
ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE: SATISFACTION AND CHALLENGES AMONG RECENTLY ORDAINED PRIESTS



**National Association
of Catholic Theological Schools**



**The Center for Applied
Research in the Apostolate**

ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE: SATISFACTION AND CHALLENGES AMONG RECENTLY ORDAINED PRIESTS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

in collaboration with

CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE APOSTOLATE

Principal Investigators:

Jonathon L. Wiggins, Ph.D.

Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ, Ph.D.

Felice M. Goodwin, B.A.

Maia T. Kapur

ADVISORY BOARD

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Bishop of Beaumont

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St. Joseph's Seminary

Study coordinator

Timothy Lock, Ph.D.

Director of Psychological Services

St. Joseph's Seminary

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Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

Enter by the Narrow Gate: Satisfaction and Challenges among Recently Ordained U.S. Priests

Executive Summary

In Spring 2018, the National Association of Catholic Theological Schools (NACTS) approached the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to discuss conducting a survey of recently ordained Catholic priests in the United States regarding how well U.S. Catholic seminaries are preparing men for their priestly life and ministry and in what areas of their priestly life and ministry the newly ordained priests are most and least satisfied.

In collaboration with NACTS, CARA designed an online survey for the project in 2019 and 2020. Using a list of names and emails of recently ordained priests provided by NACTS, CARA emailed an invitation, link, ID, and password to 1,379 priests – both diocesan and religious order – from April to July 2020. After two reminder emails, CARA received 1,012 valid responses, for a response rate of 73%. Some 988 responded to the English-language version of the online survey, with 24 priests responding to the Spanish-language version.

The characteristics of the responding priests and the major findings are summarized below:

Characteristics of Responding Priests

- Three in four responding newly ordained priests (76%) are diocesan priests, with 24% priests from a religious institute. Their average year of ordination is 2017 and about four-fifths currently serve in a parish-based ministry. About four-fifths attended a major seminary in the United States (82%), with 18% attending one elsewhere.
- Responding priests report an average age of 38 in 2020. Fully 82% were born in the United States. Three-quarters identify as white (74%), about one in ten as either Hispanic or Latino (12%) or Asian or Pacific Islander (8%), and one in 20 is Black or African American (4%).

Assessment of How Well their Seminary Prepared Them for the Priesthood

- Seminaries offer various programs to their seminarians. Responding priests are most likely to report their seminary offering counseling with a psychologist (88%), formation in chaste celibacy programs (76%), prayer groups/prayer teams (76%), mentoring during one's pastoral year (66%), and a Pastoral Year Internship (61%). Those programs *least* frequently offered are a Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year (23%), 30-day spiritual exercises (26%), and chastity support groups (38%).

- Priests also rated the effectiveness of the programs they participated in, with these five the ones they are most likely to say helped them “a great deal”: 30-day spiritual exercises (86%), Propaedeutic or Spiritual Years (78%), 8-day spiritual exercises (71%), Pastoral Year Internships (67%), and summer programs of formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation or IPF (62%).
- Priests were also asked to evaluate how well their seminary had prepared them in a variety of specific areas. They are most likely to report being prepared “well” in the areas of presiding at Mass (69%), preaching (64%), and Confessions (55%). Fewer, about a quarter to four-tenths, say they were prepared “well” in the areas of hospital ministry (42%), presiding at funerals (40%), pastoral counseling (36%), the language skills needed pastorally in their diocese (30%), pastoral skills for serving the diverse cultures in their diocese (28%), and personal skills such as time management and handling stress (24%).
- The areas priests report being *least* well prepared for are all related to administration, human resources, and leadership. One-sixth or less say their seminary prepared them “well” in the areas of human resource skills such as communication and conflict management (16%), collaborative skills such as building consensus (16%), leadership skills such as motivating people (16%), and administrative skills such as budgeting and investing (6%).
- In addition to the closed-ended measures described above, responding priests were invited to write in the areas where their seminary best prepared and least prepared them. By far, the areas they most often report being best prepared in are presiding at liturgies, preaching, and their theological training in various areas. The areas in which they say they are least prepared are those related to administration, human resources, and leadership; preparing couples for marriage; ministering in multicultural or multilingual settings; handling stress or managing their time; and having the kind of practical knowledge that would have really helped them with the realities of parish life.
- Sixteen priests were interviewed for the project, with those expressing dissatisfaction with their lives oversampled. Among these interviewees, a majority report having had a mixed experience overall of their seminary preparation for the priesthood, with a minority having had a positive experience overall. Their assessment of their seminary’s creation of an atmosphere of trust is also mixed, with six priests saying such an environment was created, six saying it was somewhat created, and four reporting that they did not have an adequate level of trust with their formation staff members.
- A minority of the interviewees (four priests) had positive assessments overall of their pastoral formation. Compared to the other priests, these priests are more likely to have felt their seminary gave them a realistic portrait of what their life as a priest would be like and to have received adequate training in administration and leadership. Among the majority (ten priests) with a mixed assessment of their pastoral formation, their main criticisms are not being given a realistic portrait of what their lives as priests would be like, inadequate training in administrative and leadership skills, not learning how to work with lay staff members and to minister to the laity well, and receiving inadequate time and mentoring in parishes and pastoral settings during their time in the seminary.

- Six of the 16 interviewees say that the preparation they received at their seminary for living a celibate life was effective. These interviewees are most likely to mention regular discussions of the topic during seminary workshops and conferences, it being a regular topic in their discussions with their formators, the network of friends they have developed for support, and having access to priests outside of the seminary who they could talk to and get a realistic portrait of what a life of celibacy is like. Among the ten priests giving a mixed or negative assessment of their formation in celibacy, they are most likely to mention the difficulties of going from a seminary environment where friends are down the hall to a lonely living situation in a rectory, formators not being honest enough about how difficult celibacy is, and not being taught how to cope well with loneliness.

Satisfaction with their Priestly Life and Ministry

- Four in five responding newly ordained priests report being satisfied with their life as a priest (59% “very satisfied” and 22% “somewhat satisfied”). One in five are unsatisfied (6% “somewhat dissatisfied” and 13% “very dissatisfied”).
- Priests were asked how satisfied they are in some particular areas of their lives. The areas they are most likely to rate themselves as “very” satisfied are the respect they receive as members of the clergy from lay persons (63%), their present financial situation (60%), and their present living situation (56%). Priests are *least* likely to be “very” satisfied in the areas of finding the right balance between their work, personal, and spiritual lives (21%) and their training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff (11%).
- Concerning the national sexual abuse scandal, one in six says the recent media stories on this topic have hindered them “greatly” in their effectiveness in ministry (16%), with an additional 64% saying this has hindered them “slightly.”
- Priests were asked to write in the areas of their priestly life that they find most and least satisfying. By far, the areas they are most satisfied are related to their immediate ministries, including celebrating the sacraments in their parishes, serving the needs of their parishioners, teaching the faith to others, presiding at Masses and other liturgies, hearing Confessions, ministering to the youth, and providing pastoral counseling. The areas they write in that they are *least* satisfied with are performing administrative and human resource duties, the poor relationship they have with the pastors under whom they serve, feeling burned out from their workload, their frustration with their diocese/bishop, and the lack of fraternity among their fellow priests.
- Generally speaking, the satisfaction of the 16 newly ordained priests interviewed is greatly associated with how welcomed, supported, and appreciated they feel. Most of them report feeling that way among the laity they serve. Not all, however, have that same feeling of support from the clergy in their dioceses and religious institutes. Not feeling supported or welcomed by the pastors who mentor them, their bishops and diocesan leaders, and/or their fellow priests who live in their area are the factors most

likely to be associated with being dissatisfied. In addition, many report not feeling their dioceses or religious institutes are thoughtful about assigning them to initial assignments that will provide them with the mentoring and support they need during first years after ordination.

- Responding priests were also asked what their largest problems are on a daily basis. Consistent with the findings above, they express their greatest frustration with their diocese and fellow priests. About one in five says the following are “very much” of a problem for them on a day-to-day basis: differences among different age cohorts of priests in their diocese (20%), theological differences among their fellow priests in their concept of the priesthood (20%), and not feeling they have input into the decision-making process at the diocesan level (17%).
- CARA also asked what programs are available to them that would provide them with some support during their initial years as priests. At least four in five report that they have these programs available: retreats (99%), spiritual direction for priests (90%), regular deanery/vicariate meetings (84%), diocesan on-going formation (84%), and priest support groups (81%). Fewer have available to them priest prayer groups (63%) or a priest mentor program for newly ordained priests (54%).

Remaining Priests in the Future

- A great majority of priests say that – if they had the choice to make over again – they would “definitely” (80%) or “probably” (16%) enter the priesthood again. This is consistent with the percentages who say that in the future they “definitely” will not leave the priesthood (76%) or “probably” (18%) will not. Still, that leaves about one in 20 that reports that they would “definitely” (1%) or “probably” (4%) not enter the priesthood if they had the choice again and who are uncertain (5%) about whether they plan to remain a priest in the future.
- Regardless of their present stance on leaving the priesthood, all responding newly ordained priests were asked: *If you have ever thought about leaving the priesthood, what were the primary reasons?* In a departure from the findings above, celibacy and the loneliness of the priestly life are the reasons that about two-fifths cite for why they have ever considered leaving. The next most frequently cited reasons are frustration with their diocese, religious institute, bishop or superior and the disappointment they feel in regards to their current ministries.
- Responding priests were also asked if they know someone who left active ministry or the priesthood within five years of their ordination. Among the 79% that do know someone who left, the reasons most often hypothesized for their departures are disillusionment with the actual life of ministry, loneliness, meeting someone they would like to be their romantic partner or to marry, and their desire to look for a romantic partner.

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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Introduction

In Spring 2018, the National Association of Catholic Theological Schools (NACTS) approached the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to discuss conducting a survey of recently ordained Catholic priests in the United States regarding how well U.S. Catholic seminaries are preparing men for their priestly life and ministry and in what areas of their priestly life and ministry the newly ordained priests are most and least satisfied.

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Interpreting This Report

Most of the questions in this survey use four-point response scales (i.e., “not at all,” “only a little,” “somewhat,” “very much”; or “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” “strongly agree”). These scales allow respondents to choose between two relatively “negative” choices (e.g., “strongly disagree” and “disagree”) and two relatively “positive” choices (e.g., “agree” and “strongly agree”). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. However, as sometimes examining the most positive response distinguishes important contrasts in level of support, those responses are presented separately.

In addition, readers may also wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be drawn by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendix I. That appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In addition to summarizing the responses to most questions for respondents as a whole, the report also compares the responses of those from selected subgroups. The first section of the report describes the characteristics of the respondents as well as the subgroups that are used in the analyses that follow. Throughout the report, the tables and charts that compare differences between and among these various subgroups are presented following the responses for priests as a whole in each section.

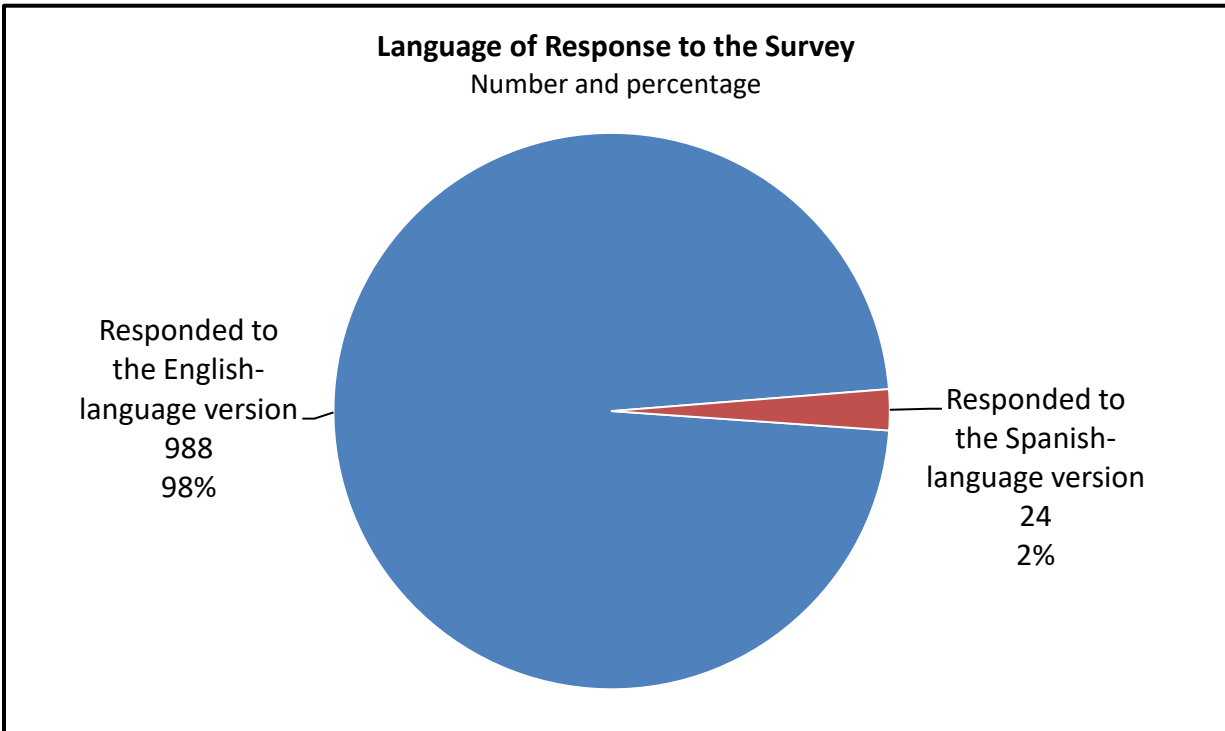
The margin of error for *differences between subgroups*, such as the differences among those with different levels of satisfaction, depends on the size of the subgroups being compared. Unless otherwise noted, all subgroup differences described in the graphs of this report are statistically significant: that is, they pass standard tests of statistical inference and can be considered to be “real” differences. In some instances, differences between or among subgroups that are not statistically significant are also noted. These differences should be treated as merely suggestive of real differences that may exist between the subgroups under consideration.

In addition to the quantitative data analyzed in this report, six open-ended questions on the survey collected qualitative data. For these data, respondents were prompted with a question and given an open box for written comments, rather than select from a set of response options. These comments are analyzed along with the quantitative data as well as in separate sections throughout this report. While these responses are not suitable for statistical analyses, they do add depth to the data that is not attainable through closed-ended questions only.

Finally, CARA conducted 16 interviews with priests about their level of satisfaction with their seminary preparation and their level of satisfaction with their lives as priests. Rather than select a representative sample of priests, half of the priests were selected from the 19% of priests who say they are dissatisfied with their lives as priests and half were selected from the 81% of priests who say they are satisfied with their lives as priests. In this way, we examine in greater detail the experiences of those who are having a more difficult time after their ordination and/or those who are considering leaving the priesthood. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix II.

Language of Response

Among the valid responses, 98% responded to the English-language version of the questionnaire and 2% responded to the Spanish-language version.



Where relevant throughout the rest of the report, comparisons are made between those who responded to each version of the surveys.

Section I: Characteristics of Responding Priests

This section of the report includes demographic, religious and other descriptive data for the 1,012 valid respondents to this survey. These data may be helpful in considering who responded to the survey.

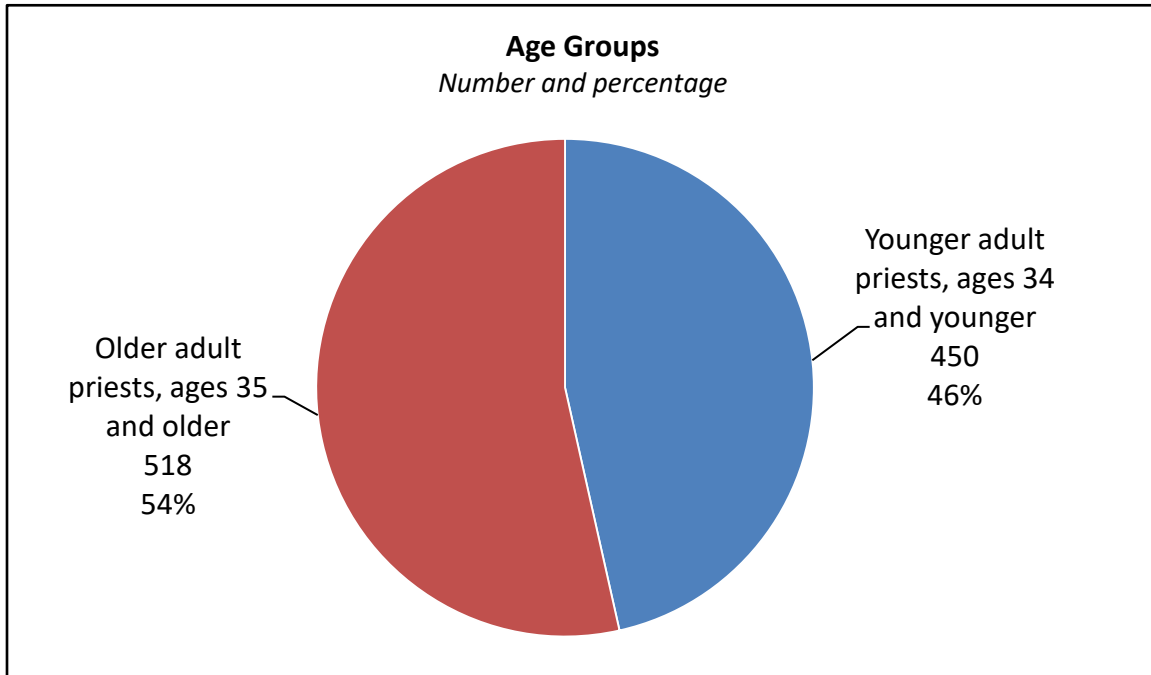
Age of Responding Priests

Responding priests surveyed in 2020 were born between 1945 and 1993. The average age of respondents is 38, with half saying they are 35 or younger. The most common age range reported is 30 to 39. Altogether, 28% are ages 40 and older.

| Age in 2020 | |
|-------------|----|
| Age Range | % |
| 27-29 | 9 |
| 30-39 | 64 |
| 40-49 | 17 |
| 50-59 | 7 |
| 60-69 | 3 |
| 70-79 | 1 |

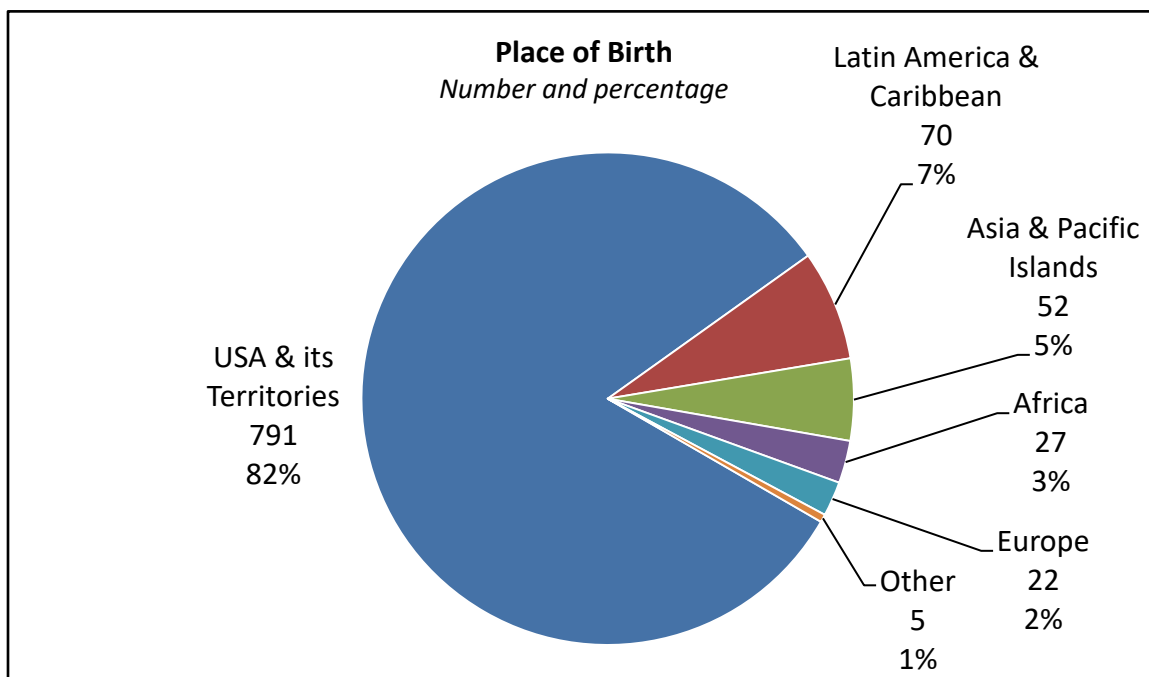
Age Groups

Nearly half of responding priests are ages 34 and younger while slightly more than half are 35 and older. As year of age is correlated with maturity, comparisons are made, where applicable, between these two age groups throughout this report.



Place of Birth

More than four in five respondents say they were born in the United States, one of its territories, or on a U.S. base overseas (82%). Among the other respondents, 7% were born in a Latin American or Caribbean country, 5% in an Asian or Pacific Island country, 3% in an African country, and 2% in a European country.

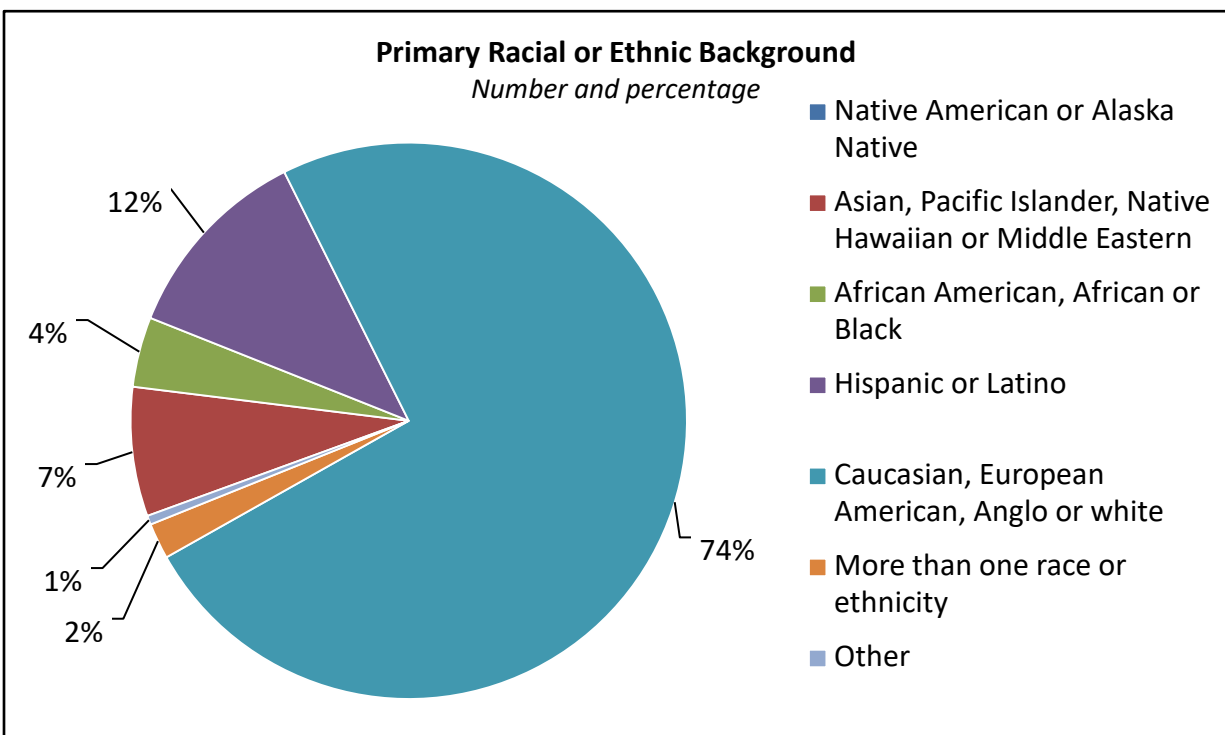


Where applicable throughout the remainder of the report, comparisons are made among those with different continents or places of birth.

Race and Ethnicity

Responding priests were invited to identify *one* primary race or ethnicity, with an option included for identifying more than one. The results are presented in the figure below. Three in four (74%) identify their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, Anglo or white, 12% as Hispanic or Latino, and 7% as Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Middle Eastern. Less than one in 20 identifies as any other race or ethnicity.

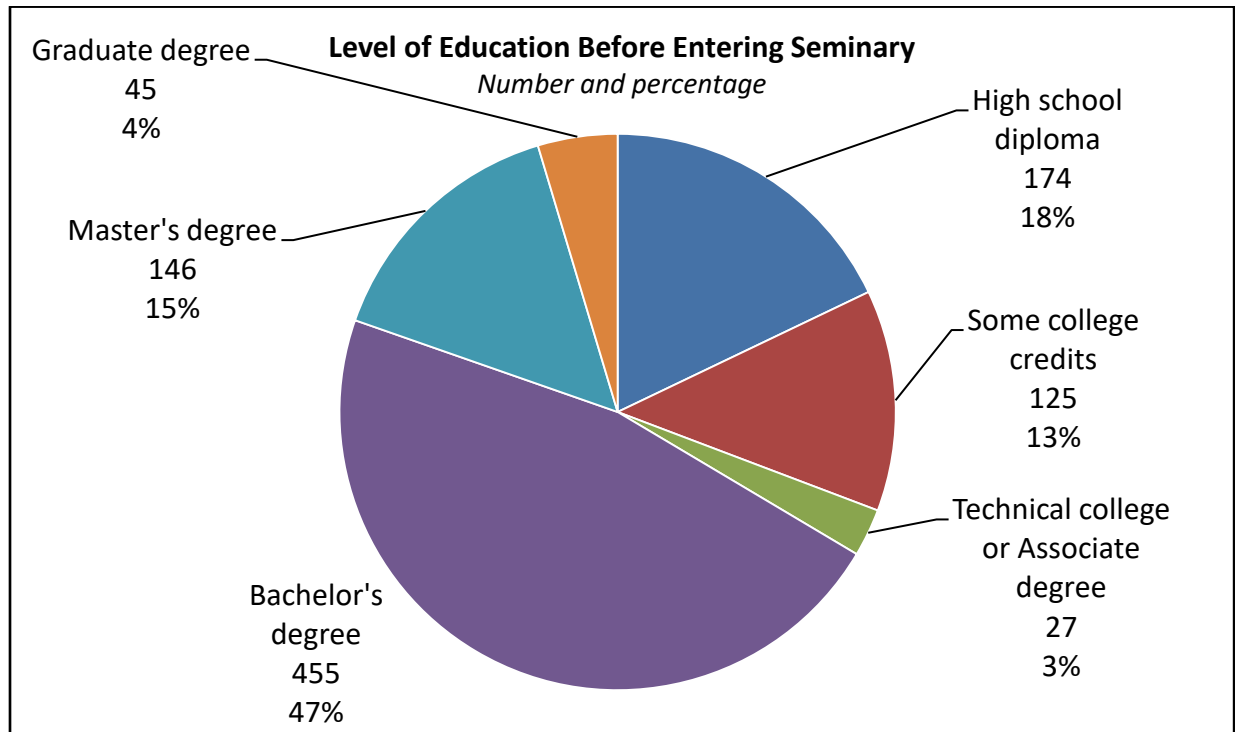
No one wrote in an “other” ethnicity. Among those writing in their multiple ethnicities, the most common combinations are white and Hispanic/Latino; and white and Asian.



Where applicable throughout this report, comparisons are made among those of different racial or ethnic groups.

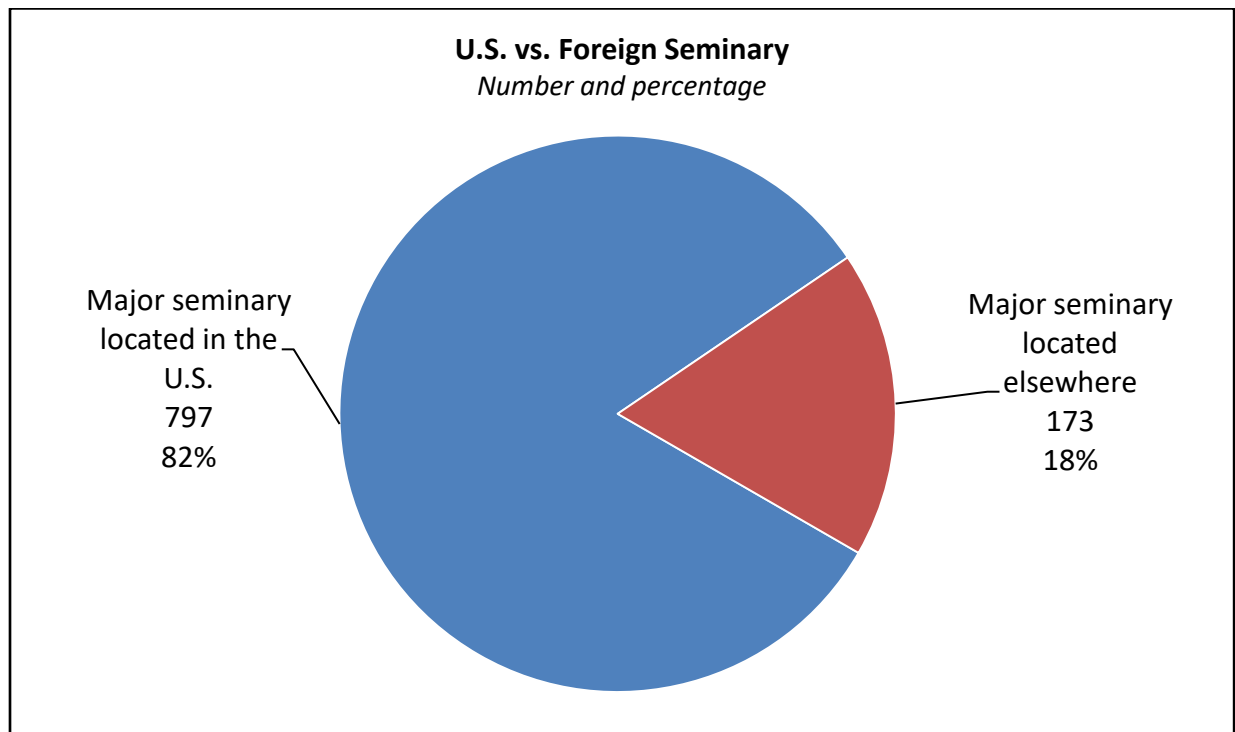
Highest Level of Education Before Entering Seminary

A third (34%) had earned less than a bachelor's degree before entering their seminary, nearly half (47%) had earned a bachelor's degree, and 19% had earned a master's or other graduate degree.



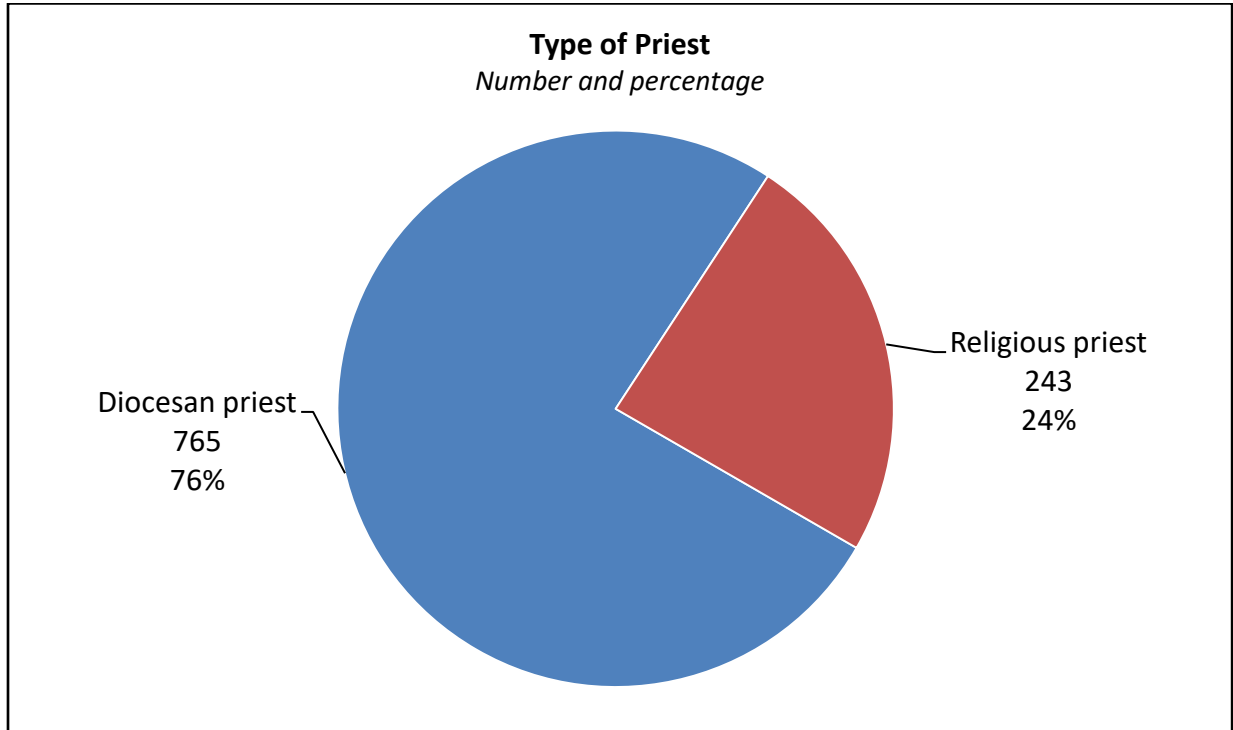
Country Where Major Seminary Is Located

Priests were asked if the major seminary in which they were enrolled prior to ordination was located in the United States or elsewhere.



Diocesan and Religious Order Priests

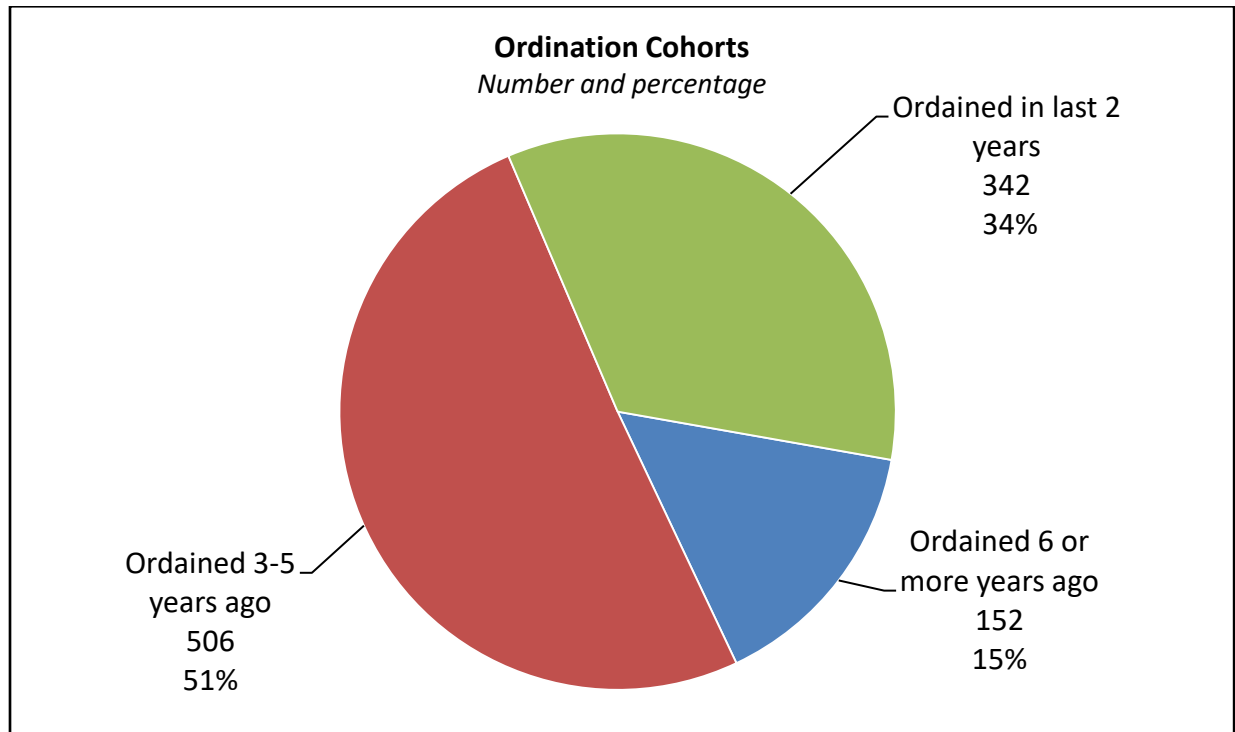
Three-quarters of respondents are currently diocesan priests (76%) and one-quarter is a religious priest (24%).



