

Is a pastor shortage on the horizon?

Many pastors nearing retirement, but enough to take their place

BY THE NUMBERS

Active (nonretired) teaching elders without a valid call

2001: **2,477** 2011: **2,728**

Number of candidates for ministry

2001: **1,215** 2011: **1,148**

All persons newly ordained as teaching elders

2001: **394** 2011: **341**

Persons newly ordained as installed or designated pastors

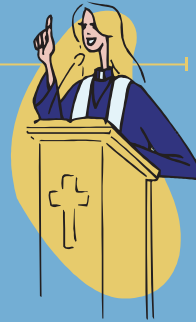
2001: **247** 2011: **171**

Number of installed or designated pastors

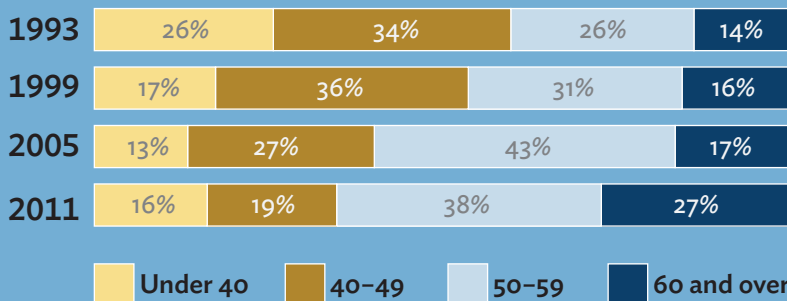
2001: **7,938** 2011: **6,860**

Percent of installed or designated pastors age 55 or older

2001: **34%** 2011: **49%**



AGE TRENDS AMONG PASTORS



About half of installed and designated pastors are age 55 or older. If all of them retire in the next decade, the number of annual retirements would double from the current average of 171 to about 340. This could portend an increased need for 170 new pastors per year, under the (unlikely) assumption that no positions are lost.

Yet after research helped to debunk the myth of a pastor shortage a decade ago, we can be skeptical that one is now imminent. There are several reasons for skepticism. The number of pastoral calls has been dropping; the number of active (nonretired) teaching elders without current calls has been increasing; and the number of candidates for ministry remains above 1,000 despite an average of almost 350 ordinations per year.

In short, there is large pool of current and potential teaching elders even as the number of pastoral positions has declined. And that pool seems large enough to meet any increase in parish openings caused by growing numbers of retirements.

In sum, there is no pastor shortage, nor is one likely. Too bad we can't say the same about another important church constituency: unfortunately, we have an all-too-real, all-too-current shortage of new members.

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