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Navigator



Praying for a New Job

Workers of all faiths are swapping PalmPilots for the pulpit

During the 16 years that Brad Brockmann was a Wall Street lawyer, the only place he went on Sunday mornings was the office. But the 1997 death of his father made him wonder if there was more to life than pushing paper for corporate bigwigs. He traveled to Mexico and volunteered at an AIDS hospice, where his numbed spiritual side began to reawaken in a very persistent way. Brock-

mann decided he had to act: he abandoned his plush office and 14-hour days and, in 2004 at the age of 50, was ordained by the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Like Brockmann, a growing number of older Americans are seeing the light—and submitting their resignations. Leaving cutthroat corporate stress for the peace of the clergy is an increasingly >>

attractive career move, says Jackson Carroll, director of the Pulpit & Pew research project at Duke University. Thirty years ago, seminary students came to the clergy at an average age of 27. Today it's 35 and rising. Seventy-two percent of Protestant pastors started in another career, and most denominations and faiths report an influx of older students.

Rabbi Stephen Julius Stein, 47, was a symphony conductor before deciding to study for the rabbinate. After 20 years in music, he longed for something more fulfilling. He found it in the synagogue. "Stepping into the synagogue gave me the same powerful feelings that I had when I first entered a symphony hall," says Stein. He now serves on the staff of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles.

Transcendent though it may be, the work-to-worship transition can be difficult, from heavy study demands—ready to learn Hebrew?—to financial burdens. The average Christian-seminary program takes three years and costs \$27,000 to \$30,000. And most clergy—aside from the occasional televangelist—won't exactly earn CEO-type salaries. Starting Christian ministers make anywhere from \$25,000 to \$40,000 a year; rabbis do better, earning about \$75,000 in their first year.

But who joins the clergy for the cash? It's all about spiritual contentment—which is why older folks tend to be dedicated students. "They bring clarity, experience, and depth of introspection to their studies," says John Braunstein, associate provost for enrollment and planning at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion of New York, where a third of the students had prior careers. For Geri Larkin, 54, who left a consulting job to attend a Buddhist seminary, the choice between office worker and spiritual guide reflected a deep midlife need for meaning. "I had to decide," says Larkin. "How will I be most valuable to the world? I wouldn't have asked that at 30 or 35." —*Lynne Schreiber*