



Summary Report

Serving Dioceses, Parishes and Religious Communities Since 1964

Spring 2000

Priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago: Moving into a New Century with Hope and Vision

A CARA Survey of the Priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago

A survey of the priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago was recently completed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The report was commissioned as part of a jubilee gift of the Ordination Class of 1972. Its goal is to help identify the needs and concerns of the priests of the Archdiocese to support them in their ministry and life and ultimately all those whom they serve.

Dr. Bryan T. Froehle, CARA's Executive Director, led the project, together with Drs. Mary L. Gautier and Mary E. Bendyna, RSM. Questionnaire review and testing was led by the Rev. Louis J. Cameli, Archdiocesan Director of Ongoing Formation for Priests, together with the Rev. Ronald Lewinski, acting on behalf of the Class of 1972 that sponsored the project.

During Fall 1999, CARA distributed questionnaires to all 915 priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago in a multiple step mail and follow-up process. A total of 497 completed returns were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 54 percent. The survey involved 219 close-ended questions on priestly ministry and life, most using four-point scales.

There were also two open-ended questions: "How does your ministry and life as a priest support the mission of this local church?" and "What could the Archdiocese do to support your ministry and life as a priest?" The comments provided were analyzed using special software. Examples of the most commonly mentioned issues are provided in this summary.

Respondents average 57 years of age, and half were ordained before 1969. Most attended Catholic elementary schools and the Chicago seminary system. Ninety-five percent were born in the U.S., and almost all belong to European ethnic groups, with over 47 percent reporting some level of Irish ancestry, 16 percent Polish ancestry, and 13 percent German ancestry, among others.

Half of those responding live with two or more other priests, but 23 percent live alone and 19 percent work with no other priests. On average, those in parish ministry serve parishes with a little more than 2,000 families, and five percent serve parishes of more than 4,000 families. Eighty-three percent are in parishes with a Catholic school. Active priests average a ten-hour workday, six days a week, usually with three weeks of vacation. One-fourth are retired, and another 28 percent expect to retire within the next ten years, although most retired priests want to continue serving in ministry in some way.

Generation and Ministry Groupings

All responses have been analyzed in terms of the priests' age and present ministry category. The four age groups are standard generational groupings based on birth years: ages 75 and older (14 percent of the total), ages 57 to 74 (33 percent), ages 39 to 56 (42 percent), and 38 and younger (11 percent).

Classifying priests by their primary ministry is somewhat more difficult because many

have dual assignments. However, most of the non-retired respondents can be put in one of four groups: pastors (36 percent), associate pastors (22 percent), seminary educators (17 percent), and diocesan officials (25 percent).

The study's major findings are highlighted here. More detailed discussion of each major finding appears in the sections that follow. Tables and graphs illustrate the overall results, and the accompanying text describes those results in more detail. Findings are based on descriptive and analytical statistics at univariate, bivariate, and multivariate levels. CARA's findings are based on statistical techniques such as factor analysis, correlation, and regression as well as cross-tabulation.

Analysis was designed to examine underlying patterns of relationships among variables and thus reveal useful insights not otherwise evident. For example, CARA studied the characteristics of priests grouped as the "most highly satisfied"—about 10 percent of the sample—to determine factors that most strongly affect priestly satisfaction.

Key Findings

This summary report is organized around seven key topics, which are discussed in the sections that follow. Those topics correspond to the major findings listed below:

† *Priests feel generally satisfied, and report feeling sufficiently skilled and comfortable in what they do.*

† *Priests' vocations stem from a desire to serve and a sense of God's call. Their motivation to serve in pastoral and sacramental ministry has grown over the years through their faith in Jesus Christ and relationship with Him.*

† *Most priests in active ministry are pastors, and would like to continue serving in some way even after they retire.*

† *Priests value lay ecclesial ministers, deacons, and flexibility in priests' liv-*

ing arrangements, along with other options that have promise to increase the effectiveness of pastoral ministry.

