

The Corps of Pastors of the Church of the Nazarene

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In 1988 the Research Center of the Church Growth Division conducted an analysis of the corps of pastors of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada. Data for ministers serving in the role of pastor on November 1, 1987, were examined in that study. In the fall of 1995 Wilbur W. Brannon, Pastoral Ministries Director, asked the Church Growth Research Center to conduct a comparable study. At the end of November in 1995 similar data were obtained for the 4,891 Nazarene pastors in the United States and Canada. The primary source of data was the role histories maintained by the General Secretary of the Church of the Nazarene, Jack K. Stone. This report describes the corps and makes some comparisons with the patterns observed in 1988. In the report, the terms "pastor" and "pastoral" are used to distinguish these from other ministerial assignments. When the terms "minister" or "ministerial" are used, they refer to all ministerial roles.

1. Tenure

The average tenure of pastors is 3 years and 3 months. This has been remarkably stable over the last eight years. More than one-third of the corps have averaged four or more years in their pastoral assignments throughout their careers. This proportion is the same as it was in 1988. (*See tables [1-3](#), pages 1-2*)

2. Experience

The median total of pastoral experience among current pastors is 10 years 8 months. This is slightly more experienced than in 1988. Almost four out of five of the pastors took their first ministry assignment since 1970. Nearly one-third (31.4%) of the current pastors have taken their first ministry assignment since the 1988 study. (*See tables [4-5](#), page 3*)

Age The median age of our pastors is 47. About sixty percent are the age of the "Baby Boomers". Nazarene ministers age at their ordination tends to be older than it was a decade ago. Almost half are now ordained after their fortieth birthday.

3. Context of Ministry

Congregation size Seven out of ten Nazarene pastors serve congregations with fewer than 100 in worship on an average Sunday morning. (*See table [9](#), page 6*)

Community Type Nazarene congregations in The United States and Canada are equally distributed between urban areas and small towns or rural areas. (*See tables [10-11](#), pages 7-8*)

Bi-Vocational Ministry About three out of ten Nazarene pastors consider themselves to be bi-vocational. Churches pastored by bi-vocational pastors were neither more nor less likely to grow than those pastored by full time pastors. (*See table [12](#), page 9*)

Corps Adequate for the Opportunities

Youth in preparation Many of the students on Nazarene college, university, and seminary campuses in the U.S. and Canada are planning a career which includes some form of ministry. When presented with a list of twenty-seven career categories, ranging from accounting to science, students are more likely to choose "Ministry through the Church" than any other option. ([See table 13, page 10](#))

Education Pastors were more likely to indicate educational preparation at Nazarene Theological Seminary than any other institution. Nazarene Bible College was the second most often indicated. ([See table 14, page 13](#))

Additions and Attrition During the eight years since the last study, more than 2,000 Nazarene elders and 230 deacons have been ordained in the United States and Canada. Over 4,000 newly licensed ministers have been added to the corps. There has been a net increase of 1,420 in the corps of ministers. ([See table 15, page 12](#))

Positions to be Filled While there are unlimited opportunities for ministry, the number of pastoral positions available to Nazarene pastors seems to have declined over the last eight years. However the number of associate positions appears to have increased significantly.

First Ministry Role During the last decade the first ministry assignment accepted by the most young Nazarene Ministers has shifted from pastor to associate. ([See table 17, page 14](#))

Unassigned Ministers At any particular time, part of the corps of Nazarene ministers is unassigned. Three out of ten of the currently active pastors who are not in their first ministry assignment have been officially classified as unassigned at some time during their ministry career. ([See table 18, page 15](#))

Tenure in Pastoral Roles

This analysis replicates a study completed in 1988. The primary source of data for the study was the file histories maintained by the General Secretary of the Church of the Nazarene, Jack K. Stone. The study was restricted to Nazarene pastors serving churches in the United States and Canada. Role histories were analyzed for 4,891 pastors. 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.

In 1988 three questions were examined regarding pastoral tenures. The study asked whether pastors were staying longer on the average in their current assignments. This question also deals with recent turnover in pastorates. The second question was whether the averages throughout careers were growing longer. Finally, that study examined the proportion of our pastors who are investing longer than the four years in each of their pastoral assignments.

Tables 1 and 2 allow us to examine trends in regard to these questions. Table 1 presents a comparison of the median tenures in pastoral roles in 1988 and in 1996.

