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***Priests in the United States:
Satisfaction, Work Load,
and Support Structures***

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

**Priests in the United States:
Satisfaction, Work Load, and Support Structures**

*A CARA Working Paper Prepared for the
Conference on Research on Priests in the United States
Sponsored by the USCCB Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry*

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CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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Executive Summary

Since its founding, CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, has conducted surveys of priests for dioceses, religious communities, and nationally within the United States. This CARA Working Paper reviews national level findings from the CARA Priest Poll of 2001 and the CARA Priest Poll of 2002, telephone polls conducted of priests randomly sampled throughout the United States. The CARA Priest Poll 2001, completed in March 2001, includes 1,234 priests. The CARA Priest Poll 2002, completed in March 2002, includes 1,212 priests, 920 of whom were randomly sampled from among all priests and 292 of whom were randomly sampled from among those ordained in 1992 or after. A number of national-level Catholic organizations commissioned proprietary questions for these polls. The data used for this report are from questions designed for public release.

Selected topics for this paper include priest satisfaction, work load, and support structures and networks. First, the paper documents in greater detail than previous research the work load carried by non-retired priests and their attitudes toward that work load. Next, it examines the extent to which several types of support are available to or taken advantage of by priests. Finally, the paper explores whether various aspects of work load and various sources of support are significantly related to priests' general satisfaction with their lives and ministry.

Major Findings

Satisfaction

- Nearly all priests say they are happy in their ministry and that they are satisfied with their lives as priests. Only 1 to 2 percent disagree.
- Ten percent of priests say they have “seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.” The proportion is only marginally larger among those ordained in the past ten years (12 percent). Five percent of all priests and 4 percent of those ordained in the past 10 years “strongly agree” with this statement.

Work Load

- Three-quarters of non-retired priests report being on call 24 hours a day in their ministry. Two in five priests who are not retired say they work over 60 hours in a typical week. One-fifth report working more than 80 hours a week.
- Twenty-five percent of all non-retired priests and 30 percent of parish priests say they are too busy to adequately meet the pastoral needs of the people they serve.

- Priests who serve in more than one parish – for example, linked, twinned, or clustered parishes – do not report having significantly longer work weeks or feeling busier than other parish priests. This may be due to the already relatively long work week of most priests.
- Parish priests spend about 16 percent of their work time in administrative and supervisory tasks. About three-quarters of all parish priests would prefer to spend less time doing this kind of work.
- Taken by itself, the number of hours a priest reports working per week is not related to the likelihood that he has thought seriously about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.
- Priests are more likely to say they have thought seriously about leaving the priesthood if they feel too busy to pray, feel too busy to meet the pastoral needs of those they serve, or if they prefer less administrative work.

Support Structures

- Over 80 percent of priests made a retreat in the previous year, about 70 percent schedule days of prayer or spiritual reflection for themselves, and slightly more than half have a spiritual director.
- About half of priests say they participate in groups that offer an opportunity for regular socializing, prayer, or theological reflection with other priests. About two-thirds say at least half of their close friends are other priests.
- Seventy percent of diocesan priests say they have a good relationship with their bishop, and 82 percent of religious priests say they have a good relationship with their religious superiors.
- Participation in priestly support groups, retreats, and spiritual direction is not related to priestly satisfaction. However, priests of the Post-Vatican II Generation (born after 1960) who schedule days of prayer or reflection for themselves are significantly *less* likely to have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the past five years than other members of their generation.
- Priests whose closest friends are other priests are less likely to have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the past five years than those with few friends who are priests.
- Priests who feel that their bishop or religious superiors are unsupportive of priests in their diocese or religious community are more likely to express dissatisfaction with their life and ministry as a priest.

Introduction

Catholic priests in the United States today are facing a number of pressures. Fewer vocations than the Church experienced in the middle part of this century and a rapidly growing Catholic population have led to a sharp decline since Vatican II in the ratio of priests to lay Catholics and to an aging of the priest population. These factors may be contributing to many non-retired priests being forced to work increasingly harder to serve the needs of Catholics. Consequently, dioceses and religious institutes are increasingly concerned with understanding the ministerial challenges confronting their priests and ways pressures can be alleviated and satisfaction and morale boosted. This paper documents in greater detail than previous research the work load carried by non-retired priests and their attitudes toward that work load. It also examines the extent to which several types of support are available to or taken advantage of by priests. And it attempts to determine whether various aspects of work load and various sources of support are significantly related to priests' general satisfaction with their lives and ministry. Data for the paper are drawn from two national level surveys of U.S. priests conducted by CARA.

The CARA Priest Polls of 2001 and 2002

The CARA Priest Polls are telephone polls conducted by CARA of priests in the fifty states and the District of Columbia. The sample frame is based on lists provided by the *Official Catholic Directory (OCD)* of the telephone numbers of nearly 43,000 diocesan and religious priests residing in dioceses or eparchies whose bishops or eparchs belong to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.¹ In both polls, priests were called up to ten times at varied times of the day and days of the week. After the tenth call or a refusal, another randomly sampled priest was used as a replacement. Occasionally, calls reached a parish where another priest had recently been assigned in place of the one sampled from the list. In those cases, interviews were not conducted with this priest and attempts were made to reach the originally sampled priest at his new location. Often, priests were busy or unavailable when calls reached the rectory, parish office, or religious community. Priests were given the option of calling back to an 800 number to complete the interview at a time of their choosing.

The CARA Priest Poll of 2001 was conducted during March of that year. Complete responses were obtained from 1,234 priests. Under standard assumptions of statistical inference, the overall margin of sampling error is less than ± 2.8 percentage points. In other words, assuming true random sampling, the characteristics of priests represented in the poll can be assumed to be within 2.8 percentage points of the characteristics of all U.S. priests.² For the CARA Priest Poll of 2002, undertaken during February and March 2002, interviews were first

¹No calls were made to priests in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

²Sampling error is not the only source of error in surveys. Note that margin of sampling error increases when examining a subset of respondents.

completed with 920 priests randomly sampled from among all priests. Next, an additional 292 interviews were completed from a sample of priests who were ordained to priesthood after 1991 and whose telephone numbers had not yet been used for the overall sample. Including the 102 priests ordained after 1991 who were interviewed as part of the overall sample, a total of 394 priests ordained after 1991 are included in the CARA Priest Poll of 2002. A sample size of 920 provides a margin of sampling error of approximately ± 3.2 percent. Taken separately, the margin of error for the 394 recently ordained priests is ± 4.9 percent.

Statistical Weighting of Poll Results

Using both *OCD* data and data available from a study conducted by CARA in 1999 for the Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)³, it is possible to compare characteristics of priests in the CARA Priest Polls with those of all priests in the United States. This allows the construction of statistical weights to adjust findings so they reflect the total population of Catholic priests in the United States as accurately as possible.

As will be seen, the CARA Priest Polls of 2001 and 2002 generally reflect known characteristics of priests in the United States with two exceptions. They under-represent retired diocesan priests and religious priests who serve in non-parish ministry. It seems likely that these two groups are more difficult to contact than others. Retired diocesan priests sometimes move out of their home dioceses and often live alone. Religious priests who are not in parish ministry are more likely to live in a large religious house with a single telephone number and less likely to be available at that number for a relatively long or uninterrupted period.

Weighted results are given in most of the analyses of this report, including all tables after “Geographic Region.” This is the last table for which other sources of data on priests in the United States exist. The succeeding tables present information on other characteristics of priests for which no information is publicly available. For this reason, there is no comparison to national figures and poll results are weighted. This compensates for the unintentional under-sampling of retired diocesan priests and religious priests in parish ministry.⁴

³At the time, the “National Conference of Catholic Bishops” (NCCB).

⁴One of the effects of weighting the data in this manner is to increase the effective age of the samples. This is because weighting increases the representation of retired diocesan priests and religious priests in non-parish ministry (who tend to be older than their counterparts serving in parishes).

Organization of this Paper

This paper is organized into four main sections. First, a preliminary section describes selected background characteristics of priests in the CARA Priest Polls. Some of these characteristics, such as type of ministry and generation, are used for the basis of comparisons made in later sections of the paper.

The second section describes measures of “general satisfaction.” In the 2001 poll, these include agreement or disagreement with three statements on satisfaction with priestly life and ministry. The 2002 poll includes a measure of whether priests agree that they have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the previous five years.

The third section addresses work load issues among priests, particularly priests who are not retired. Factors examined include the number of hours priests work in a typical week and the proportion of time they devote to various tasks, including administration. The section also reports priests’ feelings about being too busy and their concern about the amount of administrative work they are asked to do. This section then examines the relationship of work load with general satisfaction.

The final section of the paper describes the proportion of priests who participate in several types of activities for spiritual support, including priestly support groups, retreats, spiritual direction, and days of prayer or reflection. It also examines sources of interactional support, including friendships and relations with superiors. Lastly, the report analyzes the relationship between support and general satisfaction.

Selected Background Characteristics

This section describes background characteristics of priests represented in the two CARA Priest Polls. Where possible, it compares those characteristics with known characteristics of all priests in the United States. Two sources of information are used for all priests in the United States. The first is the *OCD* database from which priests were sampled for the polls. The second is a 1999 study conducted by CARA for the U.S. Bishop’s Conference, commissioned by the Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry. In that study, CARA received complete personnel reports from all dioceses and eparchies and from 89 percent of clerical and mixed religious institutes or provinces. The data were gathered in 1998. Additional available data on priests in the United States are presented in more detail in Froehle and Gautier (2000: 110-117).

Diocesan-Religious; Active-Retired

Both CARA Priest Polls experienced some difficulty contacting retired diocesan priests. As the table below shows, approximately 15 percent of all U.S. priests are retired diocesan priests. However, only 5 percent of those in the CARA Priest Poll 2001 and the CARA Priest Poll 2002 are retired diocesan priests. As a result, non-retired diocesan priests are over-represented in both polls.

Composition of Priests in the United States and Priests Sampled in the CARA Priest Poll 2001 and 2002			
	CARA Study for USCCB*	CARA Priest Poll 2001	CARA Priest Poll 2002**
Diocesan, active	48%	54%	55%
Diocesan, retired	15	5	5
Religious, active	31	33	35
Religious, retired	6	8	5

*1998 data.
**General sample only; over-sample excluded.