† *Priests' biggest concern is overwork, but not far behind are other related concerns that flow from the pressures of unrealistically high workloads: the need for a stronger prayer life, a sense of isolation, and poor communication.*

† *Priests affirm Archdiocesan leadership and favor more consultative approaches where possible, particularly on the part of the Pastoral Center.*

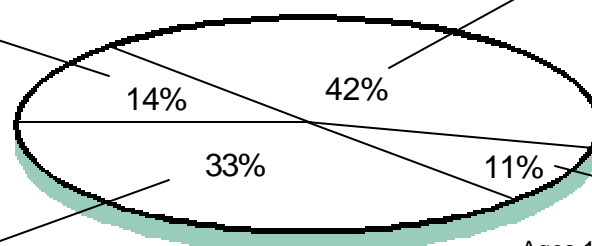
† *Priests most value the opportunity to serve the People of God in the parishes of Archdiocese of Chicago. They look for a systematic vision, as part of a faith community much larger than their local parish, and look for ways the Archdiocese and all its priests together can support each other in a common hope and vision of the Church in Chicago.*

Generational Differences

The following four generational categories cover all respondents, whose ages range from 26 to 93.

Ages 75 and over, the **World War II Generation**, whose world view was affected by the Great Depression and World War II, played a crucial role in creating institutions of 20th century social and religious life, and are often called **Builders**.

Ages 57-74, the **Silent Generation**, have been called so because of their need to conform to the *organizations* built largely by the World War II Generation. They tend to display high levels of loyalty to institutions, including the Church.

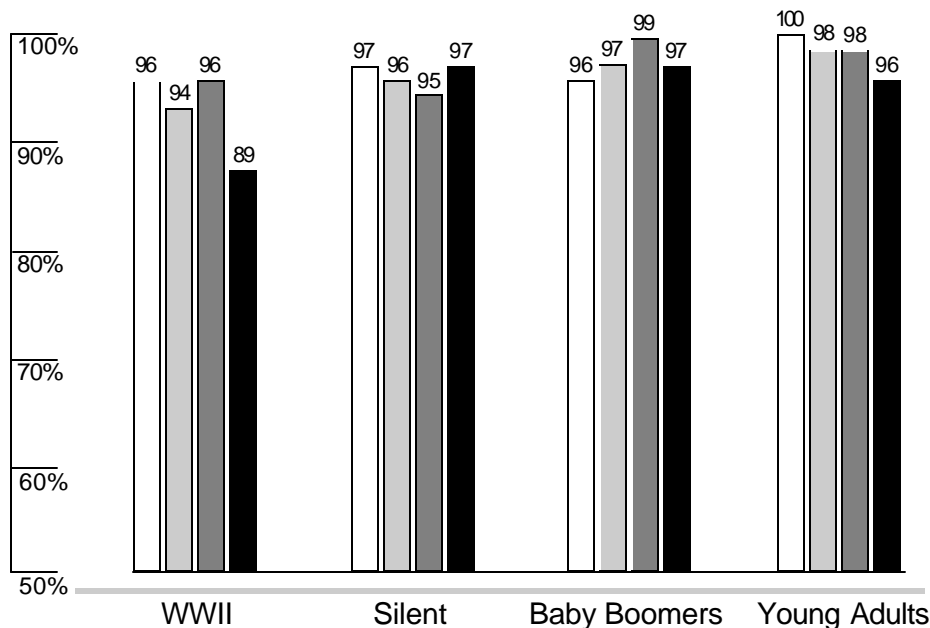


Ages 39-56, the **Vatican II Generation** came of age during the time of the Second Vatican Council. Members of this **Baby Boom** generation tend to emphasize self-actualization over institutional achievement.

Ages 18-38, today's **Young Adults** have no lived experience of the pre-Vatican II Church. Members of so-called **Generation X** were children at a time when divorce rates were climbing and socio-economic problems grew. For that reason they are sometimes called **Survivors**, and are relatively less likely to make long-term commitments, somewhat more likely to be pessimistic and pragmatic, and focus more on issues of identity and community.