- The average tenure in pastoral roles throughout their careers has remained remarkably stable over the last eight years. Half of the pastors have averaged longer than 3 years and three months and a half have averaged shorter than this.
- On the average, pastors have been in their current assignment for a shorter time than was true of pastors in 1988.
- This might be due to some periodic fluctuation in the reassignment of Nazarene pastors. For example, the year after a general assembly might have more movement between pastorates than the year immediately preceding a general assembly. However, both the measurement at the end of 1987 and this one at the end of 1995 fall about one and one half years before the next general assembly.

Table 1		
Comparison of Nazarene Pastor's Tenure* in 1988 and 1996		
Measure of Tenure	1988	1996
Tenure in all Pastoral Assignments	3 yrs. 3 mos.	3 yrs. 3 mos.
Tenure in Current Assignment	3 yrs. 1 mo.	2 yrs. 8 mos.

*Median tenure; half of the pastors had a longer period and half had a shorter one.

Tenure in Pastoral Roles – Average Longer Than Four Years

Table 2 presents a comparison of the proportions of pastors with tenures longer than four years.

- Again, there is remarkable stability in career averages between 1988 and in 1996 averaged more than four years in their pastoral assignments throughout their careers.
- There is a slight decline in the proportion who have been in their current assignments longer than four years. This suggests slightly more recent turnover among pastoral assignments than was experienced prior to the measurement in 1988.

Table 2		
Proportion of Nazarene Pastors Serving Churches Longer Than Four Years		
Measure of Tenure	1988	1996
Tenure in all Pastoral Assignments	36.0%	36.0%

Current Assignment	38.3%	27.0%
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Table 3 summarizes variations in pastors' average tenures by presenting the proportions in categories of time.

As noted above, both in 1988 and in 1996 more than one-third (36%) of the pastors had averaged four years or more in their pastoral assignments.

In 1996 the proportion of pastors who have averaged more than four years in their pastoral assignments is slightly higher than it was in 1988 (1988=20.2%; 1996=23.2%).

Table 3				
Comparison of Nazarene Pastor's Tenure* in 1988 and 1996				
Average Tenure In Pastor Roles	1988		1996	
	N	%	N	%
Less than two years	802	19.0	1042	21.3
Two to three years	978	23.1	1101	22.5
Three to four years	924	21.9	983	20.1
Four to five years	670	15.9	626	12.8
Five to ten years	743	17.6	988	20.2
Over ten years	110	2.6	148	3.0

Experience in Pastoral Ministries

Table 4 presents a comparison of total pastoral experience in 1988 and 1996.

Total pastoral experience has increased slightly over the past eight years. Half of the pastors have at least ten years and eight months experience as pastors. On the other hand, half have less than that amount of experience.

This suggests that any initiative to improve ministerial preparation could probably rather quickly impact a significant proportion of the ministerial corps. If the 1988 and 1996 patterns continue, half of the corps of pastors who will be serving in the year 2007 will be ministers who have not yet taken their first pastoral assignment.

Table 4
Comparison of Pastoral Experience* in 1988 and 1996

Median Exposure as Pastor	1988	1996
All Pastoral Assignments	10 yrs. 6 mos.	10 yrs. 8 mos.

*Median experience in the role of pastor; half of the pastors had a longer period and half had a shorter one.

Table 5 summarizes the timing of the first ministry assignment of the current corps of pastors.

One in five (21.1%) of the currently active pastors took their first ministerial assignment prior to 1970; more than twenty- five years ago.

More than half (54.8%) started their Nazarene ministry since 1980

Table 5			
Numbers and Percentages of Nazarene Pastors By the Time of Their Beginning Their Ministry			
Time of Beginning	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Before 1950	47	1.0	1.0
1951 through 1960	301	6.2	7.1
1961 through 1970	683	14.0	21.1
1971 through 1980	1179	24.1	45.2
1981 through 1990	1669	34.1	79.3
1991 through 1995	1012	20.7	100.0
Totals	4891	100.0	

Age – Current

Tables 6 through 8 summarize information regarding the ages of the active pastors in 1996.

Three out of five (59%) are in their thirties and forties, the age of the "Baby Boom" cohort.

Table 6		
Age Distribution of Nazarene Pastors in 1996		
Age Category	Number	Percent
21 to 30 years old	157	3.4

31 to 40 years old	1158	24.9
41 to 50 years old	1603	34.5
51 to 60 years old	1113	24.0
Over 60 years old	614	13.2
Totals	4645	100

Table 7 examines the relationship between pastors' age and the size of the congregation they serve.

