



Sample Content

Location: Information
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What percentage of people leave the work? Someone asked this in another group, so I took a detailed look at worker lists in several midwestern states (USA).

Content Description:

This is a sensitive topic. The summary below discusses challenges of leaving the work, the culture of the church group, and economic aspects. It is supportive of ex-workers, which may be challenging for those who were harmed by workers. I share this from the view of an ex-worker and former church member.

A Review of Worker Lists for Selected Midwestern States

Ex-workers Are Not Outliers

People start in the work with a commitment to spend their entire lives in the ministry. In many cases, they leave the work in severe emotional stress and/or are physically ill. Upon leaving, and as they rebuild their lives, ex-workers may feel they are the exception, not the rule. This perception, along with a host of other factors, can contribute to feelings of failure, shame or lack of self-worth. In reality, leaving the work is a common occurrence. Additional review of other regions is needed for broader conclusions, but for the midwestern states reviewed, almost 80% of the people who started between 1990-2009 left the work by 2024 (Figure 1).

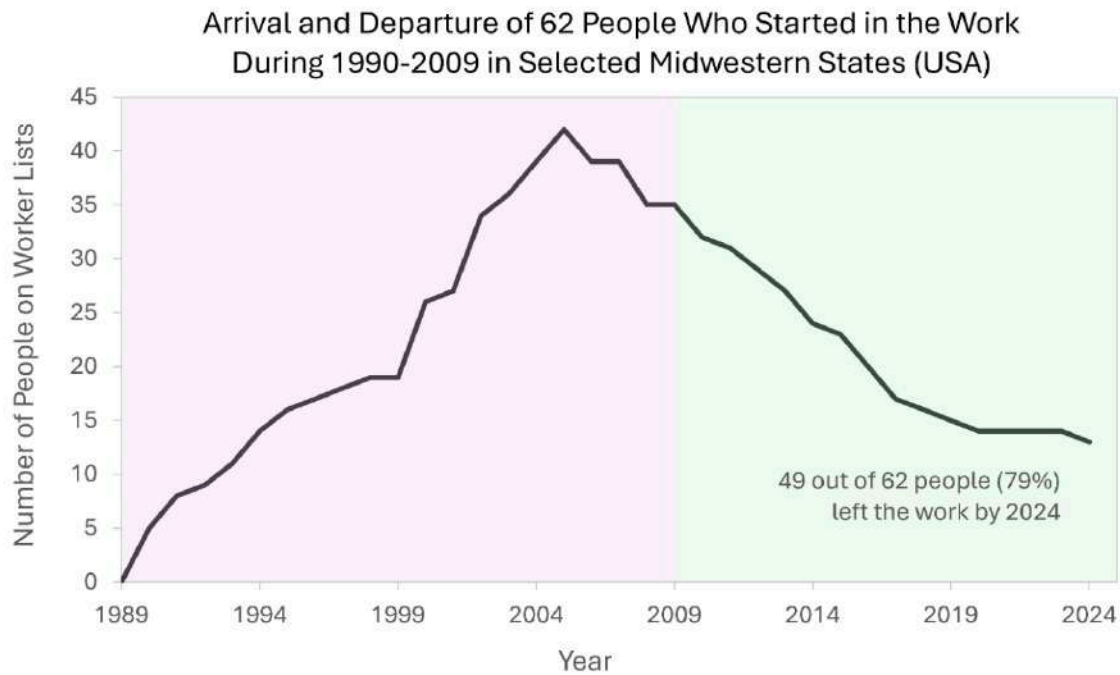


Figure 1. A total of 62 people joined the ministry in seven midwestern states during a two-decade period. Nearly 80% of this cohort had left the work by 2024.

Based on the detailed review of worker lists from seven midwestern states, preliminary review of lists from other (USA) states, and anecdotal accounts, it is very likely that a minority of people who start in the work will serve for a career-length time period (e.g., 15-20 years). Even fewer remain for their entire life. For the midwestern cohort, the average length of service was 13 years, with a range of 1 to 34 years. Half of the cohort were in the work for less than 11 years (Figure 2).