Where applicable throughout the remainder of the report, comparisons are made between diocesan and religious priests.

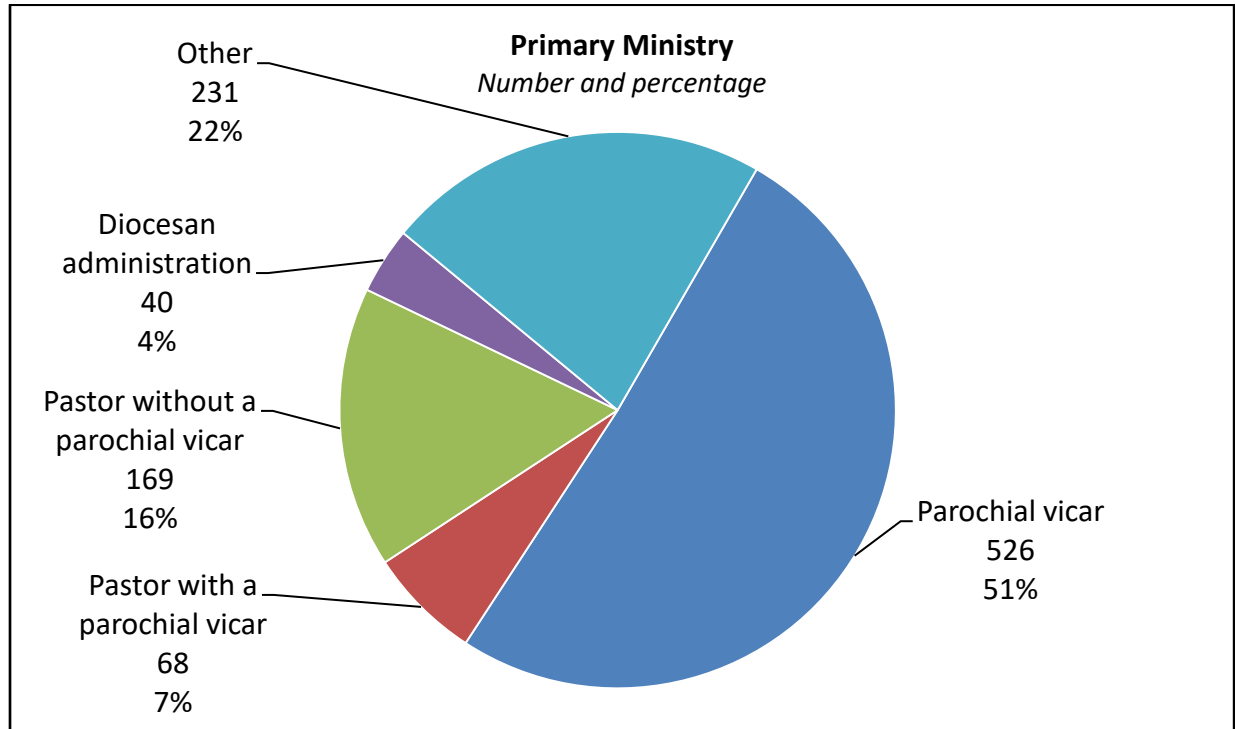
Year of Ordination

On average, responding priests were ordained in 2017. For comparison purposes, priests are divided into three groups for this study: those ordained six or more years ago (between 2011 and 2014), those ordained three to five years ago (between 2015 and 2017), and those ordained in the past two years (between 2018 to 2020).

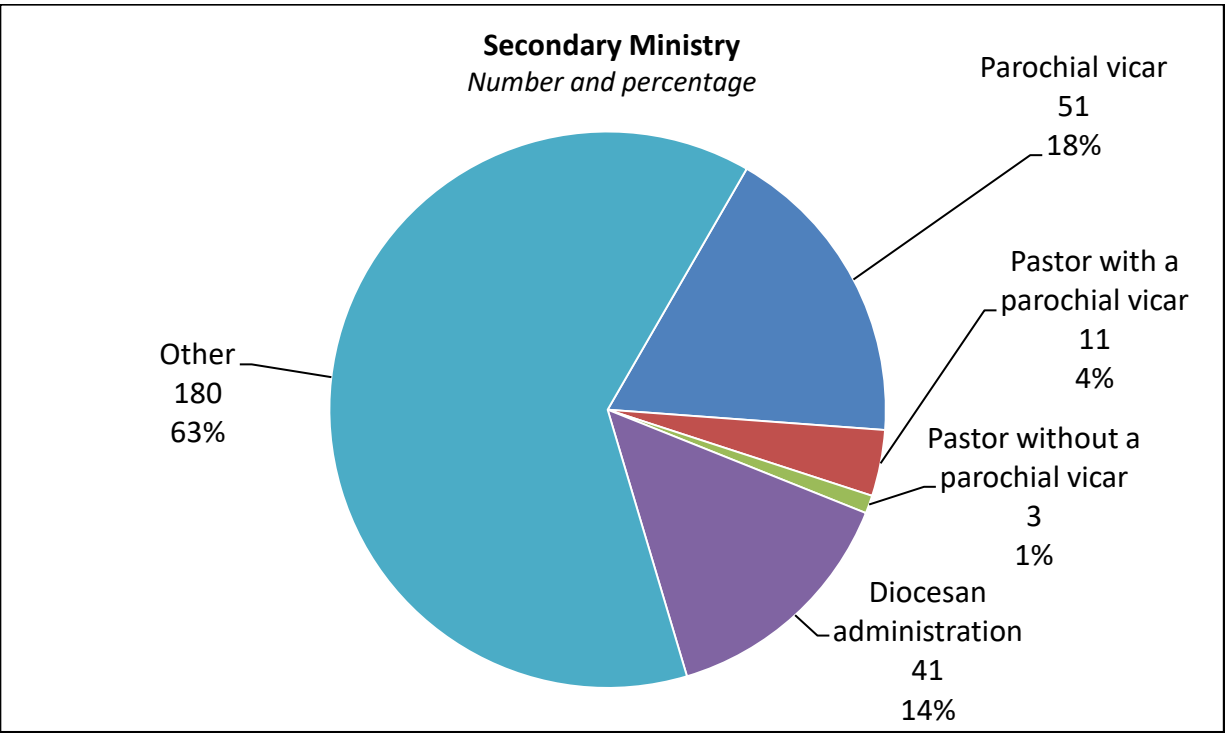


Primary and Secondary Ministries

Seventy percent of responding priests report having only one ministry and 30% report having two or more. Below is shown those identifying a ministry area as their primary ministry. That said, some priests identified up to three ministry areas as their primary ministry.



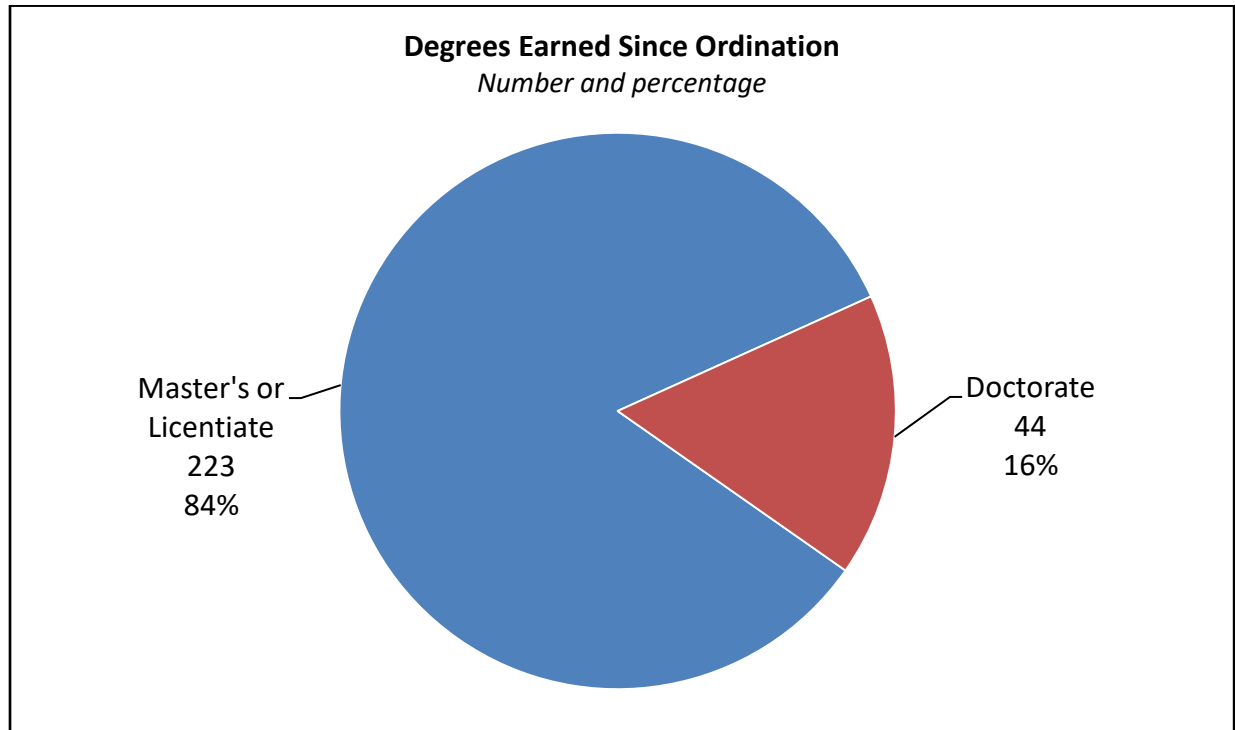
The figure below shows the areas where a priest identified an area of secondary ministry. Many marked more than one secondary ministry.



For purposes of comparison, those who report having just one ministry are compared, when appropriate, with those who have two or more. In addition, where appropriate, those involved in a parish-based ministry are compared to those in a diocesan administrative ministry.

Degrees Earned Since Ordination

Three-quarters report not having earned any degrees after their ordination, with a quarter (25%) having done so. Among that quarter of priests, 84% earned a master's degree or licentiate and 16% a doctorate.



Respondents were invited to write in what degrees they have earned since ordination.

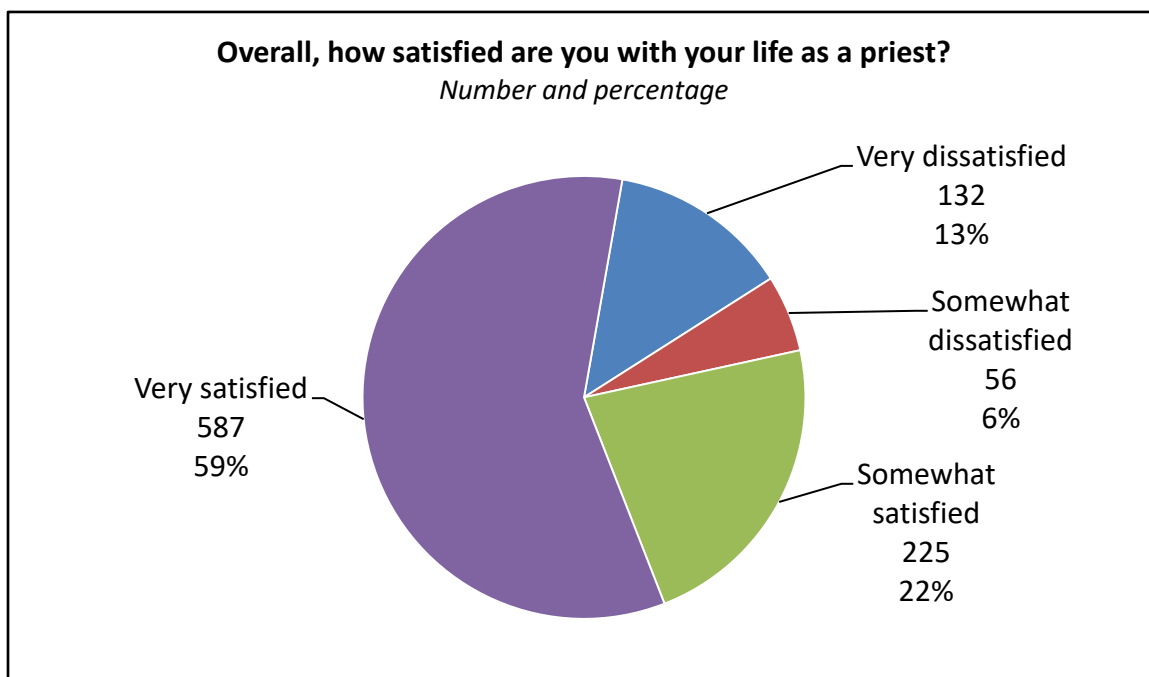
- Among those earning a master's degree, the most common fields of study listed are Systematic Theology, Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Theology, Moral Theology, Divinity, Liturgical Theology, Canon Law, and Biblical Theology.
- Among those earning a doctorate, the most common fields of study listed are Theology, Systematic Theology, Church History, and Education.

Section II: Assessment of Life as a Priest

This part of the report describes how the 1,012 responding priests assess their life as a priest.

Overall Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

Combined, four in five priests report being either “very satisfied” (59%) or “somewhat satisfied” (22%) with their life as a priest. One in five reports being either “somewhat dissatisfied” (6%) or “very dissatisfied” (13%).



Throughout the remainder of this report, those responding that they are “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” combined (188 respondents) with their lives as priests are compared to those responding that they are “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” combined (812 respondents).

Subgroup Analysis Findings

As overall satisfaction is such an important measure, it is worth noting where subgroup analyses do *not* show any significant differences:

- Those ages 34 and younger versus those 35 and older
- Those of the three ordination groups (one to two years ago, three to five years ago, and six or more years ago)
- Those reporting only one ministry versus those reporting multiple ministries.

The two analyses where there are significant differences are the language in which they responded to the survey and their place of birth.

Language of Response to the Survey

“Somewhat” and “Very” Satisfied Combined

Those responding to the survey in English are more likely than those responding in Spanish to report being “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” (combined) with their lives as priests (82% compared to 63%). Looking at this same finding in the reverse direction, 18% of those who responded in English report being “somewhat *dissatisfied*” or “very *dissatisfied*” (combined) with their lives as priests, compared to 37% of those who responded in Spanish.

“Very” Satisfied Only

In addition, those responding in English are more likely than those responding in Spanish to report being “very satisfied” with their lives as priests (59% compared to 50%).

Place of Birth

Priests who report being born in an African country are most likely to report being “very satisfied” (69%). At the same time, however, those from African countries are among the most likely to identify as “very dissatisfied” (23%). Least likely to report being “very satisfied” (54%) are those born in Latin American countries, who are also most likely to report being “very dissatisfied” (26%).

| Satisfaction with Life as a Priest, by Place of Birth | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Somewhat Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
| | % | % | % | % |
| African countries | 69 | 8 | 0 | 23 |
| United States & its territories | 60 | 23 | 5 | 12 |
| European countries | 55 | 32 | 0 | 14 |
| Asian countries | 54 | 20 | 12 | 14 |
| Latin American & Caribbean countries | 47 | 20 | 7 | 26 |

Areas of Greatest Satisfaction in Priestly Life

Priests were asked to write in a response to this question: *In what areas are you most satisfied in your life as a priest?* Some 966 provided a response.

Most priests listed more than one area where they are satisfied with their lives as priests. Responses have been grouped into the following three categories, plus an “other” category for topics not mentioned frequently:

- Satisfaction in their parish ministries
- Satisfaction with their fellow priests, dioceses, and religious communities
- Areas of personal satisfaction
- Other areas of satisfaction

Each of these categories is described further below, with sample comments presented.

Satisfaction in their Parish Ministries

By far, the areas where priests are most satisfied are related to what they do in their places of ministry. Specific areas mentioned include:

- Celebrating the sacraments generally
- Serving the needs of their parishioners and others to whom they minister
- Teaching the faith to others
- Presiding at Masses and other liturgies
- Hearing Confessions
- Ministering to the youth
- Counseling

Below are some examples of these comments that mention satisfaction at the priest's place of ministry.

I am very satisfied with my parish work.

The amount of time and number of confessions is most satisfying. Then, the ability to celebrate Mass and preach. 3rd class to the faithful.

Celebrating Mass with the people in the parish, preaching, hearing confessions, counseling, teaching young adults and adults Scriptures, running clubs at school.

Celebrating daily Mass and sacraments (especially sacrament of Reconciliation) for my parishioners and the people of God.

Sacramental, esp. Eucharist and confessions spiritual direction.

Ministering of the sacraments to the people of God. Presiding at Mass and hearing confessions are the most frequent but additionally, baptizing infants, performing weddings, anointing of the sick and finally funerals. All of these ministries have great meaning to me personally. I am also pleased to have many people in the parish from which I get great strength from their spirituality and from their willingness to be welcoming and generally appreciative of my priesthood.

I like preaching. I like one-on-one counseling and confessions. I like the varied administrative duties of being a pastor. I like leading the parish.

Providing the sacraments to the faithful. Being part of a wonderful presbyterate. Being able to help the seminarians in their formation as we have seminarians at our parish for the summer and holidays. Getting to know our parishioners and journeying with them in their faith journey.

Chaplain at the Catholic elementary school; bereavement ministry; visiting home bound; the Sacraments.

I am privileged to provide the Bread of Life and the Word of God to His people.

What makes the priesthood satisfying to me are the people that I serve. I am blessed to be a part of three parishes that have accepted me as a priest for them.

Celebrating sacraments, catechesis, community building and ministry to young adults and young families.

I am satisfied my serving the people of my parish and in the many other ministerial activities I am involved in. It begins with celebrating the Holy Mass. That brings me the most satisfaction. Other areas include but are not limited to: Celebrating the sacraments, prison ministry, serving as chaplain for the Knights of Columbus and Alhambra; Deliverance ministry, visiting the sick, funerals, weddings and preparing couples as a FOCCUS facilitator; leading the people in prayer and even growing in my own relationship with the Lord in my prayer life.

Offering the sacraments to the people of God. Being with the people in the joy and struggles of life is the most rewarding aspect. Offering the office each day for the people and being there for the moments of baptism, weddings, funerals, end of life, and all the other moments brings life.

Getting to know the families of my parish. Being invited into their homes for meals and getting to know their children in our parochial school.

My spiritual life is enriched with so many groups of lay organizations which help the life of the parish. As a parish priest, I have learned that these wonderful people run the parish with their priests and their way of life and prayers help my spiritual life to grow and to flow. Learning from them nourishes my own life so that I can walk others as well in their journey.

I love praying the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I love serving the people. I love hearing confessions and experiencing the Holy Spirit speak through me to touch people's hearts and change their lives. I love being accessible to them in a way I don't think clergy was in years past. There are so many moments for the New Evangelization to take place that just happen both in the parish and out in other arenas.

Celebrating the sacraments especially the Holy Eucharist and hearing confessions, accompanying people in spiritual direction and working with the people. I celebrate the sacraments for the Hispanic community of my parish and they have these small Christian communities (30) which is just a powerful witness of participating in Church as a family. Working with these small communities I would say has been a great joy.

To be able to celebrate the Holy Mass and consecrate the Holy Eucharist and along with being able to minister other Sacraments of the Church. To bring God to the faithful and to bring the faithful closer to God. To walk with the people in their faith.

Supply work/sacramental assistance to local parishes: Masses, confessions. Walking with the people of God and being able to offer meaningful moments of grace on their behalf as the presider at Mass, minister of baptisms, weddings, funerals, confessors, etc. Ability to offer pastoral ministry in the workplace. My training has prepared me to listen with compassion to my colleagues. Being a priest means my advice or opinion is sometimes sought by those colleagues who struggle. Walk spiritually with family and friends in their times of greatest joy and greatest need: offer an even more meaningful message at family funerals, baptism of friends' children, weddings of former students, for example.

I find most satisfaction in three areas: teaching and preaching, confessions, and getting to know and interact with families outside the physical church setting. I also find satisfaction in thinking of ideas for the future in terms of new models of ministry.

Providing the sacraments to the people and the sincere relationships.

Working with Latinos in the Northwest.

1. Mass and preaching to the laity is my greatest joy. 2. The second most fulfilling thing is that I have a Bible study that I do for about two hours every week. This has really built the faith and Bible knowledge of the attendees and I am more than happy about it.

3. I am also very satisfied with my rectory living. 4. The love and good relationships between me and the two pastors I have had since my ordination is another satisfying aspect of my priesthood. 5. Wonderful relationships with my very loving parishioners gives me satisfaction too.

I really like all of the areas of my pastoral work that I do. From celebration of the Eucharist to pastoral ministry in the hospital and nursing homes. I really enjoy to prepare couples for their marriage, parents for the baptism of their child. All of the daily ministries are for me important and I really enjoy doing all.

The ability to serve the people of God in the sacraments as well as witnessing to the call of the Gospel first in my own spiritual life. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Confession are the greatest gifts we have as Catholics and are also the most humbling aspects of the priesthood.

I am most satisfied in celebrating the sacraments and ministering to the people especially the sick. What gives me dissatisfaction in my ministry as a priest is the seeming distrust on the part of my pastor in terms of sharing the responsibility in the parish. I feel excluded and my ability paralyzed.

I am very satisfied with the ability to do the priestly work for which I was created. To celebrate the sacraments and be that conduit for God's grace that the priest particularly is. My pastor, who is only a few years older than me, and didn't receive a warm welcome by older priests when he was young, really tries to engage me in experiences which he was denied. Our parish has an elementary and high school and I spend a great deal of my time there as well, talking, counseling, visiting classrooms, exercising a pastoral presence. This leads over into my exposure as a public person and how the local church is perceived and the faith welcomed.

Being able to offer Mass and hear Confessions, the life of prayer and service, and being able to guide the people in the parish.

Providing the sacraments to the faithful and assisting with spiritual direction.

The parish I am assigned to has vibrancy to it and respect for the faith that has been uplifting. With the sacramental life and Eucharistic adoration as the heart of the parish the life of a priest has been rewarding. Additionally, my pastor is a hero of mine from the period where my faith life began to take off. Working with and learning from him has been a great opportunity. Fostering relationships and building up the faith or parishioners would be a third point.

I am very satisfied most of the time. I love the opportunity to celebrate the sacraments and teach the faith. It's challenging, but very rewarding, to share the Gospel with others,

especially young people. I am most satisfied when the mysteries of the faith become more real for me. I always am grateful that I love celebrating Mass when I find myself at rest and feeling at home in the liturgy after a vacation or time away from the parish. The immediate openness of people to the priest and welcoming him into their family and lives is something unbelievable. Hearing confessions is a hidden gem as well when you think about the deepness of people's hurting and searching for God. It's in times like hearing confessions that I know that my life means a lot and that the priestly ministry is critically needed.

I absolutely love spending time with my people. I also love working with my team (paid & unpaid) of parish support who come together to implement our parish mission. Having a strategic effort for evangelization makes all the difference. We aren't perfect in our efforts, but having a goal and a strategy has brought much fruit to our parish - and to my life as a priest.

I am most satisfied in the ministry with the people. Confessions, spiritual direction, preaching, and visiting people who are sick, and dinners with families at their home are the best parts of my life as a priest. I love seeing how God is impacting and changing people before my very eyes. I will also mention that I have had two great mentor priests in my first two parishes. That was not only a blessing but also very important as I learn how to be a priest.

Celebrating the Sacraments journeying with people as they navigate the ups and downs of life.

It is difficult to pick "most satisfied" because the whole priestly life is satisfying and challenging with each area being just one facet of it. I would say celebrating the Mass, hearing confessions, working in a team environment with office staff, and meeting with people to share the best and darkest seasons of their life are probably the most satisfying of all the areas.

Ministry in a small parish. I have no staff, so I enjoy working on the bulletins, answering calls, visiting parish members, managing two cemeteries...it has been a hands-on learning experience for being a pastor and I have loved all aspects of it! The crisis has allowed me to learn live streaming, video editing and lighting/camera management. I am constantly learning and enjoying every moment!

Being able to accompany students, faculty and staff at our Catholic university and our university parish as a priest. Also, very consoled to be with patients at our university hospital and inmates at a local correctional facility. I am very consoled in being able to work at the intersection of faith (as a priest) and science (as medical school faculty) -- bearing witness how these are very much integrated and not two different things.

Being able to be present to people of various backgrounds in both ordinary and extraordinary situations. Another area would be that no two days are ever the same. Within one day I can be helping serve food at a homeless shelter, then go to meet with a multi-millionaire deal with health issues.

I love working with people, preaching, and administering the sacraments. To be invited into the intimacy of people's lives is challenging at times, but also incredibly humbling. It is a beautiful life.

Working in Catholic Schools has been the greatest joy of my life. I never understood being called Father until I walked in those doors each day.

Estoy muy satisfecho administrando los sacramentos y sirviendo a las personas y familias con necesidades espirituales. [I am very satisfied administering the sacraments and serving people and families with spiritual needs.]

Nearly every day I get pumped to preach and teach. I love helping to spread moments of intimacy with our Lord. I'm set on fire with the prospect of aiding people's faith and of reconnecting them to Salvation History so that they can identify themselves as part of the story. I'm sometimes moved to tears when I'm confronted with the magnitude of this vocation - It's beautiful and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Worship - It is an honor to offer the sacraments and I find it extremely fulfilling. Teaching/Preaching - Preaching at Mass is more rewarding and fulfilling than I expected. I also am enjoying teaching adult education and high school class in theology. Governing - I find the governance of parish to be more fulfilling than I thought possible. It is stressful to figure out finances and the administration, but it a joy to organize the charisms of the parish and build up the faith.

I am very satisfied as a priest. Celebrating the sacraments, preaching, and pastoral counseling are all very satisfying. However, the most important aspects of satisfaction as a priest entail helping those entrusted to my care discover their vocations, developing relationships and friendships with those who are entrusted to my care.

I am most satisfied in the relationships that are formed with parishioners, families and individuals. The way they let you into their lives is so beautiful. It's humbling and a privilege. I love preaching. One of my favorite dimensions of priesthood. Strategic thinking for parish, school, and diocesan development in terms of evangelization and igniting the faith and love of our people. I so enjoy all of that. Celebrating the sacraments, particularly in moments of healing and/or conversion are so special. I recently helped a friend who had been away from God and the Church for many years come back and she experienced such healing. It's hard to express what it means to be a part of that.

Satisfaction with their Fellow Priests, Dioceses, and Religious Communities

Priests also mention satisfaction with their fellow priests, with their dioceses and bishops, and with their religious communities. While this is the second most frequently mentioned topic, it is considerably less frequently mentioned than priests' satisfaction with their parish ministries. Below are some representative comments.

Mi vida espiritual. La evangelización. El contacto con el pueblo. El apoyo de mi obispo y la relación con mis hermanos sacerdotes. [My spiritual life. Evangelization. Contact with the people. The support of my bishop and the relationship with my brother priests.]

Priestly fraternity. Whether it is with the entire presbyterate at the annual convocation, gathering with the priests from the deanery or the other newly ordained priests, meeting for dinner with a handful of brothers for dinner after the vigil Mass on Saturdays, or simply spending time with my pastor, priestly fraternity has been and remains very important.

Life with priests in my rectory (we are 4, two associates, pastor and I retired priest). We help each other and have a good relationship. I still meet with some of my classmates. Preaching is something I love but creates anxiety sometimes. A lot of people involved in ministry.

In this my first year as a priest, I am most satisfied with the community life I have with my confreres whom I live. As a member of the [Congregation] I am very happy to be part of this Evangelization team for the Hispanic Community here in the [Diocese]. This has been a wonderful experience for me and a good start for my ministry in the priesthood. I am also very satisfied with the opportunity I have to minister in this area, which I have the chance to meet people from all Latin America. It is a blessing to get to know them and learn from all their culture which enriches my ministry. Also, I am most satisfied with prayer life which is very active and very important both in our community house and within the communities we minister.

Celebrating liturgy, sacraments, having spare time for interfaith social justice work in the community.

Able to perform my sacramental duties on a regular basis. Having ability to visit nursing homes and hospitals, etc.

My ordinary has been very supportive and very engaged with the newly ordained priests. This is a plus already. His concern for our well-being has been indeed a blessing to my ministry. My ordinary encourages me to keep on on-going formation. Parish life was super enriching and encouraging. The parishioners were very supportive in my first

assignment. Spiritual life was / has been stable. taking personal time to pray. Psychologically speaking, has been good having my primary family nearby. Health-wise, I have the capacity and desire to keep playing sports and play team sports. This has been a great blessing to my ministerial life. My Jesu Caritas group has been another great blessing for me.

In my relationship with my community as well as my friendship with some priests and people. Also, I am very satisfied with my personal prayer and Communication with God through my spiritual director.

The support I receive from my religious community.

Priesthood is the primary vehicle for me to love and serve others, through the sacraments, and through my religious vows and ministry. Community life is likewise nourishing.

I find the most satisfaction as a [religious institute individual], religious priest in building relationships and bridges between the diocesan Church world, the [Religious institute] and our parishioners. I like breaking the mold a bit of some people's expectations of a priest and of the Church - hopefully by modeling a servant model of priesthood and by reaching out to the unchurched and to people of other faith traditions.

I am satisfied in my encounters and relationships with parishioners, whether appointments or sacraments; this has been fulfilling. I have been able to see the growth from year 1 to now year 5, that has given me satisfaction. I get along with my brother priest and bishop. My prayer life and discipline keep maturing with and it also gives me a sense of satisfaction.

Celebration of the sacraments, priestly fraternity with classmates and others in the diocese.

I am most satisfied when doing specific ministry tasks and the sacraments (Mass, baptisms, teaching, preaching, pastoral visits, etc.) I am also satisfied with the brotherhood and community that I am experiencing with most of my presbyterate and brother priests from seminary.

I love being a priest!!!! Celebrating the sacraments is the high point of course, particularly the Mass and Confessions. I've been blessed to be at assignments that were hubs of Confessions, so I have heard a lot of them! I also have loved just being with people... as a priest, you are just with the People of God all the time, and for the most part, that has been such a blessing. The people are so good, and they want to love their priests! I have also loved the priestly fraternity, it has been great to be part of such a wonderful team. I love being a priest!

I am most satisfied in celebrating the sacraments for the people of God. I love the parishioners and am grateful for the warm welcome as a newly ordained priest. I like hospital ministry and ministering to people in the face of death. I am also satisfied with the priest fraternity and older priests wanting the newly ordained to have healthy habits and relationships.

Preaching and presiding at the Eucharist are the most fulfilling parts of my ministry. I am in a bit of a unique position in that I am pursuing doctoral studies as a first-year priest, but I find the theological studies to be very fulfilling and to enhance and enrich my Christian life and my relationships and ministry with others. I have also been encouraged by the support of older colleagues who affirm my special ministry, my own gifts, and talents.

Priestly fraternity in my dioceses is fantastic. And we have always had that reputation. Despite differences in age, ideology, politics, etc. we are all brother priests supporting one another as we preach the same Jesus Christ. Support from parishioners. Their kindness and generosity are humbling. My own prayer / work / leisure balance. Fitting in prayer was tough for me at first, but I am indebted to my Jesu Caritas group and my spiritual director for helping me to make the time in my schedule for prayer. I love celebrating Mass with the parish on Sunday! I have always been very adept with liturgy - and I know my style is not for everyone - but it's beautiful to see the servers improving each week, and to hear the people respond more heartily to the chant each week. I have a fantastic pastor, we are polar opposites in so many ways, but we complement each other and make a great team. I have learned a lot from him and I am grateful to work with him.

My parish is wonderful. My pastor is supportive, he really cares about me and the parish, and he is a man of faith. The Lord has been very good to me.

I am very satisfied with my life as a religious priest. I feel joyful to live the evangelical councils, and feel very supported by my superiors and brothers. I think the most satisfying part of being a priest would be my common life with my brothers in community. Being able to share and reflect on ministry with them helps me engage as a sacramental minister. It also reduces the pressure that ministry can place upon us. As a scholar, being able to discuss research and writing with other priests and religious of my community is likewise enriching.

Celebrating the sacraments, especially confession and the Eucharist. Spiritual Direction, both giving and receiving. Priestly fraternity among the Archdiocesan Presbyterate.

The support I receive from my bishop. I want to teach the Catholic Faith as it was handed on to us for so many generations. I have been so fortunate to have a bishop who

backs up his priests on such things. Also, the times I have been able to say the TLM has been a tremendous benefit to my priesthood.

I love being able to serve the people and bring mercy and forgiveness into their lives. I also really enjoy being at a university and helping form seminarians as vocation director. Lastly, we have a great diocese and an amazing Bishop!

I am most satisfied in the opportunity to celebrate sacraments with people and feeling competent to do so. I am satisfied in experiencing the first few years of priestly ministry in the midst of senior priests in my religious order (community retirement house nearby) who offer their support, listening, and generosity to me in this first assignment.

Community life consisting of common prayer and meals especially. Our shared vision. Support of the other community members.

The ability to work closely with seminarians, families, and brother priests throughout my whole diocese. Overall, I feel valued and respected as an important member of the Diocese and Presbyterate, and to know that my ministry is important for the good of the individual discerners and the good of the Church.

I am most satisfied with sacramental ministry - especially in pastoral visits to the home-bound and hospitalized. The archdiocese has done a good job in maintaining contact with recently ordained including regular (quarterly) meetings for those ordained 5 years or less. It is good that the archbishop has taken an interest in the spiritual and mental well-being of his priests - especially those who are just starting in their ministries.

Most satisfied in being able to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the highest thing any human being can do. Also, I am blessed to have a wonderful bishop who is very orthodox, loves the LORD and his Mother, the Virgin Mary. I have the distinction of being the first person our bishop ordained.

I am most satisfied with the priestly fraternity and support among priests. I would say I am most satisfied above all by direct ministry to people in need, and helping to bring them to see the presence of God in their lives.

I don't know what areas...overall, I am satisfied, I do feel I have a supportive network as a priest, among my priest prayer group, spiritual director, supportive friends, brother priests, and colleagues in ministry, throughout the Archdiocese. So, while I am a bit of a drive from them, I do feel I am supported, and that I can call my bishop if I really feel the need to speak with him, and he will get back to me in a timely manner.

Communal living, I have lived with 7 different priests and most were in my age range. It was a great learning experience and positive healthy living. The IPF Spiritual Direction

Training Program also was a huge asset. It greatly enhanced my ability to relate to people who come for counseling or any type of meeting.

I am satisfied to have a Bishop that has a vision of missionary discipleship in our Diocese that he has both written about but also implemented within the Diocesan Curia. I am happy to be part of a Presbyterate that certainly has different opinions and theologies but has a shared sense of fraternity. I am satisfied in offering the sacraments (more especially the Eucharist and confession) to people and accompanying some on their path of deeper conversion. This pandemic has made many things difficult but it has been a good avenue for creativity in the use of technology and spreading the reach of our work. New methods, expressions, and ardor are being utilized for the New Evangelization. I am enriched by young families in the Movement Cristiano Familiar (Christian Family Movement) that I am working with at my current assignment.

I love being a spiritual Father. It is a tremendous source of joy to accompany families, discerners and parishes towards holiness. Community among diocesan brothers is a great gift. Younger clergy gather frequently formally and informally. Older clergy are very supportive and engaged also. Bishop is present and attentive.

Working with my pastor has been absolutely wonderful and my bishop has stayed connected with us, especially during the pandemic. The community has been amazingly supportive this first year as a priest. Having a bit more freedom to structure my prayer life and personal time (as compared to seminary) is a breath of fresh air, too. I have also greatly enjoyed getting to know my brother priests.

