

**PASTORS IN THE  
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE:  
A REPORT OF A STUDY OF THE MINISTERIAL CORPS**

The Board of General Superintendents asked the Church Growth Division to "write a research document dealing with ministerial needs, the projection of prospective ministers, as well as the careful analysis of what is going on now in the loss of ministers by death, retirement, and for other reasons." This report presents the findings of the research conducted to examine the questions posed by the request of the General Superintendents. The report is organized around five general issues: the present composition of the ministerial corps, trends in annual addition of new and attrition of experienced ministers, tenure, experience, and "Unassigned" ministers.

The primary data source for the study was the file of role histories maintained by the General Secretary, Dr. B. Edgar Johnson. Histories were available for 4,235 of the Nazarene pastors who were pastoring a church November 1, 1987. This was 96% of the total of 4,410 U.S. and Canadian ministers classified as "Pastors" (3,807 elders and 603 licensed ministers) reported by Dr. Johnson in his annual statistical report released November 15, 1987.

This percentage is high enough to provide a strong basis for assuming that findings regarding the characteristics of these ministers should be accurate for active Nazarene pastors in the United States and Canada. However, the tables and descriptions presented here may not accurately represent the experience of such other categories of ministers as evangelists, missionaries, denominational leaders, or unassigned ministers. Therefore, future analysis should probably examine and compare these groups.

It is important to note that in this report the terms "pastor" or "pastoral" are used to distinguish these assignments from other ministerial assignments. When the terms "minister" or "ministerial" are used, they refer to all ministerial roles.

### PRESENT COMPOSITION

There were 5,232 Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada at the close of the 1987 assembly season. Most (84.3%) of these churches were staffed by ministers officially classified as "Pastors". Some of the remaining churches were no doubt unable to obtain the services of a minister. However, 115 (2.2%) were pastored by "Retired" ministers. In addition, some of these congregations may have been in the process of changing pastors. The General Secretary reported 636 ministers (444 elders and 192 licensed ministers) "In the process of transfer". While the proportions of ministers in process of transfer who are pastoring is not certain, table 1 presents an estimate of the numbers of churches which were actually staffed by ministers serving as pastor. When these estimates are compared with the numbers of churches, the percentage of churches actually staffed increases from 84.3% to 92.6%.

Table 1

An Estimate of the Pastoral Staff  
of the Church of the Nazarene in 1986 & 1987

Ministerial Classification	Total Ministers in 1986	Total Ministers in 1987	Percentage Estimate of Proportion Pastoring	Resulting Estimate of Number Pastoring
Pastor	4,397	4,410	100%	4,410
In Transfer	589	636	50%	318
Retired Assigned	1,146	1,326		115*
Total	6,132	6,372		4,843

*\*Actual number of retired ministers assigned as pastors January 5, 1988*

In addition to these senior pastors, other Nazarene ministers were involved in the local church, were serving in other ministries within the denomination or were potentially available for ministry. Table 2 presents a summary of the ministerial corps adapted from Dr. Johnson's report.

Table 2

## The Ministerial Staff of the Church of the Nazarene in 1986 and 1987

Ministerial Classification	Elders 1986	Licensed Ministers 1986	Total Ministers in 1986	Elders 1987	Licensed Ministers 1987	Total Ministers in 1987
<u>Local Church Ministry</u>						
Pastor	3805	592	4397	3807	603	4410
In Transfer	409	180	589	444	192	636
Pastor C.T.M.	51	38	89	56	49	105
Pastoral Service	326	399	725	358	428	786
Sub-Total	4,591	1,209	5,800	4,665	1,272	5,937
<u>Potential/Future Local Church Ministers</u>						
Unassigned	1226	460	1686	1162	456	1618
Student	27	599	626	33	568	601
Retired Assigned	1098	48	1146	1281	45	1326
Retired Unassigned	880	77	957	787	74	861
Sub-Total	2,133	1,136	3,269	1,982	1,098	3,080
<u>Auxiliary Ministry Assignments</u>						
General Supt.	6		6	6		6
Gen. Ch. Assignment	58	8	66	61	5	66
Dist. Supt.	81		81	83		83
Dist. Assignment	35	8	43	43	3	46
Education	191	14	205	193	17	210
Chaplain	93	3	96	101	5	106
Missionary	186	11	197	185	10	195
Comm. Evangelist	134	1	135	136		136
Reg. Evangelist	148	34	182	155	28	183
Comm. Song Evang.	2	2	4	2	1	3
Reg. Song Evang.	2	2	4	4	5	
Special Service	63	13	76	72	8	80
Sub-Total	999	94	1,093	1,038	81	1,119

A consideration of the characteristics of the churches to be staffed by pastors suggests important issues regarding the adequacy of the available ministerial corps. Table 3 presents a summary of churches in categories of twenty members by membership size in 1987.

