

# The Corps of Pastors in the USA/Canada Region Church of the Nazarene 2017

Research Services

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THE CORPS OF PASTORS IN THE USA/CANADA REGION  
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE  
2017

This study of the corps of pastors continues a series of studies of the corps of pastors in the Church of the Nazarene. The series began in 1988 when the Church Growth Research Center, responding to a request from the Board of General Superintendents, conducted an analysis of the corps of pastors of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada. Since then a similar study has been conducted approximately every ten years. The primary source of data for the series has been the ministerial records maintained by the General Secretary of the Church of the Nazarene.

In this 2017 study special focus is given to whether or not there will be a shortage of pastors for the USA/Canada Region. This is not a new problem. However it is especially critical now because a major demographic transition is taking place.

The large "Baby Boom" generation has begun to reach retirement age. Defining the starting and ending dates, characteristics and labels of generations is, of course, somewhat challenging and arbitrary. The principle is that shared life experiences during childhood and youth tend to influence the choices of people born about the same time. Also, the relative size and nature of each birth cohort affects the economy and other institutions of a society, including the church.

During the decade from 1945 through 1954 just under 37 million people were born in the USA. These may be thought of as the early "boomers". They are now 63 to 72 years old. From 1955 through 1964 another nearly 42 million were born. This larger, second half of the baby boom generation have now reached ages from 53 to 62. Not only were these unusually large cohorts at birth but also, with improving health conditions, more of them have survived long enough to make choices about retirement.

In the 2016 assembly year there were 5,068 active churches in the USA/Canada Region of the Church of the Nazarene. The total number of pastors serving those churches was 4,641. Making a comparison of pastors to churches suggests that 8.4% of the churches did not have a pastor at any given time. Since some churches are between pastors at any particular time, this 8.4% percentage of vacancy does not seem excessive. However, it might be expected that the percentage of churches without a pastor will increase causing a serious shortage over the next decade as many in the "boomer" generation reach retirement age.

The expected shortage will probably not affect all types of churches equally. The following report begins with an examination of the ages of pastors and their distribution in churches of different sizes, of bi-vocational pastors, and in various community situations. The report also considers such other factors as the educational preparation of pastors.