Areas of Personal Satisfaction

Some priests mention finding satisfaction in their personal and emotional lives. Below are some representative comments.

I have a good working relationship with my Pastor. I have good prayer life and good relationship with the people I serve.

The people and God's grace keep me going. I love my quiet time in prayer, reading, contemplation and then find energy and passion in being able to share the fruit of that with others. The motto of the [Order] characterizes well that life and work of a diocesan priest. My priest friends also bring me much joy as we fraternally gather to share our joys and struggles. Finally, I love when people become energized, inspired, and on fire for their faith. Journeying with them when they have that awakening moment and feel spiritually fulfilled fulfills me as well.

I am amazed at the power a priest has to give God's Mercy to a soul-especially in anointing the sick. To be able to forgive all sins, even purgatory time is amazing. Mass

is amazing. I do love when I can feel a connection with Jesus. Some insight I'll receive during Mass or just a feeling of oneness. Sometimes in homilies or confession I'll know that the words / power /virtues coming through are not mine alone, but are from God.

Hearing confessions, witnessing to the faith, celebrating the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, preaching, Adoration, the Rosary, ministering to men, ministering to college students, and ministering to families. I enjoy great priestly fraternity. Spending an hour with the Lord each day in prayer is especially satisfying. I love being a priest and bringing the sacraments to the faithful. It is incredibly uplifting to see sinners reconciled to God and to witness the faith people have despite poor formation and poor leadership. Anointing the sick and praying with the dying also brings me great hope and helps to increase my own faith. I do not find that I am over-burdened with "work" and so I have ample time to spend with friends and family. I led an Exodus 90 group recently and this was life-changing.

My spiritual life has been the area of my life that I have grown in the most into as a priest.

I have a wonderful relationship with my pastor that has made these three years of ministry a joy. He has allowed me to discover my own unique priestly style while also being available when I have questions.

In our diocese the world is falling apart. I am happy to be a newly ordained priest in the midst of it to be able to help build what comes next. I am grateful not to be overly attached to old structures that might need to fade away in the post-scandal, post-bishop resignation, post-bankruptcy, post- Covid-19 era we're moving into.

I find work in God's vineyard to be different than I would have anticipated when I was in seminary, but also more rewarding. I feel a deep spiritual connection to God as his priest, a vocation that I could only experience to understand.

I feel like I'm doing what God wants me to do.

The belief that this vocation is God's will for me.

Other Areas of Satisfaction

Finally, some priests mentioned some areas of satisfaction that do not fit easily into any of the above categories. Below are some examples.

Very satisfied! Hopefully a new generation of faithful, balanced and courageous priests will find their way into the Episcopate. Today's bishops are most disappointing. Heavy responsibilities that none are able to bear – doesn't help us priests.

Being a spiritual father to the men in seminary and forming them in their priestly formation.

The satisfaction of being a priest. My vocation is the greatest gift of God. Experiencing the joy of being part of Christ's priesthood. Most satisfied in while anointing the sick the anointing of the sick....I have seen the tears with joy people say "thanks for coming...now I am free and happy to say good bye." Many seek a priest in their final moments.

International experience, Community life (spiritual life).

Look... I am very satisfied in general because I have come to grips with a truth about life that no one will ever tell you... you have to figure it out on your own. And what is that truth? That not just the Church, but the world in general is a theatre, and we are all actors in it. We are all playing a part that will sometimes contrast greatly with our interior life. We are all playing a game. And rule number one of this game is that you are not supposed to say that it is a game. I do believe in God, but the greatest proof that I have of him is the miracle of consciousness. And I spend a lot of time contemplating that extraordinary thing. And so, I can say that I am happy. Now, as a priest I do enjoy writing homilies. I spend a lot of time thinking about them.

Working with college students has been a great blessing. I know that my own faith grew as a result of the Catholic Student Center in college, and it has been encouraging to see so many students taking their faith seriously especially in such a difficult environment and culture. Also, the priestly fraternity in my diocese is very good. It's easy to find a healthy support structure with a group of normal, faithful, zealous, fun guys - certainly with classmates and peers but also with older priests as well.

The work of ministry and education have been very rewarding and have helped me develop strong friendships with both clergy and laity.

In my current role, I primarily spend time with college students in a (secular) campus ministry setting. I have seen so much growth and conversion in the students that I really do believe I have one of the best priestly jobs in the Catholic church right now. Just one soul transformed makes any suffering worth it!

I love offering Mass and hearing confessions. Although my assignments do not give me much opportunity to visit the sick, I am always happy and satisfied to do so. The most satisfying aspect of being the Director of Vocations/Seminarians is working closely with the seminarians and providing one-on-one guidance and formation. I am most satisfied when, due to the level of trust between a seminarian and me, I am able to assist them in approaching discernment well and overcoming difficulties. In my parochial and campus ministry, I am most satisfied when preaching and teaching.

Areas Where Least Satisfied with Priestly Life

Priests were also asked to write in a response to this question: *In what areas are you least satisfied in your life as a priest?* Some 863 provided a response.

Thirty priests say they do not have any areas where they are unsatisfied. Among the rest, most priests listed more than one area where they are unsatisfied with their lives as priests. Responses have been grouped into the following three categories:

- Dissatisfaction at their place of ministry
- Dissatisfaction with their presbyterate, diocese, religious institute, and larger Church
- Dissatisfaction in areas related to their personal lives and needs

Each of these categories is described further below, with sample comments presented.

Dissatisfaction in their Place of Ministry

Responding priests list a wide array of areas they find dissatisfying at the place where they minister, the most frequently mentioned category of dissatisfaction. The areas the priests mention most often are:

- Unable to perform administrative and human resource duties due to lack of training
- Poor relationship with the pastor or immediate superior, including a lack of mentoring and feeling unappreciated
- Too much work and feeling burnt out
- Disappointment with the laity they minister to
- Difficult staff members and power struggles
- Dissatisfaction with their assignments

Below are some examples of these comments that mention dissatisfaction at their place of ministry.

Administration, finances, no one really ever taught these in seminary.

I am least satisfied with administrative aspect of parish life: on one hand, because of lack of preparation/ training from the seminary, and on the other hand, because of the bureaucracy that I sometimes have to experience when dealing with the diocese and civil governments. Also, as a pastor or parish administrator, I have to make decisions all the time, and most often, I get afflicted with decision-fatigue.

I am most dissatisfied with the administrative side of the job, which takes a lot of time away from pastoral work, and for which there is very little help. The administrative and pastoral duties together create a workload which makes it very hard to live a balanced life. There is so little time for proper meals, sleep,

exercise, and socializing, and I also feel exhausted. While it is beautiful to be a pastor, I would have liked more than just 4 years of experience as a parochial vicar before taking on the role. I also wish someone from above would ask me how I am doing every now and then. Our formators were so "on top of us" in the seminary. Then we were ordained and nobody checks up on us to see how we're doing, ever.

My formation did not prepare me for practical issues related to the economic life of the parish. I basically have no idea how banking, taxes, fundraising, etc., works except in vague generalities.

Too much administration work that I was unprepared for in seminary. The phrase "your parish will have people to do that." is extremely wrong. I have had to learn finances, HR, fundraising and other admin concerns on the fly!

I think one of the things that I find least satisfying is the administrative work of the parish. Not because it is boring or tedious but because I have no idea of what I am doing regarding this stuff. I do not feel like I received any training in this area. Not that I think it is something worth four years of classes on.

The burden of parish administration (constant management of federal, state, local, and diocesan requirements) and ever-looming need to organize and reorganize everywhere and marshal volunteers and train and re-train staff can be suffocating and at times disheartening.

I am dissatisfied in rectory living. There's little fellowship or community. My pastor is not proactive about anything really, but things like meals together or prayer, he never gave any direction. I eventually had to make him and the other vicar put a weekly meal on our calendars. Lack of communication from the diocese is so disheartening. Vicar for Clergy doesn't respond to communications. My vocation director never once reached out to me in my first year as a priest. Collegiality seems to be almost completely forgotten at our chancery. Our priest council is merely chancery officials telling us what they're doing. The bishop doesn't ask for our advice and we don't give it. Lack of convincing leadership on the part of my bishop, my pastor, and other priests. My pastor (who is nearly 40 years ordained) has not once asked me how things are going or what I'm learning, highs and lows, nothing. He doesn't seem interested in us, the young priests, no mentoring at all even though I've explicitly asked for it. Finally, I don't seem to fit in in the presbyterate. Other young guys are much more conservative and traditional liturgically, and seem to have little theological, biblical, or pastoral acumen. I like the older guys but I'm a little more conservative than them and there's the age difference. Presbyterate is quite fractured and morale is low. Loneliness is tough too.

I have a pastor that I am with that provides very little if any mentoring and barely speaks to me.

Fraternal life with my pastor. He is absolutely the worst. I (and others in the parish) think he has undiagnosed Asperger's, and I was not prepared to work under a pastor who cares so little for the people! It's infuriating, and if I were to stay at this parish for a third year I may consider leaving the priesthood, it's just that bad.

Pastor is a good man, but not an effective leader, administrator or delegator. My priesthood has not been allowed to flourish and I have not really been able to come into my own as a priest. I am less sure of myself and "worse off" than when I began my assignment 3 years ago.

With my current pastor. He has been ordained almost 51 years and he is a total control freak. He seems totally jovial and nice to others in the parish but behind closed doors he is a total two-faced man; not caring who he talks about, etc. Needless to say, the pastor I currently have has been the area I am least satisfied with as a priest.

I am struggling in the relationship with the pastor as he has a personal, mental disease that has an effect on everyone in the parish including staff. We have brought things to the attention of diocese administration, but it does not seem like there has been a response or follow-up.

I'm dissatisfied with the parish leadership, namely, the pastor. He doesn't include me in any of the decision meetings. He treats me as if I'm one of the about-to-be-retired priests. It's almost as if he is threatened by a young, energetic priest.

La vida con mi comunidad, especialmente con mi superior inmediato, me ha humillado, me ha negado permisos, no se comunica conmigo y si trato de hablar con el, siempre encuentra cosas que echarme en cara. somos una comunidad disfuncional. [Life with my community, especially with my immediate superior, has humiliated me, he has denied me permits, he does not communicate with me and if I try to talk to him, he always finds things to throw at me. We are a dysfunctional community.]

(1) Stress as the large parish I am at now has too many activities and is much busier than the last parish. We had 5 Masses on Sundays plus the vigil on Saturday night and scheduled confessions 4 times each week. The schedule on one particular night here is so busy that my first year here I had no time for dinner as I was busy with confessions, benediction, Mass, and RCLA all in a row with no break from 5:30 pm-9 pm. (2) Sometimes prayer is rushed due to busyness and insufficient time for exercise. (3) We are supposed to have an off day but pastor scheduled meetings and school confessions on my off day, which was frustrating. (4) Lack of camaraderie between priests as I try to socialize with them but frequently plans fall through as their schedule is too busy and can't make it.

Working with an older pastor who always needs to be in control and does not know how to collaborate has been the most frustrating part of parish ministry and very limiting to my growth as a future pastor myself.

I find myself extremely overworked at times, often with little to no help from office staff. I sometimes struggle to understand what exactly my superiors expect from me in ministry.

The busyness of my life as a priest. The archdiocese has put me in a situation where I am part time at 2 parishes which take up 50% of my time, yet I am expected to work 100% at each place, particularly in serving the Spanish community. The archdiocese gives no support and it seems as though they don't care that they are setting up a priest for burnout.

How many people are not concerned about being holy and a disciple of Christ. The level of Mass attendance and/or knowledge of the faith by parishioners, often due to society but older priests who were likely not true to their vocation or conformity to Christ. Older priests who see themselves as more self-help guides than being holy priests. Poor or irreverent liturgy in many parishes. Not seeking what is true, good, and beautiful. Not symbolizing the transcendental nature of what is occurring at Mass. Staff problems. Individuals who are not

seeking holiness or do not have a real desire to be faithful. Personal issues among certain staff members. Most priests are forced to do the work of a few priests. Overwhelming administrative work at times. Not making enough time in the spiritual life. My bishop's decision to ordain a man clearly not suited for the priesthood. Having to be in the parish with that same priest. Not having the opportunity to fully express my concern with the bishop and pastor. Lack of purity of heart. The addiction to pornography among priests, improvement in my addiction but not fully under control. This needs to be very much addressed in seminaries! Busy putting "fires" out all the time when I could be praying, studying, and visiting with the faithful. Lack of fraternity and support as whole in my diocese. Lack of respect for the Church and priesthood, even among the faithful and the Church's leadership. Poor leadership in the Church which leads to confusion and scandal, even in Rome and from the pope at times.

I was well prepared by my seminary as far as the four pillars. With my interior life, I would say that my least satisfying aspect of my life is the continual growth process of my life of virtue and holiness. But I suppose that is appropriate to not be happy with where one is at. I am least satisfied in the 'clean-up' that has to be done by priests when they follow previous generations. Yes, they loved the people as they saw fit, but the liturgical irregularities, 'wonky' para-liturgies, illicit actions, lax implementation of the instructions of the Second Vatican Council have left a huge void. The faithful tell me of far too many things they've 'never heard of' or 'haven't heard of since I was a child' or 'I didn't know we still believed in that'. And, because of lack of leadership/ authority/ ordained leadership, whatever one would call it, the structural organization is sound and robust, but the interior life and catechesis in the life of holiness is lacking. I suppose focus on 'programs' and 'councils/ committees' have neutered the life of the faithful.

Lack of structure at times leaves me unmotivated and undisciplined; loneliness/ living alone; sometimes feeling personally attacked by criticism, both from laity and other priests.

1. My personal holiness and prayer life are not satisfying to me. The problem is myself. 2. I am very disappointed at the grossly poor knowledge of the bible among parishioners. 3. I am also dissatisfied at the lack of spirit filled activities that can really take people deeper into the experience of God's presence in a personal way. Apart from Mass, there are no spiritual functions in the week. Even when they are provided, not many parishioners attend.

I am least satisfied in my life as a priest when having to deal with the politics of the parish and the diocese, particularly as when they center on money. Too often, it appears, that money comes before ministry and the focus of the life and the welfare of the parish and the people of God has more to do with their wallets than their souls. It is also disheartening to witness the lack of trust and confidence that people have in the Church and, in truth, it is hard to blame them. The Church has, in so many instances, violated the sacred mission given to it, and the lack of confidence the faithful have in their bishops and priests is the result.

Administration. Dealing with the pettiness of employees. The day to day troubleshooting when there are people who are on staff who should be doing their jobs. The tiring and endless meetings that seem not to bear much fruit or results.

The drama that goes on in a parish staff and the time spent in meetings is very difficult.

Working with incompetents.

The bloated aspects of parish life: too many meetings, drama of parish staff, fear of doing what is necessary for salvation of souls.

Working with parish staff environments that may be hostile, uncharitable, or lacking understanding and appreciation of priestly ministry. Celebrating funerals or weddings for bodies of people that are not catechized. Particularly funerals, which tend to be situations where families will demand things without any appreciation for the Church's teachings. Trying to live out my priesthood to those who do not want a spiritual father.

Currently, I am the vocations director. I do not like working in an office. I do not like not having a parish as I did for the first four years of my priesthood. I do not like administrative work or having to write reports for the bishop. I spend a lot of time on non-sacramental work, and my ability to work with large numbers of people has significantly diminished. I celebrate Mass privately most days, and my opportunities to hear confessions have drastically lessened.

Lack of community life. While I understand that community life is not an essential aspect of diocesan priesthood, and that many diocesan priests don't want to live in community, it is something that I think would benefit me in particular. The only other thing is the multiplication of assignments. I have four distinctly separate assignments at the moment, perhaps because I'm young and am not prone to getting too overwhelmed due to an easygoing temperament. However, being spread too thin with multiple assignments, as many of my confreres are, means that all of them will be done mediocrally well, as opposed to doing 1-2 things really well.

My actual assignments. Of 5 years of priesthood I have spent only one in full time pastoral ministry. I have worked in the chancery as director of the office of worship for two years and one year as a full-time priest secretary for the bishop. Both of those jobs have been on a superficial level very dissatisfying and a tremendous challenge. I know that God will use these crosses and I trust in his providence, but on a personal level it has been a very hard couple of years. Priests are made to be spiritual fathers, it's what my heart yearns for!

Dissatisfaction with their Presbyterate, Diocese, Religious Institute and Larger Church

Somewhat related to their frustrations regarding their places of ministry, many priests also write of frustration with their fellow priests, their dioceses, their religious institutes, bishops nationally, and the international Church. Themes mentioned include:

- Dissatisfaction with their (arch)diocese, including a lack of communication, the amount of bureaucracy and paperwork, not feeling cared about, ineffective diocesan councils and deaneries, poor handling of priest assignments, its lack of a mentoring program for newly ordained priests, the handling of the sex abuse crisis, its over-focus on money, feeling personally persecuted from their diocese, and religious priests not feeling appreciated or included by the diocese

- Dissatisfaction with their bishop, including their lack of a relationship with him, his not defending his priests, his lack of vision
- Frustration with his fellow priests and presbyterate, especially their lack of cohesion or unity, the culture war and polarization in the presbyterate, generational differences, ideological differences, and other priests not being sufficiently orthodox or holy
- Dissatisfaction with their religious institute, including being assigned to a place where the priest does not live in community or with too few fellow priests, and community leaders being unresponsive to your needs
- Poor leadership nationally by the USCCB
- Disappointment with the pope's leadership

Below are some examples of these comments that mention dissatisfaction with their presbyterate, diocese, religious institute and the larger Church.

Any and all contact with the more "practical" arms of the archdiocese offices, the real estate, financial offices (each of which manifest destructive, awful, self-serving corruption and a track record of incompetence) suck the life out of my priestly spirit. The only thing more damaging than this is knowing that there are nearby parishes and priests such as those active at [Parish] and [Parish] who actively and vocally promote causes and ideology manifestly contrary to the faith. The scandal that they give and the lack of apparent correction by the hierarchy not only make it difficult to serve and to speak the truth, but their scandal evacuates the effectiveness and even the meaning of the priesthood and the faith we serve.

Being administrator of a parish. The lack of accompaniment on behalf of the bishop/VG/vicar for clergy. Seminary emphasizes collaboration and accompaniment, a teacher/student model; however, I am met with a sink or swim model. For example, I've had four different assignments in less than four year, and not once was I approached by the pastor/bishop/VG or VC to see how things were going. It is disheartening the lack of accompaniment provided for newly ordained priests.

Dealing with the ineffective staff at the chancery and condescended to by them. Sitting through pointless presbyteral council meetings where the ordinary and other people listen to themselves talk ad nauseum. No meaningful conversation is ever had because the ordinary becomes defensive and will not countenance disagreement.

Generally speaking - the problems I experience in the priesthood are my problems. In a different vocation and occupation, I'd have the same problems even if they didn't manifest in exactly the same way. Perhaps the only dissatisfaction I've experienced particular to this vocation is with the attitude of my brother priests and my bishop. Our diocesan offices (bishop, vicar general, other employees) are really bad communicators and tend to bully the priests to get their way. I know for certain that they've thrown at least 2 of our priests under the bus for fear of going through litigation after unfounded or non-criminal accusations.

They've done irreparable damage to their reputations and that's scary to me. Consequently, our presbyterate is really cynical about those offices. It's hard to be hopeful when everyone is telling you that everything is bad. It's hard to be bold for the gospel when your superiors don't have your back.

I am from the Diocese of [Name], that should explain everything. The diocesan administration here is absolutely abysmal in every sort of way. I do not feel our last bishop supported his priests or had their welfare in mind. The diocesan communications are absolutely terrible. We have to read things in the news and are rarely kept abreast of things via email. Often times, important email communications circulate through our Catholic center but they are never sent to the priests, making us the last to know. There is no substantial opportunity on the diocesan level for continuing spiritual and intellectual formation. There is little priestly fraternity other than what an individual priest makes of it. Equally, there is no diocesan community of parishes, rather every parish feels like it is on an Island of their own. Thankfully our diocesan seminary of [Name] closed amidst scandal; it should have closed long ago due to unhealthy numbers and lax spirituality. Parish ministry, the people of God, and hope for the future through Christ is what keeps me going. I have little, if any, respect for what happens on the diocesan level.

I do not mind being busy (in fact, I like it), but I feel like I am becoming busier so that tough decisions, regarding restructuring our diocese by closing parishes don't have to be made. Currently I am the pastor of two separate parishes (3 churches) that have no secretaries, maintenance people, or any paid staff; I am the college chaplain at [Name] University; and I am a [Name] Chaplain that drills every weekend and two weeks out of the year. My ministries cover a full 1-hour radius, except for when I am doing Guard Chaplaincy, which covers the entire state. Again, I am fine being busy, but I am already trying to juggle so much and our future vocation numbers look terrible. 4 priests are retiring this year, and 0 are being ordained. We see the writing on the wall, and yet nothing changes with the structure of our diocese or the amount of parishes we are trying to still cover. I feel like we are expecting priests to be super human, and I fear it is going to lead priests into the classic outlets of vice and sin. Finally, I am fine when someone outside the Church dislikes me or dislikes what the Church stands for and takes it out on me. It is very painful, however, when the people in the Church say or do hurtful things to me. It always catches me off guard, and it leads me in a dark place for a while. I simply don't expect to be the punching bag for people inside the Church, but it happens more often than you would think. I find myself daydreaming a lot about joining a religious order in order to finally find some peace/structure, and if I am honest with myself, I want to simply escape the tediousness of diocesan priesthood with all of its administrative demands, lukewarm society, painful liturgies due to lack of human resources, etc. Religious life looks very balanced and a much healthier place for priests right now.

Areas where I am least satisfied in my life as a priest is with the lackluster leadership of our bishops, who (overall) seem to be very passive, unimpressive, and weak in leadership. After all that has been made public over the past couple years with the most recent wave of the sex abuse crisis, I have not found most of our bishops to be inspiring leaders.

When I was in seminary, I thought the hardest thing was celibacy, but I found it is obedience. I am least satisfied with the direction the diocese takes at times. I do not know where I stand in the grand scheme of things. Not knowing what the future holds in my ministry or diocese is frustrating. Another thing that is least satisfying is the relationship with my bishop. Many of us priests don't hear from him or see him unless it's at a diocesan event. There is no check in and going to see him, seems like it requires an act of congress. We have to make an appointment with him. If we are wanting to speak with him, it won't be just to waste his time, it is because it's important. Another least satisfying thing is the constant change in the presbyterate. Change is not a bad thing, and different cultures is good for a diocese, but it seems every couple of months when we have a diocesan event, I recognize less and less people. A lot of our priests are loaned and are not incardinated in our diocese so sometimes they get called back and leave us with a hole, which either gets filled by another priest on loan, or handled by a religious order, or another parish that includes their own, meaning our priests are stretched thin.

I have been disappointed by my bishop's lack of apparent interest in and availability to me and my brother priests. I was hoping for a warm and encouraging spiritual father and I've been given a rather distant and even forbidding CEO.

I am not satisfied with the level of support that I receive from my bishop or the various diocesan offices. I am currently in an assignment the has 5 churches, covering two entire counties, as well as a major university, and the diocese and my bishop have largely forgotten about us. The diocese as well seems to lack any real direction or leadership.

My archbishop, who ordained me, is nearly a total stranger to me. Besides a signed Christmas card every year, I never hear from him personally. I have no idea if he is satisfied with my work as a pastor or not. The only time I hear from our chancery is when money is the topic or someone has complained about me. There is a circle of clergy who are very close to my archbishop. I am not, nor will I ever find myself with such a relationship with the man.

The archdiocese doesn't seem to care about their priests. We were told in seminary that we would get six years before being asked to be pastors, but I was appointed pastor of three parishes 18 months after ordination. I was thriving as a vicar and chaplain at a high school, and virtually every aspect of ministry that I enjoyed was taken away just so we could keep as many parishes open as humanly possible. The archbishop does not seem invested in me personally, and has regularly been dismissive or indifferent to issues that I have raised.

Dealing with issues among the presbyterate can be deflating. Some (including my pastor at times) can be very pessimistic and condescending. Also, I often run into the attitude of "make him do it since he is young and has energy." While I'm happy to do what I can to help, the "make the young guy do it" attitude wears thin. My time and energy are not infinite. I also live in a rectory that contains parish offices, very busy ones. There is almost no separation between work and home. This has worn me down. While I live there it doesn't feel like a home.

Divisions in the presbyterate - I think the older generation of priests look upon younger priests with suspicion. In general, my generation of priests tend more towards traditional liturgies and I've found the older generation is very resistant to us implementing more traditional liturgical practices. It's ironic, they want to call us rigid for being traditional, when they are the ones who aren't open minded enough to consider there might be a benefit to traditional aspects of the liturgy.

Internal conflicts, not being taken seriously, rigidity within diocesan presbyterate.

Rectory life, relationship or lack thereof with brother priests and bishop, toxic environment in presbyterate and diocesan structures.

1) Rectory living situation (another priest with whom I live is very difficult to get along with). 2) Division within presbyterate and dealing with a presbyterate that has generally low morale. 3) Little connection to bishop.

The poor brotherhood among priests. Besides Jesu Caritas meetings, we hardly socialize within us. The small cliques among the small presbyterate, the gossips, and the envy is very discouraging. Sometimes the overwork could be against a healthy priestly life. I noticed that if I become workaholic, could damage my ministry very badly and rapidly.

I don't have a voice. I've actually explicitly been told this by other priests. If you don't have a voice, nothing you say, nothing you think, matters or has value. There is a great toxicity in the presbyterate and in this diocese. It centers around Opus Dei and how that way of life feeds certain insecurities. In the past year, I've been told by one of my brother priests that he sees me as a competitor. I've been threatened with legal action by another because he also sees me as competition. I was a reporter who covered [topic]. I thought I knew all about ambition and ego. Then I become a priest. People on the extremes of the political theological liturgical spectrum can be vicious. I've at least learned how to navigate this aspect I don't read the anonymous letters any more. There's not a lot of balance in this life. I had a very demanding job before seminary. My evenings and weekends provided what I needed to be physically and emotionally healthy. I really don't have anything resembling that as a priest.

Relationship with older priests/downtown. It feels like we get thrown under the bus any time its remotely convenient. The archdiocese seems to get involved in parish ministry when we don't need them to, and refuse to help when we very much need their authority. Older priests seem threatened and reactive against us, and rarely allow us the chance to succeed or lead on our own.

I find that the greatest challenge in my life as a priest is dealing with the ever more apparent generational divide between younger priests and the older clergy. This divide is not perfectly uniform, of course, but it shows itself in many ways. I find that I am automatically approached with an air of suspicion by older priests — regardless of whether they would be considered "conservative" or "liberal" in their leanings (and I find those labels to be extremely unhelpful, even if many priests identify by them and evaluate others by them). The diocesan administration, too, seems to find the idea of giving responsibility to young priests or hearing their voices to be a low priority. Add to this the much greater forces at work right now, from the loss of credibility with the laity resultant from more than two decades of scandal, summarized in the [State] grand jury report, to the fact that my diocese is undertaking a Massive reorganization of parishes, and I can understand why younger priests feel alienated: both from their fellow priests and from their own people. I long for the concept of having just a single parish and a single community of people to minister to, and a strong structure of diocesan and fraternal support. I have fragments of all those things, but nothing like a complete image of any of them. I don't expect that I ever will (as perfect communities do not exist outside of heaven), but I hope that things improve on this front in the years ahead.

Camaraderie with diocesan priests. There is very little overlap or connection and often it seems that we were formed out of very different molds. In another way I am least satisfied with the cultural divisions in our Church and find it difficult to navigate what seems to be a political divide rather than authentic expressions of faith.

As a religious, the two-person lifestyle doesn't fit with how I was formed.

I am least satisfied with the culture of Church leadership, especially in my province. The scandals in the Vatican and the U.S. Church have obviously been demoralizing. But what is even more demoralizing is the cluelessness with which Church leaders deal with these scandals. The idea seems to be to ignore them with "happy talk." Frankly, the lack of transparency and outrage at the scandals is itself a scandal. But this is just a symptom of an ingrained institutional attitude among the leadership class in the Church. Frankly, these people do not understand the word "truth" or "lying" in the way that normal people do. They seem to think that the "truth" is whatever needs to be said in order to manipulate another person into feeling the way they want him to feel or do what they want him to do. But everyone knows this. So, Church leaders pretend that they're telling the truth, and I pretend to believe them. But it is ob. This is especially my experience with my province of

my religious order. Frankly, the leadership has inflicted some pretty grave abuse on me, and has forced me to collude in the coverup in order to be ordained. My provincial routinely lies to me in the sense above, and I know that I can't believe a word that he says. (He often doesn't even remember what he says even one hour after he says it, so I can't rely on what he says at any rate). One time, when I caught him in a lie and I caught him lying about lying, he openly confessed, "What I did, I did with the best of intentions, so I know that I have a clean conscience." But, of course, this contradicts the moral teaching of the Church, which he evidently does not consider himself bound by when he is carrying out his duties as superior. So, basically, as long as I focus on my prayer life, my relationship with God, and the people that I serve, I am very happy. But as a priest, I am least satisfied when the leadership of my province makes abusive decisions that affect years of my life.

The hierarchy and the priests in charge. We are reactive instead of visionary. The institution is protected more than Jesus in the Eucharist. The hierarchy is more concerned that people like us than the gospel is preached. I am incredibly frustrated with my first three years in ministry and seeing the ugly underbelly of what actually goes on.

I am tired of having to apologize for bishops. I'm a teacher, so let me be candid: you can have 30 students in a class and one student complains. Who do you obsess over? The one. 29 compliments vanish and we fixate on one. When our bishops (or idiotic priests, diocesan or religious) make absurd claims or behave irrationally, it actually makes me hate the institutional Church. I love Jesus, I believe in the Trinity, I love Mary, and I love being a priest...but, at times, I am a priest in spite of the Church's public sinfulness and stupidity.

It hasn't been a frequent occurrence in my life, but the most frustrating part of priesthood has been dealing with older priests of the boomer generation and even some of gen-x who are hostile towards younger priests without giving them a chance. I've also been frustrated by the US Bishop's actions in not taking ownership for the abuse scandal cover ups, the clear evidence that they knew about abuse (i.e. McCarrick) and did nothing. It's been frustrating that the US bishops seem more interested in saving their own reputations than standing for the truth, and it's been very clear to me that most bishops are willing to throw their own priests to the wolves to do so. The Dallas charter is a disgrace. I've also been discouraged by what the USCCB has decided to make statements on while remaining silent on issues like abortion. In summary I would say the leadership of most US bishops has been the most discouraging thing for me as a priest.

I find the actions of my archdiocese and sometimes of Pope Francis to be very discouraging.

I find the pope and the local bishop to be big sources of discouragement. Living alone and isolated from friends and other priests is depressing at times. In many ways, seminary trained me for a Church that doesn't seem to exist.

Dissatisfaction Related to their Personal Lives and Needs

Interrelated with the other two areas described above, priests wrote of their dissatisfaction in areas best described as personal areas. These areas include:

Not finding the support they need for their life as a priest from their fellow priests, the people they live with, and their pastors; not finding a local spiritual director, not finding help with their addictions, not finding time to be with their families and friends, not feeling appreciated or respected, no one checking in to see how they are doing, their same sex attraction issues, and issues related to being friends with lay persons

- Feeling lonely and isolated due to celibacy and not having an adequate social life
- Feeling so many demands on their time that they do not have a balanced life, have a poor spiritual and prayer life and inadequate spiritual growth, demanding family members, and not having learned how to say “No” when asked to do something
- Emotional issues such as not feeling they can be themselves due to their public role, their disappointment with themselves, their feeling guilty for the leisure time they take, feeling like they have to always be in a good mood, feeling they must always be politically correct, and feeling like they are not making a difference
- Feeling persecuted by their parishioners or fellow priests
- Their own sinfulness

Below are some examples of these comments that mention dissatisfaction in areas related to their personal lives and needs.

Perhaps the least satisfying aspect is the presbyterate. Upon being ordained I felt like I was shipped out to work with no one looking out for me. When days get long or situations are tough to navigate I never was taught where to turn. While prayer is the answer on one level, the presbyterate should also be there for each other. In two years of being ordained, I have not had a single guy reach out from my diocese to find out how I am doing. The lack of relationships in the aspect can be very dangerous but thankfully formators from school have remained close to fill this void.

El desinterés del obispo. El celibate. La monotonía de mi trabajo. El ego de mi párroco. El abuso del poder sobre mí. La persecución por hacer las cosas bien. La inequidad en la diócesis. [The disinterest of the bishop. Celibacy. The monotony of my work. The ego of my parish priest. The abuse of power over me. The persecution for doing things well. Inequity in the diocese.]

I think, one of the areas I am very disappointed is what in seminary is called the fraternity. The unity and help between priests. My whole family lives in another country, so I am alone in this country, and I do not find my "brother" priests trustful people with whom I can get together and spend holidays or have time to relax and have fun. Being a

"public figure" was something never was mentioned in my 9 years of formation, and I did not prepare myself to face complaints, and criticism from other "brother" priests, and from people who attend Church and are called Catholics. I was never prepared or advised about how to face false accusations, whether they are made by "brother priests" or lay people. I am very disappointed looking how many priests are working with other intentions, like power, high positions and even more sad, they do whatever they have to do to earn that, it does not matter if they destroy others. There is so much envy, jealousy and hatred among the clergy. It is sad.

The loneliness priesthood life offers. Lack of support from some pastors. Not open to multicultural diversity. Lack of support from bishops and chancery in general. Very few resources and programs available in Spanish. Very few opportunities for ongoing formation in my dioceses. Because I'm a bilingual priest, I've been told I can't plan on being 2-3 years outside of the diocese doing biblical studies. They only want canon lawyers.

The lack of mentorship or formal program of continuing education. Not much support - I felt like I was given a parish w/out so much as a "good luck" much less anyone checking on me or supporting me.

There is so little access to trained spiritual directors. I reached out to a lot of guys and got a lot of "sorry, I'm too busy." It was frustrating and I'm realizing more and more how badly I need it in my life.

I live alone. I much prefer having a pastor or "senior associate" to be a spiritual mentor and prayer partner.

The amount of drinking is too much. The sense that my opinion matters zero in any larger decision making/policy in the Church.

The demands of ministry can sometimes be overwhelming. Celibacy is also a tough thing sometimes.

I never expected I would feel this way and it initially was pretty jarring—to feel celibacy as unnecessary... don't get me wrong there are times here and there where I see the life being given. But at what cost? Of course, I knew what I was getting into, but I never expected at any level that I would feel and experience celibacy as something unnecessary. Also, I feel the people's expectations of a priest are pretty wild and many times unhealthy. It's very easy for people to see the priest as a celebrity or a purely spiritual being or even as a commodity. These were and sometimes still are difficult realities to process. I also personally struggle with the rather common ultra-conservatism in many of my young contemporaries. There seems to be a movement in young leadership in the Church that feels married to the Republican party. This has

been discouraging as the Church espouses no political system. As a result, I can feel disenfranchised a bit.

Rewards to be "on" or always happy which is unsustainable at times. Not enough support for sexual addiction and facing challenges of celibacy. Lack of confidence in Church leadership and how decisions are made. Unrealistic expectations of your priests to fulfill needs of diocese and rush to make them pastors.

Personal prayer life. Failing to pray as I should. Personal failures in chastity. Falling into sins of lust like pornography and masturbation.

Alone time.

Little care for the mental health of priests. Ever-increasing workload and demand on time. "I know you're busy Father ... but", the constant addition of work - responsibility. Rarely a day off.

My life is extremely unbalanced. I feel like I work constantly with no room for authentic leisure. In fact, I feel guilty if I ever take time for myself. I also feel very lonely at times. I don't live with any other priests, and the priests with whom I am close are also too busy to spend meaningful time together. The people of my parishes are wonderful but authentic friendships are difficult to build with parishioners because: 1) there is a power differential in the relationship, 2) it is rare that people don't try to at least occasionally "get information" or favors out of the relationship, 3) there are times that it would be inappropriate for a priest to share certain things that are happening in and around the parish life, and 4) the lives of the laity and the priest are just different so there can be a "gap" at the level of a deep understanding of the other's life.