Current Ministry

The table below shows, for priests who are not retired, whether their current ministry is primarily parish or non-parish based. Once again, the source of information for all priests in the United States is CARA's 1999 census of priests for the USCCB. Both polls appear to over-represent religious priests involved primarily in parish ministry and under-represent religious priests who are involved primarily in non-parish ministry. It may be that telephone sampling is relatively more effective in rectories than in religious houses. It is also the case that older religious priests are more likely than their younger counterparts to be in institutional ministries. Conversely, younger religious priests are more likely to be in parish ministry.

Current Ministry of Priests in the United States				
Retired Priests Excluded				
	CARA Study for USCCB*	CARA Priest Poll 2001	2002 General Sample	2002 Recently Ordained
Diocesan Priests				
Parish ministry	84%	89%	84%	93%
Non-parish ministry	16	11	16	7
Religious Priests				
Parish ministry	32%**	48%	41%	52%
Non-parish ministry	68	52	59	48
*1998 data.				
**Figures from the CARA study for the USCCB on religious priests include both parish and other diocesan ministry.				

Year of Ordination

The first column of the table below shows the decade of ordination for the more than 40,000 priests in the *Official Catholic Directory* database. Based on this information, respondents to both CARA polls are generally representative of all priests in the United States.

	2002 <i>OCD</i> Database	CARA Priest Poll 2001	CARA Priest Poll 2002*
Prior to 1940	1%	1%	1%
1940 - 1949	5	7	7
1950 - 1959	21	21	18
1960 - 1969	23	25	23
1970 - 1979	22	19	20
1980 - 1989	14	14	16
1990 - 2001**	14	13	15

*General sample only; over-sample excluded.
**2001 CARA Priest Poll includes only those ordained in 2000 or prior.

Age and Generation

In general, the age distributions of respondents to the CARA Priest Poll 2001 and 2002 resemble those for all diocesan and religious priests in the United States. A slight under-representation of diocesan priests 70 and over reflects the under-representation of retired diocesan priests noted above. The ages used are those at the time each study was conducted. Note also that the cumulative impact of ordinations, deaths, and resignations means that average age changes only slightly from year to year.

Age of Priests in the United States			
	CARA Study for USCCB*	CARA Priest Poll 2001	CARA Priest Poll 2002**
Diocesan			
Under 35	4%	6%	4%
35 - 39	6	7	7
40 - 49	18	17	19
50 - 59	23	26	26
60 - 69	24	26	25
70 - 79	17	14	16
80 or Over	8	4	3
Religious			
Under 35	2%	1%	1%
35 - 39	4	4	6
40 - 49	14	13	13
50 - 59	20	16	22
60 - 69	26	28	25
70 - 79	22	28	27
80 or Over	12	10	6
*1998 data.			
**General sample only; over-sample excluded.			

The three generations described below will be used as the basis of a number of comparisons later in this paper.

- The *Pre-Vatican II Generation* was born prior to 1943 and most were ordained well before the Council. Members of this generation are age 60 and over in 2002. They constitute more than half of all priests in the United States and remain a key reference group for priests. As is true for their secular counterparts, institutional loyalty is a key value for members of this generation.
- The *Vatican II Generation*. Members of this generation were born between 1943 and 1960 and are between the ages of 42 and 59 in 2002. They witnessed the impact of the Council during their formation years and were often directly affected by the resulting changes in seminary life and priestly ministry. As part of the “Baby Boomer” generation, they tend to place greater value on change and questioning institutions and structures than other generations.
- The *Post-Vatican II Generation*, born after 1960, includes those who are age 41 or younger in 2002. This generation is sometimes called “Generation X” and includes those who came of age after the Second Vatican Council. For them, the Council is an historical fact, not something they personally experienced. They tend to place greater value on issues of identity and belonging.

The figures in the table below show the proportion of priests in each generation for both the 2001 and 2002 polls.

Generations of Priests in the United States		
	CARA Priest Poll 2001	CARA Priest Poll 2002*
Pre-Vatican II	61%	53%
Vatican II	31	37
Post-Vatican II	8	10

*General sample only; over-sample excluded.

Foreign Born

Information on country of birth is available in the 1999 CARA study for the USCCB, but only for active diocesan priests and religious priests in parish ministry. For the sake of comparison, results from the CARA Priest Poll 2000 and 2001 have been limited in the table below to active diocesan priests and religious priests in parish ministry. As the results show, foreign born priests are under-represented in both polls, though not greatly. The table also shows that the proportion of foreign born priests is somewhat higher among those ordained in the past ten years than among priests as a whole.

	CARA Study for USCCB*	CARA Priest Poll 2001	2002 General Sample	2002 Recently Ordained
Born outside U.S.	16%	14%	11%	19%
Born in U.S.	84	86	89	81

*1998 data.

Geographic Region

Information on geographic region is available both from the *OCD* database and the CARA study for the USCCB. In the table below, priests are grouped into four geographic regions based on major U.S. Census categories.⁵ The proportions for respondents to the two polls generally resemble those for all priests in the United States. However, there is some variation, depending on the source of the data. Maps depicting these regions and data on priests in the United States are available in Froehle and Gautier 2000.

	CARA Study for USCCB*	2002 <i>OCD</i> Database	CARA Priest Poll 2001	CARA Priest Poll 2002**
East	37%	38%	40%	35%
Midwest	32	30	34	37
South	15	17	13	16
West	16	15	12	12

*1998 data.
**General sample only; over-sample excluded.

⁵The *Northeast* region includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. (USCCB Regions I, II, and III.)

The *Midwest* region includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. USCCB Regions VI, VII, VIII, and IX.)

The *South* region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. (USCCB Regions IV, V, X, and XIV.)

The *West* region includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. (USCCB Regions XI, XII, and XIII).

Race and Ethnicity

CARA polls ask questions about race and ethnic identity similar to those used in the U.S. Census. Because people of Hispanic/Latino origin can be of any race, respondents are divided into those who say they are members of each of several Census-defined racial groups, but answer “no” to Hispanic origin and all those, regardless of race, who answer “yes” to Hispanic origin. In both the 2001 poll and the general sample of the 2002 poll, 94 percent of priests are non-Hispanic whites. In comparison, only 81 percent of recently ordained priests sampled in the 2002 poll are non-Hispanic whites.

	CARA Priest Poll 2001	2002 General Sample	2002 Recently Ordained
White*	94%	94%	81%
Hispanic or Latino	3	2	8
Asian or Pacific Islander*	1	2	8
African American*	1	1	2
Native American*	<1	<1	1

Note: Due to rounding error, percentages may not add to 100.
*Non-Hispanic/Latino

Results from the CARA Priest Poll 2002 indicate that there are substantial racial and ethnic differences between recently ordained diocesan and religious priests. Eighty-five percent of diocesan priests ordained since 1991 are non-Hispanic whites. In comparison, only 71 percent of religious priests ordained since 1991 are non-Hispanic whites. This is due primarily to a much higher proportion of Asians among the recently ordained religious priests sampled in the Poll.

Race and Ethnicity of Recently Ordained Priests by Diocesan and Religious Status	
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Priests Ordained After 1991 Only	
Diocesan	
White	85%
Hispanic or Latino	7
Asian or Pacific Islander	5
African American	2
Native American	1
Religious	
White	71%
Hispanic or Latino	9
Asian or Pacific Islander	19
African American	1
Native American	0

Ancestry of White and Hispanic/Latino Priests

In the CARA Priest Poll 2001, white and Hispanic/Latino priests were asked: “What country or part of the world did your ancestors come from?” Up to three responses were recorded. The table below summarizes them. Note that because many priests reported more than one ancestry, the percentages add to more than 100. For point of comparison, the results are compared to those from an identical question asked of whites and Hispanics/Latinos in the CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2001, a random sample telephone poll of self-identified Catholics in the United States.

A relatively large proportion of these priests, 44 percent, report having Irish ancestry. In comparison, only 26 percent of all white or Hispanic/Latino Catholics in the United States report being of Irish descent. Priests are also disproportionately likely to be of German ancestry in comparison to Catholics as a whole. They are less likely than Catholics in general to be of Mexican descent.

	CARA Priest Poll 2001	U.S. Catholics (CCP 2001)*
Ireland	44%	26%
Germany	35	24
France	12	7
England, Scotland, or Wales	11	14
Poland	10	8
Italy	9	16
Czechoslovakia	6	4
Mexico	<1	10
Spain	<1	4
Other	11	20

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because some respondents reported more than one ancestry.
*CARA Catholic Poll 2001, a random sample telephone poll of 2,174 self-identified U.S. Catholics ages 14 and over. The figures are based on valid responses from 1,658 respondents who identified as “white” or “Hispanic” and were age 18 or over.

Raised Catholic

Only 2 percent of priests in the CARA Priest Poll 2002 report that they were not raised Catholic. In comparison, 10 percent of respondents to the CARA Catholic Poll 2002, a random sample telephone poll of adult Catholics in the United States, report they were not raised Catholic. Other CARA studies have found that many of these adult conversions among Catholics in general are related to marriage to someone who was raised Catholic.

Raised Catholic		
	CARA Priest Poll 2002*	U.S. Catholics (CCP 2002)**
Raised Catholic	98%	90%
Not raised Catholic	2	10

*General sample only; over-sample excluded.
**CARA Catholic Poll 2002. A random sample telephone poll of 2,100 self-identified adult U.S. Catholics.

Three percent of religious priests and 2 percent of diocesan priests are converts to Catholicism. There are larger differences by generation and year of ordination. Just 1 percent of Pre-Vatican II Generation priests, but 5 percent of Vatican II Generation priests, and 5 percent of Post-Vatican II Generation priests are converts. Eight percent of priests ordained in the past 10 years are converts. The figure is 9 percent for U.S. born whites who were ordained in the past 10 years.

The percentage of converts for those ordained in the past 10 years (8 percent) is higher than that for the Post-Vatican II Generation (5 percent) because many of those ordained in the past 10 years are members of the Vatican II, not Post-Vatican II, Generation. Fifteen percent of priests ordained in the past 10 years who are members of the Post-Vatican II Generation are converts.

Catholic School Attendance

Priests were asked whether they ever attended a Catholic elementary school and/or a Catholic high school. The table below summarizes the responses by generation. They are compared with the responses of adult U.S. Catholics to identical questions in the CARA Catholic Poll 2002. Regardless of generation, the proportion who had at least some Catholic schooling as young people is substantially greater among priests than Catholics in general. However, the proportion of priests without Catholic schooling has been increasing across the generations, from 10 percent among members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation to 30 percent among members of the Post-Vatican II Generation.