Regardless of age, most pastors serve in smaller churches (1-100 participants) Pastors of the larger churches (more than 250 participants) are more likely to be in their forties or fifties.

Pastors in their twenties or in their late sixties are most likely to be serving the smaller churches.

Table 7						
Distribution of Nazarene Pastors by Age and the Sunday Morning Worship Size of the Church They Currently Pastor						
Age Category	1-100		101-250		Over 250	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
21 to 30 years old	137	89.5	16	10.5	0	0.0
31 to 40 years old	800	70.1	294	25.7	48	4.2
41 to 50 years old	1028	64.9	414	26.1	143	9.0
51 to 60 years old	739	66.9	274	24.8	92	8.3
Over 60 years old	480	79.7	102	16.9	20	3.3
Overall	3184	69.4	1100	24.0	303	6.6

Age – At Ordination

Table 8 presents trends in the ages of Nazarene elders at their ordination.

The average age has increased about three years over the last decade. This is partly due to an increase in the age at which elders must be ordained.

The proportion ordained younger than 30 years old has decreased by 5%, from 19.5% to 14.2%.

During the same years, the proportion ordained when they were older than 40 years increased by 12%, from 32.1% to 44.2%.

Table 8

New Nazarene Elder's Age at Ordination					
Year at Ordination	Mean Age	Percent under 30	Percent 30 to 39	Percent 40 to 49	Percent over 50
1985	37.4	19.5	48.4	21.6	10.5
1986	37.6	20.8	49.3	16.5	13.4
1987	37.1	14.2	52.7	22.1	11.0
1988	37.2	23.0	45.9	20.0	11.1
1989	37.9	15.4	50.0	20.9	13.7
1990	38.1	20.1	46.9	19.7	13.3
1991	39.1	16.3	45.6	23.1	15.0
1992	39.4	15.4	42.1	25.6	16.9
1993	38.7	12.6	47.6	25.6	14.2
1994	40.3	14.2	41.6	25.7	18.5

*Source: General Secretary's records

Context of Pastoral Ministry – Congregations

The congregations in which most Nazarene pastors serve are small.

Seven out of ten churches (70.6%) have 100 or fewer in worship on an average Sunday. While ministerial preparation often seems to focus on churches larger than 250, only 311 Nazarene congregations in the U.S. are that large in participation. There are fewer than 300 congregations with at least 300 worshippers on an average Sunday.

Table 9						
Numbers and Percentages of Nazarene Congregations in Various Size Categories						
Size Category	Membership			AM Worship		
	N	%		N	%	
1 through 50	1548	31.0		1910	38.5	
51 through 100	1526	30.6	3074 61.6%	1595	32.1	3505 70.6%
101 through 150	776	15.6		692	13.9	
151 through 200	403	8.1		291	5.9	
201 through 250	225	4.5	1404	165	3.3	1148

			28.1%			23.1%
251 through 300	164	3.3		95	1.9	
301 through 350	75	1.5		70	1.4	
351 through 400	74	1.5		41	0.8	
401 through 450	57	1.1		25	0.5	
451 through 500	29	0.6		15	0.3	
501 through 550	27	0.5		13	0.3	
551 through 600	15	0.3		9	0.2	
601 through 650	12	0.2		6	0.1	
651 through 700	5	0.1		3	0.1	
701 through 750	9	0.2		8	0.2	
751 through 800	7	0.1		5	0.1	
801 through 850	9	0.2		4	0.1	
851 through 900	5	0.1		4	0.1	
901 through 950	2	0.0		1	0.0	
951 through 1000	1	0.0		0	0.0	
1001 through 1500	14	0.3		7	0.1	
1501 through 2000	2	0.0		3	0.1	
2001 through 3000	3	0.1		2	0.0	
Over 3000	2	0.0	512 10.3%	0	0.0	311 6.3%
Totals	4990	100.0		4964	100.0	

Context of Pastoral Ministry – Community Type

Table 10 presents a summary of the location of Nazarene congregations in various community types. Communities vary a great deal, making it difficult to compare and classify them. The Church Growth Research Center has identified eleven general types. This table reduces those categories to four: Major Urban includes "major urban core," "Large city," and "fringe major urban"; Suburban or Small City includes "small city or suburb," "suburban," "small city core," and "fringe city"; Small Town includes "small town," "bordering small town," and "near small town".