Personal time. I find that when I have things planned for my day off something always seems to happen where I can't take the day. With this also comes the issue of meeting my spiritual director who is 2.5 hours away. We do meet but not as regularly as I would like. Parishioners don't understand that we (priests) need time off.

Large workload in parish, diocese needs to consider reducing Masses. Priests shouldn't be doing 4+ Masses on Sundays. Feel lonely. Lots of work, little pay. Parishioners always want our time, I feel drained.

It can be lonely. At times, I wonder if I would have been happier as a married man.

There is an isolation as a pastor in a rural community. I'm 40 miles in any direction from another priest or Catholic Church. The fraternity that sustains the priesthood is difficult to come by in many places.

General parish ministry, celebrating sacraments, marriage prep, counseling, wider diocesan events, work/life balance, living arrangement, time for fraternity (or lack thereof).

Social life (loneliness/isolation), addiction, mental health (anxiety/depression), feeling like I have to solve every problem and never make mistakes.

Isolation, dismal prospects for parish's future.

I don't really feel that I am in the least bit holy. Though that doesn't seem to be a qualification.

I am least satisfied with the loneliness that prayer has brought after transitioning from seminary life. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours alone in the Church or chapel requires a training that was not there in the communal life and routine of seminary. The administrative responsibilities and email backlog are difficult to be ahead of and leading people into success and working together as a parish team.

Just about everything. The entire lifestyle is opposite me. It's too noisy, too busy, too distracting, the drama of parish & school life is draining. The business administration roles of being a pastor of a parish, school, and preschool are very stressful. It's very difficult to pray and feel I am growing in my own relationship with God, because everything I do is focused on helping others grow in their relationship with God. When I finally sit quiet with God...I find I hardly ask how he is doing...I'm always asking him something about the ministry or what he wants to say in a homily, rather than just being with him as my friend, savior, the lover of my soul, the God of the universe. Too much is expected of the parish priest.

Struggle to establish strict routine of prayer.

1) Not making time to develop gifts. Ministry feeling like I am not making a difference at times. 2) Development of a busy daily life that is not my own in a parish with thousands of people, and, a life that is not focused on prayer, which I grew to love in the seminary, but have just the fragmented pieces of now.

I am not satisfied with my own spiritual and moral life.

Being a public person and judged by so many.

Most ministries that force me out of my comfort zone, gatherings of large people where I'm expected to be social.

My own sinfulness, my relationship with my pastor.

My personal sinfulness.

Interviews of Priests Regarding their Satisfaction with Priestly Life

At the end of the survey, CARA asked responding priests: *Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone interview with a researcher about the challenges facing recently ordained priests?* Of the 503 priests who volunteered for an interview, CARA selected 16 for in-depth interviews about how satisfied they are as priests and how satisfied they are with their seminary preparation.¹ To dig deeper into why some priests leave the priesthood – which especially happens nationally within their first five years after ordination – CARA oversampled priests for the interviews who reported feeling dissatisfied in their priestly life² and/or who were not sure if they would remain priests in the future.³ The table below shows the characteristics of the priests interviewed.

| Characteristics of the Priests Interviewed | |
|---|-------------------|
| Characteristics | Number of Priests |
| “Somewhat” or “very” satisfied overall with their life as a priest | 9 |
| “Somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied overall with their life as a priest | 7 |
| Diocesan priest | 11 |
| Religious priest | 5 |
| “Probably” will leave or is “uncertain” about his future | 9 |
| “Probably” or “definitely” will not leave | 7 |
| 39 or younger | 12 |
| 40 or older | 4 |
| U.S. born | 14 |
| Foreign born | 2 |
| Responded to the survey in English | 14 |
| Responded to the survey in Spanish | 2 |

In these interviews, the interviewer raised a number of topics with every interviewee, including: (1) How satisfied are you with your life as a priest? (2) What do you find most satisfying about your life as a priest? (3) What aspects of your life as a priest do you find least satisfying or most frustrating? (4) How well were you mentored after ordination for your

¹ The interview protocol is presented in Appendix II.

² Recall from a previous section that four-fifths of responding priests report being satisfied (“somewhat” or “very”) and one-fifth reports being dissatisfied (“somewhat” or “very”).

³ As will be presented later in this report, 94% of priests report that they “probably” or “definitely” will not leave the priesthood, with 6% saying they “probably will leave” or are “uncertain about [their] future.”

ministry by your diocese or religious congregation? (5) How well have you been supported by your diocese or religious congregation since ordination? (6) In what ways could your diocese or religious congregation have been more helpful and supportive to you after your ordination? Beyond these, the questions and topics asked about were most often follow-up questions to the topics raised by the interviewees.

Generally speaking, the satisfaction of the newly ordained priests interviewed is greatly associated with how welcomed, supported, and appreciated they feel. Most of them report feeling that way among the laity they serve. Not all, however, have that same feeling of support from the clergy in their dioceses and religious institutes. Not feeling supported or welcomed by the pastors who mentor them, their bishops and diocesan leaders, and/or their fellow priests who live in their area are the factors most likely to be associated with being dissatisfied.

Areas Where They Are Most Satisfied as Priests

When asked in the interview what areas they have found most satisfying in their lives as priests, all 16 interviewees identified some areas, including the one who had recently left the active priesthood. Generalizing, their satisfaction is tied to feeling welcomed, appreciated, and supported by the laity and clergy in the four categories shown below.

- Sacramentally and pastorally ministering to the laity (12 priests)
- The support they receive from their fellow priests (eight priests)
- Feeling supported by their diocesan leaders or superiors (four priests)
- Their positive relationships with and mentoring from their pastors (three priests)

Each of these areas are discussed further below.

Sacramentally and Pastorally Ministering to the Laity

Accompanying the laity and serving as priests while presiding at Masses, hearing Confessions, or teaching religious education or at parish schools are areas especially likely to be mentioned by the interviewees. Twelve priests – both those who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied with their lives as priests – mention these general areas of satisfaction.

The excerpt from the interview below comes from a priest in his 20s who is dissatisfied overall with his life as a priest and who is not sure whether he plans to remain a priest. That said, he raves about his relationship with the people in his parish.

Interviewer: *What do you find most satisfying about your priesthood, in your priestly life?*

Respondent: *I would think the amazing appreciation of what we do by people. It's kind of blows me away every time. When you're just thinking you're being a nice guy. People*

respond and tell you that they experienced God in their life through you. That kind of thing is still weird to get used to even after five years, to get a handle on like the fact that God communicates himself through the little things that I do on a regular basis. The appreciation of the laity is tremendous.

Another interviewee – who is in his 30s, is dissatisfied overall with his life as a priest, and will probably remain a priest – expresses the same sentiment about both the laity he works with as well as the parish staff.

Respondent: *We have a wonderful parish staff. I love working with them. Of course, Sunday liturgies, when the community is most present. To be able to celebrate the sacraments. Obviously Mass and Reconciliation among the top rated. I'm the chaplain of, I'm assigned to two parishes. One of our parishes has a large Brazilian community. I'm the chaplain for them, so I celebrate Mass for that community every week in Portuguese. I hear Portuguese confessions. It's a very active community so, I mean, and they call me, in Portuguese, the word pastor doesn't mean pastor. It means shepherd. They refer to me as their pastor. The word [Foreign Language] is pastor in Portuguese. They call the pastor [Foreign Language], but they call me pastor because I'm the priest that they have the most contact with. When something comes up in the community, when somebody's sick, when somebody dies, when somebody's born, when somebody's getting married, I'm the person that gets notified, that gets called when there's a problem. I get called. There's those aspects. Then I'm very...because I am a young priest, I am attractive to young people. Most young people can only think of seeing older priests in their life. They have a priest who is willing to go to Sky Zone and jump on trampolines with a bunch of the youth group kids, or to have a priest who's willing to just, like, walk around the center of town with you and grab a coffee so you can vent. Those aspects. I would just say like my regular contact with the people of God, specifically like I said I was a theology teacher. I taught juniors. That was just so fulfilling in priestly ministry because not only was I a teacher to them, but I was also a Father. That is the most satisfying.*

This interviewee – who is in his 30s, is satisfied overall as a priest and plans to remain a priest – also expresses great satisfaction with this aspect of his priestly life.

Respondent: *I think the most satisfying, bar none, is offering Mass and offering worship for and with the people. There have been truly sublime moments of that closeness with God especially in what I think have been the most rewarding. I think when I think of my closest friends, times I've felt closest to them is when we are offering together, when we're doing, when I'm serving, something like that. I think of that as really being the most satisfying thing. I mean, of course, the other most satisfying thing we get to do is*

preaching for the salvation of souls. That's kind of our raison d'être. I think the ability to do that most freely and to be present for people in those ways, I think has been deeply rewarding. The way that I sometimes take for granted just because I always presume I'll have a pulpit. I always presume I'll have the ability to speak and to preach, and to reflect in those ways. But I really should, I should be more grateful for it. It's just a tremendous blessing.

This priest in his 30s, who is satisfied overall with his life as a priest and is not sure if he plans to remain a priest, says something similar.

Respondent: *What I find most satisfying? Celebrating the sacraments, in particular Sunday Mass. The Eucharist in general but Sunday Mass and big feast days. Those are really powerful. Hearing confessions, sacrament of Reconciliation and things like that experience. I think also more than anything I think what I...I mean I like the most and I find most spiritually, psychologically enriching, life giving, is just the relationships you develop, and that people let you into their lives just because you're a priest ... I think the most rewarding is when people let you into their lives at very significant moments. In a way that they don't let anybody in. That, to me, being allowed...and seeing people in their deaths, at the best of their moments or the worst moments of their life. That is, to me, the greatest thing about being a priest.*

Three newly ordained religious priests – who are all satisfied overall in their lives as priests, but who are not sure if they will remain priests – echo the priests above, but with less detail.

Interviewer: *Let's start with what you find most satisfying in your life as a priest.*

Respondent: *That is easy. Doing the sacramental life of the Church with the parishioners. Walking with people on their faith journey, walking with families through difficult and joyful times.*

Interviewer: *What most gives you satisfaction in your priesthood?*

Respondent: *I think this is kind of like working towards a vision for the parish, celebrating the sacraments, especially Mass. The moments of the grace when you see a breakthrough in somebody's life.*

Respondent: *I would say the challenge of preaching in a way that really livens the word and is prophetic and speaks to people's lives as Christians in the world we live in today.*

Also, yeah, a big part of my ministry is, like, accompanying university students who are such a great developmental stage and the questions that they're asking about who they are and what's important to them, and how they're thinking of the future and what their dreams are. Having some discernment tools to accompany them well and to help them be careful in discerning, and their approach to life with the decisions that they make. Those are probably like the two main things where I find a lot of joy in priesthood.

The priest below mentions the Mass and sacraments, but seems most excited by his work with families in religious education. He is in his 40s and is dissatisfied overall with his life as a priest, but probably plans to remain a priest.

Respondent: *The greatest satisfaction by far, Mass and the sacraments. But then also faith formation. I absolutely love our faith formation program and working with that and the families ... I mean I love the school and the school is a huge passion in my life. But the faith formation, when I get to see an entire family, not just the kids, I love working with the families.*

Yet another priest – who is in his 20s, is overall satisfied in his life as a priest, and plans to remain a priest – finds his greatest joy also with the laity. In his case, however, it is with the students at some nearby parish schools.

Respondent: *Satisfying would definitely be, like, school kids. I mean I just feel like it's that because I don't have my own school at the parish right now but we have two schools close by that I spend a lot of time at. Then the parish that I will be going to has a school. You could be having the worst day ever and then you get mobbed by a bunch of third graders. But yeah, we're good. Yeah, we're good. Yeah, it's awesome. Also, just like getting to know the families. One of my favorite things to do just like go to somebody's house for a cookout or a campfire or something like that, and just kind of getting to know the families in that way. They love it. Like having the priest over for a campfire is like, "Oh my gosh, that's so cool." But then you just kind of, you form that bond on a deeper level than just seeing you on the altar on Sunday. I really enjoy that. I know I'm giving more than one thing, but preaching has also been something I like. I love celebrating the Mass for the parishioners and then preaching. It just has been...I really enjoy just being able to kind of form people in that way.*

The Support They Receive from their Fellow Priests

Seven priests mention the support they feel from their fellow priests as what they find most satisfying in their priestly life. Only two say they have a support group available to them, with one saying there are support groups but he has not yet been invited to belong to one as they are limited in size. The priest below belongs to such a group, but finds the most support from

friends he made while in the seminary. He is in his 30s, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and is not sure if he will remain one.

Respondent: *Yeah, we meet once a month. We meet once a month and get together, and pray together. Sometimes we share a meal together, sometimes we don't. We're trying to get better about that part. Spend time with each other, yeah. That's another area of support that I forgot to mention. But yeah, it's part my friends though. We usually get together once every couple of weeks. At least once a month and do stuff. I had a priest, he was just moved from here. But he was on like 20 clicks away from me. He and I would play golf every couple of weeks. I got to see him almost every week for a meal. I have...that raised another. There's a family that I'm pretty close to here in the parish. They have me over almost once a week for dinner, sometimes twice a week. That other priest he's also really good friends with them. He would come there, I would go there. I would see him, I would see the family. That was a good place, that actually is good support as well.*

Indeed, almost uniformly, the other six priests also mention those men they knew in the seminary either as students or as mentors. The priest below is in his 30s, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and will definitely remain a priest.

Respondent: *I was blessed that right after I was ordained one of the men a couple of years ahead of me, he started a priest support group. We continued to meet. That's been phenomenal. We don't have any formal format or fraternity or whatever that we've adopted, like the Caritas or anything like that. But I know that other guys formed friendships where they are in regular contact and tend to be together in groups of three or more. Really, I have to say I was very pleased ... Yeah, there's a very strong fraternity both in the kind of enjoying one another's company, in the recreation sense but then also in the clerical sense. I see that and that those who have come from the seminary recently, and especially after benefiting from the spiritual year, are much more inclined to pray together.*

The newly ordained priest quoted below is a religious priest in his 30s who is satisfied overall with his priestly life and who plans to remain a priest. He also mentions his seminary cohorts.

Respondent: *Yeah, phone, text messaging, emails, visits. I mean, like, yeah, we're very intentional that way. Then the wider, not just my close friends. I think the wider [Religious Order] community, like not just the community in the local place, but the whole province, I think we're very closely connected. We visit and are in touch often.*

This priest – in his 30s, who is dissatisfied with his priestly life overall and who plans to remain a priest – also mentions some of his seminary cohorts.

Respondent: *I will say that since becoming a priest, it has been being welcomed into the priesthood by the presbyterate to [Diocese] was incredible. There are priests that...I'm not expecting every priest in the archdiocese to reach out to me, but there are priests that I knew from before seminary that I met during seminary, that I've met since becoming a priest. Every now and then they'll send me a little note like "Hey, hope you're well." [...] But I do see the vicariate as a good sense of a fraternity and support, and like a little community of priests within the archdiocese.*

Finally, this newly ordained priest in his 40s who is dissatisfied with his life as a priest overall but who will likely remain a priest, mentions not only those he attended seminary with but those he met during parish assignments during his seminary years.

Respondent: *When I am looking for advice, I see many of the priests that I was assigned to when I was in seminary, a number of them. Then I go to, where I'll call and ask advice or questions. If I'm looking for support, my priest friends really that have been ordained since I was in seminary, I would...we have a close-knit group that we get together at least once a month, just talking, venting, get everything out.*

Feeling Supported by their Diocesan Leaders or Superiors

Four of the men report that there is some kind of a program in their diocese or in their religious congregation for newly ordained priests. Four of them describe these programs as effective, but one says it is not meeting his needs. The diocesan priest below – who is in his 20s, is satisfied overall with his priestly life, and plans to remain a priest – describes such a program for a diocese. He also describes how the leaders of his diocese make themselves available.

Interviewer: *Has your bishop as well as whatever relevant diocesan staff and officials...have they been good at reaching out to you as a newly ordained priest? Not just during the pandemic, but during these first years, making sure everything's okay, checking in on you?*

Respondent: *Yeah. What we do in [Diocese] is every quarter all of the guys that have been ordained for three years or less get together with the Vicar for Clergy in person. We have an afternoon together of some intentional conversations, some kind of, like, questions that we get to get ahead of time, we can talk to each about. Then really just trying to hang out too. We go out to dinner and everything like that. That's with the Vicar for Clergy. That's the most concrete way that we're reached out to ... Over the last*

year there's been a lot of conversation between me and the Vicar for Clergy as far as that's concerned. It's sort of like checking in on that but then also checking in on me as well. I think mostly though I would say it's about the Bishop, about the Vicar General and about the Vicar for Clergy. They're incredibly busy obviously. They don't always reach out intentionally, like they don't call every month or anything like that. But any time we call anyone of them. They're still available even if we don't talk to them, it's just kind of our call, too. One thing that [Bishop Name] does is every Friday, period, is for his priests. All you have to do is call his secretary and say, hey, this Friday I'd like to meet with the Bishop and he'll give you a half hour personally, like face-to-face. He's made that very clear: "I don't care who you are. I don't care if you're mad at me. I don't care if you just want to check in, Fridays are for you." What I've been doing and what I know a lot of the young guys do is just once a year we'll make one of those meetings and just check in. Make sure we're doing what he wants us to do and make sure that we're kind of on the same page. We have our annual priest retreat that all the active priests are required to be at. We also have an annual clergy congress, and Bishop is at those as well. So, I would...there's definitely, it's not necessarily like they'll call regularly to check in, but at the same time they are very available, very personable and very willing to help in any way they can. I'm pretty impressed with that.

The religious priest below describes a similar program for the newly ordained priests in his congregation. He is in his 30s, is satisfied in his life as a priest, and plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *Okay, all right, very good. Is there some kind of network among you and the guys who were ordained either during your year or around that year? Were you finding support from one another, are you in regular contact?*

Respondent: *There is a structure that creates this opportunity. We have a gathering every year around Christmas and New Year where all of the men who have been ordained in our, let's say the first ten years of their priesthood, get together, mostly just to like spend time with each other. But there would also be, like, little helpful sessions on different aspects of like being a young priest and being supported in this ministry. Yeah, outside of that, yeah, the main thing is just having good friendships and leaning on guys especially when you need it the most.*

Less formally – I this priest in his 30s who is satisfied overall as a priest – speaks of a less formal system in his diocese.

Interviewer: *Following the pastoral year, did the diocese ask you what could have been better or seek your opinion about was the pastor a good mentor, that type of thing?*

Respondent: *They did. Actually, that year the beginning of my pastoral year that summer, we were transitioning to a new vocation director. There was a lot going on at the time. The vocation director who assigned me to that parish was okay but he was going out. The new vocation director coming in, you know, he didn't know anything about the selection process. He just knew that I had been sent there. But throughout the year he came to visit each of us a couple of times during the year and just asked us how we were doing. He did a really great job of just keeping communication with me. He knew what was going on. I stayed there and saw it through and just had conversation with him. Yeah, the diocese, they did, especially the vocation director. I felt like he took my comments seriously. Actually, I was the last one to be sent there as a pastoral year guy.*

Two religious priests and two diocesan priests mention the support they have received from the leaders in their diocese or in their religious communities as what they find most satisfying in their priesthood. The excerpt below is from a religious priest in his 30s who is satisfied as a priest overall and who plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *Did you feel like you received enough support from your major superior in those early years?*

Respondent: *Absolutely so. Personally, I kind of got introduced with, really, with my two feet into the water. I wasn't testing it. I don't have that mentality that if this don't work, I go out. I know they do say "a priest once and forever," but that's not what I'm talking about here. I just personally believe in my priesthood as being there even if I had to go out and get married or something, I still feel like my charism as a priest would still be revealed in terms of my concern for people, or wanting to be of service and all of that. Yes, I did go through some really tough times with my superior general. He was personally supportive...very supportive. One time I wrote a letter telling him how badly I was being treated, what were my feelings, how bad it was. I really, I don't know, maybe it was the way I worded the letter, I did not intend to say that I wanted to leave. But he wrote back to me to say, "Before you leave please talk to me first." I didn't say I was leaving. I didn't even contemplate leaving, I was just bringing him the issue. Yeah, very, very supportive.*

Another religious priest, this one over age 50 who is also satisfied with his priestly life overall and who also will likely remain a priest, also found support from his superior.

Interviewer: *Have you felt both initially as well as after you took that period, did you feel like you received support from your major superior or you provincial?*

Respondent: *Provincial, very much so.*

Interviewer: *Very much so, okay, right from the start then. Even during that first year when you were overwhelmed?*

Respondent: *Yes, absolutely.*

Interviewer: *Okay, how did he provide support to you during that period?*

Respondent: *He allowed me to be honest with him about where and what I was going through. He would listen. He would offer suggestions to what I needed.*

Their Positive Relationships with and Mentoring from their Pastors

A final frequently mentioned area of satisfaction – cited by three priests – is the newly ordained priests' relationships with their pastors, both as mentors and as a means of support. The newly ordained priest quoted below is in his 40s, is dissatisfied with his life as a priest overall, and will probably remain a priest. He describes the mentoring he received.

Respondent: *The first time when I was first ordained, that was a pastor, he would invite me. He would always make it a conversation like if there's anything you want to know about that you have questions, feel free to ask or talk to the business manager, the person might have those answers. He was very encouraging. He gave you a lot of freedom. It was very much about you being the self-starter. He's not going to force it on me, but if you want to know just ask and I'll show you what you need to know.*

The interviewee below describes a positive mentoring experience as well. He is in his 30s, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *What has been your ministry since ordination?*

Respondent: *All has been parish work with maybe some things on the side, so to speak. My first assignment was kind of a more ideal assignment at a parish where the priest who was pastor not only wanted to be a mentor but was capable of being a mentor. I was with him for three years. Then during that time I was still trying to advance my ability in Spanish. My second assignment I was assigned to two parishes at the same time with the pastor at each parish. That involved Spanish at both parishes. But it wasn't as cut and dry as that so for reasons of personnel and a need elsewhere I got moved in November. After about 16 months of being at two parishes I was moved. Now I live at one parish again. That parish is actually similar to my first parish but now it includes a responsibility for the ministry in Spanish every weekend. There's a community that has needs, that expect a priest that speaks...or they desire I should say, they desire a priest that speaks Spanish.*

Finally, the priest below – who is in his 20s, is dissatisfied overall with his life as a priest, and is not sure whether he plans to remain a priest – also benefited from the pastor to whom he was assigned as well as from a retired priest who taught him a lot about parish ministry.

Interviewer: *Okay, and the pastor, your first pastor, was he a good mentor?*

Respondent: *Yeah, tremendously easy to work with and also easy to talk to if I needed to run anything by him. I also had the benefit of having a priest in residence who was retired but still helped out in ministry and he was also a good mentor, too. I kind of had a good...an extra advantage there in my first few years.*

It should be noted that one priest described a program in his diocese where the mentoring in parish administration and leadership is addressed. It is a program for all parochial vicars.

Respondent: *Other than our continuing education workshop which we have each year. If that were something that was covered. But you know we have new pastor workshops. They're once a quarter in your first two years, you have new priest workshops. The diocese does this for new parochial vicars or new priests in general. Some go into administration or something a little faster even than I did. But, so there were workshops that the diocese put on that included some of that financial stuff including the kind of like specifics of our own diocese, and like "Okay this is how it works in our diocese."*

Areas Where They Are Least Satisfied as Priests

Whether it be in their diocese or religious institute generally or with the pastor to whom they have been assigned, the priests interviewed are most likely to cite an area of dissatisfaction related to a clergy member (bishop or priest) of his diocese. Below are the areas priests identified as being least satisfactory for them:

- Lack of support from their diocese, religious order or presbyterate (eight priests)
- Poor assignment process in their diocese or religious order (six priests)
- Frustration at their place of ministry (four priests)
- Issues of loneliness related to celibacy (three priests)
- Frustration with the larger Church (two priests)

Lack of Support from their Diocese, Religious Order, or Presbyterate

Issues related to a lack of support from fellow priests in their diocese or from members of their religious order arise in these areas: (1) diocesan leaders like a Bishop or a Vicar General not being in contact, not responding to phone messages, and being cliquish, (2) the assignment

process for their first assignments not being thoughtful in terms of getting them in a good place where they can be mentored, (3) not finding a sense of fraternity in the diocesan presbyterate, especially at deanery/vicariate meetings, and (4) not finding fraternity or care from the priests in their religious institute. These issues were mentioned by seven of the 15 newly ordained priests interviewed.

The priest whose interview is excerpted below is in his 30s, reports being satisfied overall with his priestly life, and is not sure he plans to remain a priest. The issues related to the diocese he finds frustrating are those related to the poor communication from his diocese, the Vicar General not returning messages when he has reached out, that his diocese responds by having a workshop rather than addressing the issue directly, and that his diocese is not more thoughtful about how it informs someone that they are moving to a new assignment.

Interviewer: *What could the diocese be doing to better support recently ordained priests than they are, or have been?*

Respondent: *Sure. I think overall, I'd say a more personable, open and communicative relationship with the newly ordained. I think that for us – I mean for me particularly but I think I speak for a lot of the young guys in my diocese – is that the communication is just awful. I mean, for example, my Vicar for Clergy, whom I like and respect as a person and as a priest, he doesn't return calls, he doesn't return messages. I don't know what he does honestly. It's, it's well known throughout the diocese that he doesn't communicate well. That's his job is to communicate with us. That and there's a lot of dissatisfaction in the presbyterate over the key diocesan officials. Not the bishop himself but the people he's entrusted with the key positions. There's no communication, there's no consultation, there's no dialogue. It's just kind of, like, do this, do that, be here. I think that they, and this happened in the seminary, too, but instead of dealing with things in a personal way, they often, when a problem arises, they come up with some kind of generalized systematic response. Instead of having guys with a good pastor and mentor and maybe having the vicar for clergy check in on them every now and then personally; instead of doing that, they have these all-day meetings that we have to attend a few times a year which guys don't like going to, where you're basically in a seminary day of recollection again. I'd say it's like instead of having the basics right, they add on a programmatic response which is okay. But if you had the basics right you wouldn't need the programmatic response.*

There was no debriefing. There was not follow up. Actually, I had been told I would be there for two years and then I was abruptly told I was moving without really any...I mean certainly no consultation, no prior communication, not even an indication that I would be moving. That was quite upsetting I'd say for me. I mean generally, like, I'm much happier with the way my seminary formation was run than the way my diocese has

been run. It's like the seminary had issues but at least there was, like, mutual respect. There was communication. There was kind of like, we're in this together kind of attitude. Whereas at the diocese it's more "Do what we say and don't ask questions." That's unfortunate. It's unfortunate. It certainly didn't have to be that way but it's just really a few people that have been in charge of most everything for the last ten years or so.

Another priest – this one in his 40s who is dissatisfied with his life as a priest but who will probably remain a priest – also had his primary frustrations with the dioceses and with his fellow priests. In the excerpts below, he mentions his diocese not accompanying or even listening to their newly ordained priests, not providing any real mentoring, and not offering any help when his parish's ministry had to go online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interviewer: *Do you feel like the diocese was checking on you to make sure you were doing well?*

Respondent: *No, there was, I mean they called it a mentor program but it is really, it's pretty non-functional. That was, of the things I would have said in my first year particularly. It would have been nice to just check on us to see, like, how you're doing by somebody. I don't know how they come up with who the mentors are at all. My mentor? I mean we do still get together occasionally or actually quite rather frequently, about every other month. We still talk and things like that, but that took a while to develop because he's just not a priest that I would have naturally gravitated towards.*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like maybe giving you some input into whom you are mentored with would have been helpful?*

Respondent: *I think that would have been helpful, yeah.*

Interviewer: *What could your diocese do to make it less stressful for newly ordained priests, or recently ordained priests I should say?*

Respondent: *How to walk with them, number one. Number two is actually, and this is going to sound harsher than I mean it, but actually listen to them. Like, I don't know if this is in every diocese, but it's like there's this little voice, and it's the good old voice: pay attention to what you're saying then you're heard. But if you're not in that group, like your voice kind of doesn't go anywhere. Sometimes I just, I'm not trying to make this sound mean, but I'm just, like, it's like there are new ideas and perspectives that are out there that leads to engage in the conversation. Like you engage the young minds ... very cliquish.*

Interviewer: *Was the diocese in touch with you saying this is how to have online ministry going on? Or were you kind of left on your own to figure it out?*

Respondent: *Left on our own to figure it out. The diocese went into bankruptcy and bishop problems. It's pretty much "Figure it out on your own."*

The priest who is quoted below is in his 30s, is dissatisfied with his life as a priest, and will probably remain a priest. He was frustrated with his diocese both while in the seminary and as a newly ordained priest.

Respondent: *But I will say that at the diocesan level, nobody in the three years that I've been ordained as priest, nobody from the Vicars for Clergy, to the secretary for clergy personnel, to the vocation's office, nobody has reached out and said, "Hey, how are you adjusting to priesthood on the diocesan level?"*

But during seminary formation I don't feel that at least while I was at the [Seminary Name], that the diocese did what they could have to keep in touch with me. Several times it was like I asked for something, just like a simple thing, like "Hey, I got an email about my student loans being almost ready to default. How come they can't be deferred anymore?" I'd have to send five, six, seven emails to different people because nobody knows who's in charge of doing it. Just gave the seminarians in [City] a sense that their diocese doesn't really care about them.

The priest below mentions his frustration with the lack of fraternity in his deanery. He is in his 20s, is satisfied in his life as a priest overall, and plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *Is that a place where you find support, the deanery itself? Not just the people around you but the deanery?*

Respondent: *Yeah, I would say not really. There has been a chance, actually right before the Coronavirus hit, so of course they all kind of got paused. But one thing that bishop was really trying to do, like, within the last year right before that is he kind of noticed, like, okay we've really got to come together as priests and have each other's back. What he was doing as Bishop and the Vicar for Clergy would come as well, he would meet with, we call them vicariates. It's the same thing. He was meeting every vicariate so it was just the priest. All the priest would get together and we just had a meeting with him. We got to voice our concerns. We got to voice, got to hear some encouragement from him, got to hear kind of his plan that obviously we're supposed to be enacting. That was really good. Then the encouragement was as the vicariates to get together once every few months or something like that, but then obviously the*

Coronavirus hit, so who knows what more that's gonna take? I would say as far as that system, no. There's not really anything set up yet but there have been attempts made to hopefully move in that direction.

The two interview excerpts below – concerning the lack of fraternity at the deanery level and how inadequately his religious institute reaches out or shows fraternity – come from a priest over age 50 who is satisfied in his life as a priest overall and who is not sure if he plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *The diocese often has structures in place as well like deanery or vicariate meetings and priest support groups. Did you participate in any of those with others?*

Respondent: *We have deanery meetings once a month but they were just sessions to complain about the bishop.*

Interviewer: *Okay, not very supportive?*

Respondent: *Not at all. In our deanery there are only two [Order Name]. The rest were all diocesan priests who very much did not care for the bishop. My brother friar and I always try to steer the conversation to what's happening in our parish, with what's going on with our people. But it always went back to how impossible the bishop was. It was not helpful at all.*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like either the religious, your religious institute or the diocese reached out to priests well during that initial period?*

Respondent: *Not at all. They didn't reach out in any way.*

Interviewer: *Okay, is there anything your order could do to make it less stressful for newly, recently ordained priests like yourself? Is there anything beyond what they are doing, that you wish they were doing?*

Respondent: *I think that really one of the most important things they could do is to emphasize, to have a provincial assembly every two or three years. I think that there really needs to be a kind of communal gathering that exists just for the sake of fraternity. Right now, we don't do that. It just depends I think. Some friars can get more and more lonely or isolated, especially the young ones, because unless you have a temperament inclined towards friendship and friends who are kind of in your face no matter what, then it's easy to kind of drift along. You are not completely alone because you live in a community. But it's, I think it can be difficult. I would say the number one thing is to have gatherings regularly that bring in everyone...I mean I don't think it's so much*

about just building bonds between the newly ordained. I think it's about building a bond between the whole province. I think that's the most important thing ... It's really not done at all. I mean there was an assembly, I think, four years ago and the one before then took place a decade before that. It happens pretty rarely. Other [Order provinces] do it every year. We're just a big province, and therefore there's a lot of expense to that. I think it's worth it, and I think we ought to do it. If not every year, at least every two, which is why I said that.

The interviewee below – who is in his 30s, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and who is not sure he plans to remain a priest – also has not found the deaneries to be a place of fellowship.

Interviewer: *I don't know if your diocese has deaneries or vicariates, but is that a place where you found some support? Is that something that happens regularly and is it a good place for priests to get together and support one another?*

Respondent: *Yeah, we have deaneries and we have deanery meetings once a quarter. But they're not really, they're not a place where I found camaraderie or support from fraternity. They're more business, kind of business style meetings. Some of the priests are quite a bit older. It's just quite a big place out there. I mean I enjoy getting fed and I enjoy that we share a meal together but they weren't...I wouldn't call them necessarily fraternal modes of fraternity or support.*

Finally, the priest below is an odd case as he had left the priesthood by the time of the interview (he had been unsure if he would remain a priest when filling out the survey some months prior). In his 40s, he had a business background before entering the seminary and found his diocese to be very inefficient in how it operated. He felt poorly placed in his assignment and, as is shown below, frustrated that his Vicar General did not support him as he tried to find innovative ways of ministering.

Respondent: *I was told in no uncertain terms by the Vicar General to cease and desist [from an evangelistic outreach effort in a large city]. I mean we went from zero to sixty almost overnight. I pushed back on the Vicar General. I said, why are we ceasing and desisting? We're going through the process. I have the support of the general council. We're working through the city. Why? While I never purposely found out, I did later come to find out informally that basically the Bishop did not want to get box and glove attention, spotlight attention, right, on this debate that was going on regarding the use of public spaces, and freedom of religion on the one hand and government and the first amendment on the other. Basically, it came from on high, that the Bishop ultimately told me to cease and desist this effort. I was very upset about that. I'll be honest with you. Part of it really made me angry. The reason it made me angry, among others, was that*

the Bishop is all about the new evangelization. He talked the good talk. But when it actually comes to a priest lifting a finger, as I did, and was actually willing to wage the good war to kind of get this to be something that we could do and that could also be a model for other parishes in the city. The minute it became clear that this would become “controversial” and upset the ruling classes, I was told to cease and desist. To me that was very hypocritical.

Poor Assignment Process in their Diocese or Religious Order

Six priests specifically mention their frustrations with the poor assignment process in their diocese or religious institute for newly ordained priests. They say the process is not well thought out and does not place the priests in places where they are likely to receive the mentoring they need. Some see the systems as chaotic while others believe they are put where there is shortage or need, regardless of what is best for the newly ordained priests. Two examples from diocesan priests are presented below. The first is from a priest in his 40s who had a business background before entering the seminary and found his diocese to be very inefficient in how it operated. He has since left the active priesthood.