Generational Similarities

Percent Responding Positively to Each Statement



Almost all respondents answered positively to all four statements below:

- My faith has grown during my time of priestly service.
- A living relationship with Jesus Christ is central to my ministry and life.
- My faith in Jesus Christ challenges me to greater generosity.
- Faith as both personal and social/ecclesial is what I seek to nurture in myself and my people.

Nearly half report that all these “very much” describe their faith

Satisfaction

Respondents are quite satisfied with their priestly ministry and life. Virtually all express positive relationships with the lay men and women with whom they work. They express positive feelings about doing a good job in ministry, giving good homilies, having the support of the people they serve, and maintaining an optimistic and enthusiastic outlook. More than 90 percent would choose the priesthood again, and six in ten say they frequently encourage young people to consider the priesthood. When asked if they think about leaving the priesthood, only twelve percent at least “somewhat agree,” and just 3 percent “strongly agree.”

Those in the middle two generations are less likely than either the oldest generation (by 17 percentage points) or the youngest generation (by 21 percentage points) to say they frequently encourage young people to enter the priesthood. The oldest two generations are more likely (by 25 percentage points or more) to say their closest friends are priests.

Priests are most comfortable with aspects of ministry and life that involve maintaining good communication and parish unity, preaching to children, ministering with an all-lay staff, shaping the

vision of the parish, and functioning as a public person. They are less comfortable in situations involving stress and conflict, such as handling negative criticism or serving in a changing neighborhood.

They suggest that their needs would be best met by programs that promote spiritual growth, which further on-going formation and education, which build practical skills in computing and parish administration, and promote priest support. When asked if they have participated in continuing education, 87 percent answer affirmatively. Actual participation in continuing education in any given year is a much lower percentage. Most would welcome programs to prepare priests for Hispanic, African American, Polish, and Asian ministries.

Most agree that priests in the Archdiocese show a real concern for one another, but say priests should gather socially more often. A majority report tensions stemming from ethnic and cultural differences or arising from competition for appointments and promotions, with one in five “strongly” reporting such tensions.

Compensation concerns are an issue for many priests, although they are relatively satisfied with the current situation. Two-thirds say salary levels are adequate, and somewhat more than half agree that their

retirement allotment is adequate. However, the various generations differ significantly in their assessments of salary and retirement benefits. Eighty-eight percent of those in the oldest generation feel salary levels are adequate, but only about 56 percent of those in the youngest two generations agree. Eighty-six percent of the oldest generation find retirement benefits adequate. But only half of the next oldest generation do so, and fewer than half of the Baby Boomers (44 percent) or the Young Adults (38 percent) agree. Such concerns may well emerge as increasingly important issues insofar as priests’ financial and health concerns impact on their ministry satisfaction and effectiveness.

Motivation

The first broad area addressed by the survey was that on which all else is built — priests’ sense of vocation and spirituality as men called to priesthood. The vast majority of priests say they were attracted to the priesthood by the desire to help others, their experience of God’s call, and love of the Eucharist. Also significant were an attraction to prayer and spirituality, the example of a priest they knew, and experience in Church ministry or Mass roles.

Attraction to the Priesthood

How much did the following attract you to the priesthood?

	“Very Much”	“Somewhat”	“Only a Little”	“Not at All”
Desire to help others	63%	30%	05%	01%
Example of a priest I knew	47	29	15	09
Experience of God’s call	46	34	10	07
Love of the Eucharist	45	38	14	03
Experience in Church ministry, Mass roles	42	31	20	08
Attraction to prayer and spirituality	41	47	18	04
Encouragement by a family member	22	29	22	27
Encouragement by a religious	22	28	16	34
Personal invitation by a diocesan priest	21	17	15	48
Experience in volunteer opportunities	20	29	28	23
Example of a priest in the family	16	09	07	68
Encouragement by another important person in my life (teacher, peer, etc.)	15	26	19	33

Personal Lives

Percentage Responding “Yes”

Do you keep up with current events?