Half(50%) of the Nazarene Congregations are located in cities and half are in small town or rural settings.

Table 10
Community Types in Which Nazarene Congregations are Located

Major Urban	1186	24.7%
Suburban or Small City	1218	25.3%
Small Town	1498	31.1%
Rural	907	18.9%
Totals	4809	100

Community type was not available for 198 of the congregations.

Context – Congregation Size and Community Type Combined

Table 11 combines the information in tables 9 and 10 to summarize the context of the Ministry of Nazarene pastors in terms of both congregation size and community type. Average Sunday morning worship attendance is used as the measure of size since the definition of membership tends to vary and may not be the same for large congregations in major urban areas as it is for small congregations in rural areas.

Large congregations (over 250 participants) tend to be found in the cities. However, 16% of these churches are in small towns or rural areas.

As might be expected, a majority (58%) of the small churches (1–100) are located in small towns (34%) and rural areas (24%). However, 42% of these churches are in cities.

Table 11						
Distribution of Nazarene Congregations by Community Type and Sunday Morning Worship Size						
Community Type	1–100		101–250		Over 250	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Major Urban	705	21.0	319	28.8	144	46.9
Suburban or Small City	709	21.1	392	35.4	113	36.8
Small Town	1132	33.7	314	28.4	46	15.0
Rural	815	24.2	82	7.4	4	1.3
Totals	3361	100	82	1107	307	100

Context of Pastoral Ministry—Bi-Vocational Ministry

Table 12 summarizes responses of pastors to the survey question, "Are you bi-vocational?" Response categories were, "No," "Yes, it is necessary to supplement our family income," "Yes, the extra income is not necessary, but my second career makes my ministry more effective," and "Yes, other,".

A significant majority of Nazarene pastors say they are bi-vocational. Most(73.6%) of those who say they are bi-vocational choose the response, "Yes, it is necessary to supplement our family income."

Bi-vocational ministry is not significantly related to the growth or decline of congregations. Bi-vocational status was not related to the rate of either membership or participation change. Churches whose pastors indicated that they were bi-vocational in 1993 were neither more nor less likely to experience membership or Sunday morning worship attendance growth during the years 1993 through 1995.

Table 12					
Pastors' Response to the Question, "Are You Bi-Vocational?"					
Congregation AM Worship Size	N	NO		Yes*	
1 through 100	2217	1211	54.6%	1006	45.4%
101 through 250	925	877	94.8%	48	5.2%
Over 250	256	254	99.2%	2	0.5%
	3398	2342	68.9%	1056	31.1%

Combined total of three "Yes" response: "Yes, it is necessary to supplement our family income" "Yes, the extra income is not necessary, but my second career makes my ministry more effective" and Yes, other"

Adequate Corps – Youth in Preparation

Table 13 summarizes responses from students on the campuses of Nazarene institutions of higher education. A survey of students' career intentions has been conducted each fall since 1990 on the campuses of the eight liberal arts colleges/universities, the Bible college, and the seminary in the United States. More than 10,000 students were enrolled in the traditional these institutions in each of the last five years. Response rates have varied from about 60% to 40%.

While the proportion varies slightly each year, about one-third of the students of all faiths responding to the survey indicate that they are planning for, or are open to, careers in ministry. In the context of the twenty-seven career categories listed on the survey, "Ministry through the Church" is more likely than any other single option to be indicated as the student's first career choice.

Nazarene Bible College and Nazarene Theological Seminary students are included in these percentages, since they are a significant part of the potential corps of ministers.

When only students at the liberal arts colleges/universities are considered, the proportions change somewhat. In 1995, 15% of the students at Nazarene liberal arts institutions answered "Yes" and 20% answered "Possibly".

This response is not easily reconciled with the common fears that Nazarene young people are not being challenged to consider a life of ministry or are not responding to God's call.

Many of these students no doubt plan dual careers, for example, school teacher and youth minister. Others will decide that this is not their calling. While some of these students are our brightest and most Godly, admittedly others probably are not. Some respondents were probably confused by the term ministry or facetious in their response.

However, it seems clear that many of the students on our campuses are preparing for ministry through the church. Many others are at least open to God's call. Idealism and spiritual obedience have apparently not departed from our campuses.