Interviewer: *Sure, start with the first assignment, the one that didn’t go so well and then let’s talk about the one that did go well.*

Respondent: *Yeah, so the first assignment, and this goes back before we previously said, right where it’s sort of a human resource issue. I mean when you’re hiring somebody for a job, right, you want to make sure that the person not only has skills, but also has the temperament, also buys into the leadership or the vision of the primary stakeholders. That’s how you make hiring decisions, right? Those are also the lines along which hiring decisions have to occur as well. Somebody’s not a good fit for the job, and they don’t have the same vision as the boss, then it’s probably not a good fit and that person should probably be asked to move along. I mean it’s the same thing in my view and this is where my criticism comes in at the Church: think of it more as a business. My first assignment was to a parish into a pastor who just was not a good fit for me. My early criticism of the whole process in terms of getting that first assignment was it should have been the case that my boss was given an opportunity, and it should have been the case that the receiving pastors should have also been given an opportunity to interview and be interviewed by the men whom they were receiving and vice versa. Had that occurred, I would have asked some questions of that pastor. I assume he would have given me truthful answers that would have probably led me to quickly conclude before the interview was even over that this parish would not be a good fit for me. Of course, that could not happen because there was no interview. It was in many ways random. I mean, the clergy personnel board and the archdiocese like to tell us if there’s sort of a method to the madness. Well you know what, there is no*

method. I'm convinced that they hang up, at the end of each year...when they're about to ordain a new batch, they have a bunch of parishes with openings on the wall and I have this vision of them throwing darts at the wall. Each dart you'll find a seminarian. Wherever the dart went is where the guy goes. I mean it's that haphazard. I think that is what the first assignment process is. It certainly was in my case...The first assignment, it didn't work out because the pastor wasn't somebody that I could easily work with. I'd liken it again to human resources. I think to myself, well, if the pastor is the president, and the associate pastor or the vicar is the vice president, you want to make darn sure that the vice president and the president have the same vision, can get along, have the same personality, have the same expectation. It would seem that I was drawn into a parish and worked as a vice president with a president that I should never had been coupled with in the first place. That's why the assignment did not work out for me. It was a personality clash, but it was also a broader clash in terms of his expectations regarding everything from rectory arrangement, living arrangements – which was personal – to the ministries that I would be involved in. Another thing and I mentioned this as maybe a little off topic, but another thing is that I think there's got to be a better and greater emphasis quite frankly put on why we're told where we have to live. They probably should not be the same place as necessarily where we also have to work and vice versa. I think when you meld the personal, which is the living arrangement, with the work arrangement and both of those are a disaster, it's going to cause problems. Whereas if one's a disaster you can kind of move the pieces a little bit to make the situation better for the man himself. In my case both situations were a disaster, which is why the situation became quickly untenable for me.

This priest – in his 30s, satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and not sure if he plans to remain a priest – expresses frustration with the assignment process in his diocese as well.

Respondent: *There is a lot I can say about that. In my diocese at the chancery level, I know for a fact that our personnel board is just, it's really just dysfunctional. There was a time in the diocese under a previous bishop where it was a much more consultative body. It was much more transparent. They talked to the guy that they were considering moving or assigning or whatever. They consulted with the pastor where that guy might be going, trying to figure out if it would be a good fit. I know that that's not happening now. There's no...the communication is awful. Transparency is lacking and the consultation is non-existent, basically. It's very unfortunate but we have, maybe, seven, eight years ago there was a young priest who left the ministry in our diocese. So the bishop who was our former bishop started this program where all the guys that are five years and less ordained would get together periodically. A kind of a continuing education you might say or formation. We've had a couple of those since I was ordained. Largely they're reactive because right after I was ordained a guy in the class*

ahead of me left the ministry after a year. Anyway in our most recent discussion of that group which we did with, it was supposed to be Zoom, and it's with a facilitator who's from outside the diocese. He's a priest and also a psychologist. It was pretty much, the young guys thought that the diocese really was not doing much of any consideration or research, fact-finding, I don't know, communication about trying to pair a young guy with a good pastor. I mean it's very unfortunate, that's all I can say. I mean my first pastor was a great man and this holy guy but he's from [African country]. We had nothing, nothing really in common. He actually took more interest in mentoring me than my current pastor. My current pastor is somebody who I think the diocese just assumed would be a good mentor because he's 40 years ordained. That's a lot of experience in the diocese. He's well thought of. But he has taken, I mean almost absolutely no interest and shown no interest in any kind of mentoring relationship. That's even after I'd even said that I would like some, on a number of occasions actually. But he's a great guy, he's a holy guy, he's a good priest. But I mean he's, as far as I know, he's just always been kind of a loner, doesn't meet us, not really in fellowship with other priests. It's been unfortunate. I think that that's been a problem in my diocese, a significant problem actually.

The priest below also mentions his frustration with the assignment process in his diocese. He is in his 20s, is satisfied in his life as a priest overall, and plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *Do you feel like the diocese made a very conscious choice, did they have a good process for figuring out where to place young priests like yourself?*

Respondent: *No. Yeah, so granted that we as a diocese are literally dead last in the country as far as priests per parish. Honestly what it very much seems like is we get sent where the need is, period. They try to have good mentors but very frequently that does not turn out to be the case. However, those good mentors are available to you if you're willing to seek them out. It's just more often than not it seems like that doesn't happen in our diocese, in the parishes we're assigned to as associates.*

But such issues are not exclusive to dioceses. The religious priest below describes his frustrations with his religious institute's assignment process as well.

Interviewer: *All right, we're gonna shift gears here a little bit and now talk about your post-ordination life. In particular, do you feel like, and I know you've been living in community, do you feel like you've received adequate support from your major superior as well?*

Respondent: *Yes, I have. I mean [Person's Name] is a provincial. I think that there was a rough situation here or there in [City], the pastor ended up having to go on a*

leave of absence and was...eventually, basically resigned right at the beginning of the whole Covid thing. I think that that was the kind of experience, that doesn't just happen. I do think that the major [superior] bears some responsibility while I probably could have done better. I don't feel like I was abandoned. I feel like the major superior is concerned. My solemn profession is in his hands. I have a bond with him.

Interviewer: *Were you the only parochial vicar there or were there more than one?*

Respondent: *There are two of us, but I ended up kind of taking the lead. It was, yeah, it was a long few months. Basically, I was kind of functionally running the parish for about three months until a new pastor was appointed. It was a team. I don't claim that I was the guy, but it was temperamentally...it often worked out that way. It was not the first experience I was intending to have, but that's kind of how it went.*

Frustration at their Place of Ministry

Related to their assignments, interviewees' frustration at their places of ministry also often involves priests there, such as their pastors who are to be mentoring them. The priest below is in his 20s, is satisfied with life as a priest overall, and plans to remain a priest. He wishes the mentoring had been better.

Interviewer: *What about your first pastor then? Was he a good mentor?*

Respondent: *Yeah. Just to be very honest, he was not that good of a mentor. I had one dinner with him and it was the first day that I showed up in the parish. Then a year in, I had one one-on-one meeting with him. Really those are the only two points of contact that we had one-on-one. I was pretty much on my own in the parishes, while honestly, a lot of my buddies had kind of managers for pastors. It would have been really rough if I was way out in the middle of nowhere. But the fact that I was so close in, and did have so many other priests around, it really didn't affect me that much. But yeah, I did not really find that mentorship in that priestly fraternity within my first assignment.*

This priest – who in his 30s, is satisfied as a priest overall, and plans to remain a priest – echoes the priest directly above.

Respondent: *I am afraid to say not quite, no. Even one of the pastors I was with that I had really looked forward to all along being with him. He was my formator at some point and I really liked him. He turned out to be one of the worst people I had to work with...One of them was not responsible at all in terms of commitment to the parish. I almost felt like I was teaching him, or calling on him to be responsible as a pastor of the parish. The other one was a good in terms of how he managed the parish, but he actually made efforts to make sure that I was not involved in the management of the*

parish. I learned from him from a distance as it were. Not actually taking me and showing me the books, and calling me into meetings to see how meeting are conducted and how to handle this and that.

In his 40s, dissatisfied with his life as a priest overall, and planning to remain a priest, the interviewee who is excerpted below also found little mentoring. In addition, he expressed that administration is his least favorite part of his job.

Interviewer: *After that first assignment, did anyone ask you how did it go? Was this a good person for us to place future people with?*

Respondent: *No. When I got assigned to my first assignment the pastor retired nine months later. That's when I became the administrator. Then the new pastor that they brought in was different. I swore I would make it six months and then I left after sticking around for six months. That was a very difficult six months.*

Interviewer: *What would you say is the most frustrating aspect of your life as a priest?*

Respondent: *Administration.*

Besides a frustration with administration, the interviewee below also had complaints about his diocese. He is in his 20s, is dissatisfied overall with his life as a priest, and is not sure he plans to remain a priest.

Respondent: *I think the challenges of administration for me is really frustrating, even though you have some sort of preparation. Like I said, I kind of feel like I'm more on remedial level and don't really understand it that well. I just wish it didn't exist for us. There are times where I wish it wasn't part of what we had to do, that we could just focus on sacramental ministry and have somebody like a manager, somebody who understood what they were doing, deal with those ins and outs.*

Finally, a priest found his greatest dissatisfaction with his interactions with the laity. He is in his 30s, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and is not sure if he plans to remain a priest.

Interviewer: *How well has that gone for you in terms of working with and ministering to laity in the parish?*

Respondent: *Yeah, laity. Specifically, I would say it's changed. It's different at different times. When I first got here it was hard. Let's be honest it was pretty tough. First priest out of a seminary, and a lot of the parishioners are not happy with the*

direction the parish is going in with one of the pastors. I was just kind of inundated with complaints, with basically them wanting to go through me to the pastor...

Interviewer: *What frustrates you most?*

Respondent: *It's most frustrating, I think, dealing with, like, not very well-formed and kind of demanding parishioners. Like I love the power. Somebody comes and has a very powerful confession. One of the most frustrating things is when someone comes in and then are not able to do it. There're so many people in line, you've got an hour. They just, they don't know how to make a good, concise, well-prepared confession. There's a lot of people who just don't know how to make a good confession and they're very frustrating. I know people come to Mass and just are very unaware of the sacredness of what's taking place. There's no understanding. They could be very demanding. Why can't I receive communion? Just kind of a sense of entitlement. That's one of the most frustrating things. They're ill-formed, entitled people. That's probably the most for me.*

Issues of Loneliness Related to Celibacy

As an aspect of their priestly life that is not satisfactory, three priests' mention the loneliness they experience and their struggles with celibacy. For the religious priest, who was quoted above about his frustrations with the lack of community life at his local community, his loneliness was directly related to not feeling that bond he hoped to feel with the priests and religious brothers in his congregation. This priest speaks about how hard it is to deal with the loneliness even though he is doing what was told to do in his seminary training.

Interviewer: *What is most frustrating?*

Respondent: *Well, first on a personal level I think what's most difficult for me is the loneliness and as I've gotten further along, not that far into it, but I and a lot of guys, understandably so, have a pretty kind of heroic motivation and heroic sense of a priesthood. But when you get into a parish and when the kind of honeymoon stage dies, fades away, there aren't a lot of heroics and you realize that you're not perfect. You make mistakes. You disappoint people from time to time. I think that, in a way it's difficult when that kind of heroic vision starts to crumble a bit. Any other part is, just for me, I've realized over time that even though I want to be a priest, I've wanted to be a priest, I want to remain a priest, that there's a part of me that does desire some, I mean like an intimate kind of an exclusive relationship like a marriage. Because at the end of the day as a priest, you come home and you're by yourself. A prayer, really deep, authentic.*

Respondent: *Okay. Even a rich prayer life in ministerial life, and good relationships with family and friends and so forth, it doesn't get rid of that. It doesn't get rid of the loneliness. That for me is something that I'm, I mean I'm still trying to figure out and address.*

Frustration with the Larger Church

Three priests have found their greatest dissatisfaction with the larger Church. One laments how hard it is to be a priest during the time where sexual abuse, diocesan bankruptcy, and seminary scandals are in the news. He is a religious priest who is over age 50, is satisfied overall with his life as a priest, and is not sure if he plans to remain a priest. Besides the sexual abuse crisis, he is also frustrated by the Church's teachings on homosexuality and women's ordinations.

Interviewer: *What do you find most frustrating in your life as a priest?*

Respondent: *That is a very long conversation. Oh gosh, just maybe the state of the Church and its position on homosexuality and women ordination. We're just, not we, they have stuck their heads in the sand about all of that. It's very sad, it's really sad. The generation of young adults, like 20, early 30-year old's find the Church irrelevant because of the great scandal, and how the Church has dealt with that. That cripples people. They're very smart young men and women. The fact that the Church turned its back on gay priests and women's ordination, they have lost a generation of people because of that. The powers that be don't seem to care about that. That's very frustrating for me.*

The other priest is in his 20s, is dissatisfied with his life as a priest, and is not sure if he plans to remain a priest.

Respondent: *But in addition to that, the new climate especially in [State] with the grand jury report and the clergy sexual abuse of minors, that has been probably one of the most difficult things to confront in our Church's past, and dealing with the ramifications of that now. The people that has hurt, and just sort of your vision as what a priest is, and what it's like to be one really, really changes a lot of that. It hurts to know that some people maybe don't trust you or whatever. I find that there...it's a difficult time to be a priest.*

Satisfaction in Areas of Priestly Life

Priests were asked how satisfied they are in ten different areas of their priestly life. They were asked to evaluate their satisfaction in each area as “not” satisfied, “a little” satisfied, “somewhat” satisfied, and “very” satisfied. The first column of numbers in the table below summarizes the positive side of the scale, showing the percentage that assessed each area as “somewhat” or “very” satisfied combined. The final column displays the percentage saying they are “very” satisfied in an area.

With one exception, at least two in three priests report being “somewhat” satisfied or “very” satisfied in each of the areas shown below. Responding priests are most satisfied in the areas of their present living situation (96%), the respect they receive as clergy members from lay persons (92%), and their present financial situation (86%). They are least satisfied in the area of their training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff (39%).

| <i>How satisfied are you in the following areas?</i> | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| | <i>Percentage responding</i> | |
| | “Somewhat” and “Very” Satisfied Combined | “Very” Satisfied Only |
| | % | % |
| Your present living situation | 96 | 56 |
| The respect you receive as a member of the clergy from lay persons | 92 | 63 |
| Your present financial situation | 86 | 60 |
| The support you receive from your bishop | 81 | 43 |
| Having enough time to have meaningful relationships with your family | 78 | 38 |
| Finding enough time to attend to your spirituality and prayer life | 76 | 33 |
| Your relationship(s) with your immediate superiors or pastors | 75 | 41 |
| Having enough time to have meaningful relationships with your friends | 73 | 32 |
| Finding the right balance between your work, personal, and spiritual life | 68 | 21 |
| Your training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff | 39 | 11 |

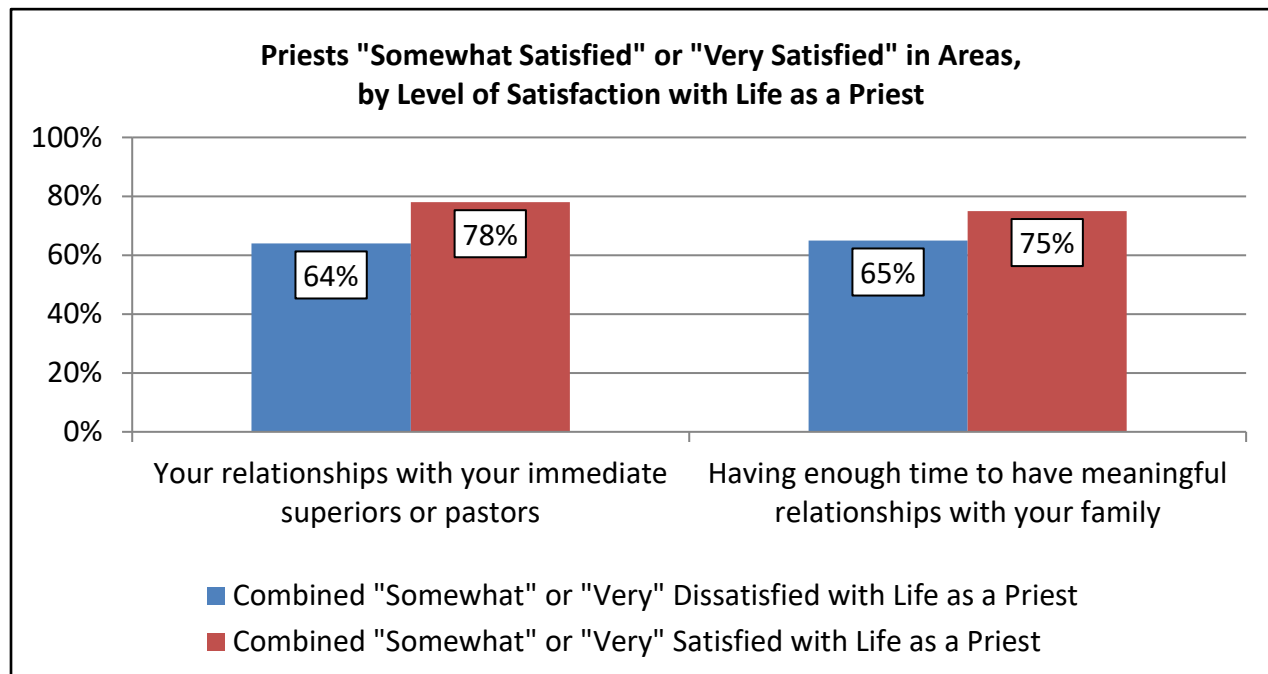
- Examining those saying they are “very” satisfied in an area, more than half express great satisfaction in the areas of the respect they receive as clergy members from lay persons, their present financial situation (60%), their present living situation (56%).
- Between a third and four-tenths are “very” satisfied with the support they receive from their bishop (43%), their relationships with their immediate superiors or pastors (41%), having enough time to have meaningful relationships with their families (38%), finding enough time to attend to their spirituality and prayer lives (33%), and having enough time to have meaningful relationships with your friends (31%).
- Between one-tenth and two-tenths are “very” satisfied in the areas of finding the right balance between their work, personal, and spiritual lives (21%) and their training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff (11%).

Subgroup Analysis Findings

Level of Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

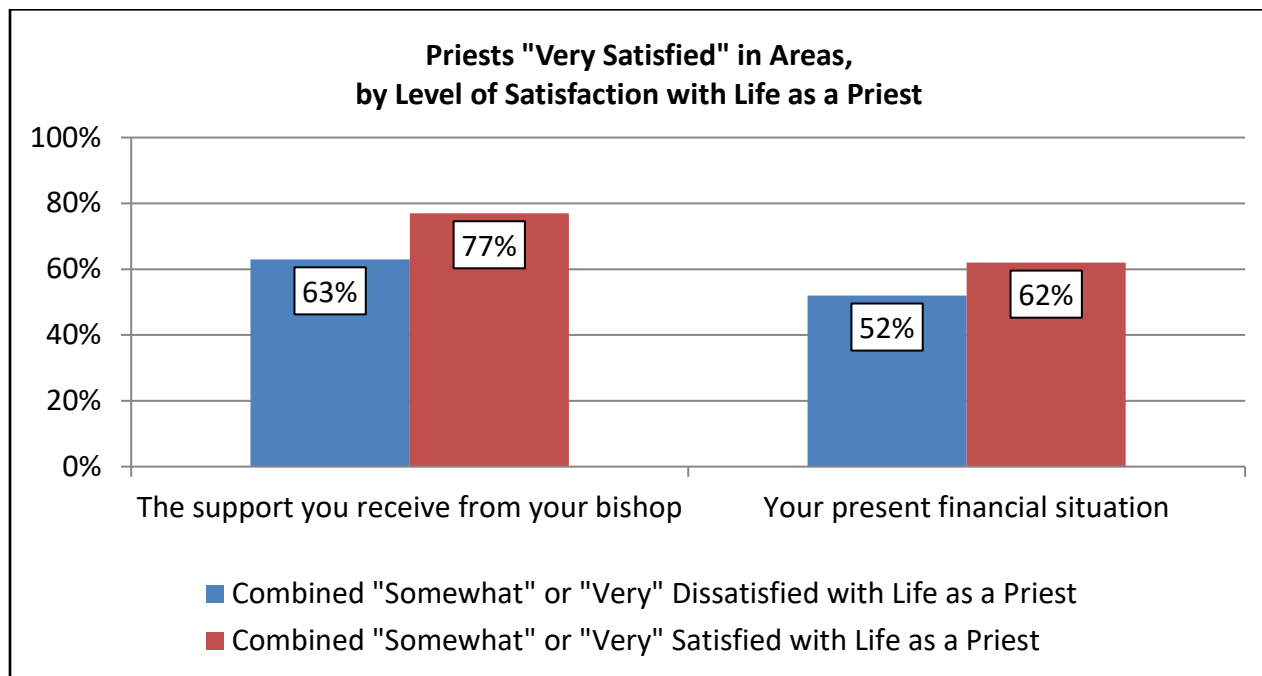
“Somewhat” and “Very” Satisfied in Areas Combined

Those who are dissatisfied overall with their lives as priests are *less* likely to say they are “somewhat” or “very” satisfied in the following areas.



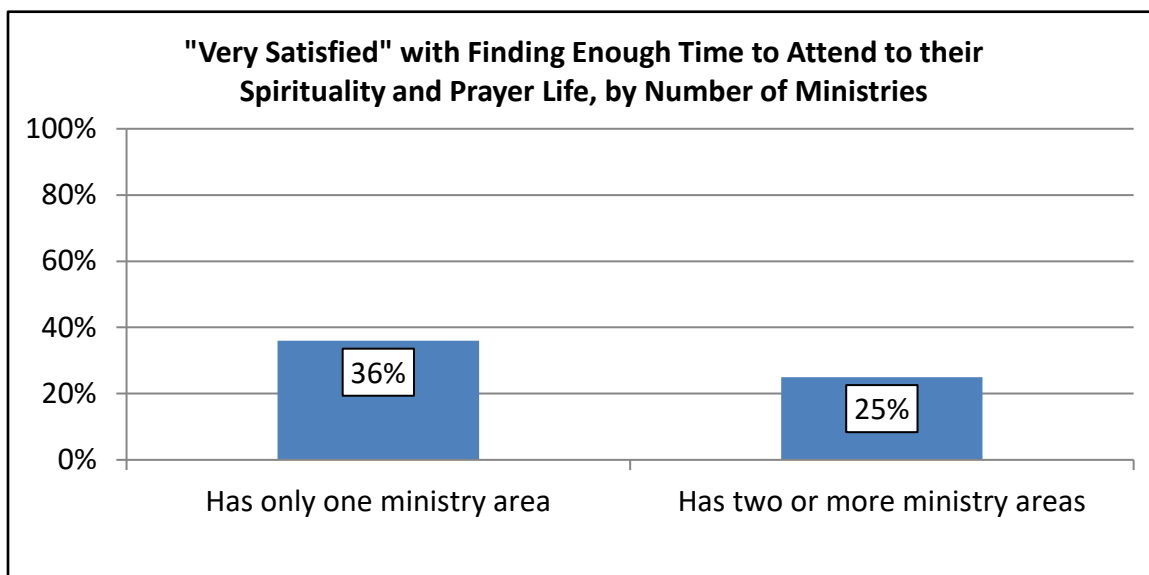
“Very” Satisfied in Areas

Those who are dissatisfied overall with their lives as priests are also *less* likely to say they are “very” satisfied in the two areas shown in the figure below.



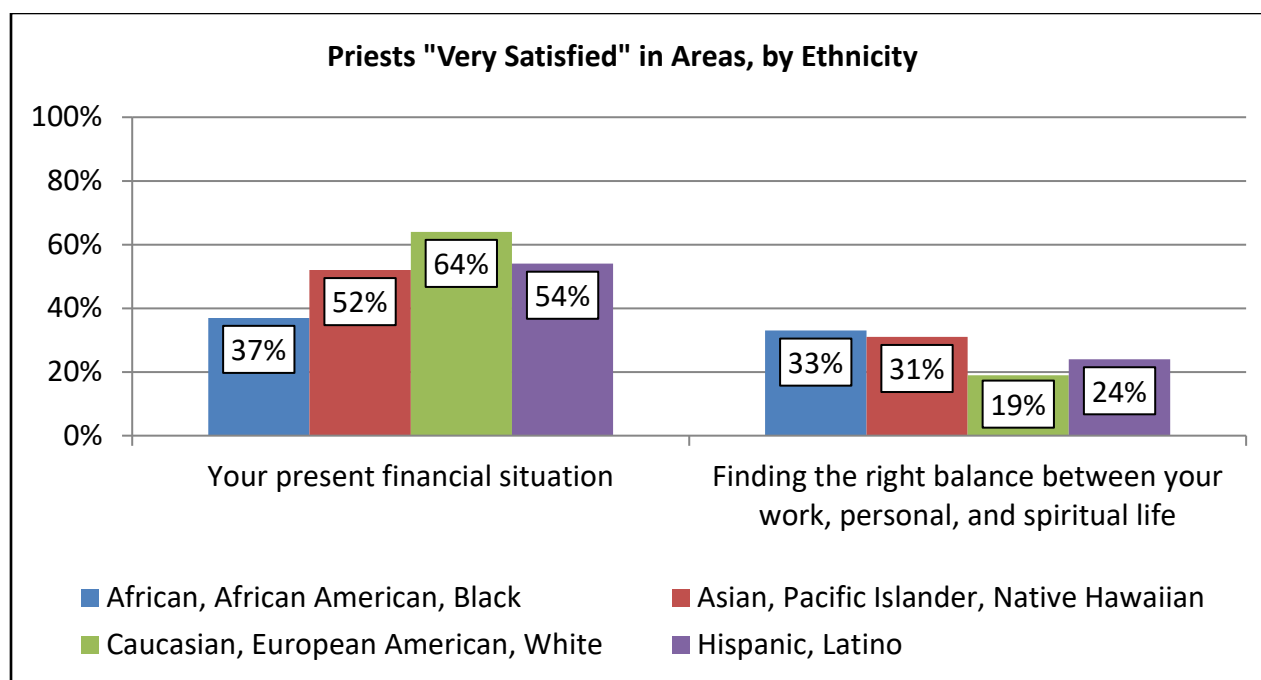
Number of Ministries

More than a third of those who report having one primary ministry and no secondary ministries indicate being “very satisfied” in the area of finding enough time to attend to their spirituality and prayer life, compared to a quarter of those with two or more.



Ethnicity

Caucasian, European American, white priests are most likely to report being “very” satisfied with their present financial situation, with African, African American, Black priests *least* likely to be as satisfied. Caucasian, European, white priests are *least* likely, however, to be “very satisfied” in the area of finding the right balance between their work, personal, and spiritual lives.

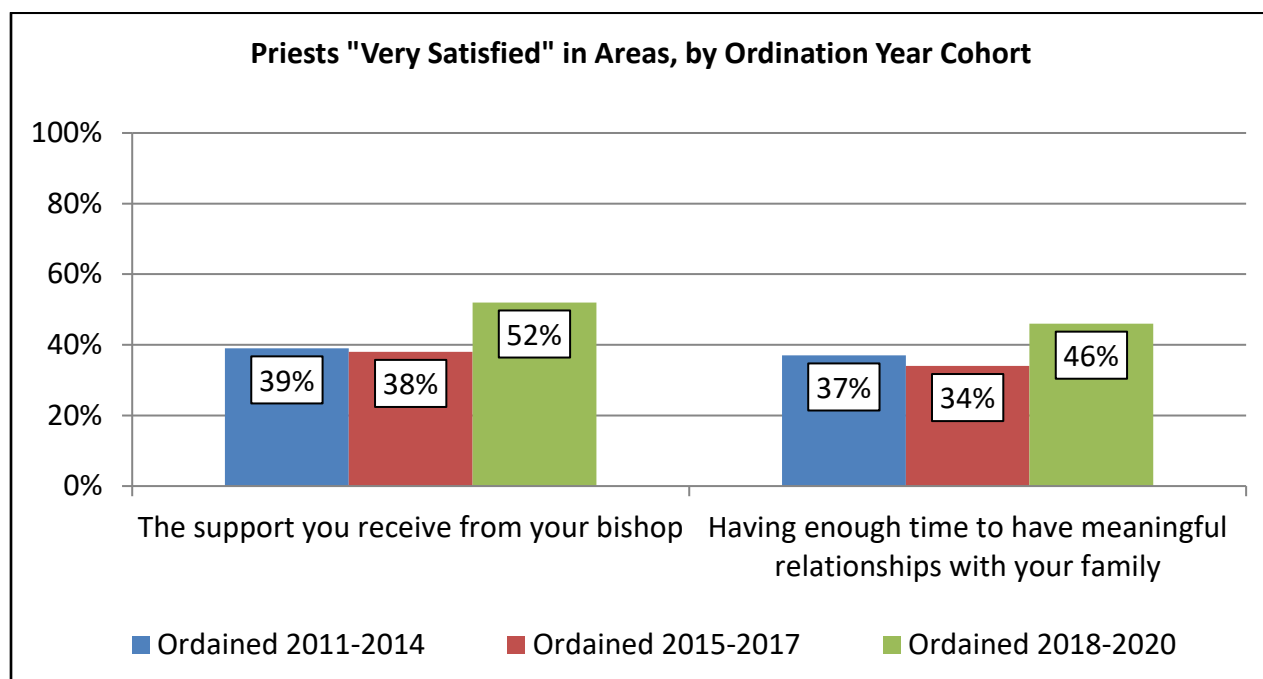


Language of Response to the Survey

- Priests responding to the survey in Spanish are more likely than those responding in English to say they are “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with their training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff (39% compared to 78%).
- Similarly, those responding in Spanish are more likely than those responding in English to say they are “very” satisfied with their training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff (10% compared to 26%).

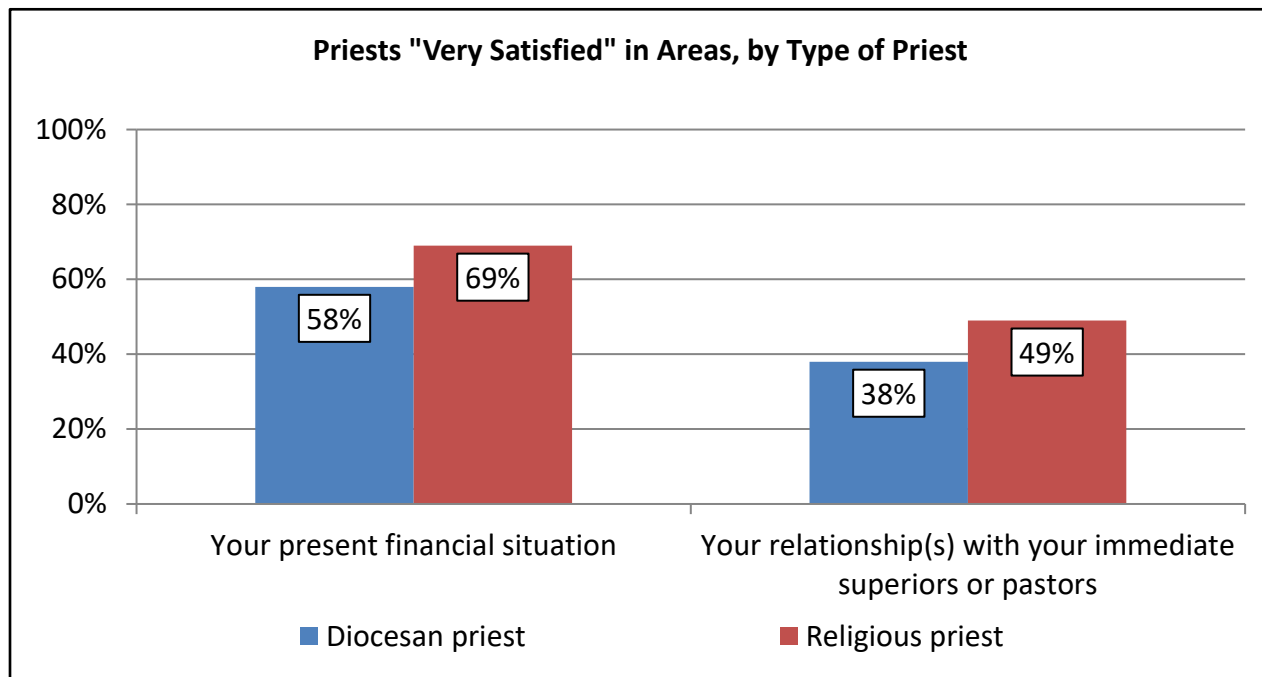
Ordination Year Cohort

Those ordained since 2018 are most likely to report being “very” satisfied in the two areas shown in the figure below.



Type of Priest

Religious priests are more likely than diocesan priests to say they are “very satisfied” in the two areas shown in the figure below.



Availability and Participation in Activities

Priests were asked whether different support activities and organizations are present in their dioceses or religious communities and whether or not they participated in those activities. They were given the choices: “this is not available to me,” “this is available but I have not participated,” “this is available and I have participated somewhat,” and “this is available and I have regularly participated.” The results, ordered from most participated in to least, are shown in the table below.

At least four in five report that they have these programs available: retreats (99%), spiritual direction for priests (90%), regular deanery/vicariate meetings (84%), diocesan on-going formation (84%), and priest support groups (81%). Fewer have available to them priest prayer groups (63%) or a priest mentor program for newly ordained priests (54%).

Please indicate whether the following are available to you and your level of participation in each:

Percentage responding

| | This Is Available and I Have Regularly Participated | This Is Available and I Have Participated Somewhat | This Is Available But I Have Not Participated | This Is Not Available to Me |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Retreats | 69 | 21 | 8 | 1 |
| Spiritual direction for priests | 53 | 25 | 11 | 10 |
| Regular deanery/vicariate meetings | 50 | 26 | 8 | 16 |
| Diocesan on-going formation | 41 | 31 | 12 | 16 |
| Priest support groups | 37 | 28 | 16 | 19 |
| A priest mentor program for newly ordained priests | 25 | 20 | 9 | 46 |
| Priest prayer groups | 20 | 23 | 21 | 37 |

Half to seven-tenths of responding priests have the following available and participate in each regularly: retreats (69%), spiritual direction for priests (53%), and regular deanery/vicariate meetings (50%). For each of those three programs, approximately another quarter (21%-26%) participate in them somewhat.

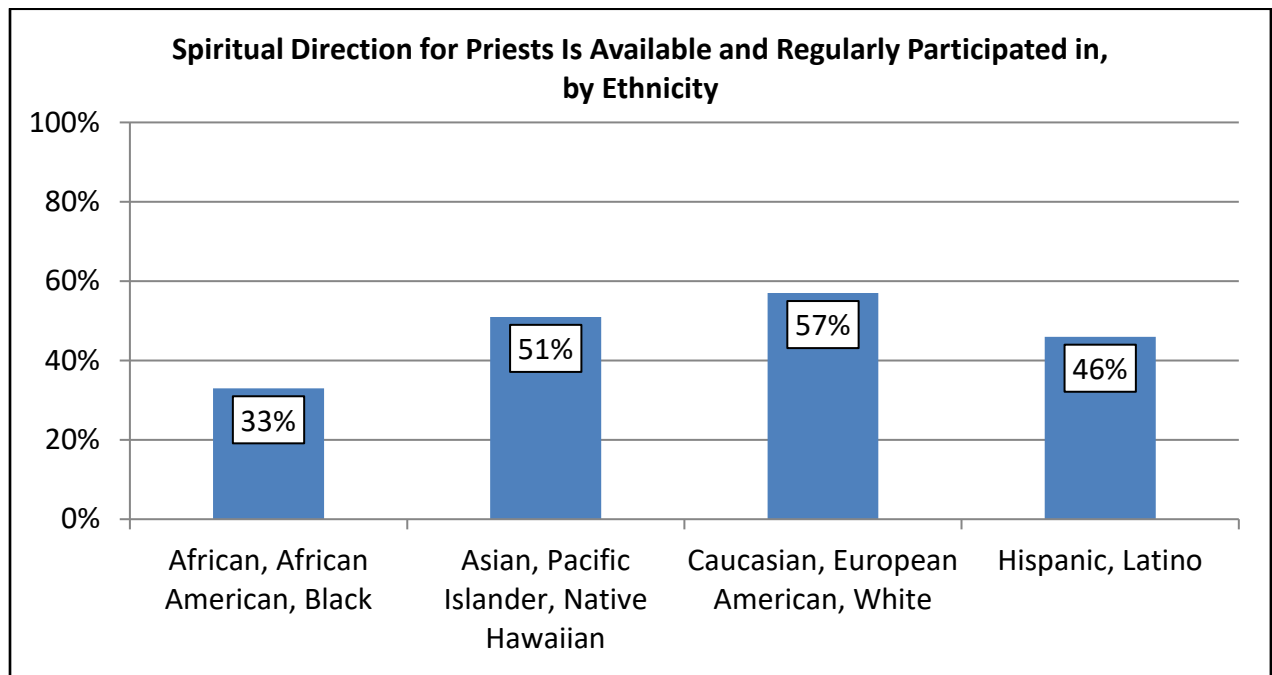
- About four in ten say they have diocesan on-going formation (41%) and priest support groups (37%) available and that they regularly participate in them. Another three in ten (28%-31%) participate in these programs somewhat.

