

## Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in U.S. Dioceses (Social Demography)



The Roman Catholic Church faces a staggering loss of diocesan priests in the United States as it moves into the twenty-first century, and there is little chance of reversing this trend in the lifetime of the current generation of church-goers. *Full Pews and Empty Altars* predicts that by the year 2005, there will be twice as many parishioners per priest as there were in 1975. Constructing a census-registry of some 36,000 priests in the years from 1966 through 1984, and using life-table techniques to forecast the Church's future, Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young portend a forty percent loss in the diocesan priesthood population, from 35,000 in 1966 to 21,000 in 2005. Along with the decline in priests will come a dramatic increase in the churchgoing population: from 45 million to 74 million. Using a novel application of the demographic transition model and multiple regression models to explain the causes of change, Schoenherr and Young find that only six of every ten priests who leave the active ministry through resignation, retirement, sick leave, or death are replaced by ordination. Two of every five pastoral positions vacated each year go unfilled. Schoenherr and Young maintain that in a society dominated by large and powerful organizations, organization demography must take its place among the other tools of social analysis. They tie their analyses to concerns of the population approach, integrating the study of declining organization size, the political economy framework, and Perrow's qualified power model. *Full Pews and Empty Altars* is one of the first major comparative studies of organizations to use the emerging organization demography approach. As such it breaks new ground both substantively and methodologically.

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