Table 13			
Summary of Responses to the Question, "Are you presently planning for ministry through the church?"			
Year	"Yes"	"Possibly"	Total*
1990	19.7%	18.9%	38.6%
1991	17.8	14.9	32.7
1992	17.9	17.7	35.6
1993	18.3	19.4	37.7
1994	19.6	18.5	38.1
1995	20.7	18.1	38.8

Adequate Corps—Education

The educational preparation of Nazarene pastors is very important. An adequate corps of pastors will be appropriately educated and otherwise prepared for their assignments. However, assessing the educational background of Nazarene ministers is difficult. We have not agreed on a definition of appropriate preparation. One's role in the church as well as the location and nature of the congregation may affect the understanding of what would be appropriate.

Educational data are also problematic. They are generated when a minister applies for a district license of orientation. Educational experience undertaken after those applications may not be reported, and therefore, may not be reflected on the official record. Furthermore, these data are generally not documented for the General secretary by formal transcripts. Therefore, the name of the educational institution, as well as other institutional data may not be precisely reported and recorded. A project is now underway, I believe, to improve these data. However,

until that project is completed, summaries like this one must be understood to be tentative and probably somewhat inaccurate.

Nazarene Theological Seminary was the most often indicated educational institution. Most of the other institutions supply students to the seminary. Nazarene Bible College was the next most often mentioned.

Table 14		
Nazarene Pastors' Educational Institutions		
Institution	Number*	Percent*
Canadian Nazarene College	60	1.2
Caribbean Nazarene College	5	0.1
Eastern Nazarene College	204	4.2
MidAmerica Nazarene College	272	5.6
Mount Vernon Nazarene College	228	4.7
N.B.C Extension	46	0.9
Nazarene Bible College	814	16.6
Nazarene Indian Bible College	10	0.2
Nazarene Theological Seminary	1065	21.8
Northwest Nazarene College	237	4.8
Olivet Nazarene University or ONC	530	10.8
Pt. Loma Nazarene College or PC/PLC	235	4.8
Southern Nazarene University or BNC	466	9.5
Trevecca Nazarene College	408	8.3

*Pastors indicated as many as seven institutions attended. Therefore, a single pastor might be included in totals of two or more of the institutions listed in the table. For example, pastors indicating NTS would also indicate the institution where they did their undergraduate work. While many of the institutions indicated were not Nazarene, only the Nazarene institutions are summarized here. Since more than one institution may have been attended, the number does not equal the 4891 pastors included in this study. For the same reason, the percentages, which are based on the 4891 so not total 100%

Adequate Corps– Addition vs. Attrition

Table 15 summarizes additions to, and attrition from, the corps of ministers since 1988. As explained in the table footnote, the annual addition totals attempt to avoid counting any addition twice.

Over the eight years since the 1988 study, more than 2,000 elders and 230 deacons have been ordained in the United States and Canada.

Furthermore, 4,037 newly licensed ministers have been added to the corps.

During the same eight years 3,071 ministers have been lost to the corps. 1,087 died. 1,245 have retired.

From 1988 through 1995, there was a net increase in the number of ministers in the corps of 1,420. Losses by attrition are not depleting the corps of ministers available for service. The average net change was an annual increase of 178 ministers.

Table 15									
Patterns in the Corps of Nazarene Ministers in the United States and Canada									
Type	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1992	1994	1995	Totals
Newly Licensed	540	465	480	502	492	506	534	518	4037
New Ordained Elders	259	248	253	265	258	258	239	251	2031
New Deacons	21	28	31	28	17	32	37	36	230
Recognized	34	49	33	32	32	22	43	39	284
Restored	19	13	27	20	25	23	22	21	170
Total Additions*	593	527	540	554	549	551	599	578	4491
Deceased	126	128	121	119	146	152	141	154	1087
Retired	178	166	199	133	139	137	156	137	1245
Dropped/Removed	68	77	88	83	105	93	96	101	711
Filed	9	10	5	4	0	0	0	0	28
Formal Attritions	381	381	413	339	390	382	393	392	3071
Net Change** in Corps	212	146	127	215	159	169	206	186	1420

Source: General Secretary's annual summary.

* Total does not include newly ordained elders and new deacons on the assumption that they were added to the corps earlier as newly licensed ministers. On the other hand, losses both by retirement and death are included in the total attritions although it seems likely that some of the losses by death had already been counted in some previous year as losses by retirement.