- More than a third of priests report that a priest mentor program for newly ordained priests (46%) and priest prayer groups (37%) are not available to them. Roughly a fifth (20%-25%) do have them available and regularly participate in them and another fifth (20%-23%) participate in them somewhat.

Subgroup Analysis Findings

Ethnicity

African, African American, or Black respondents are least likely to report having and regularly participating in spiritual direction for priests.



Language of Response to the Survey

Those responding to the survey in Spanish are more likely than those responding in English to indicate that retreats are available to them and they regularly participate in them (79% compared to 69%).

Problems in Daily Life

Priests were asked how much of a problem 16 different situations and circumstances are for them on a day-to-day basis. They were offered the responses: “not a problem,” “a little problem,” “somewhat a problem,” and “very much a problem.” The first column of numbers in the table below summarizes the positive side of the scale, showing the percentage that assessed each as “somewhat” or “very much” a problem combined. The final column displays the percentage saying something is “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis.⁴

Many problems confront priests today. How much of a problem are the following to you on a day-to-day basis?

Percentage responding

| | “Somewhat” and “Very Much” a Problem Combined % | “Very Much” a Problem Only % |
|--|--|---|
| Differences among different age cohorts of priests in your diocese | 46 | 20 |
| Theological differences among your fellow priests in their concept of the priesthood | 44 | 20 |
| Not feeling you have input into the decision-making process at the diocesan level | 39 | 17 |
| Having been assigned too many ministries and duties | 32 | 12 |
| Being so busy that you cannot meet the pastoral needs of those you serve | 30 | 10 |
| Finding as much fraternal support as you would like among your fellow priests in the diocese | 29 | 10 |
| Unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people | 29 | 9 |
| Loneliness of priestly life | 25 | 8 |
| Ministering at more than one parish | 24 | 10 |
| Differences among priests with different sexual orientations in your diocese | 23 | 10 |
| Living a life of celibacy/chastity | 18 | 4 |
| Lack of a clear idea of what a priest is | 15 | 4 |
| Conflicts with parishioners or lay persons | 14 | 4 |
| Resolving any personal psychosexual issues | 11 | 2 |
| Being expected to represent Church teachings you have difficulty with | 7 | 2 |
| Not feeling comfortable ministering to women | 1 | 1 |

⁴ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, is presented in the Appendix.

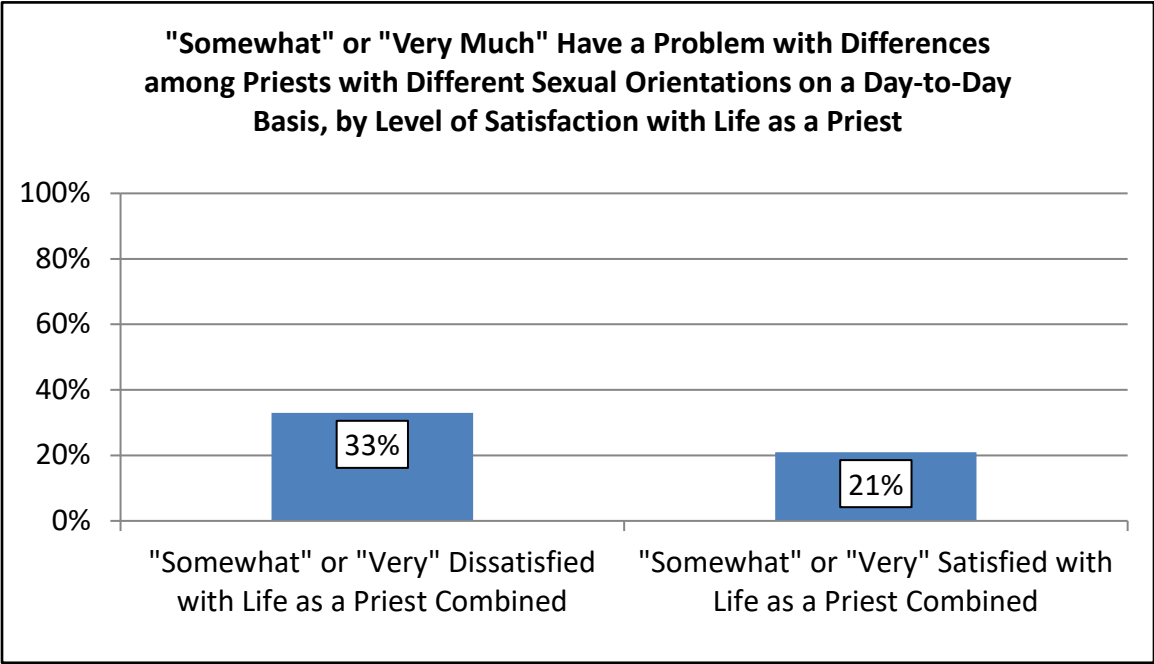
- Four-tenths or more indicate that the following are “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis: differences among different age cohorts of priests in their diocese (46%), theological differences among their fellow priests in their concept of the priesthood (44%), and not feeling they have input into the decision-making process at the diocesan level (39%). About one in five priests (17%-20%) say these are “very much” a problem for them daily.
- Between a quarter and a third indicate that these are “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis: having been assigned too many ministries and duties (32%), being so busy that you cannot meet the pastoral needs of those you serve (30%), finding as much fraternal support as they would like among their fellow diocesan priests (29%), unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people (29%), the loneliness of priestly life (25%), ministering at more than one parish (24%), and differences among priests with different sexual orientations (23%). Between 8% to 12% say each of these are “very much” a problem for them day-to-day.
- About one-fifth to one-tenth indicate that the following are “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them daily: living a life of celibacy/chastity (18%), lack of a clear idea of what a priest is (15%), conflicts with parishioners or lay persons (14%), and resolving any personal psychosexual issues (11%). Seven percent or less identify being expected to represent Church teachings they have difficulty with (7%) and not feeling comfortable ministering to women (1%) as at least “somewhat” a problem. Examining those who say these issues are “very much” a problem for them daily, between 1% and 4% say that they are.

Subgroup Analysis Findings

Level of Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

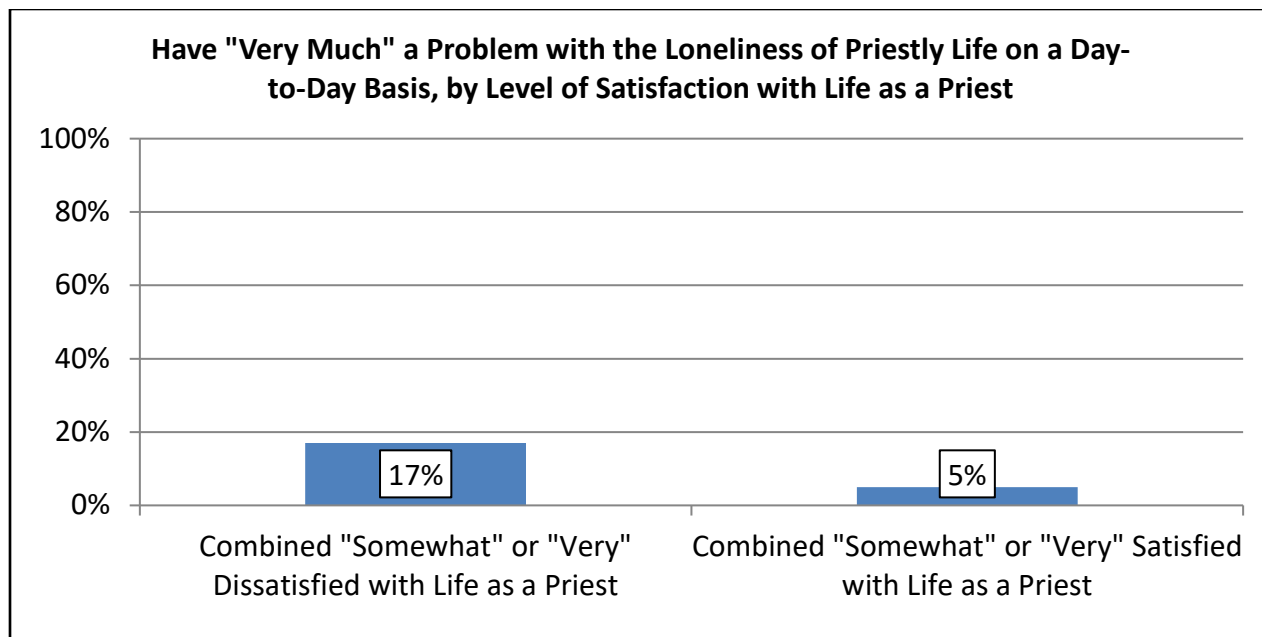
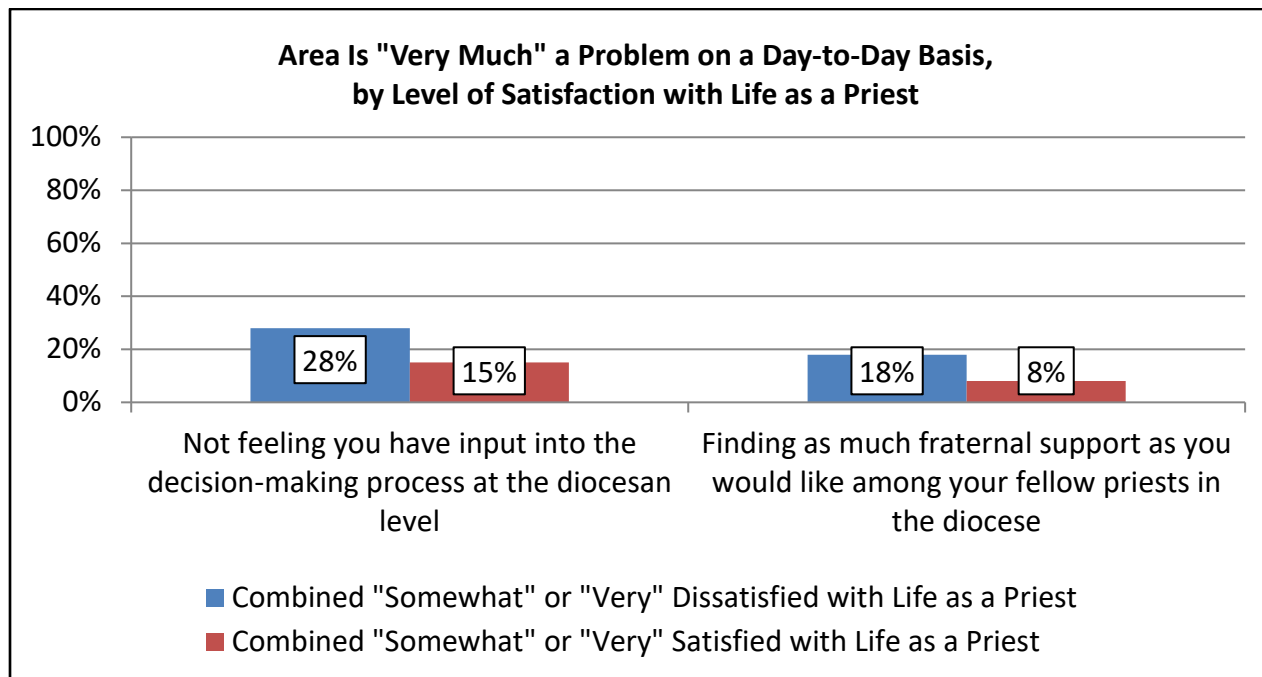
“Somewhat” or “Very Much” a Problem Combined

Those who report being “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with their life as a priest are more likely than others to report that differences among priests with different sexual orientations is “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis.



“Very Much” a Problem

Those who report being “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with their life as a priest are more likely than others to report that the areas shown in the two figures below are “very much” a problem for them.

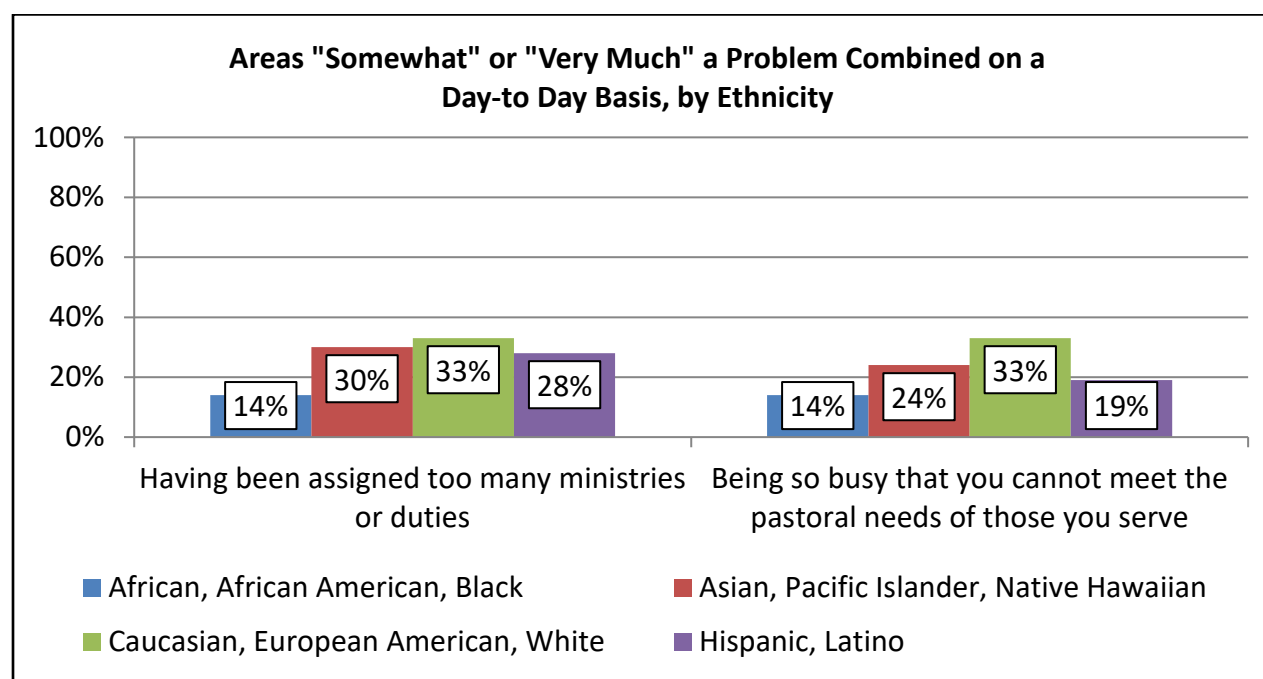


Ethnicity

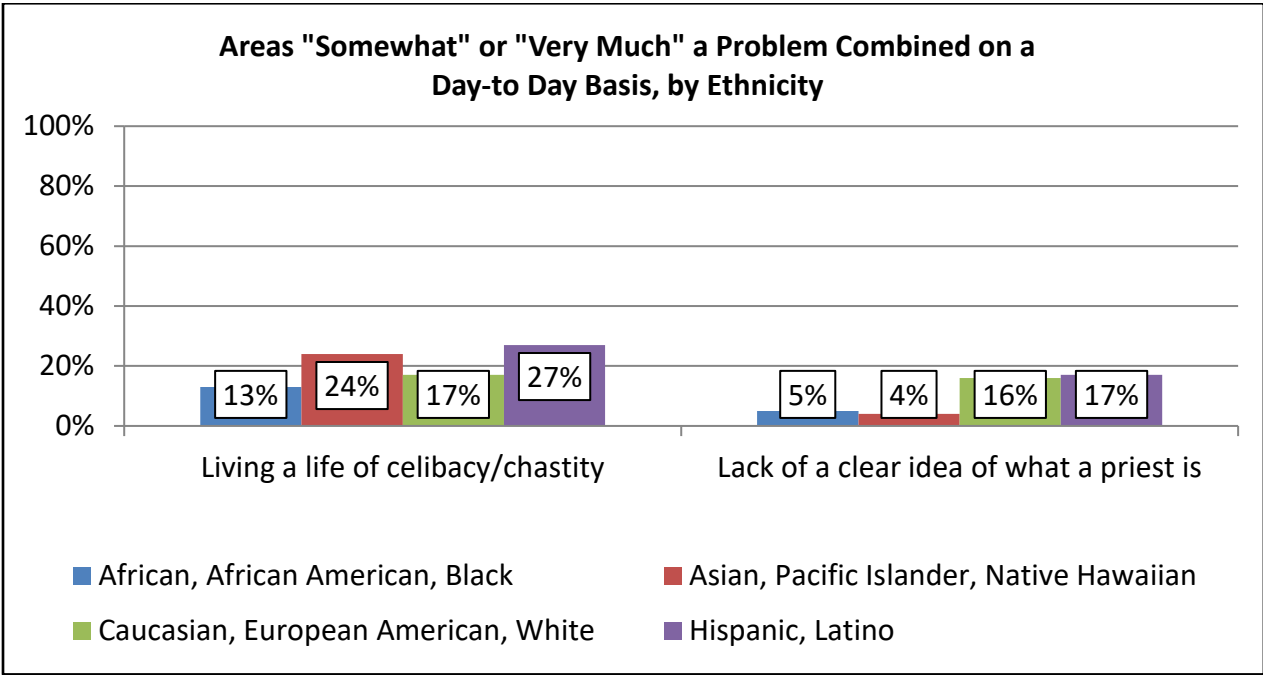
“Somewhat” or “Very Much” a Problem Combined

Those reporting different ethnic backgrounds differ in how much of a problem different areas are for them. The three figures below show the combined percentages saying an area is “somewhat” or “very much” a problem.

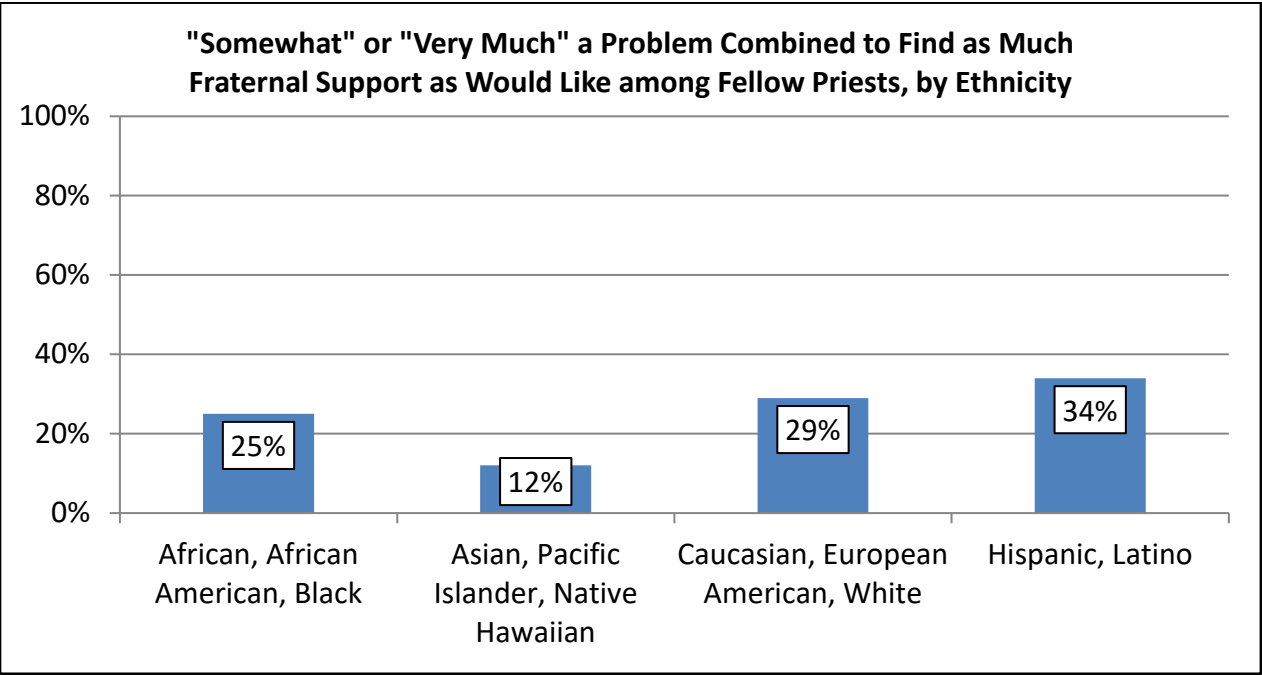
In the first, those African, African American, or Black priests are *least* likely to say the two areas are “somewhat” or “very much” a problem. Caucasian, European American, white priests are most likely to report these as problems.



In the second figure, below, Hispanic or Latino and Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian priests are most likely to say that living a life of celibacy/chastity is “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis. In addition, Hispanic or Latino and Caucasian, European American, or white priests are most likely to identify lacking a clear idea of what a priest is as “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them combined.

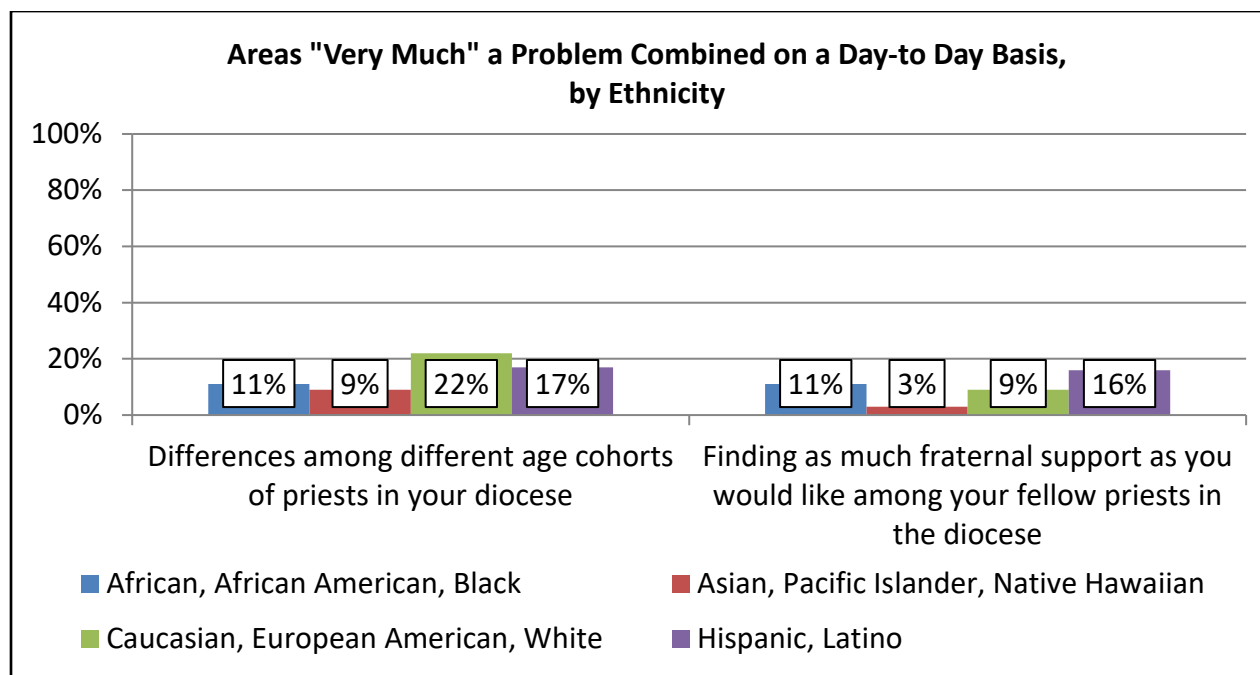


Finally, Hispanic or Latino priests are most likely to report having “very much” a problem with finding as much fraternal support as they would like among their fellow priests on a day-to-day basis, with Asian, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian priests *least* likely to say so.



“Very Much” a Problem

Hispanic or Latino and Caucasian, European American, or white priests are most likely to identify differences among different age cohorts of priests in their diocese as “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis. Hispanics and Latinos, in addition, are most likely to cite finding as much fraternal support as they would like among their fellow priests as “very much” a problem.



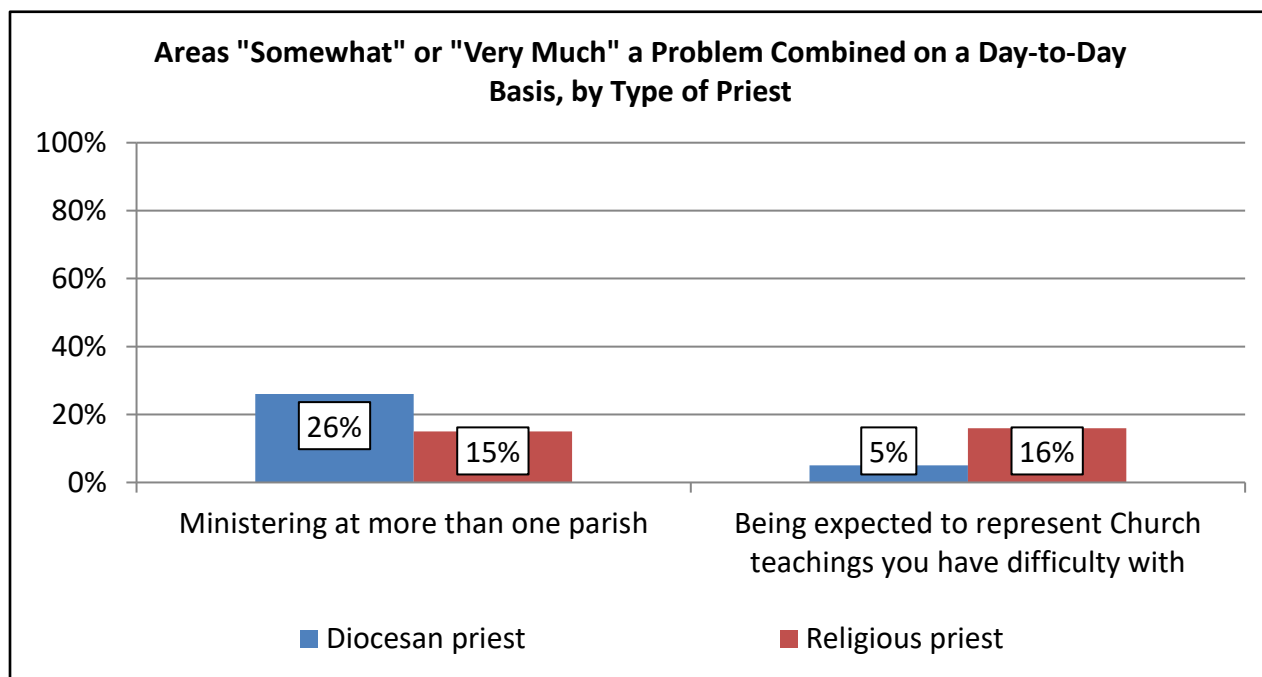
Language of Response to the Survey

- Priests responding to the survey in English are more likely than those responding in Spanish to say that not feeling they have input into the decision-making process at the diocesan level is “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis (18% compared to 5%).
- Those responding in Spanish, on the other hand, are more likely than those responding in English to say that differences among priests with different sexual orientations in their diocese are “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis (10% compared to 22%).

Type of Priest

“Somewhat” or “Very Much” a Problem Combined

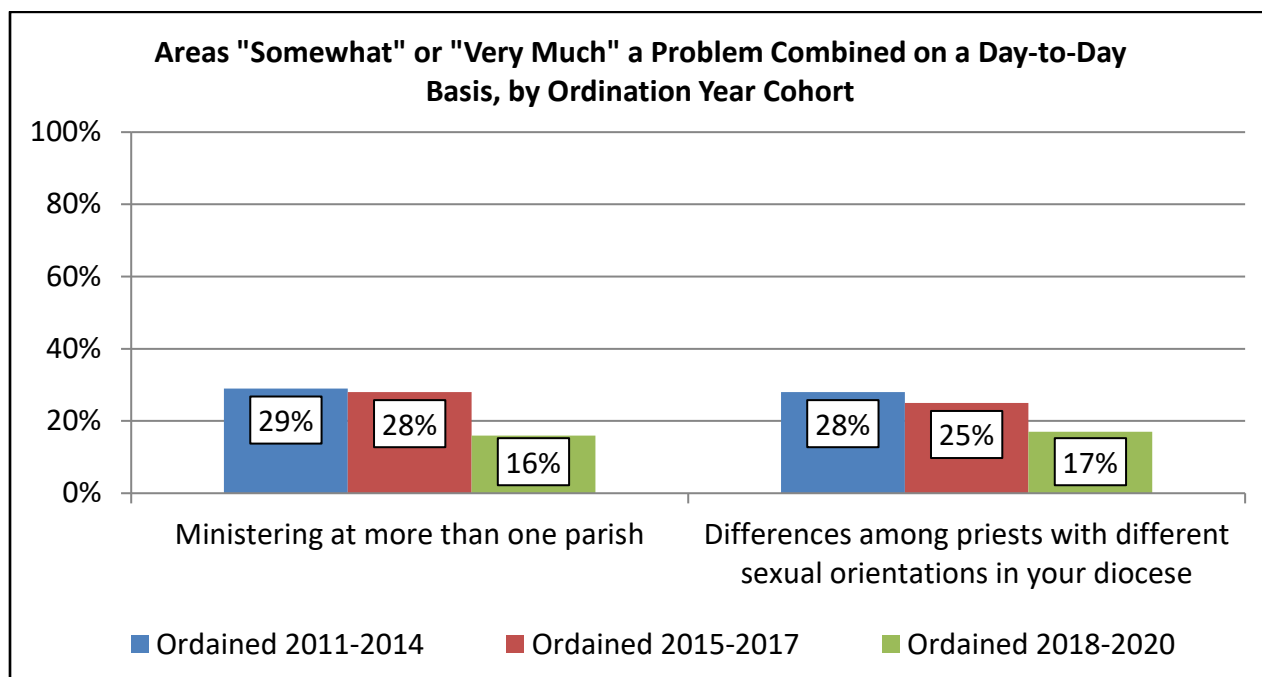
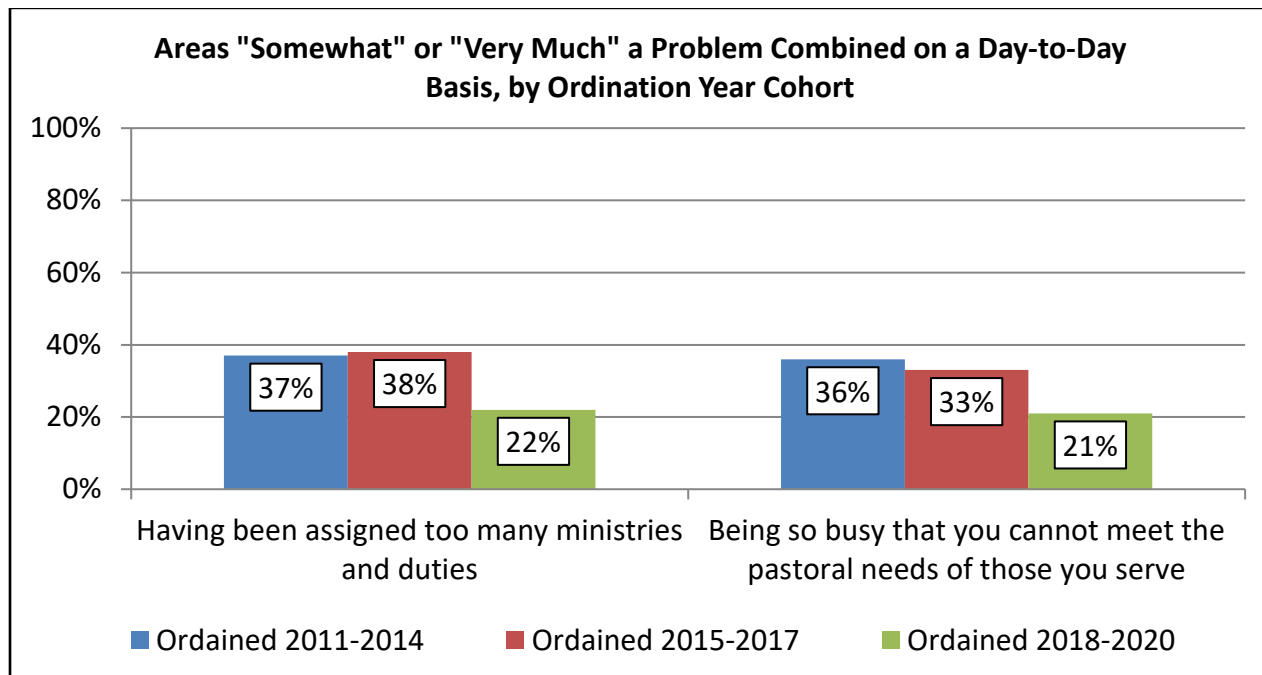
Diocesan priests are more likely than religious priests to say ministering at more than one parish is, combined, “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis. Religious priests, on the other hand, are more likely to cite being expected to represent Church teachings they have difficulty with as at least “somewhat” a problem.



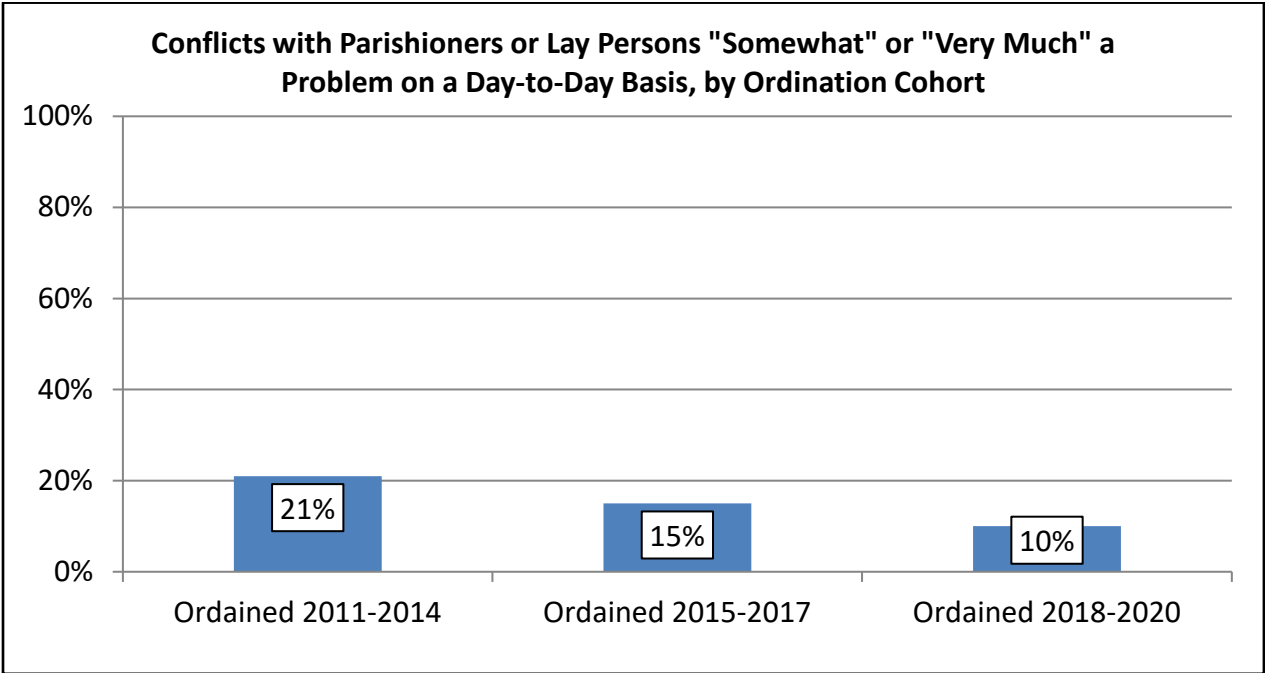
Ordination Year Cohort

“Somewhat” or “Very Much” a Problem Combined

Those ordained before 2017 are most likely to report the areas presented in the two figures below as being “very much” a problem for them.