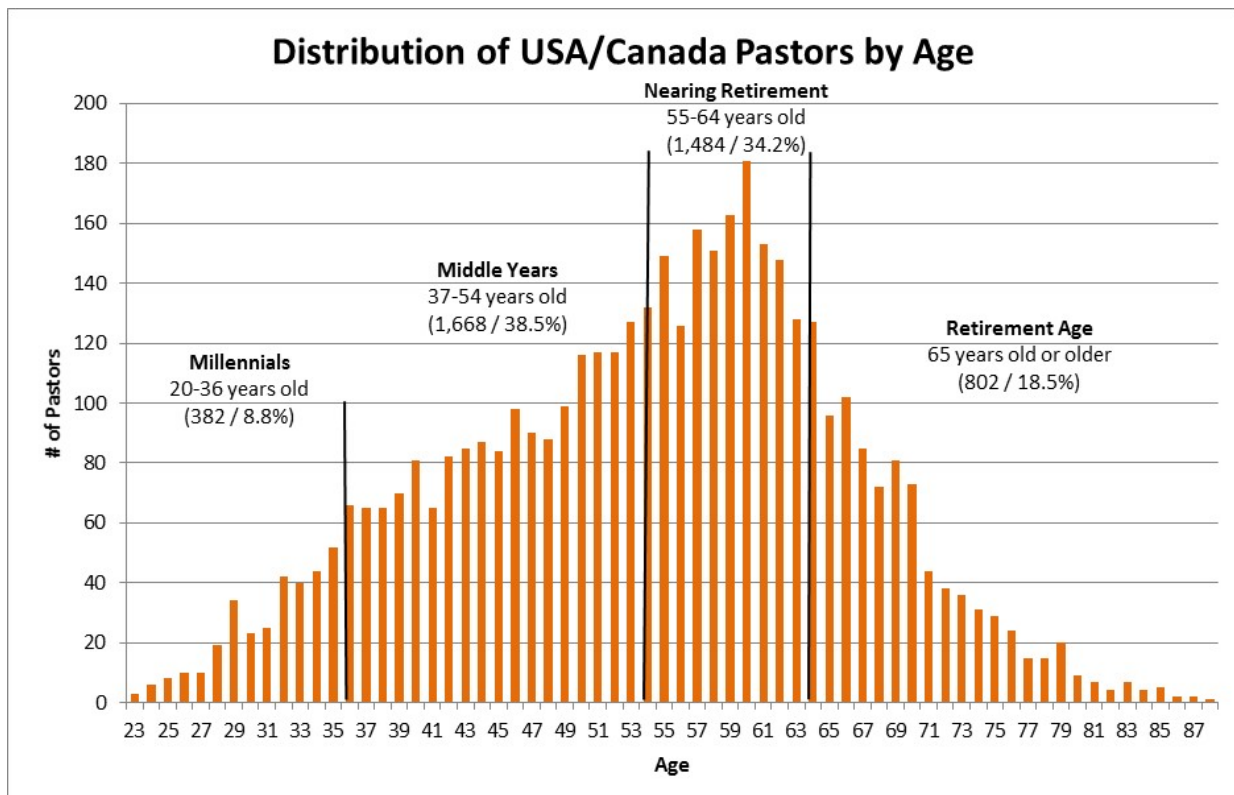
## AGE

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the current corps of pastors. Four age groups are identified by their connection to probable retirement.

The “Middle Years” category is the largest group on the chart mostly because it represents a longer span of years than the one with pastors “Nearing Retirement”.

The largest single group of any single year is those pastors who are now 60 years old. Some of them may choose to begin retirement as soon as 2019 when they reach 62, but many are likely to wait until they are 65, in 2022, 67 in 2024, or later.

FIGURE 1



## Age and Church Size

The trend line on Figure 2 shows a slight tendency for larger churches to have younger pastors. However, the median age of pastors in all sized churches is quite similar between about 50 and 55 years old and there is considerable variation. This results in a correlation between age and church size that is very weak.