	CARA Priest Poll 2002*	U.S. Catholics (CCP 2002)**
Pre-Vatican II (Born before 1943)		
No Catholic schooling	10%	48%
Catholic elementary school only	11	23
Catholic high school only	7	<1
Both elementary and high school	72	29
Vatican II (Born 1943-1960)		
No Catholic schooling	18%	40%
Catholic elementary school only	9	29
Catholic high school only	5	1
Both elementary and high school	68	30
Post-Vatican II (Born after 1960)		
No Catholic schooling	30%	55%
Catholic elementary school only	20	20
Catholic high school only	7	4
Both elementary and high school	43	21
*General sample only; over-sample excluded.		
**CARA Catholic Poll 2002. A random sample telephone poll of 2,100 self-identified adult U.S. Catholics. Only the 1,782 respondents who are age 28 or over are included in the analysis in order to better match the age distribution of priests of the Post-Vatican II Generation.		

Parish Location

The CARA Priest Poll 2002 asked priests in parish ministry to describe the rural-urban location of their parish. Priests serving in more than one parish were asked to reply with regard to their primary or largest parish.

Parish Location		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Priests in Parish Ministry Only		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
All Parish Priests		
An inner city	11%	9%
A large city but not an inner city	15	13
A suburb of a large city	24	25
A town or small city	30	36
A rural area	20	17
Diocesan Only		
An inner city	9%	6%
A large city but not an inner city	15	11
A suburb of a large city	25	28
A town or small city	31	36
A rural area	20	19
Religious Only		
An inner city	20%	23%
A large city but not an inner city	15	21
A suburb of a large city	19	13
A town or small city	24	34
A rural area	22	9

Parish Size

The table below shows the number of registered households in the parishes where priests serve. Again, priests serving in more than one parish were asked to describe their primary or largest parish.

Number of Registered Households		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Priests in Parish Ministry Only		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
All Parish Priests		
200 households or fewer	16%	13%
201 to 500 households	21	16
501 to 1,200 households	27	19
1,201 to 2,000 households	16	18
Over 2,000 households	20	34
Diocesan Only		
200 households or fewer	14%	14%
201 to 500 households	22	15
501 to 1,200 households	29	17
1,201 to 2,000 households	15	19
Over 2,000 households	20	35
Religious Only		
200 households or fewer	26%	10%
201 to 500 households	16	23
501 to 1,200 households	19	25
1,201 to 2,000 households	21	15
Over 2,000 households	18	27

General Satisfaction

This section of the report briefly describes several measures of satisfaction with priestly life and ministry that appear in the two CARA Priest Polls. In general, previous research has shown relatively high levels of satisfaction among Catholic priests. The reason for this is made clear by the research of Hoge (2002); priests who are unhappy tend to resign, while those who are relatively more satisfied remain in the ministry. Hoge finds that priests who remain are those who express higher satisfaction with five types of experiences: their current work and ministry, their living situation, living a celibate life, their relationship with their bishop or superior, and the support they receive from fellow priests (Hoge 2002: 24).

The CARA Priest Poll 2001 included three broad measures of satisfaction, two related to priestly life in general, and one related to ministry. These questions were asked in a “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” format. The first two statements were “Overall, I am satisfied with my life as a priest” and “If I had a chance to do it over again, I would still become a priest.” These might be described as summary measures of satisfaction with the priesthood. The third statement was “I am happy in my ministry,” and was asked only to non-retired priests. The results, presented in the table on the following page, reflect those of previous research; priests express relatively high levels of satisfaction for each measure.

About nine in ten priests “strongly agree” with each of the three satisfaction measures in the CARA Priest Poll 2001, with only 1 to 2 percent disagreeing.

Satisfaction Measures in the CARA Priest Poll 2001	
<i>Overall, I am satisfied with my life as a priest.</i>	
Strongly agree	88%
Somewhat agree	11
Somewhat disagree	<1
Strongly disagree	<1
<i>If I had a chance to do it over again, I would still become a priest.</i>	
Strongly agree	90%
Somewhat agree	8
Somewhat disagree	1
Strongly disagree	1
<i>I am happy in my ministry</i> Retired Priests Excluded	
Strongly agree	87%
Somewhat agree	12
Somewhat disagree	1
Strongly disagree	<1

In order to increase variation for analytical purposes, results for the three questions are combined into one general satisfaction measure for non-retired priests. To produce maximum variation, priests are divided into two categories: those who “strongly agree” with all three statements and those who give any other response to at least one of the statements. The former group is termed “highly satisfied” in the analysis that follows.

As shown in the table below, the priests categorized as “highly satisfied” constitute 79 percent of all priests who responded to the three questions. Diocesan priests in non-parish ministry are less likely than all others to be among the “highly satisfied.” Only about two-thirds (67 percent) are classified in this category. However, when considering the three satisfaction items separately, diocesan priests in non-parish ministry are no more or less likely than other priests to express satisfaction with their ministry. They are only less likely to agree strongly that they are satisfied with their lives as a priests and that they would choose to become priests again.

Members of the Vatican II Generation are less likely to be among the “highly satisfied” than those of the other two generations, though the difference is relatively small (73 percent compared to 80 percent). In fact, members of the Vatican II Generation are less likely than members of the Pre-Vatican II and Post-Vatican II Generations to “strongly agree” with each of the three separate satisfaction statements.

Percentage Who “Strongly Agree” with All Three Satisfaction Statements	
CARA Priest Poll 2001, Retired Priests Excluded	
All Non-Retired Priests	79%
By Ministry	
Diocesan, parish ministry	79
Diocesan, non-parish ministry	67
Religious, parish ministry	81
Religious, non-parish ministry	77
By Generation	
Pre-Vatican II (Before 1943)	80
Vatican II (1943-1960)	73
Post-Vatican II (After 1960)	80

The CARA Priest Poll 2002 included a single measure of general satisfaction. It too is in the format of a statement with “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” response categories. The statement reads: “I have seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.” Given the ordinarily high levels of satisfaction already noted, the question was designed to capture past or present sentiments of dissatisfaction over a fairly broad period. It did this by using wording that states negative rather than positive satisfaction as well as by specifying a five year time frame.

As the table below suggests, the question was successful in tracking somewhat higher levels of dissatisfaction than those expressed in the measures used in the 2001 poll. Ten percent of priests in the general sample agree either “somewhat” or “strongly” that they have seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years. An unexpected result for this question is that a non-trivial number of priests volunteered that they do not know or that the question does not apply to them. In part, this reflects responses of priests ordained less than five years. However, a disproportionate number of those sorts of responses come from older, retired priests. They may feel that the issue of “leaving the priesthood” is no longer relevant for them due to their age. Still, a substantial number of other priests also volunteered this response, suggesting that other issues may be associated with this question and should be given further study.

<i>I have seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
Strongly agree	5%	4%
Somewhat agree	5	8
Somewhat disagree	4	9
Strongly disagree	72	69
Don't know or does not apply (volunteered)	14	10

There are no significant differences for this question among priests in different types of ministry. As with the measures in the 2001 poll, however, priests of the Vatican II Generation tend to express the lowest levels of satisfaction. In this case, they are most likely to say they have seriously thought about leaving. Indeed, the differences are striking. After excluding responses of “don't know” and “does not apply” from calculation of the percentages, those who are most likely to “strongly” disagree that they have thought about leaving in the past five years are priests of the Pre-Vatican II Generation (93 percent), followed by priests of the Post-Vatican II Generation (78 percent). The figure for Vatican II Generation priests is 69 percent.

Work Load

This section of the report explores an issue of serious concern for the Church today: the extent to which priests may be bearing an excessive work load. As the number of active priests has declined, active priests – especially parish priests – often find that their responsibilities have simply increased to make up for fewer priests. In a self-administered mailed survey, Hoge (2002) asked a sample of priests in the United States “how important” each of fifteen problems is for them “on a day-to-day basis.” The one most frequently described as a problem by non-resigned priests was “too much work.” Fifty-eight percent of diocesan priests and 66 percent of religious priests described it as either “somewhat of a problem” or a “great problem” (Hoge 2002: 170).

In a similar question in the CARA Priest Poll of 2001, 72 percent of non-retired diocesan priests and 62 percent of non-retired religious priests (68 percent overall) report that they experience the problem of “too much work” either “a great deal” or “some.” The CARA Priest Polls included several questions designed to better understand priests’ work load and its effects on satisfaction. Most of these were in the 2002 poll.

Typical Hours Worked Per Week

The CARA Priest Poll of 2001 included trial questions that asked how many hours priests work in a typical day and how many days they work in a typical week.⁶ The purpose was to combine these measures to get a picture of the amount of time priests are serving in ministry today. However, a relatively large proportion of priests responded that they work 24 hours a day. Interviewers had been instructed in advance to double-check all responses of over 18 hours a day by repeating the question to make sure respondents had not misunderstood. Still, early results showed that about *one-fourth* of priests were reporting working 24 hours a day. CARA therefore concluded that the measure was problematic, and it was eliminated from all remaining interviews once the early results were analyzed. While the number of responses is therefore too small to be used in any serious analysis, the results offer a qualitative indication of just how great many priests consider their work load to be.

The CARA Priest Poll 2002 used a revised approach to measure the number of hours worked per day. Non-retired priests were first asked the following yes-no question: “In your work or ministry, are you on call twenty-four hours a day?” This gave priests who feel their ministry is a round-the-clock endeavor an opportunity to express that sentiment separately. A follow-up question then asked, “And how many hours do you *actually* work during a typical day?” Hours per week were estimated by multiplying this response by the number of days worked during a typical week.

⁶These measures had been developed by CARA in the course of conducting over a dozen surveys of priests for dioceses and clerical religious institutes or provinces. These studies all used self-administered mailed questionnaires.

The table below shows responses to the question of whether priests are on call 24 hours a day. Overall, about three-quarters (74 percent) of priests say that they are. This varies rather substantially, however, by whether priests are diocesan or religious and by their type of ministry. Diocesan priests are more likely than religious priests to be on call round-the-clock. Also, parish priests (pastors or associate pastors/parochial vicars) are more likely than other priests to be on call. At the high end of the spectrum, 91 percent of diocesan parish priests report being on call 24 hours a day. At the low end, 44 percent of religious priests in non-parish ministry report being on call 24 hours a day. There are only small differences between recently ordained diocesan priests and diocesan priests overall. However, recently ordained religious priests are slightly less likely than religious priests overall to report being on call 24 hours a day.

