

Clergy Preparation from the Perspective of Recent Additions to the Nazarene Ministerial Corps

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Observations and case studies have provided many of us with considerable information regarding the experience of our graduates as they move into their first ministry assignments. Information generated in this way allows us to examine in depth the nature of ministry for a few. Unfortunately, this method does not provide a basis for generalization to other ministers. And, information from cross-sectional studies, which could support generalization, is not as readily available. Therefore, recent additions to the corps of Nazarene ministers were asked to contribute to the Consultation on Clergy Preparation by reflecting on their preparation, on the basis of their early experience in ministry.

Most (76%) were pastors. Another one in five (18%) were in associate roles in local churches. However, evangelists, chaplains, ministers in auxiliary roles, and a missionary also responded. Ministers in Canada and all of the Nazarene regions of the United States were represented.

The most recent educational institution reported included approximately equal representation from Nazarene Theological Seminary (58), the Nazarene Liberal Arts colleges/universities (50), and Nazarene Bible College (47). Ministers who received their preparation through directed study, other Bible colleges, other colleges/universities, and other seminaries also responded (62).

Our newer ministers tend to begin their ministry in rural areas and small towns. Three out of five (58%) started in communities with fewer than 10,000 people. For almost two-thirds (64%), their church had fifty members or less. Nine out of ten (89%) had fewer than one hundred members. Seven out of ten (69%) ministers estimate "the approximate educational level of the average *adult*" in their first church to have been high school graduate or lower. Four out of five (83%) estimate "the approximate average *family* income of the members of the church" as under \$30,000 with 30% under \$15,000. Half (54%) estimate "the approximate age of the average *adult*" in their first church" as being 45 or younger. Half (50%) of their churches experienced net membership growth from 1988 to 1989. More than two out of five (43%) had a net gain in Sunday morning worship attendance average. And, two out of five (40%) experienced some gain in their Sunday school average attendance.

The perspective of new ministers is, of course, limited regarding both the needs of the churches and the preparation. Still, the insights and opinions learned from that perspective may be especially interesting and important to those of us who seek to prepare others to begin their ministry in similar situations.

Newer ministers are generally quite positive about their instructors, their fulfillment in ministry, their spiritual growth and discipline, and their competence. Their responses regarding some specific areas of their preparation and their financial circumstances are less positive and suggest issues which may need to be considered and improved.

Instructors

Recent additions to the ministerial corps are very positive in their descriptions of the instructors who guided their ministerial preparation. A large majority (86%) perceived their instructors as well qualified in their fields. They demonstrated a love for the Christian ministry (91%) and a love for the Church of the Nazarene (88%).

Table 1		
Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing** With Statements Regarding Instructors and Approaches		
Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree
The instructors in my ministerial preparation were well qualified to teach their respective subjects.	86.0%	4.7%
My instructors demonstrated a love for the Christian ministry.	90.7	1.9
My instructors demonstrated a love for the Church of the Nazarene	87.8	1.9

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" ("Neutral" not reported)

Fullfillment in Ministry

Recent additions to the corps of ministers are also very positive about their sense of fulfillment in ministry. About nine out of ten (88%) say they find personal fulfillment in their church work. A similar, high proportion (89%) would want God to call them into the ministry if they had to do it all over again. And, three-fourths (75%) would probably support a close friend who considered entering the ministry.

Table 2		
Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing** With Statements Regarding Fulfillment in Ministry		
Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree

I find personal fulfillment in the work I do in the church.	88.3%	6.1%
If I had it to do over again, I would want God to call me into ministry.	88.6%	4.3%
I would discourage a close friend fro enterieng ministry.	10.8	74.6%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree"("Neutral" not reported)

Spiritual Growth and Discipline

Most (89%) perceive themselves to be growing spiritually. They report their continued use of Bible study methods learned in their preparation (72%). About half (49%) continue to employ the disciplines of prayer and Bible study they developed during their preparation, according to table 3. As table 5 reports, nearly two-thirds say they were prepared with strong skills for "Living an exemplary Christian life" (65%), and for "Demonstrating Christian Holiness" in their own life (63%). Four out of five (80%) report, in table 5, strong (45%) or at least adequate (35%) skills for "Strengthening the spiritual disciples" in their own lives.

