balanced and responsive Chaplaincy that can fulfill its mission of providing for the religious needs of all soldiers and their families. The way to achieve this end for Catholics is to implement a policy change by the AMS. The "means" to this end are enough Roman Catholic chaplains to care for the Army's Catholic population. Presently, the ways and means are seriously out of balance. The AMS and the Chaplaincy simply cannot recruit sufficient priests from the civilian sector. Past experience and present demographics make it clear that an AMS policy change is essential. There is no viable alternative. The present policy will not solve the problem no matter how many resources and how much effort the AMS and Chaplaincy expend. There must be a paradigm shift.

WORD COUNT = 6448



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, "Instruction #1330.7," 16 November 1994; available from <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corrs/text/i13307p.txt>; Internet; accessed 5 September 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> Jeffrey M. Young [youngj@occh-nt.army.mil](mailto:youngj@occh-nt.army.mil), "US Chaplaincy Monthly Strength Report," electronic mail message to David A. Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 4 October 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> Olenda E. Johnson, "Three Faces of Religious Pluralism," briefing slides with scripted commentary, Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 13 August 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> Armando S. Torralva, "Thoughts on Moral Leadership," available from <http://www.nsa.naples.navy.mil/credo/CFMChaplain/ChaplainComments.htm>; Internet; accessed 22 September 2002.
- <sup>6</sup> Gaylord T. Gunhus, The U.S. Army Chaplaincy Strategic Plan FY2000-FY2005 (Washington, D.C.: The Pentagon, October 1999), 8.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>10</sup> Numerous briefings by the Army Chief of Chaplains, MG Gaylord T. Gunhus
- <sup>11</sup> Gerry J. Gilmore, "Army Seeks More Catholic Chaplains," Army Link News, November 1999 [Journal on-line]; available from <http://www.dtic.mil/armylink/news/Nov1999/a1991116mochaps.html>; Internet; accessed 18 August 2002.
- <sup>12</sup> Israel Drazin and Cecil B. Currey, For God and Country (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1995), 175-176.
- <sup>13</sup> Terry A. Dempsey, Asymmetric Threats to the United States Army Chaplaincy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 10 April 2000), 7.
- <sup>14</sup> Christine Schenk, "Bishops' Conference Discusses Priest Shortage," Future Church, 2001-2002; available from <http://www.futurechurch.org/fpm/bishops.htm>; Internet; accessed 18 August 2002.
- <sup>15</sup> Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, Catholicism USA (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 116.
- <sup>16</sup> "Census: Catholics Among Fastest-Growing Denominations," National Catholic Register, Vol. 78, No. 39, 29 September – 5 October 2002, 3.



<sup>17</sup> Amy Collins, "Looking for a Few Good Men," 21 June 2002; available from [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Daily\\_News/priests000621.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Daily_News/priests000621.html); Internet; accessed 9 November 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Jay P. Dolan, The American Catholic Experience (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 438.

<sup>19</sup> Mary L. Gautier [gautierm@georgetown.edu](mailto:gautierm@georgetown.edu), "The Why of the Priesthood Shortage," electronic mail message to David Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 11 November 2002.

<sup>20</sup> John J. Kaising, Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services, interview by author, 8 September 2002, Washington, D.C.

<sup>21</sup> Donald F. Crosby, S.J., Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 136.

<sup>22</sup> CH (MAJ) Richard Spencer, Vocation Director Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains, interview by author, 8 September 2002, Washington, D.C.

<sup>23</sup> CH (COL) Larry Racster [racstlw@occh-nt.army.mil](mailto:racstlw@occh-nt.army.mil), "USAR Priest Strength," electronic message to David Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 12 November 2002.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> CH (CPT) Maury Stout [blan.stout@riley.army.mil](mailto:blan.stout@riley.army.mil), "Air Force priest coverage in Kuwait," electronic message to David Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 18 November 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> James A. Coriden, James A., Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel, eds., The Code of Canon Law (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), Canons 900, 965, 1003.

<sup>29</sup> "Chaplains at Washington Convocation Consider Vocations and Functions of Eucharistic Ministers," AMS News Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall 2002): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Coriden, Canon 391.

<sup>31</sup> Veronica Berto, Community Manager Navy Chief of Chaplains Office, telephone interview by author, 24 October 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Yesica Figueroa, Information Management Air Force Chaplaincy Services, telephone interview by author, 24 October 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Herbert, "Chaplain Attitudinal Survey Report," U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Program Analysis & Evaluation, Research Division, Fort Knox, KY, February 2002, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Bradfield [bradfmt@occh-nt.army.mil](mailto:bradfmt@occh-nt.army.mil), "Promotions for Inter-service Transfers," electronic mail message to David Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 3 December 2002.

<sup>35</sup> "We're Looking for Some Heroes to Minister to Ours," America 7 October 2002, full page ad, back cover.

<sup>36</sup> Neely Tucker, "Judge Allows Class Action Suit by Navy Chaplains," The Washington Post, 21 August 2002, sec. A, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> David A. Kenehan, "There Are Vocations in the Army," briefing slides with scripted commentary, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, The Pentagon, 17 October 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Spencer, interview.

<sup>39</sup> Coriden, Canon 273.

<sup>40</sup> Spencer, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Bishop Edward Egan of Bridge Port, CT, interview by author, winter 1999, Louvain, Belgium.

<sup>42</sup> Molly Mulqueen, "New Seminary Suggests Big Plans in Denver," 24 March 1999; available from <http://www.cwnews.com/Browse/1999/03/9903.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 December 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Most Reverend John J. Kaising [jkaising@milarch.org](mailto:jkaising@milarch.org), "Ordaining Our Own," electronic mail message to David Kenehan [david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:david.kenehan@carlisle.army.mil), 4 October 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews by author with numerous military personnel and family members over a five year period, June 1996-June 2001, at 29 separate Army installations in CONUS.

<sup>45</sup> "Final Numbers for Seminarian Fund," The Grapevine 30 (November 2002): 6.

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<sup>47</sup> "Serra International Foundation 2000-2001 Grants," 1 January 2002; available from [http://www.serrainternational.org/old/00-01\\_grants.htm](http://www.serrainternational.org/old/00-01_grants.htm); Internet; accessed 15 November 2002.

<sup>48</sup> "Looking towards a Career as a Military Chaplain? An MCA Scholarship Could Help," available from <http://www.mca-usa.org/scholar.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 December 2002.

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<sup>50</sup> CH (LTC) Eric Wester, "Celebrating the Holidays with Soldiers Is Part of Chaplain's Call to Serve God and country," Press Release ( Washington, DC: United States Army Chaplains Corps, 19 December 2002).

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