Table 3  
Nazarene Congregations in the  
United States and Canada As They Were  
Distributed by Membership Size in 1987

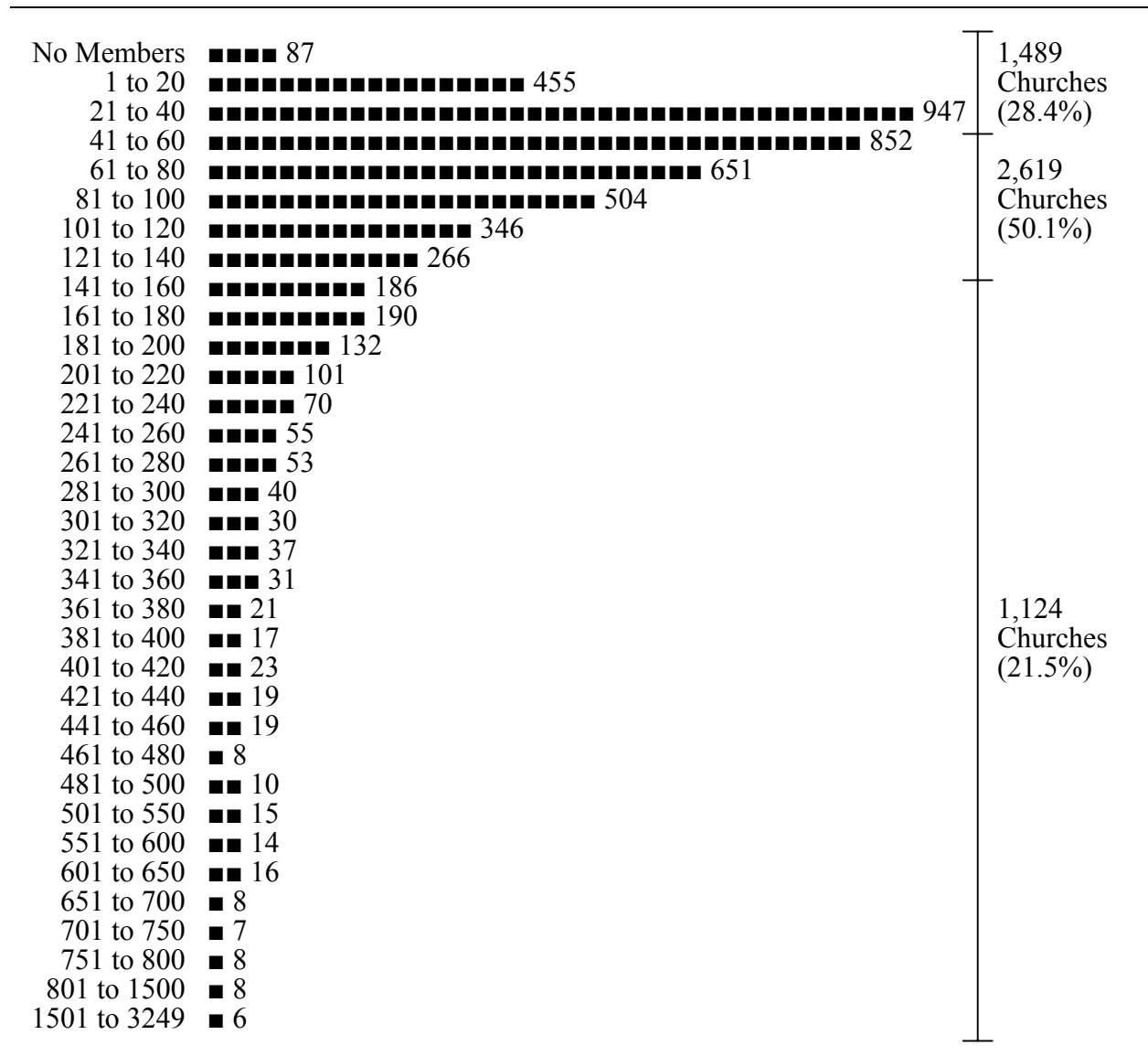
Size Category	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Members	87	1.7%	1.7%
1 to 20	455	8.7%	10.4%
21 to 40	947	18.1%	28.5%
41 to 60	852	16.3%	44.7%
61 to 80	651	12.4%	57.2%
81 to 100	504	9.6%	66.8%
101 to 120	346	6.6%	73.4%
121 to 140	266	5.1%	78.5%
141 to 160	186	3.6%	82.1%
161 to 180	190	3.6%	85.7%
181 to 200	132	2.5%	88.2%
201 to 220	101	1.9%	90.2%
221 to 240	70	1.3%	91.5%
241 to 260	55	1.1%	92.5%
261 to 280	53	1.0%	93.6%
281 to 300	40	.8%	94.3%
301 to 320	30	.6%	94.9%
321 to 340	37	.7%	95.6%
341 to 360	31	.6%	96.2%
361 to 380	21	.4%	96.6%
381 to 400	17	.3%	96.9%
401 to 420	23	.4%	97.4%
421 to 440	19	.4%	97.7%
441 to 460	19	.4%	98.1%
461 to 480	8	.2%	98.2%
481 to 500	10	.2%	98.4%
501 to 550	15	.3%	98.7%
551 to 600	14	.2%	98.9%
601 to 650	16	.3%	99.2%
651 to 700	8	.2%	99.4%
701 to 750	7	.1%	99.5%
751 to 800	8	.2%	99.7%
801 to 1500	8	.2%	99.9%
1,501 to 3,249	6	.1%	100.0%
Total	5,232	100.0%	