Table 3		
Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing** With Statements Regarding Ministers' Personal Spiritual Growth and Disciplines		
Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree
Compared to a year ago, I can see real growth in my Christian life.	88.9%	2.3%
The Bible study methods I learned in my preparation continue to be very helpful.	71.8%	13.9%
My preparation helped me develop helped me develop habits of prayer and Bible study which continue to work in my busy schedule.	49.1%	31.8%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree"("Neutral" not reported)

Sense of Competence

Four out of five (79%) of the newer ministers feel they are competent in comparison to colleagues. A large majority (80%) feel competent in sharing the gospel of Christ. Three-fourths (73%) think their preaching makes a difference in peoples' lives. And, while counseling appears to be an area in which many feel a need for help, see tables 9 and 11, 62% think people whom they counsel find help.

Table 4		
Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing** With Statements Regarding Ministers' Sense of Competence in Various Areas		
Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree
I am as competent in my work as most other ministers I know.	79.4%	4.2%
I find it easy to share the gospel of Christ in normal conversation.	80.4%	8.9%
My preaching doesn't seem to make much difference in the way people live.	15.3%	73.1%
I often feel that people who come to me for counsel do not find real solutions.	13.4%	61.6%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" ("Neutral" not reported)

Ministry Competencies

Ministers were asked to evaluate, on the basis of their experience in ministry, the tools and skills gained in their preparation. Table five presents the areas examined in order of the proportions indicating that they gained "Very strong" or "Strong" skills in the area.

Personal spiritual strength expressed in ability for Exemplary Christian living (65%) and demonstrating Christian Holiness (63%) was the area with the largest proportion reporting strong preparation. Half or more also believe they were given strong skills for "Effective Preaching" (58%), "Applying Biblical knowledge" (57%), and "Applying Theology" to people's needs and lives (50%). It is interesting to note that the proportion who feel they have strong skills for determining such needs is much smaller(23%).

Table 5

Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing With Statements Regarding the Appropriateness of Preparation Expectations**

Area	Strong	Adquate	Weak
Living an exemplary Christian life	64.7%	26.5%	8.8%
Demonstrating Christian Holiness in my own life	62.8%	30.2%	7.0%
Effective Preaching	58.3%	29.6%	12.0%
Applying Biblical knowledge to the needs of people	57.2%	34.9%	7.9%
Applying Theology to the lives of people	49.5%	35.5%	14.8%
Effective Pastoral Care	44.7%	35.3%	20.0%
Effective Christian Education	44.4%	37.5%	18.1%
Using the Biblical languages to help people understand the Bible	31.8%	42.1%	26.2%
Effectively leading public worship	31.9%	33.8%	34.3%
Analyzing the situation and needs of congregations	22.7%	33.8%	43.5%
Involving the church in Evangelism and Church Growth	20.5%	45.1%	34.4%
Effectively leading the administration of the church	20.0%	35.8%	44.2%
Analyzing the situation and needs of communities	16.8%	26.6%	56.6%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strong" or "Very Strong" skills in the area

**Indicating either "Weak" or "Little or no" skill in the area

Preparation Strengths and Needs

A large majority (92%) believe both classical theological studies and studies in the practice of ministry are important in ministerial training. An examination of responses to questions about strengths and weaknesses in various preparation areas, see tables 8 through 11 below, suggests that many ministers they were well prepared in the classical studies but not as adequately in the practice of ministry. The high proportion(57%) strongly agreeing that both classical and practice are important may mean respondents think a balance between the two areas should be achieved by adding more courses in the practice of ministry.

Table 6

Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing With Statements**

Regarding Instructors and Approaches		
Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree
Both classical theological studies (e.g., Church History and Systematic Theology) and studies in the practice of ministry are important in ministerial training.	91.6%	3.7%
The instructors who guided my ministerial preparation led me to see the Church of the Nazarene as sectarian and narrow in relationship to the larger Christian Community.	14.2%	74.1%
My preparation gave me a sensitivity to the broad social implications of the Christian gospel.	64.3%	17.4%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" ("Neutral" not reported)

About three-fourths(74%) disagree with the statement that "The instructors who guided by ministerial preparation led me to see the Church of the Nazarene as sectarian and narrow in relationship to the larger Christian community."