98%

The Pastoral Center helps me in my ministry.

56%

Do you currently have a spiritual director?

37%

Are you currently part of a priestly support group?

35%

Do you use a foreign language in your ministry?

35%

Older priests were more attracted by a cultural and institutional experience of vocation, while younger men were attracted by a relatively more personal experience of call. In particular, priests of the

Silent Generation, aged 57 to 74, are less likely than those Young Adults, 38 and younger, to say they were attracted by the experience of God’s call or past volunteer opportunities (a 24 percentage point differ-

ence). They are also less likely to say they were encouraged by a family member (a 21 percentage point difference). On the other hand, though the oldest group of priests have more friends from grade or high

Priest Support

Please respond to the following statements:

	“Very Much” and “Somewhat”	“Very Much” Only
Priests in the Archdiocese should get together socially more often	83%	32%
Priests in the Archdiocese show real concern for each other	70	22
The salary levels of priests are adequate	66	34
The ethnic and cultural differences between priests in the Archdiocese are a problem	59	17
The Archdiocese’s retirement allotment is adequate	51	21
An unhealthy competition exists among our priests for appointments and promotions	51	20

school who became priests or religious (41 percentage points more than Young Adults and 22 percentage points more than Baby Boomers).

Nearly every priest says his faith has grown during his priesthood, and that this faith is central to his daily ministry and life. About three in four say all aspects of spirituality and faith in the questionnaire “very much” describe their faith. There are no substantive differences between generations on these items.

The Mass and personal prayer and reflection are particularly important to

priests’ spirituality. The oldest generation attaches somewhat more importance to personal Eucharistic devotion and the Liturgy of the Hours than others (differences range between 18 and 31 percentage points). The personal spirituality of these older priests is also more focused on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Marian devotion (21 to 46 percentage point differences).

More than four in five priests feel they live the celibate life well and that they have a supportive environment for living this commitment. A similar, but some-

what smaller, number say that celibacy makes sense to them.

Ministry

The majority of priests have spent most of their priestly ministry as pastors and associate pastors. In addition to parish life, approximately 30 percent have spent at least some time in diocesan offices or seminary education. As would be expected, older age groups report more experience as pastor. And the youngest generation is least likely to have had experience in a diocesan office.

Most respondents in active ministry presently serve as pastors — 29 percent say they are pastors who work with other priests and 20 percent are pastors who work alone — followed by 39 percent who serve as associate pastors. Approximately 20 percent indicate they also work in secondary roles associated with either diocesan offices and ministries or as retreat masters or spiritual directors.

More than 90 percent are happy in their present assignments. Two in three of those happy in their present assignment also say they are willing to go wherever the Cardinal sends them, particularly if they are consulted in advance and if they see how the assignment fits into a wider Archdiocesan plan. Baby Boomers are least open to moving and associate pastors are more likely than pastors to prefer an assignment with more responsibility.

More than 80 percent of Chicago priests would like to serve in ministry as long as they can, and about 75 percent would be willing to serve as an associate pastor under a younger pastor and thus continue serving in parish ministry after retirement.

Half report worries about financial security in retirement. The two youngest generations are especially worried about the degree to which they can count on having some form of financial security in their advanced years. And 70 percent feel that some priests are not in good enough health to allow them to serve.

Pastoral Policies

Survey participants were asked to evaluate the usefulness of present and potential Archdiocesan policies on priestly ministry

Problems among Priests . . .

How much are the following a problem among the priests in the Archdiocese?

