



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Shortage of recruits to the priesthood threatens Roman Catholicism in Ireland



There will be only one priest ordained in Ulster this year and only three Northern Ireland students have enrolled for the Roman Catholic priesthood this year. This is one of the lowest figures on record.

These figures have prompted fears that the dwindling number of priests on both sides of the border could result in church closures.

Drop

In all, 17 men from Northern Ireland and the Republic registered for the new academic year at Roman Catholic seminaries, including St Patrick's College in Maynooth and St Malachy's College in Belfast. This is the same number as were enrolled last year. It charts a steady decline in young men choosing to enter the priesthood. The figures show a drop of 32% from 1997, when a total of 53 were accepted into the seminaries.

Seventeen men were ordained as priests this year, including one from the Armagh diocese. This figure is less than half the total number of ordinations which took place in 1999 when 39 men were ordained.

Roman Catholic records show that in 2001 there were 2,949 diocesan priests in Ireland, one of the lowest figures in 50 years.

There are fears that the drop could result in church closures like that in Drumholme, Co Donegal, last July when parishioners were told Mass could no longer be celebrated due to the lack of priests. The continuing decline is attributed chiefly to the publicity surrounding paedophile priests and the Vatican's refusal to allow priests to marry.