Almost two-thirds(64%) think their preparation made them sensitive to the social implications of the gospel.

The models of congregations used in our programs were apparently not very realistic for a majority of the newer ministers. About three out of ten(29%) agree that "The models of congregations used in my preparation were very realistic compared to the churches I have served."

About half (51%) have found strong correspondence between their work in the church and their preparation for that work. When this issue was addressed with a negative statement, the proportion disagreeing was similar. About half (49%) say they are not frustrated by the discrepancy between their preparation and their work.

Almost equal proportions say the expectations of ministry formed during their preparation generally coincide (40%) or do not generally coincide (41%) with their congregation's expectations. While district superintendents' expectations apparently coincide with preparation derived expectations more often than congregations', 30% report a difference in expectations between themselves and their supervisors.

Table 7

Percentage Agreeing* and Disagreeing With Statements Regarding the Appropriateness of Preparation Expectations**

Statement	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree
The models of congregations used in my preparation were very realistic compared to the churches I have served.	28.7%	45.4%
What I am doing in the church is very similar to what I prepared to do.	50.9%	31.0%
I am frustrated by the difference between what I prepared to do and what I find myself doing in the church.	34.1%	48.6%
There is little connection between the educational preparation I had and the responsibilities expected of me in the pastorate.	32.5%	55.2%
The expectations of my work which I formed during my preparation generally coincide with the expectations of my congregation.	40.2%	40.7%
The expectations of my work which I learned during my preparation are quite different from the expectations my denominational supervisors have for me.	30.0%	46.5%

N=217

*Indicating either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

**Indicating either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" ("Neutral" not reported)

Open-ended items are valuable because they allow the respondents to establish the categories and to express their opinions in their own words. However, the nature of these items makes tabulations subjective, and therefore somewhat unreliable. Another tabulator would undoubtedly summarize with some differences in major categories and with some difference in assignment to categories.

These items give an indication of the issues which come to ministers minds in the context suggested. They do not indicate the relative importance ministers give the issues volunteered. If a list of the volunteered responses had been given to all respondents, most others might have rated as very important something which only one or two volunteered. Therefore, the following tables should be understood only as an indication of the issues most likely to come to ministers' minds in the context suggested by the item.

The two areas most often mentioned to complete the statement, "My preparation was very good in:" were Biblical Studies, including specific studies, and Theology, including several specific approaches.

Table 8

Responses to the Open-Ended Statement: "My Preparation Was Very Good In:"

Area of Preparation	Times Mentioned*
Biblical Studies/ Interpretation	101
Theology	77
Homiletics	39
Preaching	24
Church History/History	17

The most often mentioned areas in which more preparation was needed were administration, including several specific aspects of church administration, and Counseling

Table 9

Responses to the Open-Ended Statement: "My Preparation Was Very Good In:"

Areas of Preparation	Times Mentioned*
Administration	83
Counseling	49
Church Finance	20
Homiletics/Preaching	19
Practics	18
Leaderswhip (inc. Motivating People	17

Similar responses were volunteered for the related items which probed the areas of preparation they found themselves using and needing. The most often mentioned areas drawn on, as reported in table 9, were Homiletics, Biblical Studies, and Theology.

Table 10

Responses to the Open-Ended Statement: "I Find Myself Drawing on my Preparation In:"

Areas of Preparation	Times Mentioned*
Homiletics/Preaching	67
Biblical Studies/Interpretation	60
Theology/Holiness	31
Counseling	18

The most often mentioned areas in response to the statement, "I often find myself wishing I had been trained in/to:" were Counseling and Administration.

Table 11	
Responses to the Open-Ended Statement: "I Often Find Myself Wishing I Had Been Trained in/to"	
Areas of Preparation	Times Mentioned*
Counseling	56
Administration	29
Practics	19
A Marketable Second Vocation	15
Personal Evangelism (Lay training)	15

Financial Status and Experience

Two out of every five (38%) of the newer ministers say they wish they had not taken as much money in student loans as they did. The proportion regretting the extent of their education loans was slightly higher(45%) for students from Nazarene Theological Seminary.

