

# Church and Community

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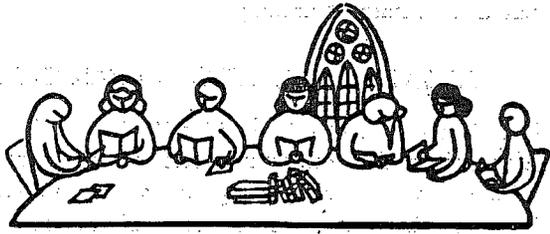
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## A Study of Seminary Graduates

**A**FTER WORLD WAR II, Silliman University resumed its task of preparing men for the pastoral ministry. Prior to the war, the College of Theology (former name of the Silliman University Divinity School) had educated men primarily for the ministry of the United Evangelical Church, a union of Presbyterian, United Brethren, and Congregational Churches. With the organization of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, in 1948, the seminary assumed a larger role in meeting the needs of a church that now extended from Northern Luzon to Southern Mindanao, and included the work of the Disciples of Christ and the Philippine Methodist Church. Because of the many changes that have occurred in the nation, the church, and the ministry, since World War II, a study has been made of those men who received the Bachelor of Theology degree from Silliman University between 1951 and 1965. During this period 160 men and women received this degree, but the study was limited to the 149 male graduates who are serving the Philippine church. This procedure reduced the number of possible respondents to 149. Of the questionnaires sent to these graduates, 101 or 67 per cent were returned. However, it was possible to secure some information about non-respondents.

This article will not attempt to give the complete findings of the study; it will be limited to answering the five questions listed below. A copy of the complete study is available from the author, upon request.

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By **Richard P. Poethig**, Associate Director of Studies, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, and Field Coordinator for Industrial Life and Vocations for the United Church, P. O. Box 718, Manila.

### WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF THE GRADUATES?

**G**RADUATES came primarily from the rural areas of the Visayas and Mindanao: 49 from Mindanao, 41 from the Visayas and 11 from Luzon. Most of the men—58—spent their youth in the place where they were born, while 19 moved to another community, but continued to live in their original province; on the other hand 24 of them made at least one major move as young people—twelve having moved from the Visayas to Mindanao.

The majority of the graduates spent their early years in a rural environment—26 in barrios of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, and 40 in towns of 2,000 to 5,000; while another 20 lived in towns of 5,000 to 15,000, these were oriented toward a rural or plantation economy, e.g. Pagadian, Oroquieta, Midsayap, Butuan, Dumaguete. An additional nine men were raised in cities of 15,000 to 30,000, which were the dominant centers of their regions, such as Cagayan de Oro and Tacloban. Only six men lived in major cities: four in Cebu, one in Davao, and one in Manila.

Since most of the graduates came from rural communities, it is not surprising that 61 were the sons of farmers; nine were the sons of men engaged in manual occupations; while 27 were the sons of men in the professional-white collar category: ten pastors, ten in government service, one male nurse, three office workers, and three in business for themselves.

Most of the sons had exceeded their fathers in educational achievement: 55 fathers received a primary education or less; eight had reached the intermediate grades; 20 had entered high school; four fathers had had some college education; and eleven had received college degrees.

### WHAT WORK ARE THE GRADUATES DOING?

**I**NFORMATION received from the 101 respondents who returned the questionnaires indicate that 72 men are presently engaged in full-time work within the United Church of Christ or its related agencies: 50 serve as pastors of congregations, ten are moderators of annual conferences, six are members of the promotional staff of the church, two are student workers, one is a foreign missionary, and three are serving in the Christian radio station, DYSR. Five men are engaged in additional study. Six men are serving as part-time pastors, while also engaging in secular work; eight are teachers; and ten are in secular occupations.

Information about the 48 non-respondents was obtained from other sources. When this information is added to the above, we find that 75

per cent of the graduates are now serving as full-time workers within the United Church or its related institutions: 55 per cent as local pastors; 12 per cent in administrative or promotional positions; and 7 per cent in teaching. Ten per cent are studying for advanced degree, three for professions other than the ministry; and 15 per cent are engaged in secular occupations, although six of these 22 men serve churches in a part-time capacity.

### WHAT ARE THEIR PROBLEMS?

CONSIDERABLE UNANIMITY marked the replies of the graduates concerning the problems they face as they work in the Church. The largest number of respondents indicated that inadequate financial support was their greatest problem; two additional problems mentioned by many pastors were the conservatism of the congregation, and difficulty in adjusting to local conditions. Let us look briefly at each of these problems:

**Inadequate salaries.** The reports indicate that 25 per cent of local, full-time pastors receive monthly salaries of P120 or less; that 41 per cent receive salaries between P120 and P180; and 34 per cent receive P180 and above. Pastors gave two major reasons for their low salaries: the low incomes of their parishioners; and poor stewardship education. One of the major reasons for leaving the local pastorate for administrative and promotional positions in the church is that salaries are higher: thirteen of the 25 men in these positions receive P240 or more; and twelve receive from P180 to P240 per month. Those who leave church work for secular occupations do so because of the financial needs of their families.