Figure 1 presents this distribution of churches graphically. Table 3 and figure 1 suggest that 87 (1.7%) of the existing churches are inactive and, therefore, do not need a pastor at this time. An additional 455 (8.7%) have so few members (1-20) that it seems unlikely that a full-time pastor could be supported. In fact, in his book, *Get Ready to Grow*, Paul Orjala estimates that churches with fewer than 75 members cannot afford a full-time pastor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1978, page 91). The total of the congregations with twenty members or fewer is 542

(10.4%). If these churches are subtracted from the total for which pastors are needed, the result is 4,690 active churches with more than twenty members.

Figure 1

A Graphic Presentation of the Nazarene Congregations in the United States and Canada As They Were Distributed by Membership Size in 1987



As presented earlier in table 1, there appear to have been about 4,843 ministers actually serving as pastors at the time of this study. Therefore, in general it might be concluded that the active ministerial corps is currently sufficient to staff the "viable" congregations. Table 4 compares numbers of pastors with churches of various strengths.

Table 4

Toward a Comparison of the Churches and Current Ministerial Staff In the Church of the Nazarene in the U.S.A. and Canada

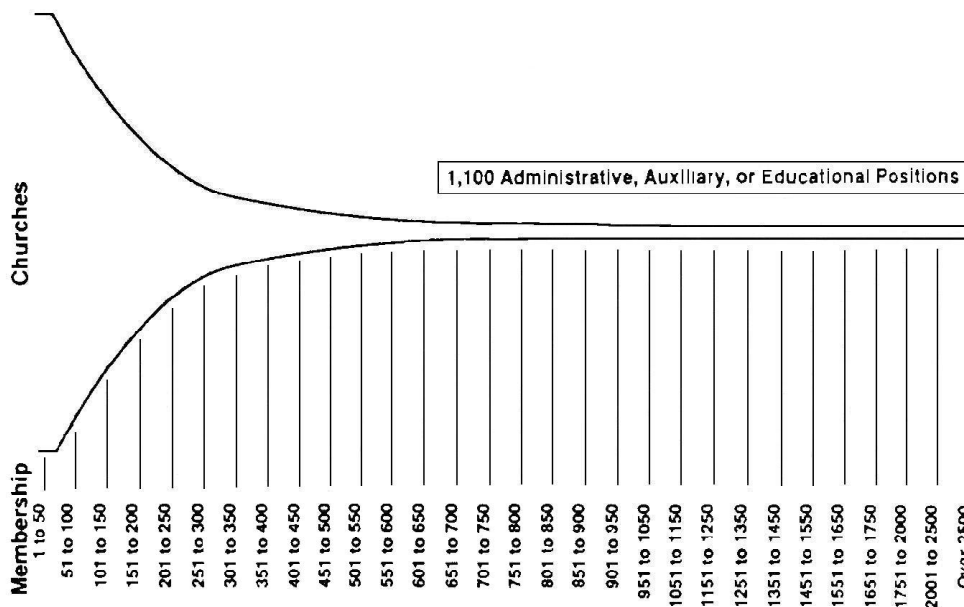
Existing Churches by Strength and Size	Distribution of 1987 Churches		Distribution of Study Pastors		Probable Availability of Pastors	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Struggling - 0-40 Members	1,489	28.5%	1,014	68.1%	1,100	73.9%
Average - 41-140 Members	2,619	50.0%	2,226	85.0%	2,619	100.0%
Strong - Over 140 Members	1,124	21.5%	995	88.5%	1,124	100.0%
Total	5,232	100.0%	4,235		4,843	

There appear to be at least enough ministers to fill the pulpits of the churches which are large enough to be able to support a pastor.

If the churches pictured in figure 1 are seen as potential assignments, it seems probable that the Nazarenes have too many pastors for their relatively few "good" churches and a shortage of pastors for the large numbers of weak churches 30 to 40 years old located in rural or suburban settings which are no longer growing.

Figure 2 presents these factors graphically. Imagine, if you will, that the available positions as pastors of Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada were something like a funnel with the entry positions at the large end and the "best" positions at the small end. Approximately 1,100 additional prestigious positions as denominational administrators, missionaries, evangelists, educators, chaplains, and other auxiliary ministry existed in 1987. These are represented by the box above the small end of the funnel.

Figure 2



Two problems for ministers become more evident when considered with this figure. First, it becomes very clear that most ministers will never fill what the Nazarene culture has come to define as prestigious, important positions.

This may affect the quality and number of new ministers. Nazarene young people prayerfully seeking God's will concerning a career in teaching would be expected to take potential openings into account. Perhaps potential ministers are also considering limited openings as an indication of God's leadership.