FIGURE 2

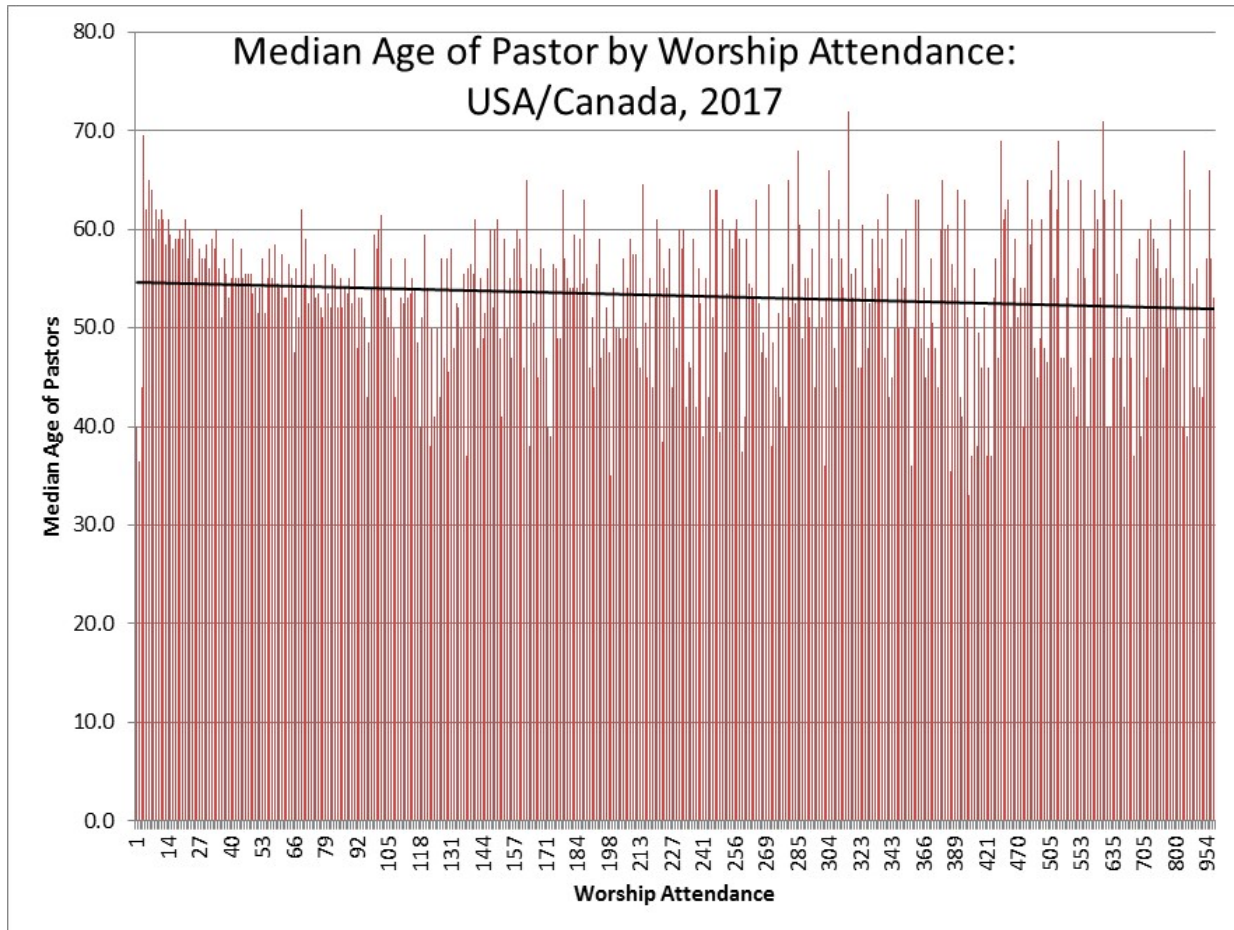


Table 1 allows closer examination of the proportions of pastors in four age cohorts.

- Pastors in the “Millennial” age group (20-36) make up 8.7% of the current corps of pastors. They are slightly over represented in churches smaller than 100 and under represented in churches larger than 250.
  - Overall they pastor 8.7% of these churches. In churches under 50 they pastor a slightly higher proportion with 9.3% and they serve 9.9% of the churches from 50 through 99.
  - However, they pastor fewer than 5% of the churches with 250 or more attending.
- Pastors in the “Middle Years” age group (37-54) are underrepresented in churches smaller than 50 and over represented in the larger sizes.
  - Overall this group serve as senior pastor in 38% of these churches. They pastor a smaller proportion (30.9%) of the churches with fewer than 50 attending.
  - In contrast, they pastor more than 50% of the churches larger than 400.