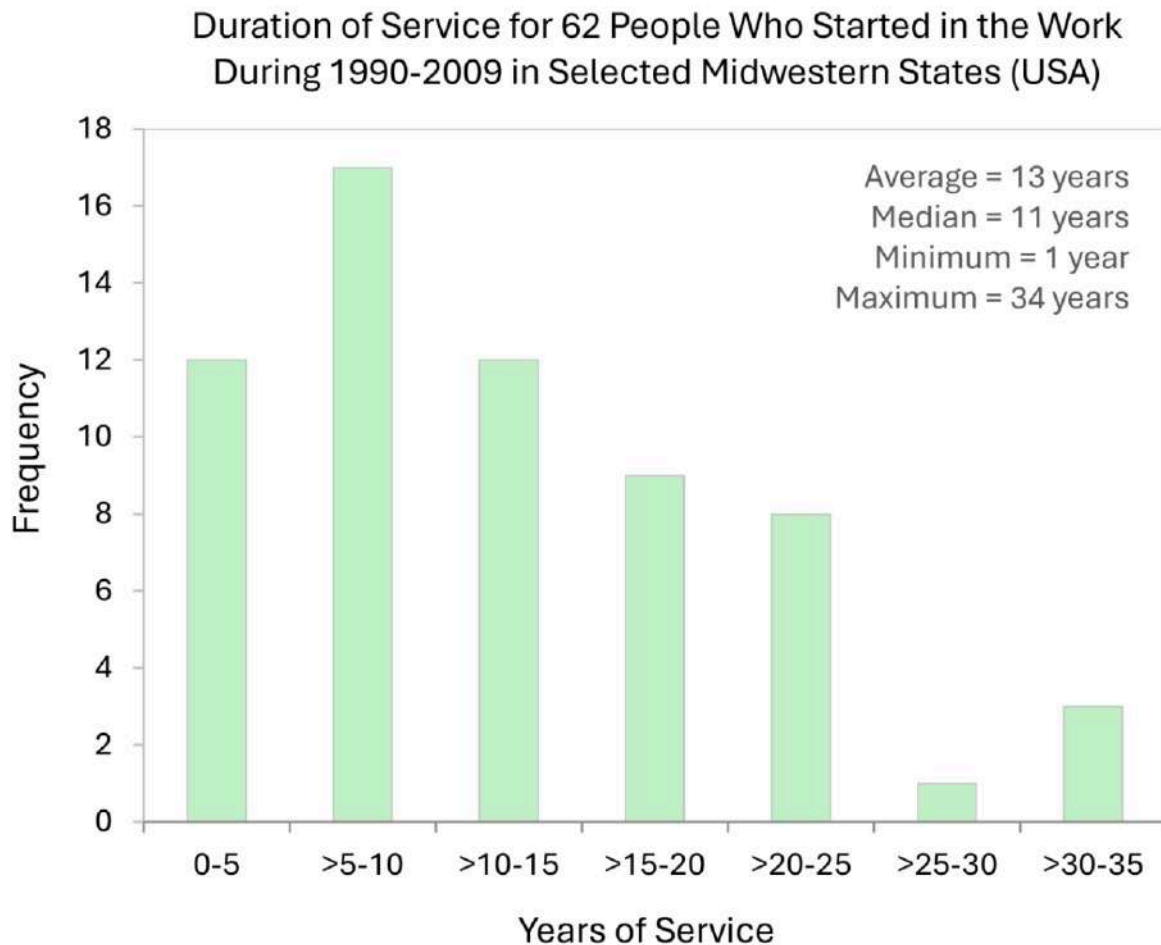


Figure 2. Duration of service distribution and statistics for a cohort of 62 people who started in the work during 1990-2009.

Constant Worker Turnover is Masked

Based on the lists reviewed, there is constant turnover of new workers (Figure 3). This cycling in and out of the work may be masked by several factors. New workers appear on lists with at most an asterisk to denote their arrival. Upon leaving the work, people disappear from these documents with no acknowledgement. Worker movements between states are typically noted on lists for the state(s) they are departing from, meaning that their arrival appears as simply an addition to the list, similar to new workers. This lack of institutional acknowledgement can be viewed as a signal that leaving the work is, at best, not noteworthy, and at worst, a reason for the community to withhold support from the person who is leaving. If there are supportive conversations for ex-workers, they are commonly held behind closed doors, further limiting awareness of their experiences and minimizing group-level

memory of their service.