The relatively high proportions of younger pastors who evidently dropout long before retirement may also be partially explained by the realities represented in this visual model. These withdrawals probably include both the weeding out of the poorly qualified and a realistic adjustment of some of the best and brightest. The first may be desirable, but the second surely is not. Since the proportion of "good" churches is so small, the expectation that good pastors will serve better and better charges might be expected to produce an aspiration-achievement discrepancy for many, if not most, young ministers. There are simply not enough strong churches or prestigious administrative positions to accommodate all those who have been encouraged to expect promotion. Unfortunately, it may be the most perceptive, most qualified, and most spiritual - rather than the misfits and least committed - who sincerely interpret the current lack of positions judged worthy by the church as a sign that they should follow God's leadership in other vocations, or as a sign that they have misunderstood God's will for their lives, or even as an indication that the system is not fair.

Furthermore, the large number of pastors compared to the relatively small number of strong churches may increase the institutional problem which Thomas O'Dea called the "Dilemma of Mixed Motivation" ("Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," in *Sociology and the Study of Religion*, New York: Basic Books, 1970, page 244). He argues that early in religious movements "disinterested motivation," or selfless service, characterize participants and leaders. However, as the group becomes more institutionalized and stable "there arises a structure of offices--of statuses and roles--capable of eliciting another kind of motivation, involving needs for prestige, expression of teaching and leadership abilities, drives for power, aesthetic needs, and the quite prosaic wish for the security of a respectable position in the professional structure of the society." In fact, Jesus dealt with something like this by taking the slave's towel and both demonstrating and demanding selfless service (John 13: 1-17; see also Matthew 18: 1; Mark 10: 35-37). O'Dea believed that, "It is precisely because of its ability to mobilize self-interested as well as disinterested motivation behind institutionalized patterns that institutionalization contributes stability to human life." But, he also thought, "The criteria of selection and promotion in the institutional structure must of necessity reflect the functional needs of the social organization and emphasize performance and therefore, will not distinguish very finely between the two types of motivation involved."

When little boys choose up teams in the school yard only a few can be chosen early, therefore, many experience a destructive rejection. To avoid rejection a lot posturing goes on in the hope of being noticed and chosen. The popular belief that pastors must create a market for their ministry seems to create a similar situation in which most may experience rejection. It also seems to promote the problem of "mixed motivation."

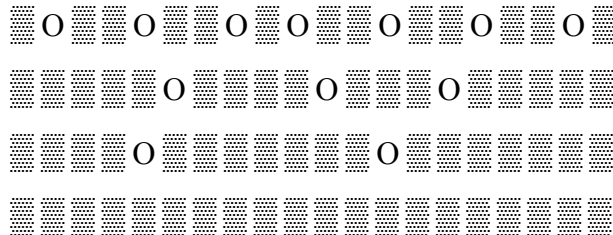
A second problem for ministers becomes more evident when considered in the context of figure 2. Two-thirds (66.8%; 3,496) of the congregations which need to be staffed by Nazarene pastors have 100 or fewer members (see table 3). More than one-fourth (28.5%; 1,489 churches) do not have more than 40.

Figure 3 illustrates types of churches and training of ministers to pastor those churches. The squares represent congregations and ministers trained to lead those congregations with more than

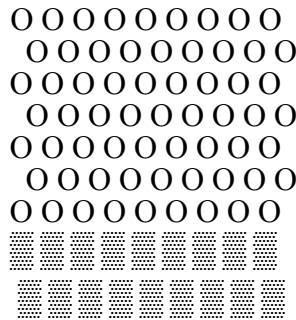
100 members. The circles represent congregations and ministers for those churches with 100 or fewer members. There were 1,736 larger congregations (over 100) and 3,496 smaller congregations (100 or fewer) in the United States and Canada in 1987.

Figure 3

PASTORAL PREPARATION



EXISTING CHURCHES



As this illustration suggests, Nazarene ministerial training programs may not be preparing enough students for the special challenges of effectively leading small congregations. Strategies and programs to motivate and prepare ministerial students to serve the struggling congregation which is a challenging, newly planted church appear to have been more prominent and successful in recent years. However, similar special training and motivation seems needed to prepare to serve the struggling congregation which is a stagnant, older congregation located in a rural or suburban population which is no longer growing. Perhaps ministerial training needs to be examined again with special attention given to preparing ministers to serve these 1,500 to 3,500 churches.

ENTRY AND DEPARTURE TRENDS

When pastors were traced on the first of January each year from 1984 to 1988, 3,048 were found to have held a pastoral assignment all of that time. Another 191 who were pastoring at the beginning and end of this period, had some time during the five years when they did not have a pastoral assignment. Similarly, 199 pastored during the middle of this period but were not pastoring at the beginning or end. Table 5 shows these patterns.

Table 5  
Pastoral Force, 1984-1988

<u>Pattern of Pastoring</u>	<u>Number</u>
Each January 1 - 1984 to 1988	3,048
1984 & 1988 with some "Lapse"	191
Middle but neither 1984 or 1988	199
In 1984 but not in 1988	1,139
In 1988 but not in 1984	1,141
Total Pastors, 1984-1988	5,718

Over one-thousand (1,139) who were pastors at the beginning of this five year period, were not pastoring at the end of it. Almost precisely the same number (1,141) were pastoring on January 1, 1988, who were not in a pastoral assignment January 1, 1984.