TABLE 1  
Age of Pastors by Church Size

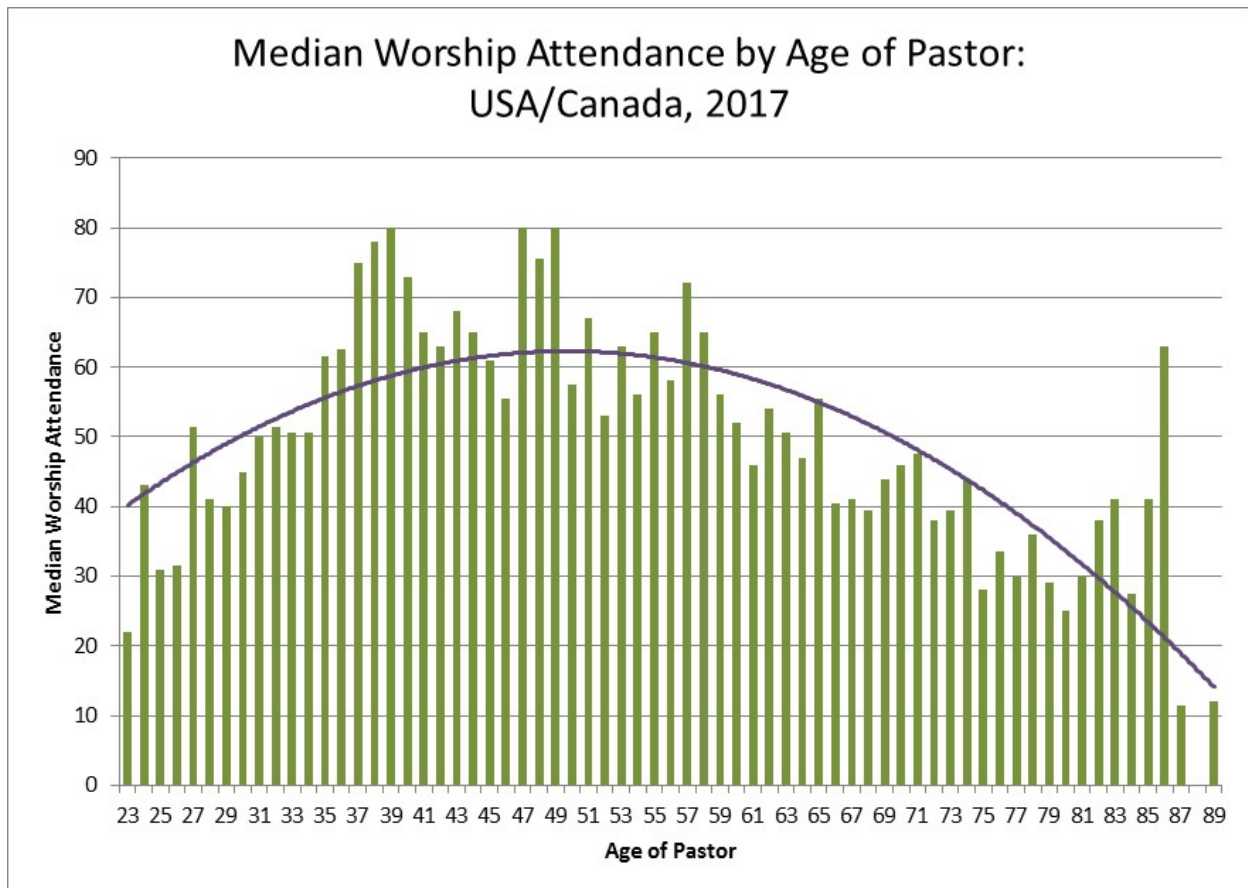
Worship Size	N	Millennial 20 – 36	Middle Years 37 – 54	Nearing Retirement 55 – 64	Retirement Age 65 or older	Totals
1 to 49	1,836	9.3%	30.9%	35.0%	24.8%	100%
50 to 99	1,200	9.9%	41.6%	33.3%	15.2%	100%
100 to 249	838	7.9%	44.5%	34.8%	12.8%	100%
250 to 399	182	4.4%	45.1%	38.5%	12.1%	100%
400 to 999	117	.9%	53.8%	35.0%	10.3%	100%
1,000 or More	27	3.7%	51.9%	37.0%	7.4%	100%
Proportions		8.7%	38.0%	34.7%	18.6%	100%
Counts	4,200	365	1,598	1,456	781	

*Note: 136 churches reported an attendance size of zero. These churches are not included in table 1.*

Figure 3 presents these realities in a different way. As can be seen on the chart, churches with the largest median attendance size tend to be served by pastors in what we have labeled the Middle Years (37-54).

- While there is considerable variation in the distribution, the youngest and the oldest pastors tend to be serving smaller churches.

FIGURE 3



## Age and Community Type

Millennials are not likely to be in churches in the major urban core communities.