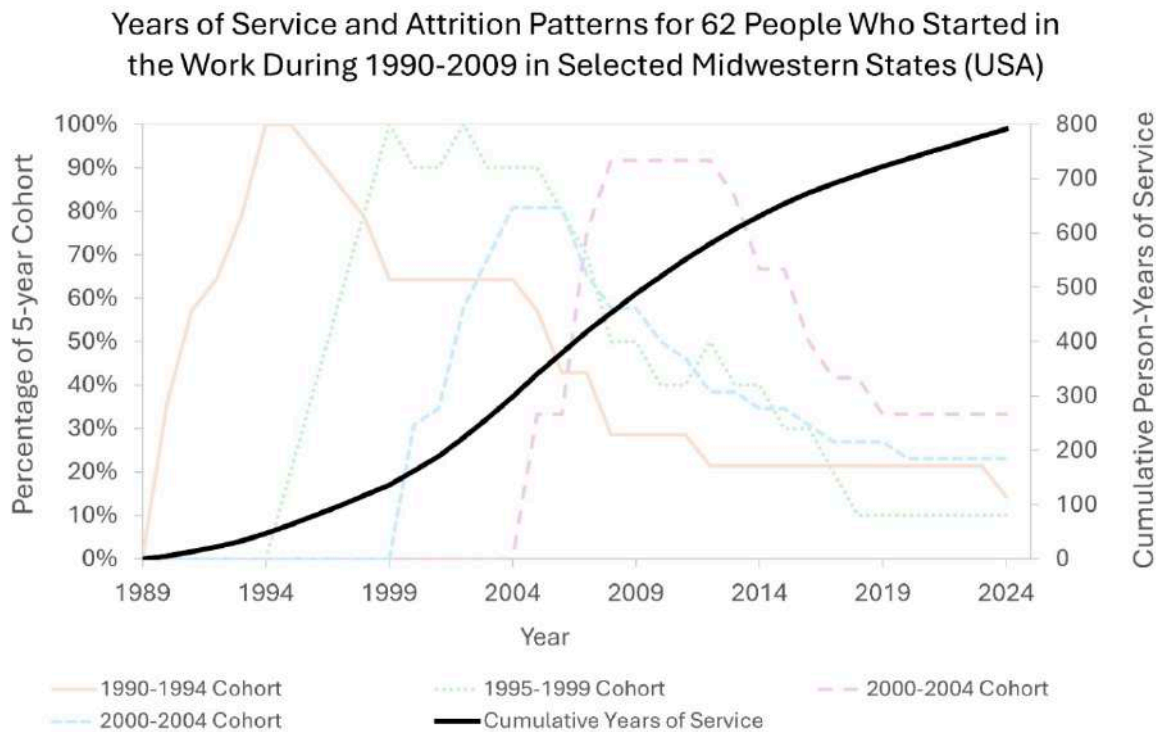


Figure 3. Cumulative years of service for the 62 people who started in the work, overlaid on patterns of arrival and attrition for people sorted into 5-year cohorts.

Acknowledging the Value of Service

The midwestern cohort of people who started in the work between 1990-2009 contributed almost 800 person-years of service (Figure 3). The ex-workers from this cohort contributed about 625 of those person-years. In all of the lists reviewed, zero lists acknowledged the time or effort of any person leaving the work.

The remainder of this section may also seem cold or impersonal because earning power is used as a way to express the contribution of this cohort. Workers are taught to think of themselves as "unprofitable servants" or similar descriptions. Most feel deeply indebted to the friends despite drawing no regular salary, no insurance (with some exceptions, particularly those enrolled in government programs), and no guaranteed retirement or way to save for retirement. Additionally, many friends don't think of church-related functions in terms of business transactions, although they do exchange room and board and other resources for the services of workers. Most importantly,

human lives are far more valuable and complex than just their potential economic output. However, earning potential is a minimum value that most people can readily relate to.

Considering numerous individuals in this midwestern cohort were en route to college degrees, already had careers, and/or had skills and traits to have careers, it seems reasonable to estimate their earning power based on median income in the US. Using median annual income values for each year between 1990-2024 and multiplying by the number of person-years served each year, the earning potential of this cohort of 62 people is estimated at \$35 million (Figure 4). The income data were already corrected to 2023 US dollars and 2024 median income was assumed to be the same as 2023.