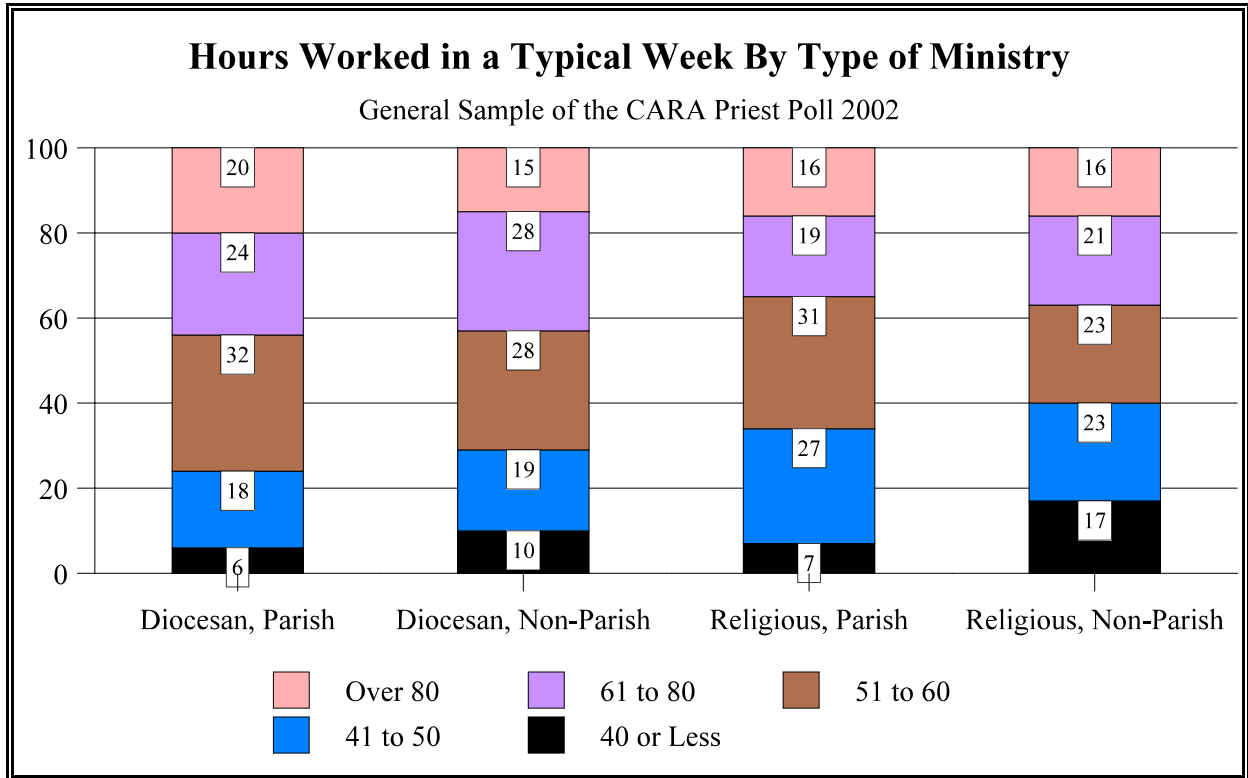
<i>In your work or ministry, are you on call twenty-four hours a day?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained Only
All Non-Retired Priests		
Yes	74%	79%
No	26	21
Diocesan, Parish Ministry		
Yes	91%	92%
No	9	8
Diocesan, Other Ministry		
Yes	57%	--*
No	43	
Religious, Parish Ministry		
Yes	78%	65%
No	22	35
Religious, Other Ministry		
Yes	44%	32%
No	56	68
*Too few cases exist in this category for any meaningful analysis.		

Including the question on whether priests are on call 24 hours a day seems to have eliminated the problem of priests reporting *working* 24 hours a day. As a result, very few priests in the CARA Priest Poll of 2002 report working more than 16 “actual” hours in a typical day. With the new results, it is possible to give a more accurate picture of the hours priests work during a typical week. The table below summarizes estimated hours worked per week in five categories, ranging from 40 hours per week or less to over 80 hours per week.

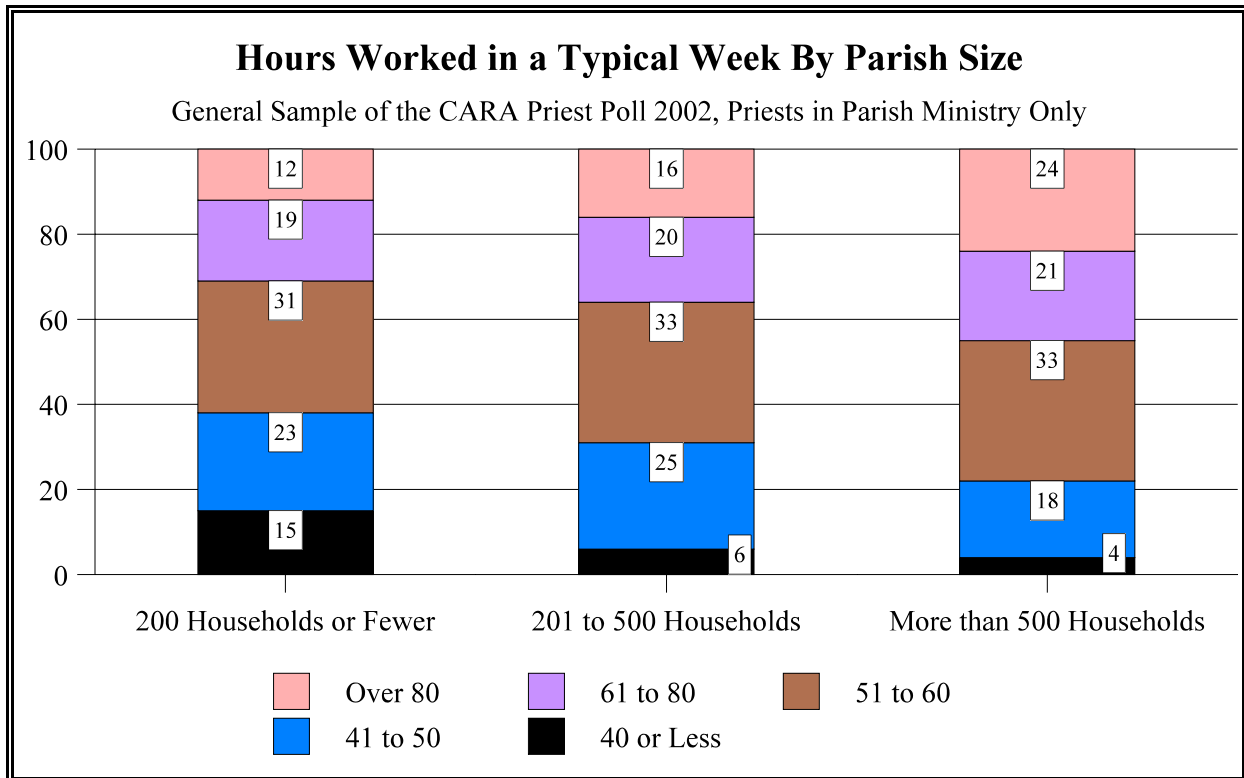
Estimated Hours Worked in a Typical Week		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained Only
40 Hours or Less per Week	9%	4%
41 to 50 Hours	20	15
51 to 60 Hours	30	36
61 to 80 Hours	23	27
Over 80 Hours	18	18
Median (Midpoint)	58	58
Mean (Average)	63	65

Hours worked among non-retired priests are indeed generally high. Only about one in 10 priests reports working 40 hours or less in a typical week. About four-tenths work over 60 hours per week, and nearly two-tenths work over 80 hours per week. Again, it should be emphasized that hours per week has been measured indirectly by multiplying hours worked per day by days worked per week, so these figures may exaggerate the case if fewer than all the days priests report working are full work days. Still, the findings suggest that most priests are working an exceptionally large number of hours.

As noted earlier, the likelihood of being on call 24 hours a day is greater for diocesan than religious priests and greater for priests involved in parish than non-parish ministry. However, differences in terms of estimated hours worked per week, while somewhat parallel, are much smaller. Seventy-six percent of diocesan priests in parish ministry report working over 50 hours per week. By contrast, 60 percent of religious priests in non-parish ministry report working over 50 hours. In both cases, the modal experience is a large number of working hours. Comparisons by category for each group suggest more similarities than differences.



However, somewhat greater differences in hours worked per week may be observed among parish priests in parishes of varying sizes. Those in larger parishes tend to work slightly more hours than those in smaller parishes.⁷ For example, 24 percent of priests whose parishes have more than 500 households report working over 80 hours per week. This percentage is half as large (12 percent) for priests whose parishes have 200 or fewer households. Note that increases in parish size above 500 households produce little change in time worked.



⁷It is difficult to draw comparisons for the effects of parish size between priests who serve a single parish and those who serve more than one parish. For this reason, priests who report serving in more than one parish have been excluded from comparisons in the graph.

A series of follow-up questions in the CARA Priest Poll 2002 attempted to determine some basic information about how priests allocate their time. They were asked: “About how much time do you spend in” each of several activities “during a typical week?” Six response categories ranged from “two hours or less” per week to “over twenty hours” per week. The questions asked about four types of activities:

- “Parish administrative or supervisory work” (asked to parish priests only)
- “Visiting or counseling parishioners”⁸
- “Personal prayer” (asked to all non-retired priests)
- “Preparing for the Sunday homily” (asked to all non-retired priests)

The table below summarizes the results for parish priests (those assigned as pastors or associate pastors/parochial vicars). Of the four activities, parish priests tend to spend the least amount of time preparing for the Sunday homily. They tend to spend somewhat more time in administrative work than in visiting or counseling parishioners or in personal prayer.