- They serve as pastors in a proportion higher than their overall level (8.7%) in churches in Fringe Cities (11.1%), Small Towns (9.8%), and Rural communities (9.7%).
- Pastors in the “Retirement Age” group (65 or older) serve in a proportion higher than their overall level (18.6%) in churches in Major Urban Cores (25.3%), Large Cities (23.9%), and Rural communities (22.3%).

TABLE 2  
Age of Pastors by Community Type

Community Type	N	Millennial 20 – 36	Middle Years 37 – 54	Nearing Retirement 55 – 64	Retirement Age 65 or older	Totals
Major Urban Core	249	3.6%	32.9%	38.2%	25.3%	100%
Large Cities	301	6.3%	38.2%	31.6%	23.9%	100%
Fringe Major Urban	426	8.5%	42.5%	30.5%	18.5%	100%
Small City or Suburban	278	8.6%	43.2%	34.2%	14.0%	100%
Suburban	349	9.5%	42.1%	31.8%	16.6%	100%
Small City Core	113	8.8%	46.0%	32.7%	12.4%	100%
Fringe City	477	11.1%	40.9%	34.6%	13.4%	100%
Small Town	327	9.8%	39.4%	34.6%	16.2%	100%
Bordering Small Town	494	8.3%	39.5%	34.2%	18.0%	100%
Near Small Town	405	7.7%	38.8%	35.6%	18.0%	100%
Rural	883	9.7%	31.1%	36.8%	22.3%	100%
Proportions		8.7%	38.3%	34.4%	18.6%	100%
Counts	4,302	374	1,648	1,479	801	

*Note: The community type was not known for 34 of the churches. These churches are not included in table 3.*

## EDUCATION

Table 3 summarizes the educational experience of the 4,399 Church of the Nazarene pastors in the USA in February, 2017, based on the unaudited records kept by the General Secretary.

- Many of the pastors appear to have attended and earned degrees at more than one of the Nazarene educational institutions.
  - Many pastors report having attended or earning at least one degree at Nazarene universities in the USA.
  - No educational record was reported by 11.6% of the pastors.

TABLE 3  
Pastors<sup>1</sup> Educational Experience

Institution	Attended - No Degree	Associate Deg./Cert.	Bachelor's Degree	Masters Degree	Doctoral Degree	Totals	
						N <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>3</sup>
NBC	12.6%	4.0%	4.2%			918	20.9%
Naz. U. in USA	13.8%	.6%	30.1%	5.2%	.1%	2,188	49.7%
ENC	.6%	.1%	2.3%	.3%		146	3.3%
MNU	1.3%	.0%	4.7%	.1%		268	6.1%
MVNU	2.2%	.4%	3.5%	.3%		282	6.4%
NNU	2.7%	.1%	2.8%	.8%		277	6.3%
ONU	2.3%	.0%	6.1%	1.3%	.0%	433	9.8%
PLNU	1.0%	.0%	2.1%	.5%		159	3.6%
SNU	1.8%		4.1%	1.0%		303	6.9%
TNU	1.9%	.0%	4.5%	.8%	.0%	320	7.3%
NTS	3.4%	.1%	.2%	12.4%	.5%	727	16.5%
Other Naz. Col.	1.5%	.3%	1.0%	.2%	.0%	133	3.0%
Other Univ.	34.4%	8.3%	17.7%	5.1%	1.1%	2,929	66.6%
Other Sem.	2.7%			4.5%	1.9%	401	9.1%
Proportions	68.4%	13.3%	53.2%	27.3%	3.5%		
Counts	3,011	584	2,342	1,203	156	7,807 <sup>4</sup>	
No Record						511	11.6%

<sup>1</sup> The 4,399 ministers who were serving as senior pastor in the USA Churches of the Nazarene on February 23, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Cumulative total of pastors who indicated having attended the institution and may have had one or more degree outcomes. For example, in the top row 555 pastors report attending NBC without earning a degree, 177 earned an associate degree, and 186 earned a bachelor's degree. Some of these may have been the same person earning more than one degree. The total of 555, 177, and 186 is 918.