The 1,139 pastors in 1984 who were no longer pastors in 1988 had moved to a variety of roles assignments. The largest group (309; 27.1%) were now "Unassigned". The next largest group (211; 18.5%) had retired. The third group (203; 17.8%) had surrendered or filed their credentials or had failed to renew their district license. A smaller group (109; 9.6%) had become associate ministers. Table 6 presents the current role assignments of the 1984 pastors who were no longer pastoring by 1988.

Table 6  
1988 Roles of 1984 Pastors

<u>Role</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Unassigned	309	27.1%
Retired	211	18.5%
No Official Credential	203	17.8%
Associate Pastor	109	9.6%
Evangelist	87	7.7%
Student	31	2.7%
Deceased	27	2.3%
Pastor of Mission	25	2.2%
Chaplain	22	1.9%
District Superintendent	21	1.8%
District Assignment	19	1.7%
Education	19	1.7%
Missionary	19	1.7%
Interdenom. Assignment	17	1.5%
In Transfer/Uncertain	11	1.0%
General Assignment	9	.8%
	1,139	100.0%

The 1,141 ministers who were not active pastors in 1984 but had become pastors by 1988 held a variety of roles assignments in 1984. The largest group (470; 41.2%) had been neither licensed nor ordained in 1984. Many may have been students. The second largest group (231;

20.2%) were officially classified as students in 1984. A large group (177; 15.5%) had been associate pastors. The fourth largest group of these pastors (146; 12.8%) were "Unassigned" in 1984. Table 7 presents all of roles held in 1984 by those who had become pastors by 1988.

Table 7  
1984 Roles of 1988 Pastors

<u>Role</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No Official Credential	470	41.2%
Student	231	20.2%
Associate Pastor	177	15.5%
Unassigned	146	12.8%
Evangelist	31	2.7%
District Assignment	29	2.5%
Retired	17	1.5%
Missionary	11	1.0%
Interdenom. Assignment	8	.7%
Education	7	.6%
Pastor of Mission	6	.5%
Chaplain	4	.4%
General Assignment	3	.3%
<u>District Superintendent</u>	1	.1%
	1,141	100.0%

Since 1980 an average of 425 new ministers have entered the ministerial corps each year. The average during the 1970s was 369 and during the 1960s was 343. The average number of losses by death, retirement, surrendered credentials and inactive status of licensed ministers since 1980 has been 438. The average annual loss during the 1970s was 291 which was precisely the same average as that experienced during the 1960's (291). Table 8 presents the annual patterns.

Table 8  
Trends in the Corps of Ministers  
in the Church of the Nazarene over the Last Three Decades

Year	Total New Ministers	Total Ministers Lost	Net Ministerial Corps	Number of Churches	Ratio of Ministers to Churches	Ministers Available for Other Roles
Pre-1954			5,424			
1954	565	196	5,793	4162	139.2%	1,631
1955	427	221	5,999	4280	140.2	1,719
1956	365	273	6,091	4366	139.5	1,725
1957	319	269	6,141	4434	138.5	1,707
1958	308	229	6,220	4520	137.6	1,700
1959	360	231	6,349	4639	136.9	1,710
1960	336	202	6,483	4693	138.1	1,790
1961	445	288	6,640	4714	140.9	1,926
1962	375	290	6,725	4738	141.9	1,987
1963	347	318	6,754	4785	141.2	1,969
1964	315	282	6,787	4815	141.0	1,972
1965	318	294	6,811	4829	141.0	1,982
1966	325	332	6,804	4871	139.7	1,933
1967	351	351	6,804	4899	138.9	1,905
1968	316	297	6,823	4909	139.0	1,914
1969	304	257	6,870	4906	140.0	1,964
1970	379	410	6,839	4905	139.4	1,934
1971	355	315	6,879	4895	140.5	1,984
1972	340	297	6,922	4913	140.9	2,009
1973	378	282	7,018	4936	142.2	2,082
1974	330	310	7,038	4948	142.2	2,090
1975	336	190	7,184	4955	145.0	2,229
1976	402	225	7,361	4955	148.6	2,406
1977	404	270	7,495	4957	151.2	2,538
1978	383	275	7,603	4956	153.4	2,647
1979	384	338	7,649	4970	153.9	2,679
1980	386	373	7,662	4995	153.4	2,667
1981	453	367	7,748	5033	153.9	2,715
1982	441	403	7,786	5049	154.2	2,737
1983	444	445	7,785	5080	153.3	2,705
1984	421	528	7,678	5122	149.9	2,556
1985	444	545	7,577	5136	147.5	2,441
1986	442	451	7,568	5169	146.4	2,399
1987	366	393	7,541	5232	144.1	2,309*
Totals	12,864	10,747				

*\*In 1987 there were 1,905 administrative, missionary, evangelist, associate, educational, chaplain, and other auxiliary ministry positions*

In 1987 the number of new ministers dropped to 366. This decline of approximately 60 below the average during the 1980s may represent beginning effects of the sharp reduction in numbers of youth immediately behind the baby boom. The peak of the baby boom affected

enrollments of college freshmen as it passed through that age level in the early years of this decade. Those freshmen should have now completed college and perhaps seminary. In 1980 Lyle Schaller predicted that "if the seminaries attract their traditional share of each age cohort, and if the typical seminary graduate is in the twenty-four to twenty-eight age bracket, this [the baby boom] will mean record numbers of seminary graduates entering the ministerial marketplace during the 1980-89 period" (In the foreword, page 14, to the book, *Too Many Pastors?* by Jackson W. Carroll and Robert L. Wilson, HarperCollins, 1980, which reported research findings of The Hartford Seminary Foundation concerning the clergy employment situation in twelve denominations, including the Church of the Nazarene).