Hours Spent in Various Tasks During a Typical Week				
General Sample of CARA Priest Poll 2002, Priests in Parish Ministry Only				
	Admin. or Supervisory Work	Visiting or Counseling Parishioners	Personal Prayer	Preparing for the Sunday Homily
Two hours or less	13%	14%	14%	25%
Three to five	21	34	29	53
Six to ten	27	28	38	19
Eleven to fifteen	16	15	14	2
Sixteen to twenty	11	6	3	1
Over twenty hours	12	3	2	0

⁸This question was originally intended to be asked to parish priests only (it seems to make little sense for non-parish priests). However, due to an error in questionnaire skip logic, it was asked to all priests in active ministry. As would be expected, a large number of non-parish priests volunteered that this item did not apply to them or chose the “two hours or less” option, presumably because the literal response of “no hours” fits there. Still, more than 40 percent of non-parish priests gave some other (valid) answer. They may be referring to counseling with other types of people they serve (not parishioners). Though this is interesting, this analysis excludes their responses since it cannot be interpreted in the same context. For similar reasons, responses of “does not apply” for any item have also been excluded from the percentages.

In the table below, the six categories of responses for each type of activity are combined with information on hours worked per week to produce an estimate of the average *percentage* of their working time that priests spend in each.⁹ Thus, parish priests may be said to spend about 16 percent of their work time in parish administrative or supervisory work. Not surprisingly, pastors tend to report larger proportions of time in these activities than associate pastors/parochial vicars, who tend to spend a greater proportion of time visiting or counseling parishioners and in personal prayer.¹⁰ In general, priests report spending about an equal proportion of time preparing for the Sunday homily. There are, at most, minimal differences between religious and diocesan priests on any of the measures.

Average Percentage of Time Spent in Various Tasks During a Typical Week				
General Sample of CARA Priest Poll 2002, Priests in Parish Ministry Only				
	Administration, Supervisory Work	Visiting or Counseling Parishioners	Personal Prayer	Preparing for the Sunday Homily
All Parish Priests	16%	12%	12%	7%
By Type of Ministry				
Diocesan, pastor	18	11	11	7
Diocesan, assoc./vicar	11	15	14	8
Religious, pastor	17	11	11	7
Religious, assoc./vicar	9	14	13	7
By Parish Size (Households)				
200 or fewer	15	10	13	8
201 to 500	17	11	13	8
501 to 1,200	16	12	11	7
1,201 to 2,000	15	12	10	7
Over 2,000	16	15	12	7
Note: The 1 percent of parish priests who report working fewer than 30 hours per week are excluded to avoid inflating the percentages.				

⁹This figure is an *estimate* on two counts: the categories are inexact (especially the upper category of “over twenty hours”) and the number of hours per week is, itself, an estimate.

¹⁰It is not clear if personal prayer was counted by most priests as part of their work time or not.

Though it may appear in the table that there is little relationship between parish size and the proportion of time spent in administrative or supervisory work, a relationship becomes evident when examining only pastors (excluding associate pastors/parochial vicars). Pastors in parishes with 200 or fewer registered households spend about 15 percent of their time on such tasks. Pastors in parishes with over 2,000 parishioners average about 21 percent of their time on these tasks (these figures for pastors only are not shown in the table).

Another relationship between parish size and time in a particular activity is evident in the table. Priests serving larger parishes tend to spend a greater proportion of their time visiting and counseling parishioners. This is partly but not entirely attributable to the fact that there are relatively few associate pastors/parochial vicars serving in smaller parishes. As seen above, priests in this type of assignment tend to spend more time than pastors in visiting and counseling.

In research on mainline Protestant pastors, Perl (2002) found that those who tend to spend a relatively greater percentage of their time in administrative tasks tend to spend a relatively smaller percentage in one-on-one interaction with congregation members. Though the data from the CARA Priest Poll 2002 are more limited, there is no evidence of such a trade-off between administration and visiting or counseling parishioners. If this were the case, one would expect a negative correlation between the proportion of time spent in each of these tasks—in other words, an increase in one would correspond to a decrease in the other.

However, such a correlation does not exist. It may be that most Catholic priests assigned to parishes do not experience such a tradeoff between administrative and pastoral tasks because they increase the overall number of hours worked when their administrative responsibilities increase. Such speculation fits with the long hours worked by many priests. It may be that as a result of a sense of call to provide pastoral ministry and a sense of necessity to perform basic administrative and supervisory functions, Catholic parish priests do not “trade-off” functions so much as “trade up” functions—thereby working longer and longer hours. As the findings in the following section show, most priests do not want to be spending as much time on administration and supervision as they currently do.

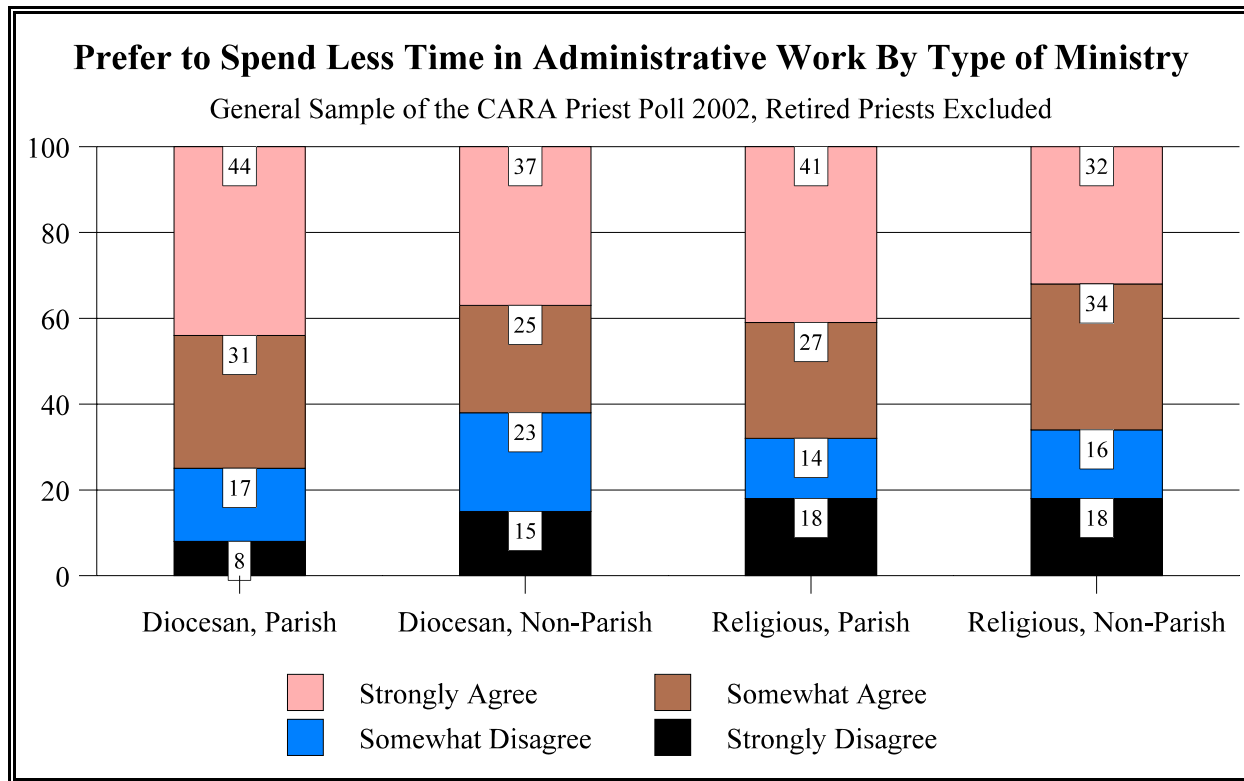
Preference for Less Administrative Work

The CARA Priest Poll 2002 also asked all non-retired priests to express agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “I would prefer to spend less time in administrative or supervisory work.” This question makes it possible to gauge whether priests feel unsatisfied the extent of their administrative responsibilities, which is a somewhat distinct issue from the objective amount of time they spend in such tasks.

As the table below shows, 70 percent of non-retired priests agree either “somewhat” or “strongly” that they would prefer spending less time in administration or supervision. The table separately shows the responses of recently ordained priests. From time to time, previous CARA surveys of individual diocesan presbyterates and members of religious institutes have suggested that more recently ordained priests, especially associate pastors/parochial vicars, sometimes desire more responsibility, including administrative responsibility. However, the results below show that recently ordained priests express a level of agreement closely similar to priests overall regarding administrative or supervisory work.

<i>I would prefer to spend less time in administrative or supervisory work.</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained Only
Strongly agree	40%	33%
Somewhat agree	30	35
Somewhat disagree	17	22
Strongly disagree	13	10

Diocesan priests in parish ministry are most likely to agree that they would prefer to spend less time in administrative or supervisory work. As the graph below shows, 44 percent “strongly” agree. In comparison, 32 percent of religious priests serving in non-parish ministry agree “strongly.” This is generally parallel to differences in hours worked per week, where diocesan priests in parish ministry generally work the most hours and religious priests in non-parish ministry the least. In both cases, though, differences remain relatively small overall.



As might be expected based on the relative proportions of time they spend in such tasks, pastors are somewhat more likely than associate pastors/parochial vicars to agree either “strongly” or “somewhat” that they would prefer less administrative or supervisory work (76 percent compared with 66 percent; results are not shown in the graph).

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a relationship between the number of hours parish priests spend in administration each week and their preference for less administrative work. Fifty-two percent of parish priests who report spending two hours or less in administrative or supervisory work in a typical week agree at least “somewhat” that they would prefer less administrative or supervisory work. In comparison, 83 percent of parish priests who report spending at least sixteen hours per week in administrative or supervisory work agree they would prefer less administrative or supervisory work. Thus, it is not the case that parish priests who put in relatively longer hours on administration or supervision are doing so because they get greater satisfaction from these activities. If anything, the reverse is true. Parish priests generally want to spend less time in administrative and supervisory activities and, in general, the more time they spend in these activities the less they want to do them.

Sense of Being Too Busy

A pair of questions in the CARA Priest Poll 2002 were designed to examine the extent to which priests feel they are too busy. They were asked whether they are too busy to pray as much as they would like and whether they are too busy to meet most of the pastoral needs of the people they serve. These are somewhat more subjective measures of priests' work loads than hours worked per week.

Measures of Feeling Too Busy			
General Sample of the CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded			
	All Non-Retired Priests	Diocesan Only	Religious Only
<i>I am too busy to pray as much as I would like.</i>			
Strongly agree	8%	9%	8%
Somewhat agree	28	29	27
Somewhat disagree	24	25	21
Strongly disagree	40	37	44
<i>I am too busy to meet most of the pastoral needs of the people I serve.</i>			
Strongly agree	6%	7%	5%
Somewhat agree	19	21	20
Somewhat disagree	31	25	25
Strongly disagree	44	47	50

Fewer than one in ten priests agree “strongly” that they are too busy either to pray as much as they would like or to meet most pastoral needs of those they serve. A majority disagree with both statements. Thus, these measures do not appear to indicate that large proportions of priests experience their work load as getting in the way of meeting personal and ministerial needs. This contrasts with the finding that well over half of priests in active ministry say they experience the problem of “too much work” to at least “some” extent.