One in five (19%) owed more than \$10,000 in educational debt when they completed their preparation. This proportion was lower for Nazarene Bible College (10%), but higher for the four year Nazarene colleges/universities (26%) and Nazarene Theological Seminary (31%).

Table 12				
Responses to the Question, "When You Finished Your Ministerial Preparation, Did You Have Any Educational Debt?"				
Amount of Educational	Overall	NBC	College	NTS

Debt	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
No I (and my spouse) completed preparation without any debt	39%	38%	25%	26%
Yes, I (and my spouse) owed under \$5,000	22	23	35	21
Yes, I (and my spouse) owed \$5,001 to \$10,000	20	28	14	22
Yes, I (and my spouse) owed \$10,001 to \$15,000	12	4	20	21
Yes, I (and my spouse) owed over \$15,000	7	6	6	10
	215	47	49	58

*Nazarene Colleges and Universities in U.S. & Canada

Their median salary, not counting housing, in their first ministry assignment was \$150 a week, with a mean of \$155 (st. dev. =\$99), or . The most common salary was \$100 per week.

For most (58%), the amount of ministry income related to family needs has resulted in a real financial struggle or increasing debt. The proportion who have experienced poor financial support is the lowest for ministers from the Nazarene colleges/universities (49%) and highest for those from Nazarene Bible College (69%). The proportion of ministers from Nazarene Theological Seminary (56%) may be higher than the Nazarene colleges because more seminarians have a higher level of educational debt.

Table 13				
Responses to the Question, "How Well Has Your Ministry Income Cared for Your Needs?"				
Response Category	Overall Percent	NBC Percent	College Percent	NTS Percent
Very poorly. We are going into debt.	12%	13%	8%	12%
Poorly. We are surviving but it is a real struggle.	46	56	41	44
Adequately. We do about as well as most other families.	35	27	39	39
Well. We seem to be better off than most others our age.	5	2	10	5
Very well. We are more than able to meet our needs.	2	2	2	0

	211	47	49	58
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*Nazarene Colleges and Universities in USA Camp; Canada

Two out of five (40%) of the currently assigned ministers have found it necessary to be bi-vocational. If currently unassigned ministers were included in the analysis, the proportion would be significantly higher (56%). Responses were so low from newer ministers who had been assigned but were unassigned at the time of the survey that they were excluded from the analyses reported. However, the incidence of "unassigned" periods during Nazarene ministers' careers may be a particularly important issue when interpreting the results of the question regarding bi-vocational ministers. Almost all of the "unassigned" respondents said they had found it necessary to be bi-vocational ministers. And, "Unassigned" periods in the careers of Nazarene ministers are evidently more common than many may have thought. An earlier study found that 23% of assigned Nazarene pastors with less than ten years experience in 1987 had been officially classified as "Unassigned" sometime during their first decade of service. Half (50.7%) of the assigned pastors with more than forty years experience had been officially "Unassigned" at least once during their career. Therefore, the two out of five (40%) is probably to positive to be realistic. In addition to the 40% whose ministry assignment makes an income supplement from a second vocation necessary, over a life-time career about half will evidently find income from a second vocation necessary during the unassigned periods they will experience. However, table 14 reports the most positive proportions.

Table 14				
Responses to the Question, "Have you Found it Necessary to be Bi-vocational?"				
Amount of Education Debt	Overall Percent	NBC Percent	College Percent	NTS Percent
Yes	40%	44%	29%	24%
No	60	56	71	76
	46	49	39	58

*Nazarene Colleges and Universities

This proportion decreases as the years of formal education for ministry increase. Among ministers who received their preparation at Nazarene institutions, the proportion from Nazarene Bible College (44%) was highest with Nazarene colleges/universities lower (29%) and Nazarene Theological Seminary the lowest (24%).

Of the one-fourth to nearly half of our newer ministers who have found it necessary to be bi-vocational, 86% report that their preparation did not include knowledge and skills for the second vocation.