Since many Nazarenes enter the ministry without seminary training, the effects of the baby boom might have been expected to affect the numbers of new ministers earlier than Schaller predicted, perhaps from about 1977 through 1986. The lower numbers of young people following the baby boom might be expected to affect numbers of new ministers for the next few years.

## TENURE

The length of time a pastor gives in leadership to a congregation, his tenure, undoubtedly influences the health of the church. Unfortunately, neither the precise nature of this influence nor the average tenure of Nazarene pastors appear to have been determined.

John Wesley evidently thought short tenures were better. In October of 1787 when he was 84 years old, having recently completed an "intensive survey of the entire scope and spread of British Methodism," Wesley reviewed the Methodist responsibility in the Lord's vineyard in a sermon called "On God's Vineyard" (Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964: page 104). Among the strengths of the movement, he asserted that "another excellent help" was "the constant change of Preachers; it being their rule, that no Preacher shall remain in the same circuit more than two years together, and few of them more than one year. Some, indeed, have imagined that this was a hinderance [sic] to the work of God: But long experience, in every part of the kingdom, proves the contrary. This has always shown that the people profit less by any one person than by a variety of Preachers; while they 'Used the gifts on each bestow'd, Temper'd by the art of God' " (*The Works of John Wesley*, facsimile edition of the 1872 edition, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, volume 7, page 208).

Wesley's preference for short tenures is not widely shared in contemporary America, however. Most experts now believe longer tenures tend to cause better growing, healthier churches. For example, John Vaughan recently reminded us that all of the pastors of the twenty largest churches have pastored their congregation longer than twenty years ("Trends among the World's Twenty Largest Churches," in *Church Growth: the State of the Art*, C. Peter Wagner, ed., 1986, page 131; see also, Towns, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes them Grow*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969, page 115; and Reeves and Jenson, *Always Advancing*, San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1984, page 24). The evidence appears to be clear that pastors of super churches tend to have long tenures in those congregations. It is not as clear that this tendency among a few anomalies provides a basis for assuming a causal relationship between tenure and the growth of more typical churches. Furthermore, it is even less clear that there is a sound basis for the assertion that the direction of causation is from tenure to growth.

However, until tenure patterns can be accurately measured, it is not possible to examine how tenures and church growth interact. Therefore, it is important to determine the average tenures of Nazarene pastors.

There are several relevant questions regarding trends in tenures. One might ask whether pastors were staying longer, on the average, in their current assignments. Or, it might be asked whether the averages throughout careers were growing longer. The question might also be whether a larger proportion of pastors are averaging longer than four or five years. Therefore, four indicators of various aspects of tenure were calculated.

An average tenure was calculated for each pastor by dividing the total time served in pastoral assignments by the total number of these assignments. The median average tenure in their pastoral assignments among active Nazarene pastors in 1987 was 3 years and 3 months.

The proportion with a longer than 4 year average tenure in the churches they have served as pastor was 36.0%. The proportion who have been in their current pastoral assignment longer than 4 years was 38.3%.

The number of pastors recently moving into their present assignment was about balanced by the number who have spent several years in their current church. The median tenure, on November 1, 1987, in their present assignment was 3 years and 1 month.

Among the active pastors in 1987, 36.0% had average pastoral tenures longer than four years. A slightly larger proportion (38.3%) had been in their current assignment longer than four years.

Table 9 summarizes variations in pastors' average tenures by presenting the proportions in categories of time. The largest group of pastors (602; 14.2%) have averages from two to two and one-half years. In the cumulative percentage column it will be seen that two-thirds (64%) of the currently active pastors have experienced average tenures of four years or shorter.

Table 9  
Numbers and Percentages of Nazarene Pastors  
with Average Ministerial Tenures of Various Lengths

Median Tenure in Months	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 1 year	180	4.3%	4.3%
1 to 1.5 years	285	6.7%	11.0%
1.5 to 2 years	337	8.0%	19.0%
2 to 2.5 years	521	12.3%	31.3%
2.5 to 3 years	457	10.8%	42.1%
3 to 3.5 years	539	12.7%	54.9%
3.5 to 4 years	385	9.1%	64.0%
4 to 4.5 years	419	9.9%	73.9%
4.5 to 5 years	251	5.9%	79.8%
5 to 5.5 years	208	4.9%	84.7%
5.5 to 6 years	129	3.0%	87.8%
6 to 6.5 years	122	2.9%	90.7%
6.5 to 7 years	77	1.8%	92.5%
7 to 8 years	102	2.4%	94.9%
8 to 10 years	105	2.5%	97.4%
10 to 15 years	68	1.6%	99.0%
Over 15 years	42	1.0%	100.0%
Total	4,227*	100.0%	

\*These data were not available for 8 pastors

## EXPERIENCE

The median years of pastoral experience by active pastors in 1987 was 10 years and 6 months. One-fourth (25%) of these pastors have more than twenty years experience as a pastor.