Parish priests are more likely than non-parish priests to agree with both statements, though the differences (not shown in the table) are relatively small. This may suggest that parish priests do not experience highly disproportionate pressures in trying to meet the needs of parishioners in comparison to priests who serve other populations.

Another somewhat unexpected finding is that there is not a strong relationship between hours worked per week and feeling too busy to pray or to meet pastoral needs. Priests who work 40 or fewer hours per week are indeed somewhat less likely than all others to “somewhat” or “strongly” agree that they are too busy for these activities (23 percent in terms of praying and 15 percent in terms of meeting pastoral needs). But there are only negligible differences between priests who work 41 to 50 hours per week and those working over 80 hours per week. (Note that these findings are not shown in the table above.)

As discussed above, there is apparently no direct “trade-off” between the proportion of hours that parish priests spend in administrative work and the proportion they spend visiting and counseling parishioners. A sense of conflict between administrative and pastoral duties does appear, however, when examining time in administration and whether priests feel too busy to meet the needs of those they serve. As the table below shows, parish priests who report spending over twenty hours a week on administrative or supervisory work are twice as likely to agree (either “somewhat” or “strongly”) that they are too busy to meet all the pastoral needs of the people they serve (44 percent compared to 20 percent).

Percentage Who Agree They are Too Busy to Meet All the Pastoral Needs of the People they Serve	
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Parish Priests Only	
All Parish Priests	30%
By Absolute Hours Per Week Spent on Administration	
Two hours or less per week	20
Three to five hours	23
Six to ten hours	30
Eleven to fifteen hours	32
Sixteen to twenty hours	40
Over twenty hours per week	44
By Percentage of Weekly Work Time Spent on Administration	
Five percent or less	22
Six to ten percent	26
Eleven to fifteen percent	28
Sixteen to twenty-five percent	38
Over twenty-five percent	40

Work Load Among Priests Assigned to Multiple Parishes

An increasingly common way that dioceses are dealing with the constraints of fewer priests is by “clustering” or “linking” parishes. This arrangement often places one pastor in charge of a pair or group (cluster) of parishes. Parish priests responding to the 2002 poll were asked: “Do you currently serve in more than one parish, for example parishes that are linked, twinned, or clustered? Or do you just serve in one parish?” Twenty-seven percent reported serving in more than one parish. Presumably, being in charge of more than one parish can be a source of additional stress for priests. We have heard anecdotal evidence of priests in such situations experiencing strain in having to travel between the parishes and sometimes deal with two or more pastoral councils, staffs, sets of volunteers, and so forth. For this reason, we expected that priests serving in more than one parish would disproportionately fall in the upper ranges of the various measures of work load that have been presented thus far. In other words, we expected that they would work longer hours, feel busier, and express greater dissatisfaction with their administrative responsibilities than other priests.

However, priests serving in more than one parish do not report working significantly more hours than their counterparts who serve in just one parish. This may be due to the already large number of hours worked reported by all parish priests, especially pastors and those in larger parishes. There is also no evidence in other survey responses of other strains being greater than for parish priests in general. Priests assigned to the pastoral care of multiple parishes are no more or less likely to report having too little time to pray or to meet the needs of their parishioners. And they are no more or less likely to say they would prefer less administrative work.

The Relationship Between Aspects of Work Load and Satisfaction

This subsection of the paper examines the relationship between measures of work load and general satisfaction. The purpose is to infer the extent to which a large or excessive work load may contribute to dissatisfaction. We begin with the most general measure of work load available in the two polls – the extent to which priests in the 2001 poll say they experience “too much work.” As seen earlier, 68 percent of non-retired priests say they experience this either “some” or “a great deal.” The table below shows that 78 percent of all non-retired respondents to the 2001 poll are categorized as “highly satisfied” on the combined measure of satisfaction with priestly life and ministry. The table then breaks this down separately for priests giving each of four responses to the question about too much work. Eighty-eight percent of priests who say they do not experience too much work are highly satisfied. In comparison, only 71 percent of priests who say they experience too much work “a great deal” are highly satisfied.

Percentage Who Are “Highly Satisfied” (“Strongly Agree” with All Three Satisfaction Statements) CARA Priest Poll 2001, Retired Priests Excluded	
All Non-Retired Priests	78%
By Extent to Which Non-Retired Priests Say They Experience “Too Much Work”	
None	88
A little	76
Some	77
A great deal	71

The question about the experience of too much work was one in a series of five in the 2001 poll on the extent to which priests experience each of several potential problems in their lives and ministry. They were also asked the extent to which they experience “unrealistic expectations or demands from superiors,” “unrealistic expectations or demands from people you serve,” “negative attitudes toward priests,” and “lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests.”

Experiencing a lack of encouragement or support from other priests is much more strongly related to satisfaction than experiencing too much work. And experiencing unrealistic expectations or demands from superiors is also more strongly related to satisfaction. Thus, the perception of having too much work is a predictor of priests’ satisfaction, though not nearly the most important.

Of course, this finding reveals little about which specific aspects of priests' work load contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. We next examine the various aspects of work load measured in the CARA Priest Poll 2002. These are compared with the one measure of general satisfaction in the same poll – level of agreement with the statement, “I have seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.”

Previous research has suggested that, among non-retired priests, there is little relationship between the number of hours per week they work and their satisfaction. This may be because priests who work long hours often do so for various reasons. As Hoge has found in as yet unpublished research, some priests who work long hours do so out of a strong sense of mission and service, not necessarily because they have to. However, some previous research has suggested that priests who are able to schedule a day off from work each week express greater satisfaction than others, even if they work the same number of hours in a week.¹¹

In the CARA Priest Poll 2002, there are no significant relationships between the amount of time that priests currently work – either the overall number of hours per week or the proportion spent in particular tasks – and having thought seriously about leaving the priesthood in the previous five years. This seems to reflect previous findings of no relationship between hours worked and priestly satisfaction. However, apparently in contrast to previous findings, the data show no relationship between having a day off (i.e., working 6 days or less in a typical week) and having thought seriously about leaving.

Nevertheless, priests who express agreement on three opinion items – feeling too busy to meet all the needs of the people they serve, feeling too busy to pray, and preferring to spend less time in administration – are more likely than those who express disagreement to have thought about leaving the priesthood in the previous five years. These relationships are illustrated in the table on the following page. For purposes of simplicity, the satisfaction measure is dichotomized into just two categories. One represents those who “strongly *disagree*” that they have considered leaving the priesthood, and the other category represents those who selected any other response.

¹¹This comes from a proprietary survey conducted by a colleague in the sociology of religion who asks that we not publicize the study at this time.

Eighty percent of all non-retired priests in the general sample “strongly disagree” that they have seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the last five years. However, this decreases to 73 percent among priests who “strongly agree” that they would prefer less administrative work, to 60 percent among priests who strongly agree they are too busy to pray, and 56 percent among priests who strongly agree they are too busy to meet the pastoral needs of those they serve. In general, the relationships are parallel – though not quite as strong – among recently ordained priests.

Percentage Who “Strongly Disagree” That They Have Seriously Thought About Leaving the Priesthood in the Last Five Years CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
All Non-Retired Priests	80%	76%
By Feeling Too Busy to Pray		
Strongly disagree	89	78
Somewhat disagree	76	77
Somewhat agree	78	82
Strongly agree	60	54
By Feeling Too Busy to Meet Pastoral Needs		
Strongly disagree	90	86
Somewhat disagree	80	78
Somewhat agree	65	68
Strongly agree	56	57
By Preferring Less Administrative Work		
Strongly disagree	94	81
Somewhat disagree	86	77
Somewhat agree	78	77
Strongly agree	73	73

We conclude that the *amount* of time a priest works – either overall time or amount of time in administration is not, in and of itself, a cause of higher or lower satisfaction. However, the way priests *feel* about that amount of work is rather strongly related to satisfaction. It appears that if they feel they face a large amount of work for reasons beyond their control, especially administrative obligations, their satisfaction declines. Arguably, the most important of the three relationships in the table above is the one between satisfaction and preferring less administrative work. This is because a relatively large proportion of priests prefer less administrative work while only a minority feel too busy either to pray or meet the needs of those they serve.

Support Structures and Networks

This section of the paper explores the extent to which priests experience several types of personal and professional support in their lives today. These support structures include spiritual sources of support – activities that promote reflection and prayer such as participation in retreats and spiritual direction. They also include interactional sources of support, such as friendships and relations with superiors.

