

## CLERGY JOBS AND CAREERS: JOBS AS A PRIEST, RABBI OR MINISTER

Clergy are responsible for the religious education, spiritual guidance, and moral counseling of the members of their faith. Many seem uncomfortable calling their jobs "careers" or a "professions;" they frequently said in surveys and interviews that they became members of the clergy in response to an internal sense of being "called" to the occupation. This sense of "divine request" supports the clergy member through long hours, low pay, stratified hierarchical politics, and at times, weak congregational support for their own ministries. "You have to be very confident that you are doing the right thing, because when you're preaching to one or two people in the whole church, there's not a lot of positive feedback," wrote one Protestant minister. While many mentioned the demoralizing aspect of sporadic attendance in church or synagogue, all agreed with the one who said, "we are not the focus of what we do. Our community is the focus, and how they are doing is how we judge ourselves."

This is not a job for those whose only desire is to help others; clergy often run large organizations and need the willingness and skills to do so. Office and administrative responsibilities, fundraising, and sermonizing are important parts of the job. Clergy must be able to get along with all factions of their congregation. Frequently, clergy members will specialize in one aspect of the profession, such as one who has a reputation as a powerful sermonizer or an exceptional fund-raiser, and delegate other aspects of the job to more junior professionals. Being organized and attentive to detail helps in managing administrative tasks while keeping "doctor's hours: We're always on call." In most cases, the rigorous coursework involved in becoming a member of the clergy aids in the acquisition of these traits. Additionally, strong communication skills, patience, intellect and dedication are required.

Perhaps the most compelling thing our surveys conveyed about the field was a sense of excitement and extreme satisfaction. The religious community is a growing, vibrant arena where the free exchange of opinions and ideas and the chance to make real, spiritual insight become possible. "The feeling I get every day," wrote one Presbyterian minister, "is that I'm a witness to everything wonderful about people." Many wrote about the unique perspective and the unusual opportunity they had to contribute positively to the human experience.

### How to Become a Priest, Rabbi or Minister

The education of a clergy member depends on religious and denominational affiliation. Many Protestant churches require their ministers to complete a three-year graduate degree; Rabbis complete a course of study lasting four to five years in a Jewish theological seminary; training for the Catholic priesthood usually entails eight years of study beyond high school at a Catholic seminary. The curricula studied at each religion's seminary is surprisingly quite similar. All training includes some form of study in homiletics (preaching), history, religious laws, counseling, and the practical aspects of ministering to a congregation. A significant number of denominations are requesting that their prospective clergy have practical experience in running a business, social counseling, or teaching before they are sponsored to assist their congregations. Each denomination has specific restrictions on who can become a member of the clergy-- for example, women can not become priests, Orthodox Jewish rabbis, or ministers in certain Protestant denominations. Many clergy-in-training are apprenticed to a clergy member responsible for an established congregation, and spend two to six years after school studying the practice of ministering to a congregation and assuming certain areas of responsibility, such as running Sunday school courses or managing holiday festivals.

### Careers Related to Being a Priest, Rabbi, or Minister

Those who leave the clergy do so for a variety of reasons: Dissatisfaction with their advancement, a loss of the sense of "calling," or the general difficulty of dealing with the downside of the human condition. When they leave, many continue to apply their ministering skills and become social workers, vocational guidance counselors, psychologists, teachers, and substance-abuse counselors. Some return to school for advanced degrees in fields such as psychology, philosophy, comparative religion, and medicine.

### Past And Future (Major Associations)

Judaism has been around for roughly 4,000 years, and Christianity for around 2,000. While keeping a core set of beliefs intact, these two religions have been in a continuous state of revision and evolution. In general terms, Christians (including Catholics and Protestants) and Jews both believe in the sanctity of the Old Testament. Christians believe that Jesus the Messiah was the son of God, and follow the teachings presented in the New Testament. Jews do not. Catholics and Protestants split during the Reformation when Martin Luther put up his 95 theses in protest (hence the PROTESTants) against the abuses of the Catholic Church.

Judaism and Christianity face the same challenges today that they have always faced: Providing each of their believers with moral guidance, and educating their adherents. Now, religions must also prove themselves relevant in a chaotic and demanding world. But religion has been around for a very long time, and the demand for new clergy members should remain steady.

### Quality of Life

#### Two Years Out

Two years into the profession, many members of the clergy continue in their studies and assist an assigned local congregation under the direct supervision of experienced clergy members. Duties are mainly administrative and assistant-level, and many new members are merely observers for up to one year on the job. Hours are long in study, but light in pressure.

#### Five Years Out

Five-year clergy members have assumed additional responsibilities, most notably counseling members of the congregation on faith, worship, the teachings of the sect, and issues of family, marriage, and child-rearing. A clergy member's success is often based on the depth of his personal involvement. Other duties may involve teaching, sermonizing, inviting speakers, and working with members of other congregations on joint charitable projects. Satisfaction is high, but hours can be excruciatingly long.

#### Ten Years Out

Ten year clergy members have established strong links to their community and are leaders in both civic and religious matters. Many oversee the more junior members of the clergy and supervise religious education. Moves between congregations, which occur with relative frequency in years one through seven, drop as clergy find their professional matches. Satisfaction is high; hours continue to be long.

### Professional Profile

# of people in profession:	347,000
% male:	80
% female:	20
average hours per week:	50

### Professionals Read

Lilith  
Biblical Review  
Cross Currents  
Tricycle

### Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

*Our Father*  
*The Chosen*  
*The Thornbirds*  
*The Name of the Rose*

### Major Employers

New York, NY 10022

Tel: 212-753-2261

Contact: Call the Archdiocese: 212-371-1000

752 Steilton

Teaneck, NJ 07666

Tel: 212-877-8640

Fax: 201-837-8981

99 Overlook Circle

New Rochelle, NY 10804

Tel: 914-235-1201

Contact: Personal Prelature

**You'll Have Contact With**

Fundraisers

Parishioners

Psychologists

Social Services Workers

**Major Associations**

American Association of Rabbis

350 Fifth Avenue

Suite 3304

New York, NY 10118

Tel: 212-244-3350

National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors

P.O. Box 1570

Littleriver, SC 29566

Tel: 803-280-7191

National Federation of Priests' Councils

1337 West Ohio Street

Chicago, IL 60622

Tel: 312-226-3334

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