	<u>“Very Much” and “Somewhat”</u>	<u>“Very Much” Only</u>
Being overworked	89%	45%
Need for a stronger prayer life	88	38
Loneliness/isolation	78	30
Poor communication	78	30
Burnout	73	23
Dissatisfaction with their work	72	14
Low morale	68	21
Low self-confidence	54	10
Abuse of alcohol	54	6
Financial difficulties	51	13
Inappropriate sexual activity	34	4

. . . Response by the Archdiocese

How successfully is the Archdiocese addressing its priests’ problems of:

	<u>“Very Much” and “Somewhat”</u>	<u>“Very Much” Only</u>
Abuse of alcohol	77%	32%
Inappropriate sexual activity	63	25
Need for a stronger prayer life	59	11
Financial difficulties	51	14
Communication	44	5
Being overworked	35	4
Low morale	34	5
Burnout	33	5
Dissatisfaction with their work	33	2
Low self-confidence	30	4
Loneliness/isolation	29	3

and parish life. They were also asked about matters affecting the financial support of both the Archdiocese and its parishes.

Priests are most likely to say that more effective pastoral ministry can be promot-

ed by improving cooperation among parishes in sharing ministry staff, hiring more lay ecclesial ministers in parishes and diocesan offices, and increasing the use of deacons.

Priests show strong support for merg-

ing rectories and for greater flexibility in living arrangements. They also favor reducing the number of Masses offered when attendance is low. They support regular performance evaluations for priests but not tying priests’ salaries to merit-

based inducements. Thirty-seven percent favor lowering the age of priests' retirement, while 20 percent would raise the age. Younger priests show more support for giving priests flexibility in living arrangements and are somewhat more likely to favor lowering the retirement age.

More than 90 percent say that parishioners do not understand the concept of stewardship. Many priests also feel that numerous parishes are overextended financially. Eighty percent think there are too many special collections. Slightly more than 70 percent say Catholic schools place unmanageable financial burdens on parishes, but nearly the same number agree that these schools are effective in communicating Catholic faith and tradition.

Presbyteral Issues

Archdiocesan priests are most concerned about overwork, having more time for a stronger prayer life, and the sense of isolation they experience vis-a-vis other priests and the Archdiocese as a whole. Although they report high personal levels of satisfaction, about two-thirds say they perceive problems with low morale among the priesthood. These questions were worded to reflect priest's perceptions of the presbyterate as a whole. As a result, these findings do not measure the level of these problems within the presbyterate, just the perceptions of priests that these issues are concerns. About half cite low self-confidence, financial concerns, and abuse of alcohol as problem areas for some. One-third say inappropriate sexual activity is a problem, although only 4 percent say it is "very much" a problem.

In general, younger priests are more likely than older priests to express some of these concerns. The youngest group is much more likely to report feeling overworked and dissatisfied, compared to the oldest generation of priests (over 20 percentage points more than older generations). Similar proportions are also more likely to say financial issues or poor communications are problems.

Priests feel the Archdiocese successfully addresses problems of alcohol abuse, inappropriate sexual activity, the need for a stronger prayer life, and financial diffi-

Retirement

Age when priests not yet retired expect to retire:

64 or younger	2%
65 - 69	23
70 - 74	65
75 or older	10
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Retired Priests	25%
Average Retirement Age	69

culties. But they feel it has been less successful in addressing problems associated with priest burnout, low morale, overwork and dissatisfaction with work, low self-confidence, and loneliness and isolation — the very areas they identify as the most problematic for priests of the Archdiocese.

In addition, many of the same differences in the way older and younger priests perceive the extent of these problems are replicated in their perception of how well the Archdiocese deals with them. Seventy percent of the oldest group say the Archdiocese successfully addresses overwork among priests, but only 36 percent of those age 57 to 74 and fewer than one-third of the two youngest generations agree. Similarly, a majority of the oldest generation say the Archdiocese successfully addresses dissatisfaction with work, burnout, low morale, loneliness, and low self-confidence—but only a third or fewer of the younger generations agree.

Archdiocesan Leadership

Priests of the Archdiocese affirm the Cardinal's leadership. More than 80 percent say they feel they can speak candidly to the Cardinal and his vicars, and that the Cardinal provides effective leadership for the Archdiocese. Written comments suggest that priests are looking to the Cardinal for a consistent, focused vision for the mission of the Archdiocese.