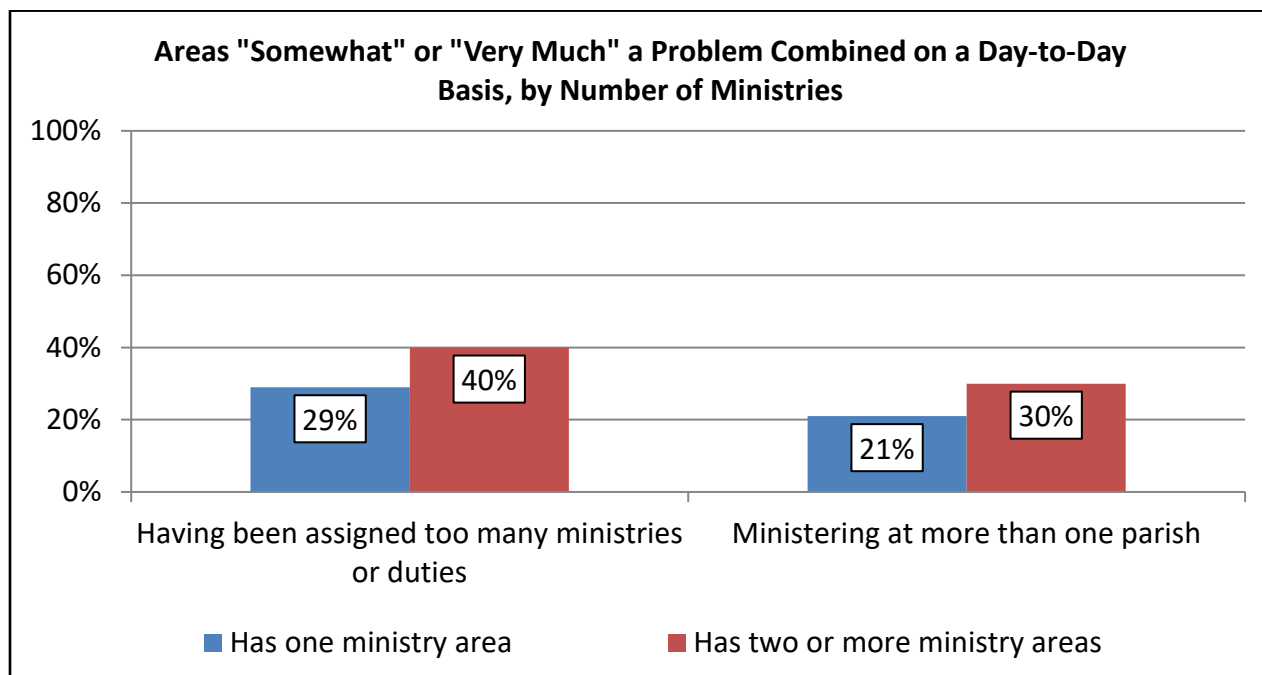


Finally, the earlier the ordination cohort, the more likely its priest members say that conflicts with parishioners or lay persons is “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them on a day-to-day basis.



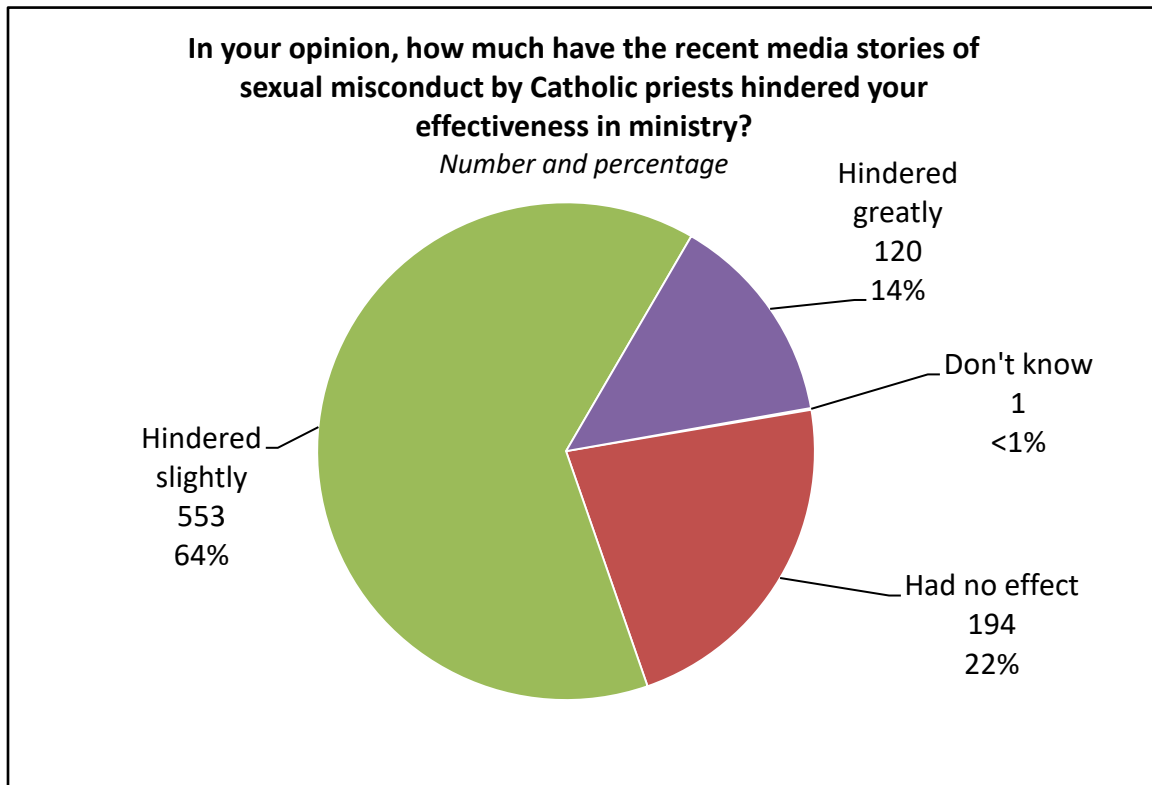
Number of Ministries

Priests who report having a combined two or more primary and secondary ministries are more likely than those with only one ministry to report that the two areas shown in the figure below are “somewhat” or “very much” a problem for them.



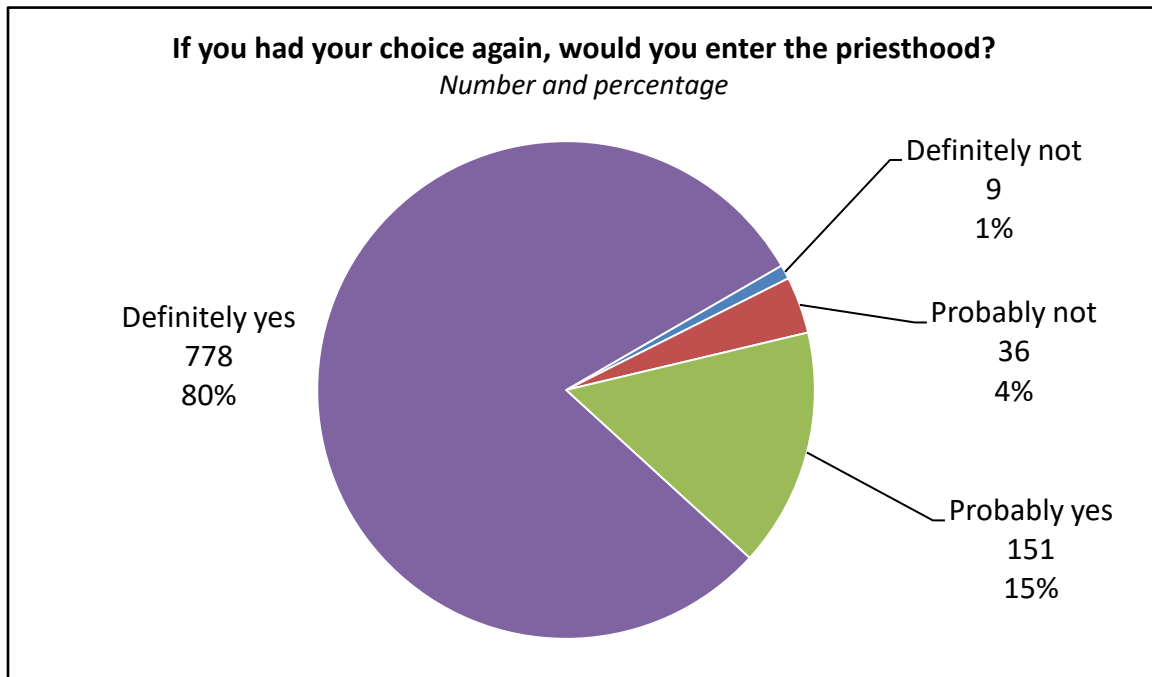
Effect of the Sexual Abuse Scandal on their Ministry

Priests were asked how the recent media stories about sexual misconduct among priests has hindered their effectiveness in ministry. The results are presented in the figure below. A combined 78% say it has hindered their ministry either “slightly” (64%) or “greatly” (14%). Some 22% say it has “had no effect.”



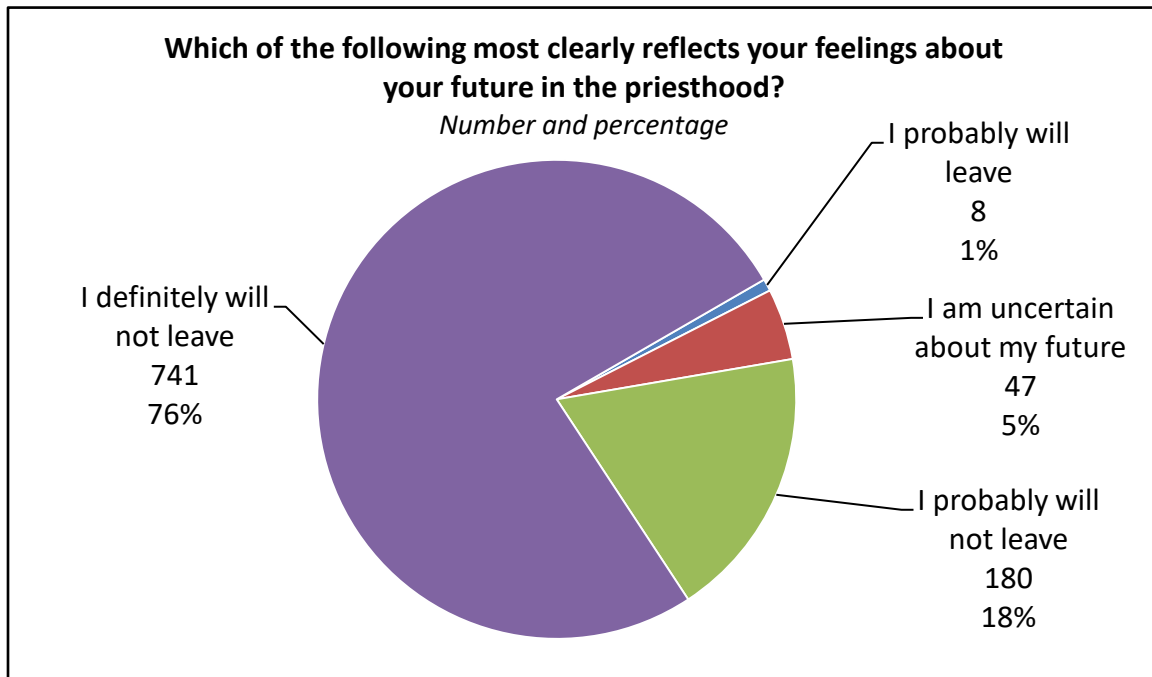
Would They Again Enter the Priesthood

Priests were asked whether they would enter the priesthood again if they had the choice again. The results are presented in the figure below. Eight in ten (80%) say they “definitely” would do so, with another 15% saying they “probably” would do so. One in 20 combined say they would “definitely not” (1%) or “probably not” (4%) do so.



Future in the Priesthood

Priests were asked about their future in the priesthood and whether they see themselves staying or leaving. A combined 94% either “definitely will not leave” (76%) or “probably will not leave” (18%). Among the remaining one in 20, 5% are “uncertain” about the future and 1% “probably will leave.”



Reasons They Have Considered Leaving the Priesthood

Priests were asked to write in a response to this question: *If you have ever thought about leaving the priesthood, what are the primary reasons?* Some 589 priests provided a response, with 183 of these responses specifying that they have never really considered leaving.⁵ Among the 406 that did list reasons, many mentioned more than one reason.

The responses can be grouped into these seven categories plus an “other” category for those reasons that occurred infrequently. The categories are ordered from most commonly mentioned to least.

- Loneliness of the celibate life
- Frustration with their diocese, religious institute, bishop, or superior
- Disappointment with their ministries, living situations, or those to whom they minister
- Overwork and stress
- Issues with the larger Church
- Disappointment with their fellow priests
- Personal shortcomings and psychological issues
- Other reasons for considering leaving the priesthood

Below are descriptions of these reasons and representative comments in each category.

Loneliness of the Celibate Life

Nearly two-fifths of responding priests write of the loneliness they experience while living out their vow of celibacy as a reason they have considered leaving the active priesthood. This is the most frequently cited reason for considering leaving. Besides the loneliness, others mentioned their desire to live a more normal life, with a spouse and children as well as to have a more normal job. For some, these issues were continuing issues for them, while others wrote that they have learned to better live with it. Some comments include the following:⁶

Yes. Feelings of loneliness and isolation (some of which was self-inflicted), led to me seeking out friends from college—one of whom I had dated for a brief time. I fell into an inappropriate relationship with her for a few years and was considering leaving in order to pursue her in marriage. Fortunately, my bishop provided me with the resources and opportunities needed to revive the memory of why I became a priest in the first place, and a spiritual director/mentor who was able to provide me with a sense of belonging and meaning.

⁵ All of the comments, including those saying they have never considered it, can be seen in Appendix II. Among those counted as not having seriously considered it are those who responded “Not applicable.”

⁶ This is the category that the great majority of the comments written in Spanish fit into best.

The challenge of chastity and celibacy.

El celibate. [Celibacy.]

I have thought of leaving, but mostly those were in states of desolation where I had a difficult time coping with celibacy.

The challenge of chastity and celibacy.

Celibacy can be challenging, but also the life of a priest is very demanding on the person, sometimes I have the desire to just be a private person and to live a "normal" life.

Any thoughts of leaving were always fleeting. I never thought about or formulated a plan. Most often these thoughts were provoked by periods of loneliness.

Lonely, desire for marriage and family, boredom, desire to try something different.

Matrimonio. [Matrimony.]

I have not considered it, but I think the challenges faced are loneliness. Again, being across the ocean from my community and family, that is keenly felt. An older brother of mine (ordained a few years ahead of me, with whom I was in the seminary) recently announced his departure, and was in higher studies. That has really spurred me to make time when I am feeling lonely to reach out to my brothers in [Religious Institute Name]. There is a further sense of loneliness, apart from distance. There are things I just can't share with my parents and siblings. Not that I don't want to or they won't listen. Just there is a gap of experience, in the way there are parts of my parents' relationship I just cannot enter into. Even in community, priesthood is a life of intimacy with the Lord. While that intimacy with Christ is profound and beautiful, the inability at some moments (and usually the most tender and beautiful moments of it) to be known by others and to share it with others can be difficult. I think these are also the most beautiful and treasured moments of being a priest.

To be sexually active and free to make my own mistakes without worrying about a superior.

Loneliness. I was once ill and living with two other priests. None of them checked on me to see if I needed anything even though they were aware. Some women parishioners were able to reach out when they realized I was unwell. I felt like if I died, no one would know till days later and I noted the warmth of having a companion, thus contemplating the joys of married life with a partner who loved me and would check on me.

During my second year of priesthood, I fell in love with a parishioner. I wouldn't say I thought about leaving but it was definitely a crisis moment. Thankfully I had good

support from a spiritual director, counselor and priest support group. I was able to pass through the experience of falling in love with a greater appreciation and commitment to my priesthood.

The lingering desire of sexual intimacy, and how to receive/give proper affection, is a constant companion. But I've had helpful experiences of being in love, and being supported by superiors along the way, that remind me that I am loved, and am capable of loving in appropriately chaste ways. I know the warning signs for my needing support, and have 100% confidence and trust in my provincial superior and his delegate for young priests. I recognize that I am very fortunate to have this support, and might well struggle without it.

The loneliness and isolation are tough. Family and friends don't really understand your life. They have their own lives. So do parishioners. So, at night I guess guys just watch Netflix or something, and I'm not satisfied with that. I often don't relate well to other priests. Sometimes you just feel like nobody cares and you're not truly known by anyone but God. I get tired of always having to be the guy who reaches out to other priests. No one takes initiative about reaching out and very few guys ever open up about their struggles. I had to start a support group. I have no best friend(s) priest or otherwise. Giving all the time and never receiving is tough. I've definitely more fully realized my own personal woundedness since being a priest. Spiritual life helps a lot, but I need deep human relationships and am lacking them. I honestly wonder based on my personal history of at times having reckless behavior, if I shouldn't get out just to save people from possible scandal or disappointment.

Once, I fell head over heels for a woman. That was the closest I'd ever come to considering leaving the priesthood. But I knew the feelings would subside, and they did. I see now it was a moment of infatuation and temptation, but I felt convicted I am called to be a priest.

I allowed myself to get too close to a woman my age, who subsequently expressed her romantic feelings towards me. I feel the same way, and I have no background on how to deal with a situation like this. I am left only thinking about "ontology" and how I'm "a priest forever" which has proved largely insufficient. I think I will at least need time to think about my future ministry.

If I found a good partner in life. However, I am not looking and when such opportunities have arisen, I've avoided them.

La incomprensión, la falta de libertad y el estar solo. [The misunderstanding, the lack of freedom and being alone.]

Wanting a physical relationship with a woman. I have no intention of leaving priesthood for this, but after hearing so many stories of priests straying and leaving, I always try to remember "pride goes before the fall". There is the potential for temptation there, but knowing it is a temptation also motivates me to establish safe and healthy boundaries.

Loneliness. Burnout. Dissatisfaction. Loneliness!

La Soledad y mujeres. [Loneliness and women.]

I am committed to the priesthood. I will not leave. That said, celibacy is very challenging. I strongly support the discipline and would not want it changed, but the celibate life is challenging.

Frustration with their Diocese, Religious Institute, Bishop, or Superior

About a quarter of responding priests mention their frustration with their diocese or religious institute and its leadership as a reason they have considered leaving the active priesthood. Some characterize the structure of their diocese or institute as unconcerned about priests like them as people, with others finding their diocese or institute dysfunctional. The comments below express some of that frustration.

Hitting a point where I couldn't handle the lack of support/trust from my bishop. Early in my second year I started a countdown to his retirement. To be honest, the only reason I didn't fall off that ledge is because he writes our assignment letters in a way that I know he can't force me into a punishment assignment, it has been the main comfort from that area. If we have another bishop like this (passively abusive) I don't know if I can handle. I would say I would leave for not being strong enough to endure what is going on. The next question adds to this... since my ordination, less than 6 years ago, we have lost 5 men, I think, ordained less than 5 years, the struggle is real here. All but one man directly named the bishop as a primary reason in that, mostly through lies and deceit.

I feel completely unsupported by the bishop. My sense of my relationship with him is not only strictly "professional" but even servile: priests as assets, as opposed to collaborators. In these circumstances, it's hard to conceive a priesthood as a dynamic, growing, and rich vocation, and not a mere role of assigning warm bodies to celebrate masses in a parish.

Por la injusticia que se da por parte de las autoridades, el maltrato de los sacerdotes hacia mi persona, la discriminación y el exclusivismo de ciertos sacerdotes. [Because of

the injustice that occurs on the part of the authorities, the mistreatment of the priests towards me, the discrimination and exclusivism of certain priests.]

The lack of diocesan support in every sense of the term. The administration is often focused on policy, money, and the status quo not ministry and the parishes themselves. Our previous bishop also did a terrible job of supporting/defending his priests. I would at times ask myself, "Why stay when I am so quickly hung out to dry?" It is a terrible moment when the bishop turns his back on a priest without ever consulting him. This happened to me in a very public way to which I was left on my own to defend myself to the media and the rest of the diocese.

Bishops not respecting me, or bishops not being spiritual leaders (no backbone).

It's not about leaving the priesthood per se; the temptation is caused by superiors who seem not to know what they are doing and/or are unable to enter into honest dialogues about ministerial possibilities (as opposed to conversations aimed at acquiescence to pre-determined decisions).

Poor treatment from my vicar general and other superiors and brother priests. (Although other brother priests including seminary friends often were what got me through as well.) False accusations of sexual impropriety and embezzlement. It was absolutely terrible and the permanent deacon who accused me and many others falsely was never reprimanded or removed from ministry which is infuriating. Dealing with a possession with no training and no support from the diocesan exorcist for almost a year before they actually stepped in and helped and freed her. Being overlooked for positions because of jealousy by other priests and passed up on parishes because of priests' bias against me, mainly one the VG.

In the wake of the abuse scandal, priests have gotten the message that they are disposable. We have abandoned our values in favor of self-protection. We have been made to feel that we will be disposed of if inconvenient. The manner in which we have treated clergy who have gotten into trouble undermines our credibility and calls our fundamental orientation of Church into question.

Being lied to by the bishop and seeing the bishop do everything possible to save the human institutional Church while not showing any ability to admit wrongdoing or place the spirituality of the faith ahead of saving face or protecting his legacy.

The only major factor that has shaped my brief thoughts of leaving have centered around unreasonable or unacceptable demands from my religious order's leadership upon me for ministry, e.g., provincial ordering me to pastor a 5-parish region alone and maintain an 8-weekend-mass schedule.

I have never had to work so hard in my life. I am over 60 years of age and the prospect of slowing down or retiring seems impossible. Working within a diocese that is moving backward in time rather than forward is tremendously disconcerting. Our bishop cares little for his priests or people - only focused on himself and his grand way and what he/we wear.

Most of my frustration with the priesthood currently stems from my frustration with the diocese, it's leadership, the abuse crisis, and the ever-present threat of being falsely accused. I often feel helpless and I have a very negative view of my future as a priest in this diocese.

Yes, often because of church administration, diocesan leaders in the church who lie, lack of transparency, communication and inclusion, or having a simple relationship in general with our bishop. I feel abandoned from years of poor governing, planning and managing of our church/diocese.

Not given the adequate help from the diocese to adequately deal with my personal or pastoral problems. They still handle things in such an antiquated way. If the bishop of a diocese symbolizes Christ the high priest and diocesan office for the apostles, a newly ordained priest can feel resonate with the feeling of being abandoned by God.

I don't feel connected to my archdiocese. I'm not on any boards, I don't hear from other priests. I was part of a good support group, but they disbanded and reformed without me. I have no idea if my archbishop likes me or hates me. If I left tomorrow, I doubt the chancery would notice.

Disappointment with their Ministries, Living Situations, or Those to Whom They Minister

Concerning why they have ever considered leaving the active priesthood, about a quarter of priests mention their disappointment with the ministry to which they are assigned, their current living situations, and/or to the people to whom they minister. Sometimes the frustration is with their pastor under whom they serve – most often with the lack of mentoring they have received – or with other parish staff members. Other times, it is frustration with the laity, who they see as argumentative. Still others are disappointed with how apathetic the laity they serve are, with some only coming to them when they need a sacrament but not being involved with the parish otherwise. Finally, some are frustrated with the authorities who assigned them there without giving it proper thought. Below are some sample comments.

Too much stress and the unrealistic demand of the laity, and at times the diocese.

La dificultad de ni saber como manejar conflictos con los laicos y trabajadores que estan bajo nuestro mando. es muy dificil. [The difficulty of not even knowing how to

handle conflicts with the laity and workers who are under our command. It is very difficult.]

If the thought crossed my mind briefly, it was because of the day-to-day monotony of canon law, work for my bishop, and parish administration.

Feeling constrained and treated as a sacramental vending machine rather than a theological leader/teacher; not being able to make a difference through preaching and teaching because of the apathy of fellow priests or parishioners.

I have never thought of leaving the priesthood, but in the midst of a difficult first assignment I did think about seeking ministry outside my diocesan, i.e. becoming a military chaplain or a missionary. I felt like I was put into an assignment that the bishop knew would be difficult but did not warn me or offer support.

In times of stress or experiencing the apathy or resistance of parishioners, it could be tempting to wonder if life would be more fulfilling elsewhere. Or, in periods of loneliness or stress, the thought of marriage would be attractive. But leaving has never been anything considered or felt drawn to do. I am blessed with good peers, brother priests, spiritual direction which all help me to stay rooted in this wonderful call.

Staff conflict.

Very stressful episode in the parish where some people said very hurtful things about me because of some decisions I had to make.

Being relegated to serve mostly Hispanic ministry because I am Hispanic, and because I work well (unlike some un-assignable). Not that I am complaining to serve them but the workload is high and somedays I feel as a sacraments machine. There is little opportunity to explore other ways to minister because someone needs to lead sacraments for the growing Hispanic population.

I do not feel that I am living out my ministry as I thought I would. I also feel useless and wasting my time in my current assignment where pastoral work ranges between four to six hours a week.

Lack of support and almost hatred from laity. Not being named pastor when others with fewer years of priesthood being named pastors.

Yes, during a very difficult, long, and unhealthy assignment, I did not receive adequate support or recognition of the situation needed to fulfill the duties of the assignment. When explaining the situation, I was met with disbelief and the power entrusted to my authority was revoked. After many months, the situation was resolved with my transfer.

When I finished, I realized how close I had come to leaving the priesthood because of health concerns and a number of other issues.

In my last assignment from July to yesterday (30 April), I wanted to leave the priesthood at least once a week. This was due to bullying and harassment by the pastor. I felt isolated, I felt alone, I felt rejected and worthless. I felt that the only escape was to leave ministry. It was only by the grace of God and the encouragement by some close lay friends that I stayed. Thank God, I have recently been given a more nurturing assignment where I can grow as a newly ordained priest.

I don't like the geographical area where I am currently assigned. I am from a rural area at the other end of the diocese but am currently assigned to the largest urban area in the state. Living in this environment and being separated from my family is very difficult. I am hoping to be reassigned closer to home and hopefully that will help the geography problem. Another challenge that I have faced is that before entering seminary, I had an active job working outdoors that I enjoyed immensely. When I get frustrated with various aspects of priesthood, I somewhat regret following this path. Neither of these issues is enough for me to seriously consider leaving the priesthood.

Bad assignments (bishop not taking into account who I am and what gifts and talents I have and assigning me in places where I was not able to contribute meaningfully to parish life), lack of fraternal support (the land-size of my diocese makes it difficult to see other priests), lack of care from the bishop.

My first pastor provided no support or guidance. I had questions he wouldn't answer thankfully. I was able to be reassigned. If I were still stuck there, I'd probably be gone by now.

Overwork and Stress

Feeling stressed out from overwork and concerns about their health from such situations is mentioned by about one in ten responding priests as a reason they have considered leaving the active priesthood. Below are some representative comments.

Overwhelmed from stress of work, too much of it, difficulty getting a break and disconnecting from pain of those to whom I ministered.

The demands are too high for my shortcomings.

Exhaustion. Very, very long hours with little time for myself and my own needs (physical, mental, spiritual) and the disability [inability] to take that time off due to priest shortage in my diocese.

Everything was too much, too overwhelming, too much and not enough support.

Early into my priesthood (first couple of months), I felt I had made a mistake because I missed my friends and family. I was working long days with no day off. This went on for almost my entire time as associate. Now that I have my own parish, that has changed somewhat. I have more authority to be able to say no to losing my day off. I still don't, but I can if I truly need to.

If I were to leave, it would be due to the high demands placed on priests. Constantly being available for appointments, teaching various classes, attending meetings, on-going education, and then making time to prepare homilies. Sometimes I just can't wait for my day off and I dislike that feeling.

Stress levels and the feeling of a lack of support. I often feel as if I am left to struggle on my own in my ministry.

Issues with the Larger Church

A little less than one in ten priests mentions issues they have with the larger Church in the United States and/or in the world as what makes them consider leaving the active priesthood. Some specifically mention the sexual abuse crisis, with others lamenting the poor leadership of organizations like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) or the papacy. Below are some examples of these comments.

I would leave because I'm generally disgusted with the leadership in the American Church. I'm not a culture warrior, I'm not for women's ordination or married clergy. I want good, holy priests who minister to God's people and help them to come to know and love Jesus. I don't see this often enough.

Feeling like the Church I represent is not the Church of Christ because it does not expound strong enough the values that were dear to Jesus' heart during his ministry on earth namely, deep concern for the poor, speaking up against injustice of all kinds including racism among Catholics, and too much concern with money. There are parts of the world where the bishops' side with oppressive regimes against the vulnerable and the Pope apparently does not show the same concern for suffering people everywhere in terms of statements of condemnation of evil acts against civilians by the state.

Harm caused by the ongoing sexual abuse crisis. Harm caused by Church teachings on sexuality, marriage/divorce, contraception, etc., dysfunctional church systems (personnel, administration, priorities, etc.), extremism exhibited by vocal Catholics who influence leaders, the role of money in ministry priorities and uncreative bishops in the U.S.

Confusing and contradictory teachings from the Pope about the reason for the Church and priesthood. He often seems to oppose evangelization and treats the Mass as a means to a social/cultural end. If we shouldn't strive for conversions, what's the point? If the liturgy serves primarily human ends, why am I set apart?

I have thought about leaving the priesthood primarily because of the corruption in the hierarchy of the Church. It is clearly more prevalent than we were led to believe in seminary. Most of the talk was on the successes reforming after the sex abuse scandal, but there is still a very severe lack of charity and faith. The focus on money and protecting the "inner club" is sickening, including having our vicar general say he "couldn't wait till this whole McCarrick thing blows over". It's disheartening and confusing.

Protestant and secular humanist culture of American Bishop's conference, priests, and general Church in America.

Disappointment with their Fellow Priests

About one in 20 responding priests cites their disappointment with their fellow priests as a reason they have considered leaving the active priesthood. Many seem to have had an expectation of finding support among their presbyterate, and have been disheartened by the lack of fraternity or encouragement they find there. The comments below are typical of those on this topic.

The criticism and gossips from other priests and people. Defamation of my good name and ministry. Discrimination for being who I am. The envy and jealousy among clergy. The injustice and corruption within the hierarchy.

Clericalism- I become quite frustrated by other ministers who hold their priesthood over the faithful. Homophobia and the maltreatment of the LGBTQ community, firing people due to their sexual orientation rather than uphold their dignity and showing compassion, respect, and sensitivity. Its navel gazing on abortion and turning politics into a single issue- while migrants, creation, death penalty, war - physical and sexual violence is ignored by the leadership of the U.S. Church.

Unhealthy living situations. No commonality amongst priests. No priestly fraternity. No enthusiasm for the faith. Toxic environments in the presbyterate and diocesan structures. Loneliness.

I have only ever had fleeting thoughts of leaving the priesthood. Too many active homosexual clergy, terrible and effete leadership, persecution for being too "traditional," and women were the primary reasons.

Older presbyters who do not support my zeal for souls without forgetting the doctrine of the Church. Lack of support from my pastor and people in the diocese.

The frustration in dealing with the other priests and their view of ministry, they are not interested in helping the faithful and "meeting them where they are at..." but rather assume an odd sense of clericalism. The cassocks, birettas, and cinctures, need to be left behind and the faithful need to be spiritually led and helped.

Personal Shortcomings and Psychological Issues

One in 20 responding priests indicates that it is their own personal shortcomings and their struggle in dealing with psychological issues that have caused them to consider leaving the active priesthood. The most commonly cited issue mentioned is dealing with depression. The comments below are examples of these issues.

There were times early on that I thought I may have made a mistake. I needed to work through some anger and was able to do that through prayer and SD [spiritual direction].

Despite available psychological assistance and abundant support both in seminary and in priesthood, it would be personal psychological issues of anxiety, depression and stress. I am not sure I can handle the amount of stress included in this responsibility, both for the material and spiritual wellbeing of the parish. Despite continued spiritual direction and daily prayer, I would leave due to an inability to feel like a genuine minister, as my personal experience of God is one of darkness; ironically, however, it is precisely this that allows me to be an effective listener, companion, and communicator of God's presence for the people in pastoral situations.

Inadequacy. Uncertainties about God.

Clinical depression had warped my sense of reality to the point of delusion. Once, I received proper medication and treatment, I have never thought of leaving.

Not seriously although I went through a tough period of about 18 months, dealing with depression - pastor/diocese very supportive during this time particular.

The only reason was personal struggles with anxiety. This was something I dealt with in seminary and I need to continue working with from time to time.

Other Reasons for Considering Leaving the Priesthood

About one in 20 topics mentioned by priests for why they have considered leaving the priesthood does not fit easily into any of the above categories. Reasons cited include not finding the correct balance between their ministerial, spiritual, and personal lives; being

inadequately prepared for the ministries they are performing; wanting to change from being a diocesan priest to a religious order priest; family issues; financial insecurity; and feeling they are being falsely accused of something. A selection of these comments appears below.

Only as a "thought". I reflect on this thought, remembering all the priests I have known and who have left the priesthood. I pray for them, and realize that I am not exempt from the possibility of also leaving the priesthood. This "reality check" helps me to continually seek support and help from my priest friends. I am conscientious that my primary reason of my challenges as a priest have come from forgetting my prayer and spiritual growth; from neglecting my personal relationship with God.

I feel like I didn't really get a good perspective of the daily life of priest in seminary. I feel like I should have taken time off before ordination. Also, my seminary didn't teach a course on the priesthood until my last semester in seminary, when I was already a deacon and about to graduate. Seminary is a place where a lot of emotional and spiritual abuse happens from faculty and bishops. It's all about playing politics at times, while negating what the best pastoral application.

It would be for religious life, not leaving the priesthood itself. But it would be to get out of the diocesan life in order to seek a more prayerful, contemplative way of life. Sometimes the busyness (and business-like mindset) of many parishes is just overly exhausting.

Concerns with existing biological family who may one day need care that I want to provide in such a way that the Bishop would not approve of.

I am frustrated with the financial situation in which we are left. We are essentially on the hook for our own retirement, but we are not paid well enough to provide for our own retirement. Even if our salary were to stay the same, I think the employer contributions to our 403b need to be far higher than they are.

The fear of scandal - false accusation but with understanding that even if falsely accused you are forever tarnished and even this would negatively impact any future ministry.

If I ever thought of leaving, it would be if I lost the meaning of the deep Christian identity in Christ our Lord and the priesthood that he established, and the loss of connection with our Lord at a deep personal level too. Which I pray and hope these would not happen.

I don't like to ask for money during the sacrament of celebrations. I know that is a tradition to the people support the Church during the sacraments' celebrations with money. Personal: I didn't like to ask for money to the people, I prefer that the people

sent the money later to support the church, later because they want to do and they want grow up and know the church necessities.

If I stopped believing in God.