<sup>3</sup> The percentage the number in the totals column is of the 4,399 USA pastors. For example, the NBC row total of 918 equals 20.9% of 4,399.

<sup>4</sup> Since it is not uncommon for pastors to have attended more than one of these institutions, the count of 7,807 is larger than the 4,399 total number of pastors.



Nearly one-in-four (24.3%) pastors report that the highest degree they have earned is a graduate degree, either a masters (20.8%) or a doctorate (3.5%) (see Table 4).

TABLE 4  
Highest Degree Earned

Highest Degree	Count	Percent
No Degree Listed	1,910	43.4%
Associate	204	4.6%
Bachelor	1,217	27.7%
Masters	915	20.8%
Doctorate	153	3.5%
Total Pastors	4,399	100.0%

Most ministers ordained in the last decade reported attending at least one Nazarene educational institution.

- While the percentage fluctuated throughout the decade, in 2015, the most recent year for which data are available, this percentage was 60.8%. It may be a matter of some concern that in 2015 nearly two-in-five (39.2%) did not report having attended any Nazarene institution.

TABLE 5  
Ordinands' Educational Preparation

Year	Number of Ordinands	Attended a Nazarene Educational Institution	
		Number	Percent
2006	362	197	54.4%
2007	347	194	55.9%
2008	279	159	57.0%
2009	347	199	57.3%
2010	376	242	64.4%
2011	389	246	63.2%
2012	354	221	62.4%
2013	365	220	60.3%
2014	393	221	56.2%
2015	334	203	60.8%
Totals	3,546	2,102	59.3%

## BI-VOCATIONAL PASTORS

The first time we asked pastors if they were bi-vocational was in 1993 (what we called the Quadrennial Church Census). At the time, 31% responded “Yes” (3,398 pastors responded). In the same survey we asked, “Is your spouse employed outside the home?” 60% percent responded “Yes.”

In a 2005 ANSR Poll we asked “Are you bi-vocational?” (30% of pastors said “Yes” [n=375]), and we asked spouses “Are you employed outside the home?” (69% of spouses said “Yes” [n=375]). The 2009 ANSR Poll asked the same two questions with only slight changes in the responses (pastors saying “Yes” to bi-vocational=32%; spouses saying “Yes” to working=68%). So from 1993 to 2009 the percentage of pastors who were bi-vocational only changed 1%, but the percentage of spouses employed outside the home increased by 8%.

In 2013 the USA/Canada Region added a supplemental section of questions to the Annual Pastor’s Report. One of the questions was, “Does the pastor of this church consider himself/herself to be bi-vocational?” Overall, 41% responded “Yes” (a jump of 9% from the 2009 ANSR Poll). In 2016 the percentage responding “Yes” to this question was 42%. Additionally, a 2016 Clergy Marital Health survey asked the spouses of Nazarene pastors if they were employed outside the home, to which 74% responded “Yes” (n=186).

As reported above, the 2016 USA/Canada Region stats show that 42% responded “Yes” to the bi-vocational question; however, the percentage varies greatly by church size (64% are bi-vocational in churches with less than 50 in average worship), the year the church was started (56% are bi-vocational in the churches that have been started since 2010), and cultural group (a higher percentage of pastors tend to be bi-vocational in cultures other than White/English speaking churches). Table 6 shows the difference in bi-vocational status by worship size.

TABLE 6

Does the pastor of this church consider himself/herself to be bi-vocational?<sup>1</sup>

Worship Size	N	No <sup>2</sup>	Yes, to supplement income	Yes, to assist ministry	Yes, other	Totals
1 to 49	1,797	35.6%	54.6%	3.0%	6.7%	100%
50 to 99	1,183	65.7%	27.0%	4.1%	3.1%	100%
100 to 249	827	85.2%	9.7%	2.9%	2.2%	100%
250 to 399	180	92.8%	3.3%	2.8%	1.1%	100%
400 to 999	115	96.6%	.0%	1.7%	1.7%	100%
1,000 or more	27	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100%
Total	4,129					

<sup>1</sup> Source: the 2016 Annual Pastors Report Supplemental Questions

<sup>2</sup> The actual wordings of these response categories were, “No,” “Yes, it is necessary to supplement their family income,” “Yes, the extra income is not necessary, but their second career makes their ministry more effective,” and “Yes, other”.