Three out of ten (28.4%) of the pastors active in 1987 took their first ministerial assignment since 1980. Three-fourths (74.3%) began their ministerial careers since 1965. This information is summarized in table 10.

Table 10

### Numbers and Percentages of Nazarene Pastors Beginning Their Ministry in Various Time Spans

<u>Time Period of Beginning</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative Percent</u>
1986 to 1987	254	6.0%	6.0%
1981 to 1985	947	22.4%	28.4%
1976 to 1980	782	18.5%	46.8%
1971 to 1975	651	15.4%	62.2%
1966 to 1970	513	12.1%	74.3%
1961 to 1965	377	8.9%	83.2%
1956 to 1960	309	7.3%	90.5%
1951 to 1955	256	6.0%	96.6%
Before 1950	146	3.4%	100.0%
Total	4,235	100.0%	

## UNASSIGNED MINISTERS

There were 1,618 Nazarene ministers officially classified "Unassigned" at the close of the 1987 assembly year. This is down slightly from the 1,686 in this classification the previous year. These elders (1,162) and licensed ministers (456) are officially part of the ministerial corps. However, it seems reasonable to ask whether there is any real hope that significant numbers of them will accept pastoral assignments in the future.

These ministers may be stubborn drop-outs unwilling to pastor. They may have chosen to remain unassigned. According to Carroll and Wilson in *Too Many Pastors?*, "In 1965 the Church of the Nazarene had forecast a serious shortage [of ministers] by 1975, but there has been an upturn in the number of clergy and a slowdown of new church development. The large increase in unassigned clergy who, according to Nazarene officials are there by their own volition, also suggests no great shortage of clergy" (HarperCollins, 1980, page 46).

Other unassigned ministers are no doubt failures without any potential for ministry. However, other circumstances are also likely. Some are no doubt middle-aged pastors too old to be attractive to church boards. Others are good pastors voted out of bad situations. Some are probably pastors between assignments while they deal with personal matters. Some may be successful leaders who are temporarily unable to find a church equal to their stature. And, these

suggestions certainly do not exhaust the reasons that an active pastor might be temporarily between assignments.

In 1979 and 1980 L. Dale Horton conducted a study of unassigned elders in the Church of the Nazarene. This research was a part of his Masters of Church Management program in the Institute for Church Management of Olivet Nazarene College. At that time he identified 1,141 ordained elders who were listed in District Minutes. He sent questionnaires to the 1,123 of these for whom a mailing address was available. Responses were received from 375 (33%) of these unassigned elders. This rather low response rate gives some cause for concern regarding the validity of assuming all unassigned elders would answer as this one-third did.

Unassigned ministers told Horton that their median age at the beginning of their unassigned status was 42 years old. Their average ministerial career had been 14 years at the time of the study. Two-thirds (67%) had had careers of less than 20 years.

According to Horton, unassigned elders tend to leave the pastorate from small churches. The median size church was 62 members. These ministers tend to have been bi-vocational during their last pastorate, receiving on the average 59% of their income from the church. Over half (57%) say health problems were a major reason for becoming unassigned.

A substantial majority (62%) of these unassigned elders said they would accept another pastorate. Responses to the open-ended question, "I would accept another pastorate if \_\_\_\_\_" included: "If God's will" (22%), "If it were full-time and would support me" (13%), "If conditions were right" (9%), "If health improved" (7%), and "If asked" (4%).

The professed willingness to return to a pastoral assignment appears to be supported by district superintendents responses. During the three years prior to the study, a number equal to 10% of the total unassigned elders had been assigned pastorates by the superintendents participating in the study.

As noted, Horton's response rate raised the question of validity. However, our study of the career histories of the currently active pastors provide support for his findings.

Among the 4,235 active pastors in the present study, almost one-third (32.8%) have experienced a period during their ministry when they were officially classified as "Unassigned" by the General Secretary. Table 11 presents the percentages broken down by the time of beginning their first ministry assignment.

The median time spent in unassigned periods is one year (11.96 months). The mean is 1 year and 3.4 months. About one-fourth (27%) of these were less than six months long. Seventeen percent were longer than two years.

Table 11

Numbers and Percentages of  
Nazarene Pastors Experiencing Periods of  
Unassigned Status by Year  
of Entry into Ministry

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1980 to Present	317	23.3%
1975 to 1980	255	33.6%
1970 to 1975	205	32.0%
1965 to 1970	175	38.2%
1960 to 1965	152	42.3%
1955 to 1960	92	36.1%
1950 to 1955	121	47.3%
Before 1950	74	50.7%
Overall	1,391	32.8%

As might be expected, pastors with longer careers were more likely to have been unassigned. Half (50.7%) of the pastors who began their ministry prior to 1950 have experienced some time when they were unassigned.