**Conservatism of the congregation.** Pastors spoke of the tensions that develop between the seminary graduate, armed with his new theology, and the congregation that clings to its traditional beliefs. Frequently the struggle is between the generations—a young pastor challenged by elder leaders of the congregation. Many pastors said that since a man's first pastorate is a crucial one, he should have good supervision in it.

**Adjustment to local conditions.** Many pastors recognized their need to relate themselves to the life of the people in the local church. They stressed the need for patience and the ability to listen; some said that pastors should work slowly at change and not expect it to come overnight. Others felt that the seminary should prepare men more adequately for what they will find in the local pastorate, for example, through a more adequate field work program. Others felt the need for more help in translating the terms of theology into the language of the layman.

### WHAT ARE THEIR ASPIRATIONS?

MORE EDUCATION is the goal of an over-whelming number of graduates—60 out of 101. Thirty of the 60 had definite ideas concerning the degrees they wished to attain or the courses of study they wanted to pursue. Besides those who wished to obtain the A.B., B.D., or M.A., some specified definite fields of study—guidance counseling, ministry in higher education, religious drama, mental health, library science, agriculture, and law. Twenty-two men want to continue in the local pastorate; and four men in promotional work want to return to work in the local church. Four men wanted to continue in the teaching ministry, four wanted to stay in the industrial ministry, and two in student chaplaincies. On the other hand, fifteen men expressed a desire to leave the full-time pastorate: five wanted to teach, four wanted part-time work, and six were interested in various other jobs.

### WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE PASTORATE?

A MORE VARIED CURRICULUM in the Divinity School and greater emphasis upon intellectual achievement have heightened the expectations of young pastors. Confrontation with tradition-oriented congregations combined with low salaries, have led many young pastors to look for greener pastures. The average length of service in one church is two to three years. In reaction to this situation, many young pastors seek further education—some seek it to enable them to deal more effectively with the problems of the local church; and others as a means of escaping from the pastorate.

This situation would probably not be as difficult if pastors could find fulfillment in their assignments. But the local congregation views the minister's role primarily in terms of his preaching and pastoral functions. Since most evangelical congregations in the barrios and towns of the Philippines tend to consist of a limited number of family groupings, the pastor's scope of activity is circumscribed. He can become acquainted with his congregation within the first month of service. Life in the barrio or town is itself culturally confined, and the pastor, who has come from the exciting environment of a college campus, has a limited outlet for his new knowledge. Even within the church, response to his preaching may be restrained, because of a lack of understanding of his theology. This is a further source of dissatisfaction to him.

A resourceful pastor will seek to find ways of reaching out beyond his work within his congregation and becoming involved in the community.

His ability to find wider avenues for expressing his ministry gives more meaning to his life in the community. Unfortunately, most pastors and congregations still have a minority-consciousness and find it difficult to make their way in the community. Some congregations tend to see any move of the pastor to become involved in the community as outside the bounds of his assignment.

### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SEMINARY

**T**HEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES are to train ministers for leading the Church in fulfilling its responsibilities in the world of tomorrow, they must become more involved in the life of the local church. Seminary administrators and faculty members must discover the nature of the local congregations; they must know the problems that laymen face in their daily lives; they must help to present the truth of the Christian faith in ways that are relevant for today's problems. As seminaries raise academic standards for their students, they must also intensify the practical involvement of students and faculty members in the problems of the local church and community. Two ways of achieving this end are to:

**Give seminary students practical experience in the secular world.** During their internship year seminarians might work in agricultural development, in industry, on the staff of a labor union. Field work education might include work with social agencies, as well as in churches. The focus of these assignments should be upon involvement in the problems of the local community.

**Invite seminary administrators and professors to participate more actively in local congregations.** As the gap has widened between the new knowledge of the professors and the traditional thinking of congregations, antagonism has developed against "modernistic" thinking. It is the young pastors, who are less well prepared than their teachers, who have taken the brunt of this conflict. As teachers learn more about the congregations, they can prepare graduates for a more fruitful ministry among them. Seminary professors should play a greater part in the education of the laymen of the local church.

Emphasis upon the education of the laity places greater responsibility upon theological seminaries. If they take seriously their responsibility to the church, seminaries can play a redemptive and creative role in the lay revolution which is taking place in the world church today.