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Montana State University sociologist studies pastoral role of clergy

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FOR RELEASE TUESDAY, MAY 23

Montana will serve as a case study for the nation in a survey of the mental health roles of clergymen being conducted by Dr. Raymond L. Gold, associate professor of sociology at Montana State University.

The two-year study is supported by a \$24,082 grant to Dr. Gold from the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, a branch of the Public Health Service of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Dr. Gold is trying to find out how clergymen and other mental health practitioners function, in their own view and in the view of each other, in small and middle-sized Montana communities. Results of the study could be useful in setting up a more rational system of counseling services in such communities, he said.

The MSU sociologist is interested primarily in the clergyman's pastoral role. Clergymen are called upon more and more often for counseling in all aspects of human relations, whether they like it or not, Dr. Gold pointed out. Many young ministers are well equipped to perform counseling services because of recent emphasis in seminaries on pastoral psychology, he noted.

During the course of the study, Dr. Gold will interview a high percentage of the state's clergy, a sample of wives of clergymen, and many others whose occupations involve counseling. These last include most social workers and some lawyers, physicians, nurses and teachers.

In this summer's interview schedule, Dr. Gold will be assisted by Benjamin Wright of Butte. Wright earned a master's degree at MSU and will work toward the doctorate at the University of Washington next year.

(more)

The project is directed at understanding how mental health practitioners perform their services and how the work of one group is related to that of others in the field. Dr. Gold observed that referrals of cases among practitioners are rare in Montana and where they do exist, they operate on an informal rather than institutionalized basis. This means that if a key figure in a chain of personal relationships leaves the community, the whole system breaks down. Dr. Gold sees this as a basic problem in Montana.

Montana is an ideal state for the study because it is split by the Continental Divide into a section oriented to the West Coast and one oriented to the Midwest, according to Dr. Gold. The composite picture of the whole state will reflect the attitudes of both these regions of the country, thus yielding more comprehensive results than would be possible in a more homogeneous state, he believes.

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