Once again, the oldest generation — those 75 and older — is the most supportive on each item listed. They are 20 percentage points higher than Baby Boomers for example (91 percent compared to 71 percent) in their agreement that the

Cardinal and vicars listen to their concerns, with the other two generations falling between these extremes. Nearly the same difference exists between these two generations in their feeling that the Cardinal is leading the Archdiocese in the right direction (90 percent compared to 70 percent).

A slight majority of priests say the Pastoral Center helps them in their ministry and handles priest personnel issues well. However, as few as one-third feel that the Pastoral Center heeds input from parishes, or that Pastoral Center officials adequately consult with priests.

The generations differ in their assessment of the Pastoral Center, with the oldest group consistently expressing the strongest support. Two-thirds of those 75 and over say the Pastoral Center handles personnel issues well, as do 60 percent of the next oldest generation. However, fewer than half of the two youngest generations (47 and 49 percent) give such positive responses.

In addition, while just over 1 in 2 of the oldest generation say Pastoral Center officials adequately consult with priests and heed input from parishes, only about 1 in 4 other priests give such positive assessments.

More than 70 percent indicate the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House is a good place for retreats, and about a third of priests use it for this purpose. However, whereas 90 percent of the oldest generation, and 70 percent of the next oldest generation use the retreat house, it is used by only 55 percent of the Baby Boomers group and by some 40 percent of the Young Adult priests.

Priestly Life and Needs

Almost all comments given by priests in response to two open-ended questions can be grouped into the categories found on the next page. Due to the nature of qualitative research, this list cannot be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive — some responses can be categorized into multiple categories and a few do not fit any category. Representative examples of some of the most commonly mentioned themes are presented in the section that follows.

Priests of the Archdiocese speak out about . . .

Their Ministry . . . *My work is to center my life in Christ and constantly call the parish to conversion to Christ, to encourage all to share God's gifts, and to build a Church together.*

I am trying to form a parish that has a strong sense of mission to evangelize by word and deed. Through good liturgy and mature lay leadership I believe we can better support the mission of the local church.

I preach and teach that God loves us and give my people the opportunity to shine that life. . . that is what Church is all about.

Through my ministry, I further the mission to make Christ visible in our society by preaching the Gospel and living it.

My ministry helps to give form and substance to the Church's mission to the poor.

I build up the local church through witness and liturgy. I also serve as plant maintainer and builder.

I am pastor of a parish. Parish is where most Catholics experience "Church."

Their Lives . . . *I believe my love for Jesus strengthens my desire to do ministry. I believe my desire to serve helps the parish see my sincere care for them.*

Trying to be a pastor that brings the gospel message and an example of someone who is joyful as a priest and a Catholic.

I serve the spiritual/sacramental need of a large parish. I make myself available to my people at both ordinary and extreme moments.



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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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I bring hope and grace to the mission. I enable others to be a part of that vision. I extend God's consolation, forgiveness joy, and peace to my people. They in turn support me.

We are to bring Christ to our people by our lives.

Faithful, faithful living attracts others to do the same!

Their Archdiocese . . . *To listen more attentively to the presbyterate . . . To encourage us to dream and vision, and less talk about correcting things or bandaging things . . . Initiate more opportunities for priests to gather informally.*

Get me help, more staff within our budget and a little recognition.

Keep encouraging vocations.

Let me retire from "pastor" at an age that gives consideration to health, family, medical history and continue to minister as co-partner here or another parish.

Deepen and strengthen our pride and comradery in this priesthood and share more openly our fraternity, in the joy and sorrows of our priesthood.

Keep in touch. I want to stay firmly connected to the Archdiocese.

Be more supportive, show more appreciation of what we do. Call us to pray, not to simply meet or study.

Affirm, affirm, and affirm my work in the vineyard.