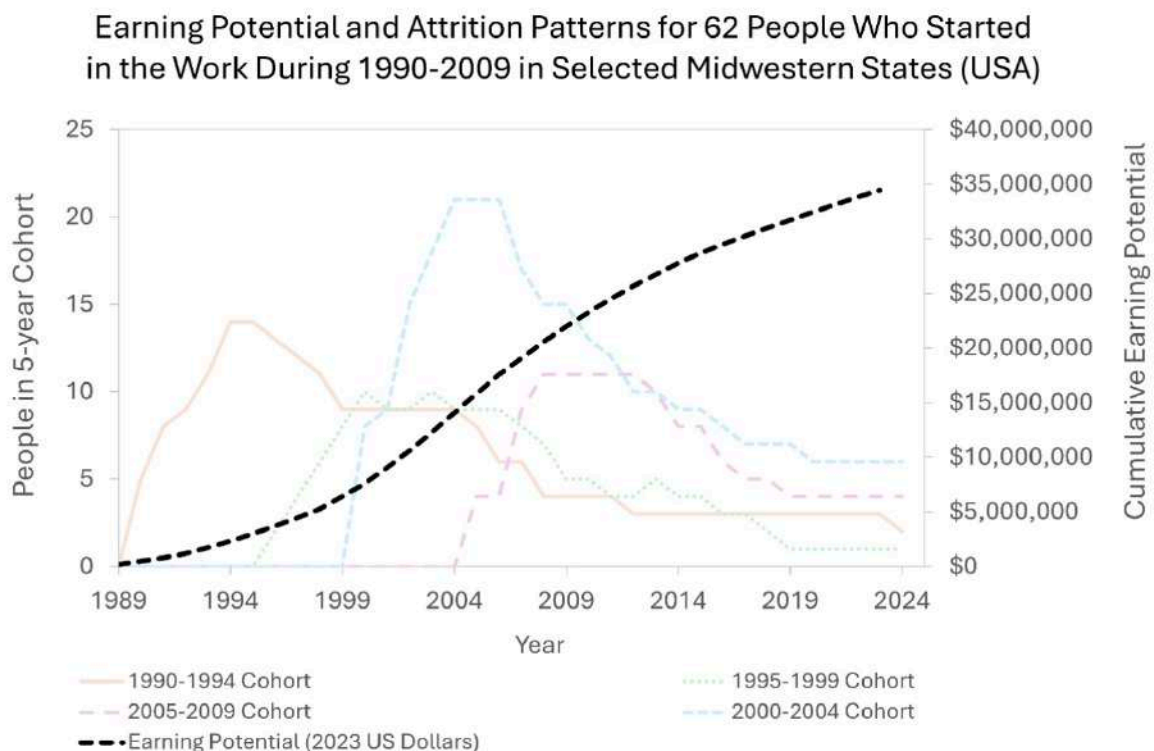


Figure 4. Earning potential for the midwestern cohort, overlaid on patterns of arrivals and departures for 5-year cohorts.

Conclusions

On a personal level, I hope this analysis does not cause unnecessary distress or harm to anyone who has served in or supported the ministry. To those who served in good will: you are valuable and you always have been. To those who supported workers in the best way you knew at the time but have recently gained a new perspective: thank you. To those who continue to support a system that relies completely on the low-cost services of people who have given away control of almost every aspect of their lives:

please take a moment to think seriously and objectively about the real human costs of the system you are supporting.

Sources of Data and Error

Data were compiled from worker lists provided by Mike and Abbi Prussack and other sources. While we have tried to accurately depict data, sources of error include data entry errors, ambiguity of lists, mid-year changes to lists, people serving less than one year, and other factors. Median annual income, corrected to 2023 US dollars, was obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics website.

Anonymous reviewers provided insight and corrections. As noted throughout the document, we acknowledge the limited geographic extent of the lists reviewed. Other regions may reveal different magnitudes of attrition, but we suspect that similar patterns will emerge.

Send Corrections to:

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Updates:

April 14, 2025: published to private groups

April 15, 2025: minor revisions to text, updated title of Figure 1