Table 15				
Responses to the Question, "Did Your Preparation Include Knowledge and Skills for the Other Employment?"				
Amount of Education Debt	Overall Percent	NBC Percent	College Percent	NTS Percent
Yes	14%	11%	7%	7%
No	86	90	93	93
	85	19	14	14

*Nazarene Colleges and Universities

The levels of educational debt, reported in table 12, and of financial support from their ministry, indicated in table 13, would probably require larger proportions in bi-vocational ministry if ministers' wives were not working outside the home. Nearly three-fourths (72%) of the wives of the newer ministers have found it necessary to work outside the home.

Table 15				
Responses to the Question, "Has it Been Necessary for your Wife to Work Outside the Home?"				
Amount of Education Debt	Overall Percent	NBC Percent	College Percent	NTS Percent
Yes, full-time	44%	46%	54%	41%
Yes, part-time	28	32	23	25
No	228	22	23	34
	210	46	48	56

*Nazarene Colleges and Universities

The Sample

The survey was conducted in the spring of 1990. In mid-April, 1990, a questionnaire was mailed to a representative sample of recent additions the Nazarene ministerial corps. Five hundred active ministers whose first ministry assignment was within the last ten years were systematically selected from the files of the General Secretary of the Church of the Nazarene. Two hundred and seventeen usable responses were received by June 11, 1990. While the 43.4% response rate raises a question about the representativeness of the responses, a

comparison of known characteristics of ministers who did and did not respond suggests that non-responses were randomly distributed rather than systematic.

With a sample response of 217, it can be estimated with 95% confidence that proportions among all new Nazarene ministers in the United States and Canada might vary as much as 4% above or below percentages from the sample around 10% or 90%, 5% for those around 20% or 80%, 6% for those around 30% or 70%, and 6.5% for those around 40% and 60%.

A sample of one hundred unassigned new ministers also received the questionnaire. Unfortunately, only nineteen responses were received from the sample of unassigned. These responses were analyzed and compared with those from active ministers. However, since the response rate was so low, results are not reported here.

Conclusions

The responses raise some areas of concern. Most ministers begin their ministry in small churches in small communities. The models used in our programs apparently tend to prepare them for larger congregations in growing communities. This discrepancy may result in an unnecessary frustration over worthy ministry in the smaller congregations which make up a large proportion of the ministry responsibilities in the Church of the Nazarene.

The combination of the levels of educational debt, the rising costs of supporting a family, and the poor level of financial support from their ministry is another important area of concern. A bi-vocational approach has been necessary for nearly half. Few of these were equipped by their education for the required second vocation. Three-fourths of the wives have found it necessary to work outside the home. The financial necessity of becoming bi-vocational and of needing the income their wives could earn has undoubtedly presented a dilemma for some ministers, some wives, and some of the congregations they serve. Strongly held beliefs about "full-time" ministry and about "working wives" must have become conflict issues in some of these situations. There may be another important, long-term, denominational implication in the fact that three-fourths of the wives work outside the home. Nazarene ministers' wives appears to have made ministry in smaller churches viable. If their work is at the minimum wage level, denominational flexibility probably will not be affected. However, if ministers' wives move to a professional level of employment, it will probably become more difficult to relocate pastors when churches and superintendents believe that is necessary.

Large proportions of the newer ministers are optimistic about the strength of their competence in several areas, perhaps excessively positive. However, they tend to be less positive about several of the practice areas. Their preparation for leading public worship, involving the church in evangelism and church growth, and diagnosing the situation and needs of congregations and communities left many with weaker skills and tools, as they perceive it. They strongly support the need for balance between classical theological studies and studies in the practice of ministry and appear to desire an increase in the practice in order to achieve such a balance.

The newer ministers tend to be very positive in their responses, particularly regarding their instructors, their fulfillment in ministry, their spiritual influence, and their competence. They tend to believe they have strong skills in Preaching, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology. This

subjective evaluation may be more optimistic than realistic. However, the application of their ministry preparation to their initial experiences in ministry seems to have left them positive about their preparation.