## CONCLUSIONS

There appear to be enough ministers to fill the pulpits of at least the strong churches. However, many congregations are not strong. In 1987, 1,489 (28.4%) of the 5,232 Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada had 40 or fewer members. Many of these may be 30 to 40 years old and located in rural or suburban populations which are no longer growing. It is not clear that existing training programs for ministers will prepare an adequate corps to staff these churches. Further, since there appear to be approximately 1,000 more ministers in the corps than there are appropriate positions in which to place them, a rather high level of attrition and placement in an "Unassigned" status is necessary. Unless additional positions are created and accepted within the Nazarene culture as appropriate, this condition should probably be expected to continue.

The average annual number of new ministers during the 1980s has been 425. This is an increase over the average during the 1970s (369) and the 1960s (343).

There has been an increase in losses of ministers which corresponds to this increase in new ministers. The average annual number of losses by death, retirement, surrendered credentials, and inactive status of licensed ministers during the 1980s has been 438. The average annual loss during the 1970s was 291 which was precisely the same average as that experienced during the 1960s (291). It should probably be noted that this is the only one of these three decades in which the average annual losses have outnumbered the average annual gains.

The most recent year in which data regarding losses are accessible by type is 1985. Between 1980 and 1985 the average annual number of losses by death was 166, by retirement was 156, by surrendered credentials was 56, and by inactive status of licensed ministers was 110.

The predicted baby boom appears to have caused a temporary inflation of new ministers entering the corps beginning in 1976 and continuing through 1986. If other factors do not intervene, it should probably be expected that there will be a decline in numbers of young people entering the ministry for several years corresponding to the sharp declines in births beginning in the early 1960s. Since numbers of losses have tended to decrease when the numbers of new ministers decreased, it may be expected that ministerial losses will also decline.

Predicting the long-term consequences of the 1980s pattern of more annual ministerial losses than gains, the effects of the fewer youth now that the baby boom has passed, and projections of rapid church planting is necessarily an exercise involving speculation. For example, the greater numbers leaving the ministry might either represent a crisis in commitment or a realistic adjustment to career opportunities. Nazarene young people prayerfully seeking God's will concerning a career in teaching would be expected to take potential openings into account. Perhaps ministers are also considering limited openings as an indication of God's leadership.

The large number of unassigned ministers suggest that it will be possible for a few years to increase the number of new churches while continuing to experience the 1980s pattern of about 15 more annual losses than gains. However, a pattern of planting 100 churches each year and 15 excess losses over gains in ministers could not be continued for more than about ten years before shortages would be experienced. By that time some strategy should probably be developed to reduce the numbers of ministers unnecessarily lost to the Nazarene ministerial corps.

The median average tenure in their pastoral assignments among active Nazarene pastors in 1987 was 3 years and 3 months. The median tenure, on November 1, 1987, in their present assignment was 3 years and 1 month. The greatest value in this identification of the average tenure of Nazarene pastors who were active pastors in 1987 may be that it establishes a baseline of information for future studies. Without such data for the previous decades, it is not possible to examine the changes in tenures which may have resulted from attempts to increase the length of time Nazarene pastors spend in the congregations they serve.

The pastoral corps has a relatively high proportion of inexperienced ministers. Most (62.2%) of the people who are serving Nazarene congregations today have apparently completed their training and begun their ministry since 1970. Causes of this relative inexperience have not been explored. It may be that age discrimination exists, that it is difficult to find a place to serve in the Church of the Nazarene when one is older. A second explanation may be that many pastors do not have adequate resources to cope with the heavy demands of the pastorate. Overwhelmed, they prematurely retire from the ministry. Another explanation may be that unrealistic personal or denominational models of successful ministry create problems. Discrepancies between aspirations and achievements may result in unnecessary loss of pastors.

The resulting weakness in experience and stability could present disturbing consequences to the denomination. However, it also permits a rather rapid infusion of ideas and methods into the system. For example, it would be possible to equip a large proportion of the Nazarene pastors with church growth principles and procedures in a relatively short period of time.

Movement between pastoral assignments and officially "Unassigned" status is evidently much more common than previously assumed. Therefore, efforts should be made to reduce negative labels which some have associated with this status. As many as one-third of the currently active corps of pastors may have suffered unfair, and unnecessary stigma while they were unassigned. Further, since the data make it clear that many of the "Unassigned" ministers would return to pastoral service, the "Placement Information Service" which provides District Superintendents with names and records of potential pastors should be corrected to include Unassigned Ministers. The exclusion of this category undoubtedly makes re-entry into the active pastoral corps more difficult.

The corps of pastors in the Church of the Nazarene appears to be relatively strong. There are evidently more ministers than "good" assignments. Annual additions to the number of ministers have remained consistently high throughout the last three decades. Since 1976 more than 350 have joined the corps every year. However, this research suggests that some attention should probably be given to ministerial training programs and strategies to reduce ministerial attrition in order to maintain an adequate staff prepared to serve the whole range of churches which make up the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada.

Kenneth E. Crow  
April 4, 1988