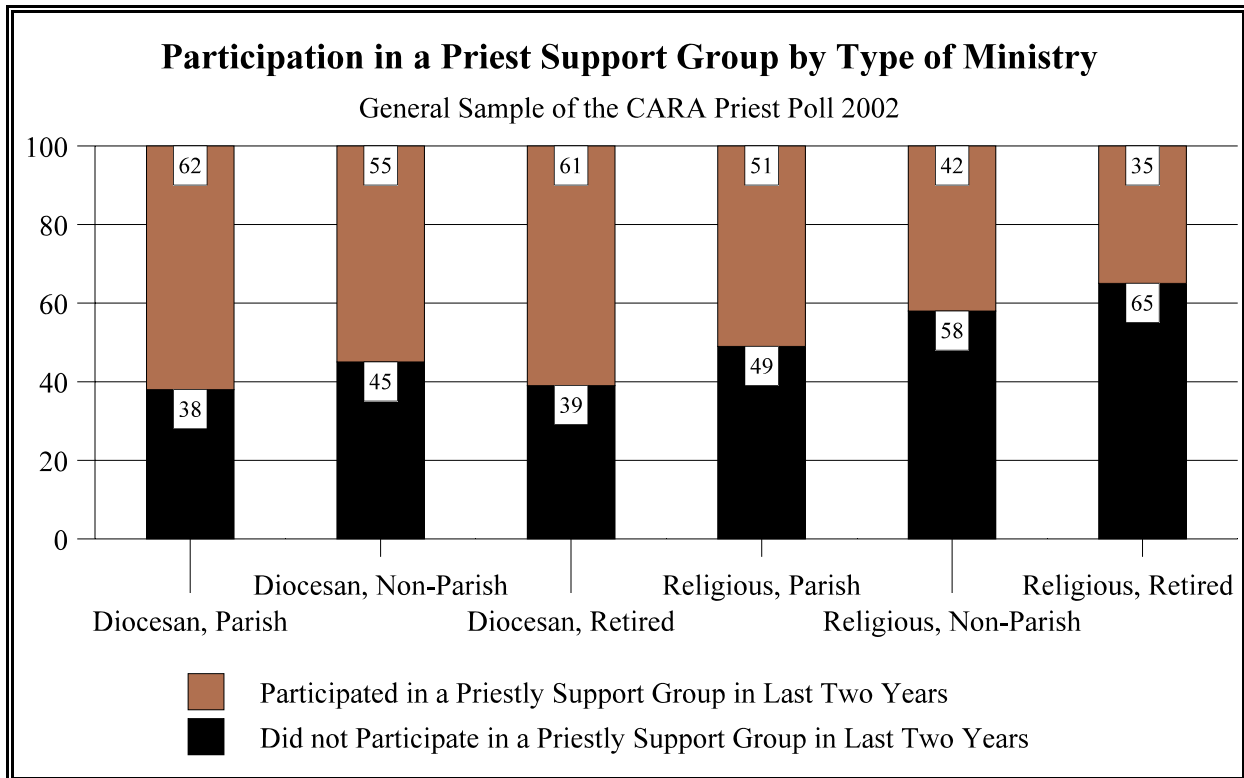
Priest Support Groups

The first source of support is one that bridges the categories of spiritual and interactional support. In both the 2001 and 2002 polls, priests were asked about participation in support groups of priests. As will be seen below, these are often settings for both spiritual reflection and social interaction with friends.

Question wording in the two polls varied slightly. Respondents to the 2001 poll were asked: “During the last 12 months did you participate in a support group for priests?” Forty-eight percent of priests replied that they had. In the 2002 poll, however, the time frame for participation was expanded from one to two years: “Have you participated in a priestly support group in the last two years?” This alteration in wording produced only a slight change in results; 54 percent of priests in the general sample reported they had. For priests ordained in the previous ten years, the percentage is slightly higher (61 percent), a statistically significant but not particularly large difference.

<i>During the last twelve months did you participate in a support group for priests?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2001		
Yes	48%	
No	52	
<i>Have you participated in a priestly support group in the last two years?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
Yes	54%	61%
No	46	39

Participation in support groups is most common among diocesan priests in parish ministry. As shown in the graph below (with results taken from the 2002 poll), 62 percent have participated in the previous two years. Rates of participation are generally lower among religious than diocesan priests, with only 42 percent of religious priests in non-parish ministry and only 35 percent of retired religious priests having participated in the past two years.



In the 2001 poll only, a follow-up question asked priests who had participated in a support group whether it was primarily social or whether it was for prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection. Only 14 percent of these priests report that their support group is primarily social. But 43 percent volunteer that the group is *both* social and spiritual in nature – a very large percentage for a response not overtly suggested by question wording. Religious priests are more likely than diocesan priests to report that the groups they participate in are primarily for prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection. And religious priests are less likely to volunteer that the groups are both social and spiritual.

<i>Is the support group primarily social or is it for prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection?</i>	
CARA Priest Poll 2001, Only Priests who Participated in a Support Group in the Previous Year	
All Priests	
Primarily social	14%
For prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection	43
Both (volunteered response)	43
Diocesan Priests Only	
Primarily social	16%
For prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection	37
Both (volunteered response)	47
Religious Priests Only	
Primarily social	9%
For prayer, spirituality, or theological reflection	58
Both (volunteered response)	33

Retreats

Eighty-four percent of priests in the 2001 poll and 85 percent in the 2002 poll report having made a retreat during the previous year. These findings reflect the similar wording used in 2001 and 2002 on this topic, in comparison to the questions about participating in priestly support groups.

The proportion of priests reporting making an annual retreat varies very little among priests in different ministries or of different generations. It also varies very little between priests born in the United States and foreign born priests. It therefore appears that the factors determining which priests are unable to make an annual retreat, or who choose not to do so, are more random than systemic in nature.

<i>During the last twelve months did you go on an annual retreat?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2001		
Yes	84%	
No	15	
 <i>Did you make a retreat during the past twelve months?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
Yes	85%	86%
No	15	14

Spiritual Direction

Both the 2001 and 2002 polls asked priests whether they participate in spiritual direction. The wording, however, was different. The 2001 poll asked whether priests met with a spiritual director in the last twelve months, and the 2002 poll asked if they currently have a spiritual director. In both cases, more than half report participating in spiritual direction, and the variation that does exist may be explained as a result of the question wording.

In the 2002 poll, recently ordained priests are significantly more likely than priests in the general sample to report having a spiritual director. This appears to reflect, in part, age differences. Younger priests are more likely than older priests to have spiritual directors. Fifty-one percent of members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation have a spiritual director, compared with 60 percent of Vatican II Generation members and 63 percent of Post-Vatican II Generation members. Among priests ordained in the last 10 years, 63 percent of Vatican II members and 71 percent of Post-Vatican II members have spiritual directors.

<i>During the last twelve months did you meet with a spiritual director other than a retreat director?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2001		
Yes	63%	
No	37	
<i>Do you have a spiritual director?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
Yes	55%	69%
No	45	31

In addition to age, participation in spiritual direction varies with a number of other characteristics of priests.

- Diocesan priests are more likely than religious priests to have a spiritual director (61 percent compared to 51 percent in the 2002 poll).
- Priests residing in more urban areas and serving in larger parishes tend to be somewhat more likely than priests in rural areas and smaller parishes to participate in spiritual direction.
- Among members of the Post-Vatican II Generation, foreign born priests are more likely to have a spiritual director than those born in the United States (85 percent

compared to 67 percent in the 2002 poll). There are no differences on the basis of country of birth among priests of the older generations.

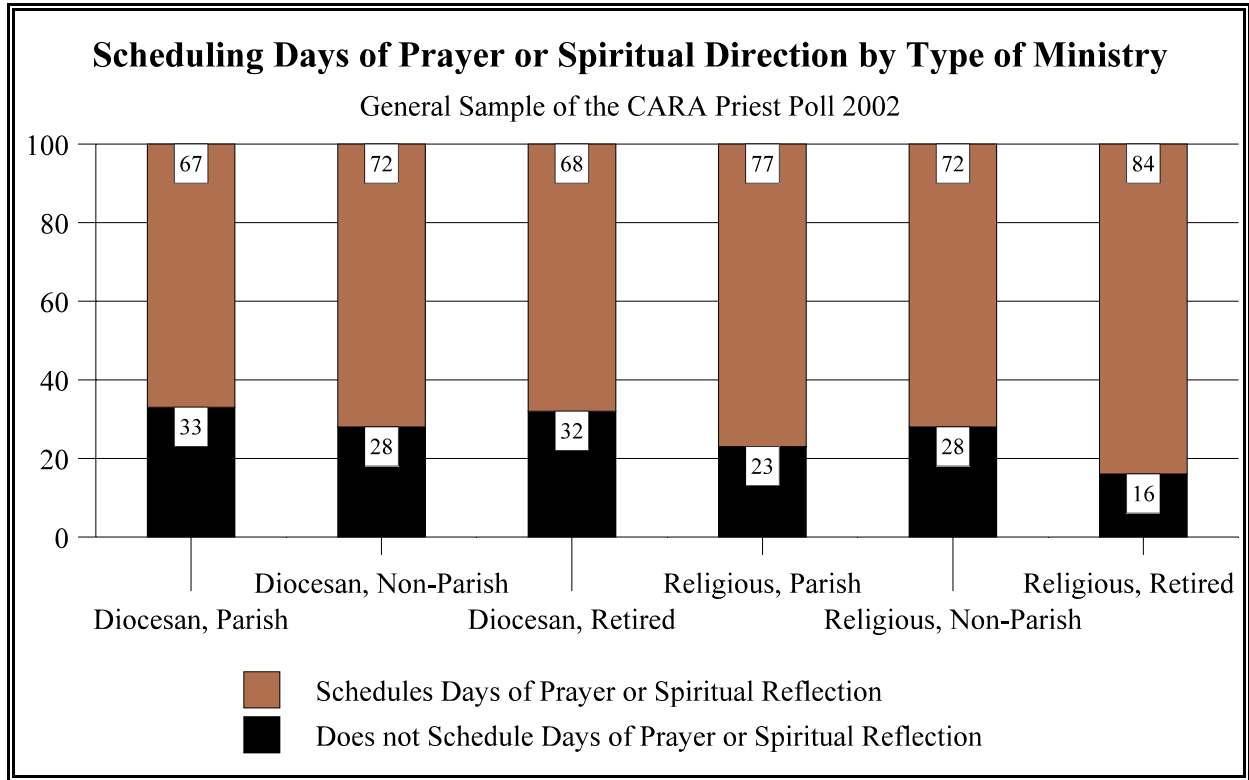
Days of Prayer or Spiritual Reflection

In the 2002 poll only, priests were asked whether they schedule days of prayer and spiritual reflection for themselves. Seventy-one percent of priests in the general sample report that they do. The proportion is somewhat higher among recently ordained priests. However, this is not a generational difference because, on the whole, older priests are actually slightly more likely than younger priests to schedule days of prayer or spiritual reflection.

<i>Do you schedule days of prayer or spiritual reflection for yourself?</i>		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
Yes	71%	78%
No	29	22

Foreign born priests are more likely than those who were born in the United States to schedule days of prayer and spiritual reflection for themselves (88 percent compared to 70 percent). Contrary to the case with spiritual direction, however, this holds for all generations, not just the Post-Vatican II Generation.

Religious priests tend to be slightly more likely than diocesan priests to report that they schedule days of prayer or spiritual reflection for themselves. However, this tends to be the case only when comparing priests in parish ministry or retired priests. Religious and diocesan priests in non-parish ministry are equally likely to schedule days of prayer or spiritual reflection.



Friendships

In the 2002 poll, priests were asked about friendships. They were asked to describe the proportion of their close friends who are priests and the proportion who are parishioners or former parishioners. Five response categories ranged from “none” to “all.” In general, priests’ close friendships include relatively large proportions of other priests. Two-thirds (67 percent) report that at least half their close friends are priests. However, only one in 20 (5 percent) report all close friends to be priests. Finally, 7 percent of priests report having no close friends at all. This latter group, as will be seen, is particularly likely to report having thought about leaving the priesthood.