**Total additions minus total formal attritions. In each year the net change was an increase.

Adequate Corps – Ministry Roles

Table 16 summarizes the distribution of Nazarene ministers in various roles. The General Secretary's annual statistical report includes a report on the ministerial corps. The number of

ministers serving as pastors on the day of the report each year is not precisely the same as the number of opportunities, or ministry positions, available. In any given year there may be slightly more, or fewer, congregations in the process of calling a new pastor. However, the variation from year to year is probably not large.

The number of positions to be filled by pastors has not increased significantly over the last eight years.

- There has been an overall increase of 422 in ministers serving all of these roles. The largest increase (385) has been in the role of associate minister.
- A comparison of the 1,420 net increase in ministers available to serve, in table 9, and the increase of 422 in ministers in these major roles suggests a surplus, rather than a shortage, of Nazarene ministers.
- The relatively fixed nature of the number of positions available to be filled may be seen in the fact that while 1,453 ministers who were serving as pastors in 1995 who were not in that role in 1991 were no longer in that role in 1995. When 1,453 came in, 1,502 went out. The decrease of 49 is the same as the net decline of 49 in the number of active congregations during these same years. The precise difference of 49 in both cases is no doubt somewhat coincidental.
- The 1988 study found that 1,141 ministers were pastoring on January 1, 1988, who were not in a pastoral assignment January 1 1984, and 1,139 who were pastors at the beginning of this five year period, were not were not pastoring at the end of it. During that five year period the number of active churches actually increased by 67.

Table 16								
Numbers of Ministers in Various Roles in the United States and Canada								
Year	Pastor	Associate	Evangelist	Chaplain	Administrator	Educator	Missionary	Total These Roles
1988	4509	912	329	124	216	207	192	6489
1989	4585	914	322	134	226	203	226	6610
1990	4533	1039	309	148	237	199	191	6656
1991	4582	1050	313	164	234	219	184	6746
1992	4572	1128	309	153	216	210	194	6772
1993	4583	1193	298	162	224	208	191	6849
1994	4491	1280	292	174	228	212	189	6866
1995	4493	1297	296	185	233	220	187	6911

Change over 8 years	-16	385	-33	61	17	13	-5	422
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Adequate Corps–First Ministry Roles

Over the last decade the first ministry assignment taken by young ministers appears to have shifted from pastor to associate. Table 17 summarizes that trend.

In 1983 55% of the young ministers taking a first assignment were pastors and 35% were associates. By 1992, 59% of the first assignments were as an associate minister and 39% were as a pastor.

The number taking their first ministry assignment is half, or less, of the number of newly licensed member, in table 15, most of these years. Undoubtedly some students obtain licenses but never complete their preparation and accept an assignment. Others may complete their education but fail to obtain a position.

The shift from a majority beginning the role of pastor to a majority starting as associates may reflect the growing cost of ministerial preparation and the relatively better salaries of associates.

Table 17							
First Ministry Assignment for Young* Nazarene Ministers							
Year	Pastor		Associate		Other		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1983	141	55.3	89	34.9	25	9.8	255
1984	146	58.2	87	34.7	18	7.2	251
1985	125	51.9	100	41.5	16	6.6	241
1986	129	47.6	129	47.6	13	4.8	271
1987	119	49.4	112	46.5	10	4.1	241
1988	142	53.0	121	45.1	5	1.9	268
1989	102	43.0	120	50.6	15	6.3	237
1990	84	38.2	122	55.5	14	6.4	220
1991	87	42.9	102	50.2	14	6.9	203
1992	72	38.5	108	57.8	7	3.7	187

*First ministry assignment taken prior to their thirtieth birthday

Similar data for 1993 through 1995 were not conveniently available for all ministers at the time of this analysis. The trend is presumed to have continued.

Adequate Corps – Unassigned Ministers

"Unassigned" status is evidently not uncommon in the experience of Nazarene pastors. Table 18 summarizes the proportion of currently active Nazarene pastors who at some point in their ministry career were classified as unassigned.

- The median time spent in unassigned periods is one year, as it was in 1988.
- As might be expected, pastors with longer careers were more likely to have been unassigned.
- There are surely many reasons that a Nazarene minister might be "Unassigned." Since this study is limited to active pastors, the numbers and proportions in table 17 do not include any ministers who were unwilling to take an assignment as pastor after being unassigned.
- Some unassigned ministers were probably between assignments while they dealt with personal matters.
- Others were good pastors voted out of bad situations.
- Some may have been successful leaders temporarily unable to find a church equal to their stature.
- Among those "unassigned" ministers who were not considered here because they are not currently active in their pastorate, some are no doubt failures without any potential for ministry. However, this and the suggestions above certainly do not exhaust the reasons that an active pastor might be temporarily between assignments.