There is very little variation by age in the proportion of pastors who say they do not consider themselves to be bi-vocational.

- Millennial pastors are very slightly less likely than older groups to perceive themselves as bi-vocational (61% saying “No” to the question vs. 59% overall.)

TABLE 7  
Age of Pastors by Bi-Vocational Status

Bi-Vocational Status	N	Millennial 20 – 36	Middle Years 37 – 54	Nearing Retirement 55 – 64	Retirement Age 65 or older	Overall
No	2,519	61.2%	57.7%	59.8%	59.8%	59.1%
Yes: Necessary	1,423	33.1%	35.2%	33.4%	29.9%	33.4%
Yes: Not Necessary	136	2.2%	3.7%	3.0%	3.1%	3.2%
Yes: Other	183	3.6%	3.5%	3.8%	7.3%	4.3%
Proportions		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Counts	4,261	366	1,641	1,468	786	

*Note: 75 churches reported that there was no pastor. These churches are not included in the table.*

There are significant yearly cash salary and benefits differences between pastors who are bi-vocational and those who are not.

TABLE 8  
Senior Pastors' Total Compensation<sup>1</sup> by Bi-Vocational Status

Worship Size	Bi-vocational Pastors			Not Bi-vocational Pastors		
	Number Reporting Salary	Median Total Compensation	Median Church Income	Number Reporting Salary	Median Total Compensation	Median Church Income
1 to 49	978	\$15,600	\$39,935	632	\$26,000	\$57,132
50 to 99	393	\$26,367	\$78,453	827	\$46,070	\$118,360
100 to 249	105	\$33,358	\$141,927	744	\$64,848	\$240,839
250 to 399	12	\$55,148	\$248,265	172	\$86,200	\$515,349
400 to 999	4	\$39,988	\$267,260	120	\$100,354	\$932,032
1,000 or more	0			29	\$133,000	\$1,987,928
Total	1,492			2,524		

<sup>1</sup> From the Annual Pastors Report Supplemental questions: Senior Pastor's Yearly Cash Salary (including housing allowance) plus Senior Pastor's Yearly Employee Benefits (includes cost of insurance, S.S. reimb., 403(b), etc.)

## TENURE

Pastors with an NTS record in the General Secretary's records have longer pastoral tenures on average, both in pastoral assignments that have ended (Closed Pastoral Assignments in the table below), and in current, ongoing assignments (Open Pastoral Assignments).

Table 9 is based on all the current and past pastoral assignments for pastors at the time of the study. Current (open) assignments are much longer than previous (closed) assignments.

Apparently tenures generally are increasing. Among the causes of longer tenures may be:

- The 2008 financial crisis has made it more difficult for pastors to move to another pastorate.
- An increase in the number of bi-vocational pastors, because a pastor with a second job may be less likely to move.
- An increase in the percentage of pastors' spouses that are working, because a pastor with a spouse who has steady employment may be less likely to move.
- A decline in churches with parsonages, because a pastor with a mortgage may be less likely to move.

TABLE 9  
Pastors' Tenure and Graduate Ministerial Preparation

Measure	Closed Pastoral Assignment		Open (Current) Pastoral Assignment	
	No NTS Record (N=4,690)	NTS Record (N=1,434)	No NTS Record (N=4,007)	NTS Record (N=747)
Mean Years	4.6	5.2	8.0	9.8
Median Years	3.6	4.3	5.6	7.2

## CONCLUSION

The large “Baby Boom” generation has begun to reach retirement age which raises serious questions about a looming shortage of pastors in the Church of the Nazarene. Of the 4,336 senior pastors for whom age data were available, 802, or 18.5%, are in fact already 65 or older. Most of these pastors may be expected to retire over the next decade. Furthermore, in each of the next ten years between 96 (in 2019) and 181 (in 2024) of the current pastors will reach their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. While not everyone will retire when they reach 65, the numbers retiring and needing to be replaced in the corps will undoubtedly be large.