About one-third (35 percent) of priests who have ever served in parish ministry say that half or more of their close friends are parishioners or former parishioners. Of this group, one in four have no close friends who are priests; all the rest (75 percent) have at least some close friends who are priests.

Friendships with Other Priests and Parishioners		
CARA Priest Poll 2002		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
<i>How many of your close friends are priests?</i>		
[No close friends]	7%	3%
None	2	1
Fewer than half	24	26
About half	35	41
Most	27	26
All your friends	5	3
<i>How many of your close friends are parishioners or former parishioners?*</i>		
[No close friends]	7%	3%
None	18	18
Fewer than half	40	53
About half	24	19
Most	8	7
All your friends	3	<1
*Asked only of priests who have ever served in parish ministry.		

Support from Fellow Priests

As was seen earlier in this paper, respondents to the 2001 poll were asked the extent to which they experience the problem of “lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests.” The table below shows the response frequencies for this question. About two-thirds of priests say they experience lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests at least “a little,” though only about one-tenth say they experience it “a great deal.”

Extent to Which Priests Experience the Problem of “Lack of Encouragement or Support from Fellow Priests”	
CARA Priest Poll 2001	
None	32%
A little	26
Some	31
A great deal	11

In general, older priests are least likely to say they experience lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests. Sixty-four percent of members of the Pre-Vatican II Generation say they experience this problem at least “a little.” This compares to 75 percent of members of each of the two younger generations.

Relationships with Superiors

Respondents to the 2001 poll were asked about relationships with their superiors – diocesan priests about their bishop and religious priests about their religious superiors. They were asked the extent to which they agreed with two statements, one about their own relationship with their bishops or superiors and a second about the understanding and support of their bishops or superiors toward priests in general in the dioceses or religious community.

As the table below shows, 70 percent of diocesan priests “strongly agree” that they have a good relationship with their bishop, with just 6 percent disagreeing either “strongly” or “somewhat.” Fewer, 59 percent strongly agree that their bishop understands and supports the priests in the diocese, with 12 percent in disagreement.

Diocesan Priests' Views of Their Relationships with Their Bishops	
CARA Priest Poll 2001	
<i>I have a good relationship with my bishop.</i>	
Strongly agree	70%
Somewhat agree	24
Somewhat disagree	3
Strongly disagree	3
<i>My bishop understands and supports the priests in his diocese.</i>	
Strongly agree	59%
Somewhat agree	29
Somewhat disagree	6
Strongly disagree	6

In comparison to diocesan priests, religious priests tend to be more positive about their relationships with superiors. Eighty-two percent strongly agree that they have a good relationship with their religious superiors, and 70 percent strongly agree that their superiors understand support the needs of members of the religious community.

Religious Priests' Views of Their Relationships with Their Superiors	
CARA Priest Poll 2001	
<i>I have a good relationship with the religious superiors in my religious community.</i>	
Strongly agree	82%
Somewhat agree	15
Somewhat disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1
<i>My religious superiors understand and support the needs of members of my religious community</i>	
Strongly agree	70%
Somewhat agree	26
Somewhat disagree	3
Strongly disagree	1

The Relationship Between Sources of Support and Satisfaction

On the whole, there is little relationship between participation in any of the activities of spiritual support (support groups, retreats, spiritual direction, and scheduling days of prayer or reflection) and any of the measures of general satisfaction available in the CARA Priest Polls. The only statistically significant relationship is exhibited by scheduling days of prayer or spiritual reflection. Among priests of the Post-Vatican II Generation only, those who do schedule such days are significantly less likely than those who do not to agree that they have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the past five years (8 percent compared to 22 percent).

Relationships are generally stronger when it comes to interactional sources of support. As has already been seen, a very strong inverse relationship exists between satisfaction and experiencing lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests. Similarly, there is a relatively strong relationship between satisfaction and having close friends who are priests. As the table below shows, those who count a higher proportion of priests among their close friends are more likely than those with a smaller proportion to “strongly *disagree*” that they have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the past five years.¹² Note that while this appears to be the case with recently ordained priests as well as priests in general, fewer numbers of recently ordained priests make the relationship more difficult to observe.

Percentage Who “Strongly <i>Disagree</i>” That They Have Seriously Thought About Leaving the Priesthood in the Last Five Years		
CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded		
	General Sample	Recently Ordained
All Non-Retired Priests	80%	76%
By Proportion of Close Friends Who Are Priests		
None or no close friends	70	—*
Fewer than half	77	68
About half	78	79
Most	87	80
All your friends	92	—*
*Too few cases.		

There is no relationship between the proportion of priests’ friends who are parishioners and the likelihood that they have seriously considered leaving the priesthood in the last five years.

¹²This analysis is limited to non-retired priests, partly to be consistent with other analyses but also because very few retired priests have seriously considered leaving the priesthood.

There is also a significant relationship between priests' satisfaction and their perceptions of the support of their superiors. The table below examines attitudes on whether one's superiors are understanding and supportive of priests in the diocese.¹³ Overall, 77 percent of non-retired diocesan priests are classified as "highly satisfied" on the combined measure of satisfaction calculated from the CARA Priest Poll 2001. However, this drops to 48 percent among those who *strongly disagree* that their bishop understands and supports the priests of the diocese. A similar relationship appears to exist among non-retired religious priests, but there are too few who disagree that their superiors are understanding and supportive for reliable statistical analysis.

These results appear to be in accord with Hoge's (2002) findings that satisfaction with relationships with superiors significantly predicts whether priests resign or stay in the active ministry.

Percentage Who Are "Highly Satisfied" ("Strongly Agree" with All Three Satisfaction Statements)	
CARA Priest Poll 2001, Retired Priests Excluded	
All Non-Retired Diocesan Priests	77%
By Agreement that the Bishop Understands and Supports Priests in the Diocese (Non-Retired Diocesan Priests Only)	
Strongly agree	86
Somewhat agree	70
Somewhat disagree	49
Strongly disagree	48
All Non-Retired Religious Priests	78%
By Agreement that Religious Superiors Understand and Support the Needs of Members of the Community (Non-Retired Religious Priests Only)	
Strongly agree	85
Somewhat agree	69
Somewhat disagree	—*
Strongly disagree	—*
*Too few cases.	

¹³This measure is used rather than that for one's own relationship with the bishop or superiors because responses to the latter, as have been seen, are substantially more skewed toward the positive end of the response scale.

In summary, spiritual sources of support measured in the CARA Priest Polls are generally not related to satisfaction. The only item that shows a significant relationship with satisfaction is scheduling days of prayer and reflection for oneself – and this holds only for the youngest generation of priests. This relationship is somewhat interesting because, as was seen earlier in the paper, there is no relationship between satisfaction and having a day off in a typical week (among any priests, including members of the Post-Vatican II Generation). It may be that, for young priests, it is not so much being able to have a day off from work but the way in which that day is used that is important.

In contrast to the spiritual sources of support, several interactional sources of support are strong predictors of satisfaction. This is true for experiencing little lack of support from fellow priests, for having a large proportion of priests among one's friends, and for feeling that one's bishop or superiors are generally supportive of priests. Given the relationship between satisfaction and having friends who are priests, it is interesting that there is no relationship between satisfaction and participating in priestly support groups, which are often at least partly social in nature.

Summary

This paper has examined three main topics related to priestly life: satisfaction, work load, and sources of support among priests in the United States today. It has also explored the extent to which work load and support contribute to satisfaction. We now briefly review the findings.

Priests' satisfaction levels, as measured in the CARA Priest Polls, are quite high. One reason for this is almost certainly that priests who are dissatisfied tend to leave active ministry. However, the limitations of the measures should also be kept in mind. As a general rule, respondents to surveys (whether priests or anybody else) tend to express higher satisfaction when the scope is broad, for example satisfaction with their life in general, than when they are asked to evaluate very specific aspects of their lives. The measures used in this paper are broad; they ask about one's life as a priest, ministry, and thoughts about leaving the priesthood. Clearly, overall satisfaction among priests tends to be high, but it should not, therefore, be automatically concluded that most priests have no feelings of discontent in their daily lives.

As we expected, many non-retired priests report working relatively long hours in a typical week, and the majority describe themselves as experiencing "too much work" to at least "some" extent. Most parish priests, and many priests in non-parish ministry, report being on-call 24 hours a day, something that may compound their perceived work load. Parish priests spend an average of 16 percent of their typical work week on administrative or supervisory tasks. The majority say they would prefer less administrative work. Despite these concerns, most priests do not describe themselves as too busy to pray or too busy to meet all the needs of the people they serve.

The number of hours priests work is not related to their general satisfaction. But negative perceptions about work load, including the perception of experiencing overwork, do tend to decrease satisfaction. Feeling too busy to pray, feeling too busy to meet all the needs of the people they serve, and wanting less administrative work are all related to lower satisfaction. The amount of administrative work priests face does not directly predict their satisfaction levels. However, more administrative work does increase the likelihood that priests want less administrative responsibility and that they feel too busy to meet the needs of those they serve. And, as has been seen, these attitudes increase the likelihood that priests express dissatisfaction. On the whole, results suggest that work load is not as important in determining satisfaction as relationships with fellow priests and superiors, discussed in further detail below.

A majority of priests take advantage of each of three spiritual sources of support examined in the CARA Priest Polls: making an annual retreat, participating in spiritual direction, and scheduling days of prayer and spiritual reflection for themselves. About half of priests take part in a support group for priests; a large proportion of these groups appear to be both spiritual/reflective and social in nature. Findings about interactional sources of support are also generally positive. Most priests report having a large proportion of other priests among their close friends, and fewer than half describe themselves as experiencing a lack of support or encouragement from fellow priests. Finally, most priests view their bishop or superiors as

supportive and understanding toward priests and describe their own relationship with their bishop or superior as good.

For the most part, taking advantage of spiritual sources of support is unrelated to priests' general satisfaction. By contrast, interactional sources of support tend to be strong predictors of satisfaction. Priests who perceive a lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests, who have relatively few close friends who are priests, and who view their bishop or superiors as unsupportive are more likely than others to express dissatisfaction. The strongest relationship is exhibited by perceiving a lack of encouragement or support from fellow priests.

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