Table 18			
Nazarene Pastors Experiencing at least One Period of Unassigned Status by Time of Entry into the Ministry			
Entry Decade	Total Number	Unassigned*	
		Number	Percent
Through 1950	46	30	65.2
1951 through 1960	299	133	44.5
1961 through 1970	680	254	37.4
1971 through 1980	1167	436	37.4
1981 through 1990	1594	418	26.2
Since 1990	516	56	10.9

Overall	4302**	1327	30.8
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*At least one period when the pastor was officially classified as "Unassigned" in the General Secretary's records.

Conclusions

The most surprising finding of this study may be the stability of the average tenure of pastors. The average tenure remains the same as it was in 1988– three years and three months. Increasing average tenure is evidently very difficult to achieve.

The amount of experience in pastoral experience has improved slightly. The median is now ten years and eight months, two months longer than 1988. The positive aspect of this finding is that any improvement in initial ministerial preparation would effect a significant proportion of the pastoral corps fairly quickly. The negative side is that we have a relatively high proportion of inexperienced pastors.

The evidence presented here does not support the persistent perception of a shortage of pastors in the Church of the Nazarene. The number of students indicating plans for, or openness to ministry are encouraging. We may need to make certain that more of our brightest and most Godly are open to Gods call on their lives. We may need to channel youthful idealism more effectively toward the realities of service in the Nazarene context. However, there is a surprisingly positive response among the students on our campuses toward the possibility of a career in ministry. The comparison of annual additions to the corps with annual losses from it is consistently positive. Since we have not been increasing the number of active churches, new ministers now are more likely to take associate positions than positions as pastor. Further, since their appear to be 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.

The "Baby Boom" appears to have a continuing effect on the corps. About sixty percent of the pastors are in that age range. As this large cohort moves through mid–life there may be larger numbers than usual of call to ministry relatively late in life. The smaller cohort following the "Boomers," born between about 1965 and 1975, is about through college now. As this group has come through, there have been lower enrollments in our religion departments and seminary. The trend toward older ordinands probably reflects the large size of the "boom" cohort and the small size of the "bust" cohort. The cohort between 1975 and 1995 is larger and if we continue to be faithful in presenting the challenge, might be expected to increase religion department enrollments again.

Movement between pastoral assignments and officially "Unassigned" status is evidently much more common than is often assumed. Therefore, the negative labels which some have associated with this status are probably unfair. As many as one–third of the currently active corps of pastors may have suffered unfair, and unnecessary stigma while they were assigned.

Almost one-third of the corps of pastors are bi-vocational. In spite of the special challenges they face, these pastors' churches are growing as well as those served by full time pastors. The evidence suggests that bi-vocationalism is more often by default than by intention. The second vocation is a necessity rather than purposeful. Perhaps we should do better at recognizing the strategic necessity and possibilities for this significant segment of the corps. Perhaps we should also do better at preparing pastors who will serve in this way.

As with other professions, there are no doubt a few genius pastors. These ministers would thrive in any assignment. Regardless of setting or circumstances, their inherent ability shines through and they accomplish the miraculous. Perhaps as many as ten percent of the corps could be these ministers, however it seems likely that the percentage is somewhat lower than this. In fact, even these genius pastors are not immune from the enemy of souls, so their proportion of the corps is probably somewhat lower than it might have been.

At the other end of the continuum is a group of abject failures. These ministers could not succeed in any assignment. They should probably have been encouraged away from the pastorate. They are lazy, inept, incompetent, and often destructive. They misuse the authority of the church. They abuse members. They misappropriate funds. They are incapable of spiritual leadership. This group might also amount to as much as ten percent of the ministerial corps. And, it may be that their ranks appear to be larger because some ministers may drift into this group as a result of poor preparation and bad experience. However this group is also limited.

The corps of pastors in the Church of the Nazarene appear to be relatively strong. There may be some discrepancy between the availability of "genius" pastors and the number of "excellent" assignments. At the other end of the spectrum, there may be a shortage of pastors who can afford and are willing to serve in some of our smallest or most troublesome churches. In between, most of the ministry of the church takes place. Most ministers are probably neither geniuses nor lazy incompetents. With appropriate support most of these ministers can be successful and the churches they serve can thrive.