The Church of the Nazarene in the USA and Canada is probably already experiencing pastoral shortages in certain kinds of settings; for example, small churches, rural churches, and immigrant/minority churches. It may be that one of the ways districts in the USA/Canada Region have dealt with pastoral shortages is by not increasing the number of senior pastor positions available. The number of active churches in the USA/Canada Region peaked in 1988 at 5,261. At the time the population of the US was 244,498,982. At the close of assemblies for 2016 there were 5,068 active churches (a decline of 3.7%), and the US population was 324,118,787 (an increase of 32.6%). Much of the US population growth has been among immigrant and minority groups, and without a sufficient number of pastoral leaders, especially among minorities, the USA/Canada Region has not started enough churches in order to keep up with population growth.

It is not possible to accurately project the number of pastors who will need to be replaced. In addition to denominational factors like these, individual issues will affect the scope of the need. Health realities will shorten some intended careers. Financial windfalls or emergencies will intervene to delay or hasten retirement decisions. Some will choose to retire as early as possible, perhaps choosing 62 rather than 67 as their time to begin Social Security benefits. For a variety of reasons others will continue to pastor in their seventies and eighties.

It is interesting and probably important to speculate about the impact of the retirement of boomer pastors. Many boomer aged leaders of Christian denominations are predicting that there will be a crisis with too many pastors retiring and too few younger pastors willing and able to take their places. On the other hand, as we have worked with this study one Nazarene leader who is in the Millennial age group expressed the concern that since too few boomers are

financially able to retire there are not enough positions becoming available for Millennials who are ready to move into the places of pastoral ministry to which God has called them and for which they have prepared.

Indeed, financial challenges appear to be one of the factors which make clergy among the occupational groups most likely to still be working after age 65 (according to a recent study comparing occupational groups which was summarized in an April 2017 *Time* magazine chart). Other factors for some retirement age pastors may include obedience to their understanding of God's will, their belief that they are still needed by the churches, the personal fulfillment they continue to find in their ministry, and the better health care that has given them the ability to continue to deal with the high demands of pastoral ministry,

New pastors needed to fill the positions that will be left vacant by the large number of retirements will probably come from several sources. Some may be returning pastors who have been temporarily out of the corps for financial, health, family or other reasons. Others come from the younger decade of the Boomer generation who are now retiring from other careers and have sensed God's call to finish their working lives as pastors. It seems likely, however, that most new additions to the corps of Nazarene pastors on the USA/Canada Region will come from the generation born between about 1980 and the mid-1990s; the group that is often labeled the Millennial generation.

Identifying and describing in broad overviews generations like "Baby Boomers" and "Millennials" has helped our understanding of the transitions taking place in society. However, the advantage of these simplified understandings is balanced by a danger of assuming stereotypes are accurate and adequate for understanding individuals in the group. Boomers, like older generations before them, may be tempted to speculate that members of a younger generation, like Millennials, are not as capable, committed, or obedient to God as they were. Observing some examples that fit the stereotypes, they may fear that younger people will not accept or be adequate for the demanding task.

This is not a new problem. Moses doubted that God could make him adequate (Exodus 3-4). In fact, every generation has some who refuse to serve or who are not capable, but it seems likely that God will be able to work among the millennial generation as he was able to do among earlier ones. Some boomers who were less than ideal as they began their ministry, have become effective pastors.

There is, indeed, a looming potential crisis. However, the problem of a shortage of ministers is apparently also not new. Jesus encouraged his followers to make such a shortage a matter of prayer, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2, Matthew 9:38, NIV). It may be that, as in the past, our Lord will call enough workers to meet the needs of the harvest, and that Nazarene Christians will, as in the past, respond in obedience to that call. We are praying that it will be so.