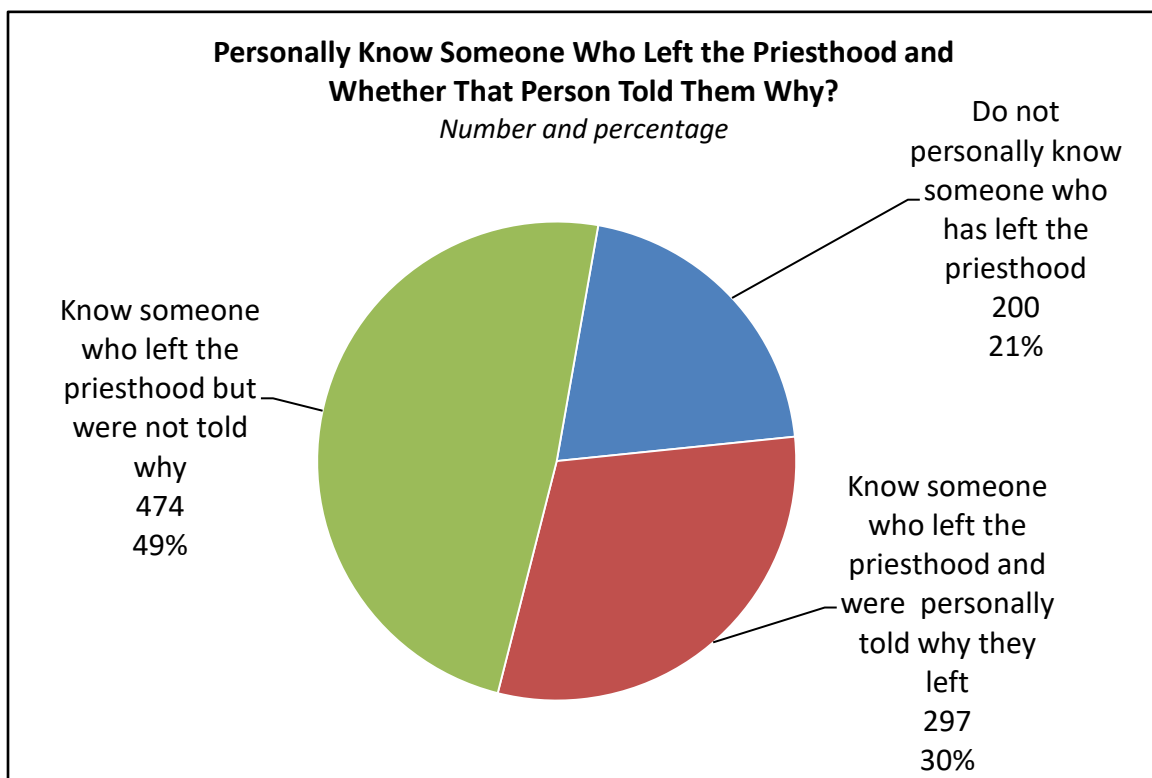
Like Peter, I can say "I will never leave you Lord", and then he left. I do not think I would leave, but this same Petrine weakness is in my own veins, and the biggest threat to me leaving the priesthood is, like Peter, a lack of faith.

Reasons Others They Know Have Left the Priesthood

Priests were asked whether they know someone who has left the active priesthood within five years of their ordination and whether they knew the reasons that person left.

Personally Know Someone Who Left the Priesthood within Five Years of their Ordination

Priests were asked both whether they know someone who has left active ministry/the priesthood within the first five years of their ordination and whether that person had personally told them why they were leaving. The results of the two questions in relationship to one another are presented in the figure below.



Know Someone Who Left the Priesthood in their First Five Years and That Person Told Them Why

The 297 respondents who say that they both personally know someone who has left the priesthood in their first five years after ordination *and* that that person told them why they were leaving were asked a series of follow-up questions concerning what those reasons were. Some 293 listed at least one reason. The percentage listing each reason (they were told to choose up to three reasons) are shown in the table below.

| Top Three Reasons the Person Who Left the Priesthood Gave for Why They Left | |
|---|----|
| Reason | % |
| Disillusionment with the actual life of ministry | 40 |
| Loneliness | 39 |
| Meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or marry | 36 |
| Longing for a romantic partner | 34 |
| Discouragement | 24 |
| Sexual acting out | 18 |
| Lack of emotional intimacy | 10 |
| Lack of connection to the diocesan presbyterate | 9 |
| Same-sex attraction | 8 |
| Emotionally dependent relationships | 6 |
| Porn addiction | 3 |
| Other | 26 |

The top five reasons listed are: disillusionment with the actual life of ministry (40%), loneliness (39%), meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or marry (36%), longing for a romantic partner (34%), and discouragement (24%).

Among those writing in an “other” reason, responding priests are especially likely to have written in reasons related to:

- Depression or other mental health issues
- Conflict with the bishop or diocesan authorities
- Ineffective vocational discernment or immaturity problems
- Individual malfeasance (financial, sexual, addictions, boundary issues) and was removed
- Desire to be married or a relationship led to a pregnancy
- Family crises or issues
- Overwork, burn out or exhaustion
- Bad relationship with his pastor or immediate supervisor
- Frustration with the laity they encountered as a priest
- Problems with their brother priests

Know Someone Who Left the Priesthood in their First Five Years But That Person Did Not Tell Them Why

The 474 respondents who say that they personally know someone who has left the priesthood in their first five years after ordination but that that person did not tell them why they left were also asked a series of follow-up questions concerning what they suspect that person's reasons for leaving were. Some 452 provided a response. The percentage listing each reason (they were told to choose up to three reasons) are shown in the table below.

| Top Three Reasons They Suspect for Why That Person Left the Priesthood | |
|---|----------|
| Reason | % |
| Disillusionment with the actual life of ministry | 49 |
| Loneliness | 40 |
| Meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or marry | 37 |
| Longing for a romantic partner | 33 |
| Discouragement | 25 |
| Sexual acting out | 16 |
| Lack of emotional intimacy | 14 |
| Lack of connection to the diocesan presbyterate | 14 |
| Same-sex attraction | 8 |
| Emotionally dependent relationships | 8 |
| Porn addiction | 4 |
| Other | 19 |

The top five reasons listed are: disillusionment with the actual life of ministry (49%), loneliness (40%), meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or marry (37%), longing for a romantic partner (33%), and discouragement (25%). Please note that these were the same top-five reasons listed by those in the subsection directly preceding this one.

Among those writing in an “other” reason, responding priests are especially likely to have written in reasons related to:

- Psychological and grieving issues
- Poor prayer/interior life habits
- Conflict with the bishop or diocesan authorities
- Authority and obedience issues
- Mishandled by religious institute leadership
- Issues adapting to community life
- Ineffective vocational discernment or personal immaturity problems

- Poor judgment from seminary formators
- Poor idea from seminary formation of what life as priest would be like
- Individual malfeasance (sexual, addictions, boundary issues) and was removed
- Issues with celibate life or being in a relationship that led to a pregnancy
- Family crises or issues
- Overwork, burn out or exhaustion
- Bad relationship with his pastor or immediate supervisor
- Problems with their brother priests
- Weak commitment to the priesthood
- Cultural differences between the priest and the diocese
- Loss of faith

Section III: Assessment of Seminary Education

This section of the report describes how the 1,012 responding priests assess their seminary education and experience.

Availability and Participation in Activities

Priests were asked whether certain programs were offered in their seminary and how much they participated in each. They were given the choices: “this was not offered at my seminary,” “this was offered but I did not participate,” “this was offered, I participated in it, and it was not helpful,” “this was offered, I participated in it, and it helped me somewhat,” and “this was offered, I participated in it, and it helped me a great deal.” The results are shown below.

Please indicate whether the following were offered in your seminary and your experience with each:
Percentage responding

| | Participated in It and It Helped a Great Deal | Participated in It and It Helped Somewhat | Participated in It But It Was Not Helpful | Was Offered, But Did <u>Not</u> Participate in It | Was <u>Not</u> Offered in my Seminary |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| 8-day spiritual exercises | 36 | 14 | 1 | 4 | 45 |
| Pastoral Year Internship | 29 | 11 | 3 | 17 | 39 |
| Mentoring during your pastoral year | 27 | 25 | 6 | 8 | 34 |
| Counseling with a psychologist | 26 | 24 | 6 | 32 | 12 |
| Formation in chaste celibacy program | 25 | 38 | 11 | 3 | 24 |
| Prayer groups/prayer teams | 23 | 34 | 5 | 15 | 24 |
| Summer programs of formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) | 18 | 8 | 4 | 26 | 44 |
| 30-day spiritual exercises | 16 | 2 | <1 | 8 | 74 |
| Peer accountability partnering | 15 | 20 | 5 | 9 | 50 |
| Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year | 12 | 3 | <1 | 8 | 77 |
| Chastity support group | 8 | 8 | 2 | 19 | 62 |

Using the final column in the table above for how available programs are, the programs most likely to be offered at the seminaries attended by the priests are counseling with a psychologist (88%), formation in chaste celibacy programs (76%), prayer groups/prayer teams

(76%), mentoring during one's pastoral year (66%), and a Pastoral Year Internship (61%). Those *least* frequently offered are a Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year (23%), 30-day spiritual exercises (26%), and chastity support groups (38%).

Concerning participation in the programs offered, about a quarter to a third of priests report that they have participated in each of the following during their time in their seminary and that each helped them "a great deal": 8-day spiritual exercises (36%), Pastoral Year Internship (29%), mentoring during their pastoral year (27%), counseling with a psychologist (26%), formation in chaste celibacy program (25%), and prayer groups/prayer teams (23%). As such, these are the programs that have helped the greatest proportion of responding priests the most, regardless of whether it was offered at their seminary or not.

Non-participant rates for the programs ranges from 27% to 85%. Those with the lowest non-participant rates (less than half) are:

- Formation in chaste celibacy program (27% not participating overall: 24% because it was not offered, 3% chose not to participate in it)
- Prayer groups/prayer teams (39% not participating overall: 24% because it was not offered, 15% chose not to participate in them)
- Mentoring during pastoral year (42% not participating overall: 24% because it was not offered, 8% chose not to participate in it)
- Counseling with a psychologist (44% not participating overall: 32% because it was not offered, 12% chose not to participate in it)
- 8-day spiritual exercises (49% not participating overall: 45% because it was not offered, 4% chose not to participate in it)

The programs with non-participant rates over half are:

- Pastoral Year Internship (56% not participating overall: 39% because it was not offered, 17% chose not to participate in it)
- Peer accountability partnering (59% not participating overall: 50% because it was not offered, 9% chose not to participate in it)
- Summer programs of formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation – IPF (70% not participating overall: 44% because it was not offered, 26% chose not to participate in it)
- Chastity support group (81% not participating overall: 62% because it was not offered, 19% chose not to participate in it)
- 30-day spiritual exercises (82% not participating overall: 74% because it was not offered, 8% chose not to participate in it)
- Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year (85% not participating overall: 77% because it was not offered, 8% chose not to participate in it)

Efficacy of Programs

The table below makes the data more comparable, removing those who did not participate in a program either because it was not offered at their seminary or because they chose not to participate. In this way, the efficacy of each program can be better evaluated.

| Effectiveness of Programs among Those Who Participated in Them <i>Percentage responding</i> | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | Participated in It and It Helped a Great Deal | Participated in It and It Helped Somewhat | Participated in It But It Was Not Helpful |
| | % | % | % |
| 30-day spiritual exercises | 86 | 11 | 2 |
| Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year | 78 | 19 | 3 |
| 8-day spiritual exercises | 71 | 27 | 3 |
| Pastoral Year Internship | 67 | 26 | 7 |
| Summer programs of formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) | 62 | 26 | 13 |
| Mentoring during your pastoral year | 47 | 43 | 10 |
| Counseling with a psychologist | 47 | 43 | 10 |
| Chastity support group | 46 | 46 | 9 |
| Peer accountability partnering | 38 | 50 | 13 |
| Prayer groups/Prayer teams | 37 | 55 | 9 |
| Formation in chaste celibacy program | 34 | 51 | 15 |

Among those who participated in each program, more than half of responding priests indicate that the following helped them “a great deal”:

- 30-day spiritual exercises (86%)
- Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year (78%)
- 8-day spiritual exercises (71%)
- Pastoral Year Internship (67%)
- Summer programs for formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation – IPF (62%)

Less than one in six rated any of the programs as “not helpful.” The three programs with the highest percentage saying they were not helpful were:

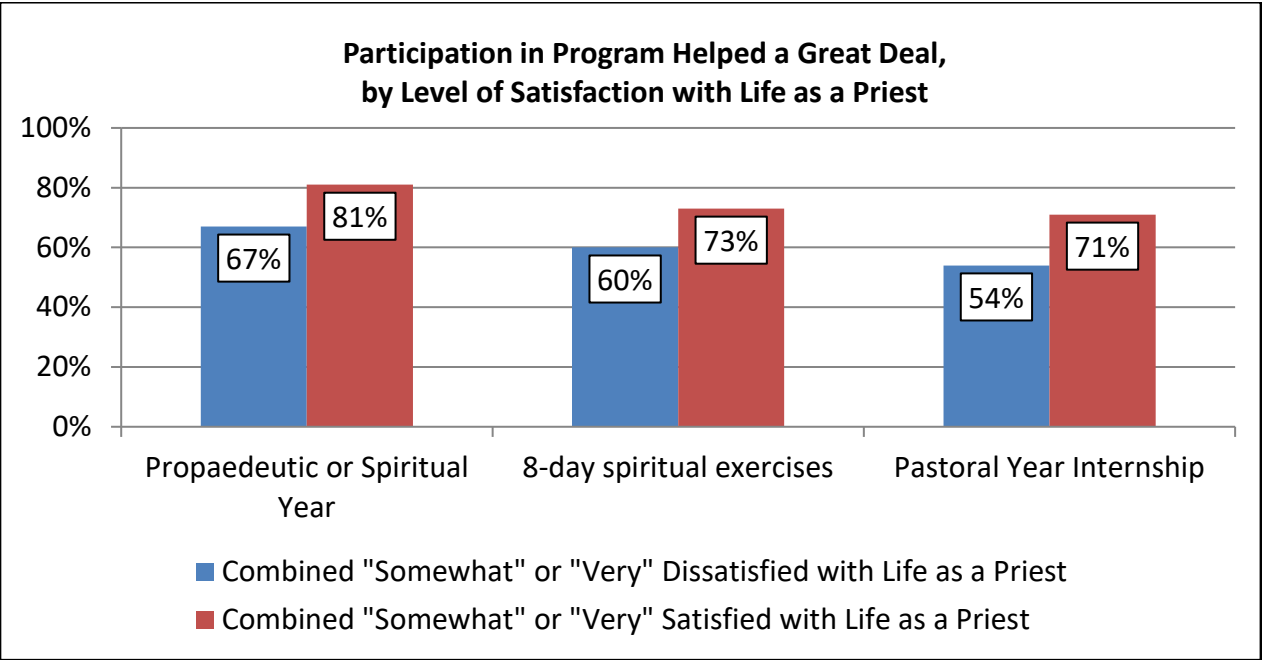
- Formation chaste celibacy program (15%)
- Summer programs for formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation – IPF (13%)
- Peer accountability program (13%)

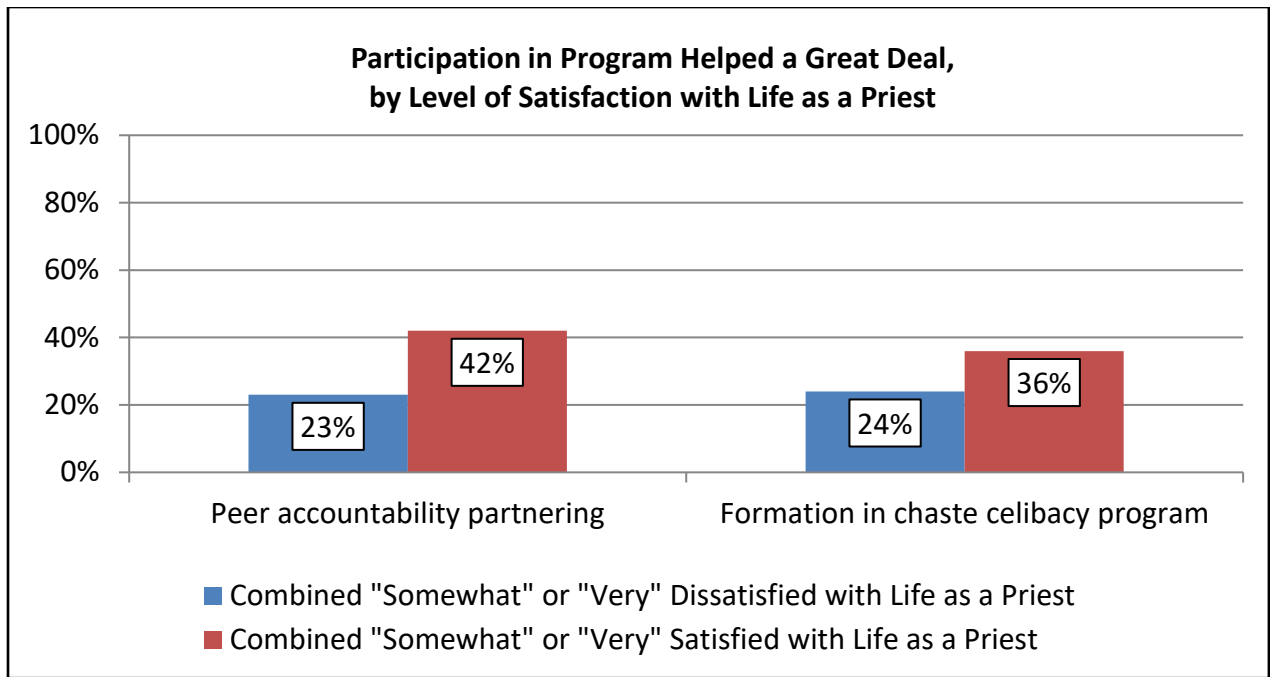
Subgroup Analysis Findings

Included in the subgroup analyses below are only those saying they participated in a program.

Level of Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

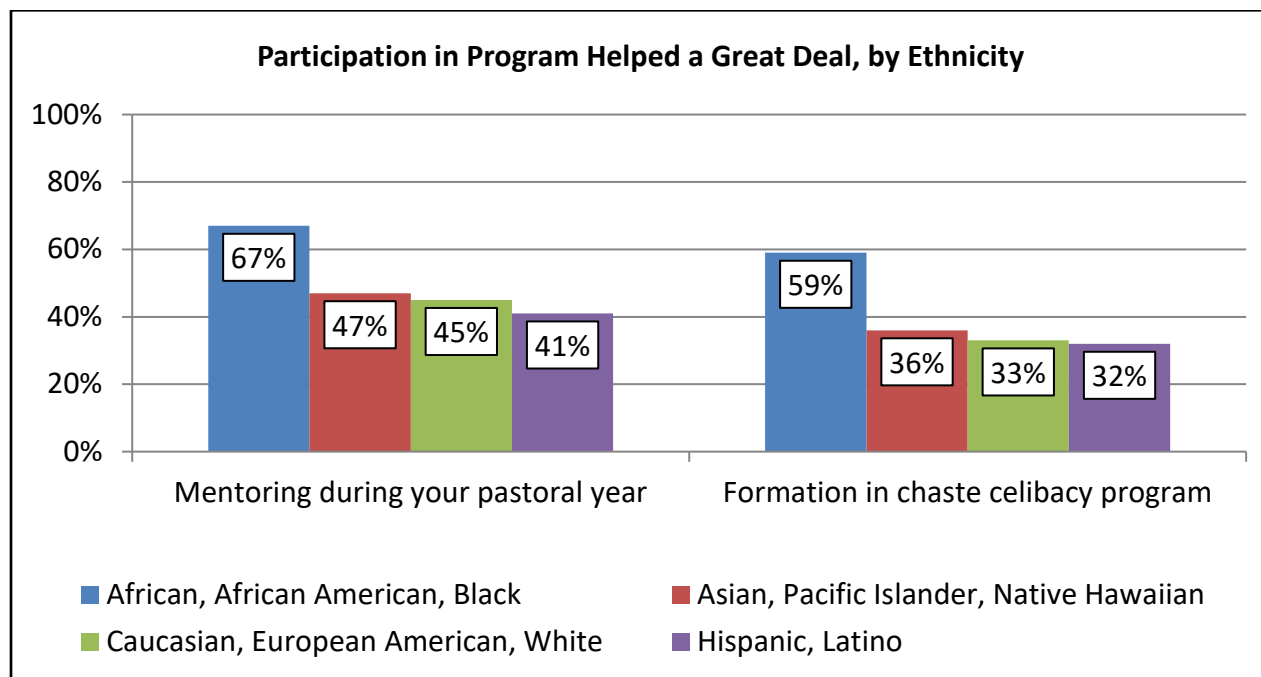
Those who are satisfied overall with their lives as priests are more likely to say they participated in the programs shown in the three figures below and that the program helped them “a great deal.”



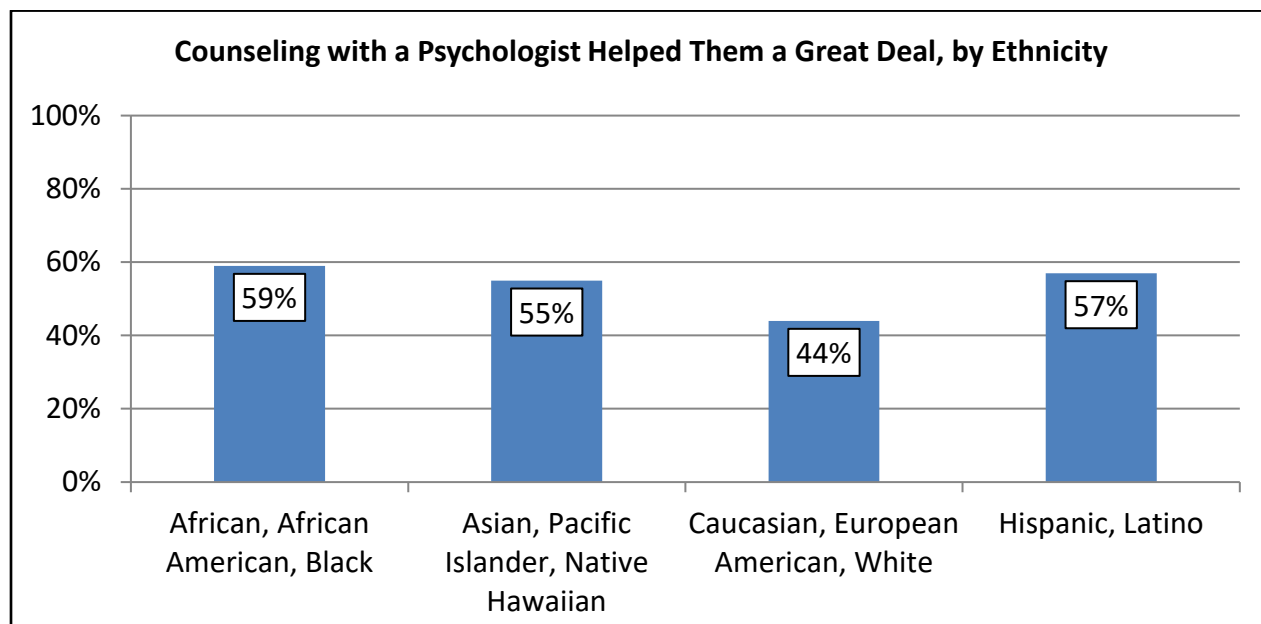


Ethnicity

African, African American, or Black priests are most likely to report that the two programs in the figure below helped them “a great deal.”

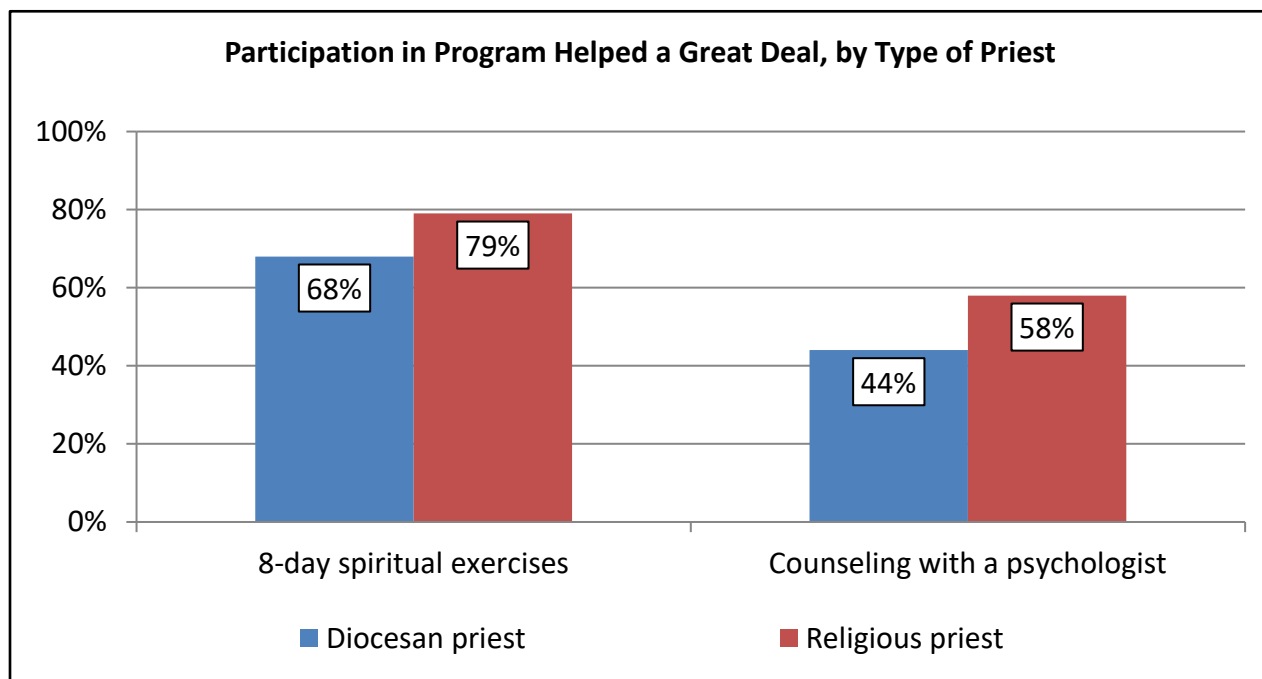


Caucasian, European American or white priests are *least* likely to report that participating in counseling with a psychologist helped them a great deal.

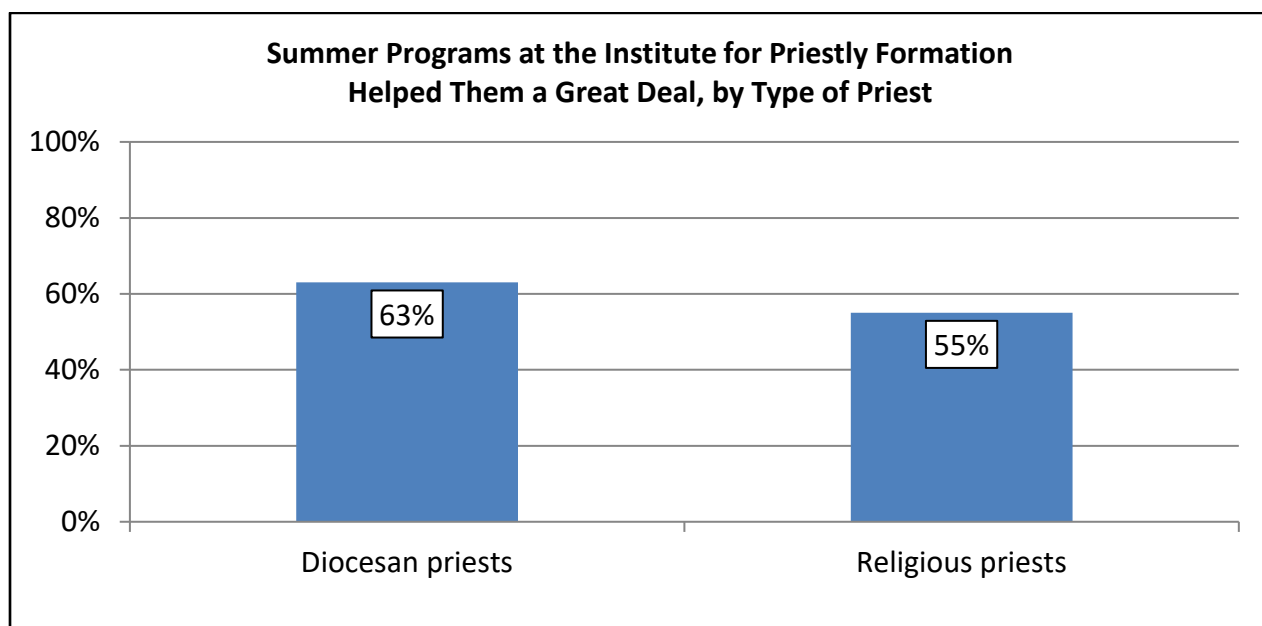


Type of Priest

Religious priests are more likely than diocesan priests to say that participating in the two programs shown in the figure below helped them “a great deal.”



Diocesan priests, on the other hand, are more likely than religious priests to say that participating in the summer programs at the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) helped them “a great deal.”



Effectiveness of Seminary Preparation

Priests were asked to evaluate how well their seminary prepared them in 13 different areas in light of their current experiences. They were offered these responses: “not at all well,” “a little well,” “somewhat well,” and “well.” The first column of numbers in the table below summarizes the positive side of the scale, showing the percentage that assessed each area as “somewhat well” or “well” combined. The final column displays the percentage saying their seminary prepared them in this area “well.”⁷

Examining the first column of numbers below, priests are most likely to say their seminary prepared them “somewhat well” or “well” in the areas of preaching (91%), presiding at Mass (90%), and Confessions (84%). Less than half, on the other hand, say they were prepared at least “somewhat well” in these administrative areas: human resource skills (46%), collaborative skills (46%), leadership skills (45%), and administrative skills (23%).

| <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In light of your current experiences, how well did your seminary prepare you in the following areas?</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Percentage responding</i></p> | | |
|---|--|---|
| | <p style="text-align: center;">It Prepared Me “Somewhat” and “Well” Combined</p> <p style="text-align: center;">%</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">It Prepared Me “Well” Only</p> <p style="text-align: center;">%</p> |
| Preaching | 91 | 64 |
| Presiding at Mass | 90 | 69 |
| Confessions | 84 | 55 |
| Pastoral counseling | 74 | 36 |
| Presiding at funerals | 73 | 40 |
| Hospital ministry | 72 | 42 |
| Pastoral skills for serving the diverse cultures present in your diocese | 60 | 28 |
| Language skills needed pastorally in your diocese | 56 | 30 |
| Personal skills such as time management and handling stress | 56 | 24 |
| Human resource skills such as communication and conflict management | 46 | 16 |
| Collaborative skills such as building consensus | 46 | 16 |
| Leadership skills such as motivating people | 45 | 16 |
| Administrative skills such as budgeting and investing | 23 | 6 |

⁷ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, is presented in the Appendix.

Examining the percentage saying their seminary prepared them “well” only:

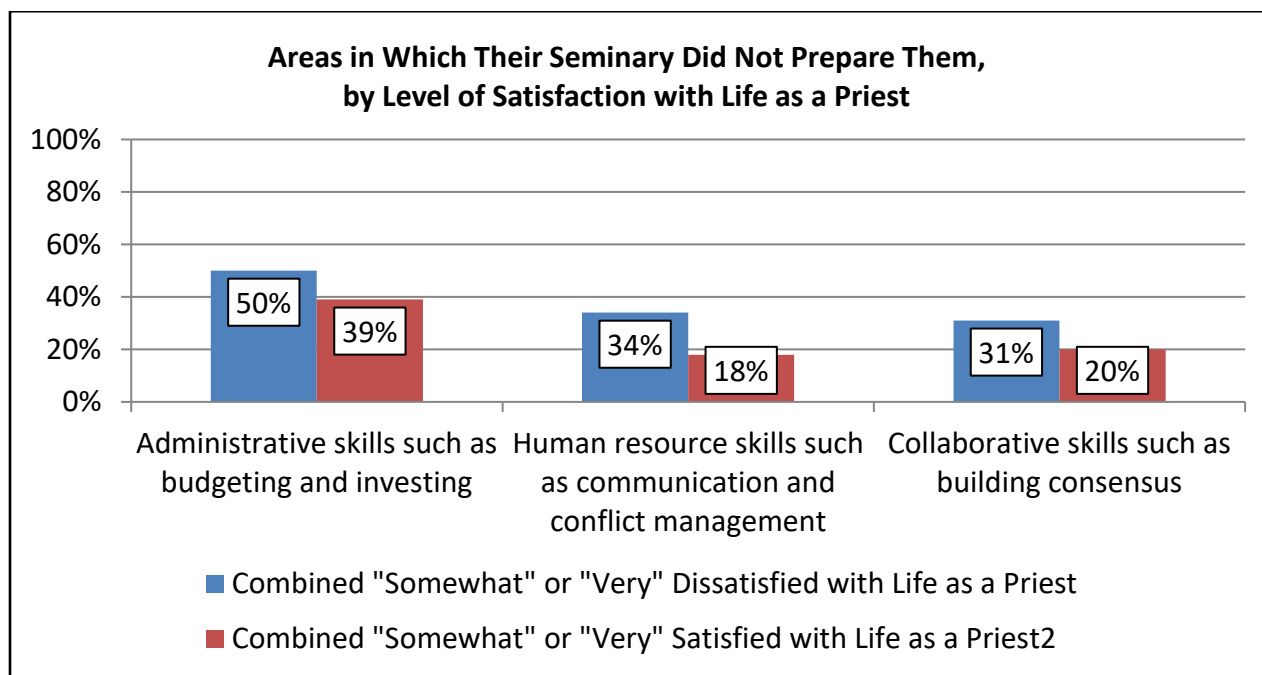
- More than half indicate that they were prepared “well” in the areas of presiding at Mass (69%), preaching (64%), and Confessions (55%).
- About four-tenths say their seminary prepared them “well” in the areas of hospital ministry (42%), presiding at funerals (40%), and pastoral counseling (36%).
- A quarter to three-tenths report that their seminary prepared them well in these areas: language skills needed pastorally in their diocese (30%), pastoral skills for serving the diverse cultures present in their dioceses (28%), and personal skills such as time management and handling stress (24%).
- One-sixth says their seminary prepared them well in these areas: human resources such as communication and conflict management (16%), collaborative skills such as building consensus (16%), and leadership skills such as motivating people (16%).
- One in 20 reports that their seminary prepared them “well” in the area of administrative skills such as budgeting and investing (6%).

Subgroup Analysis Findings

Level of Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

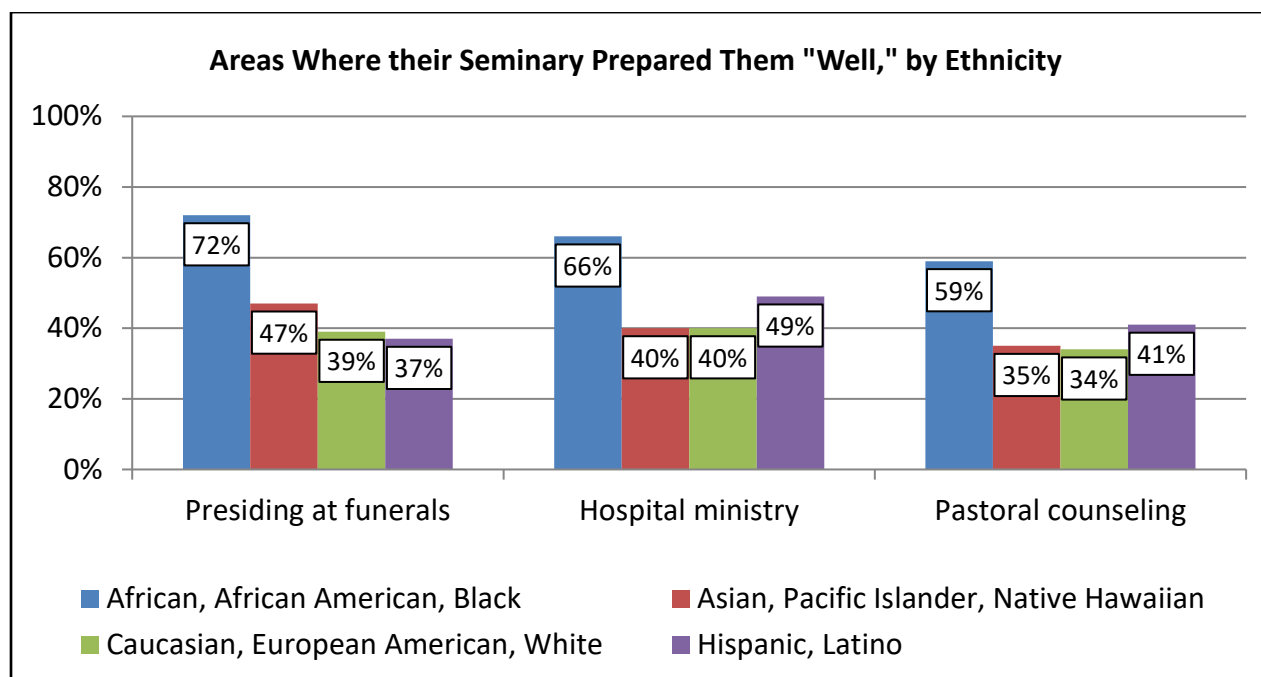
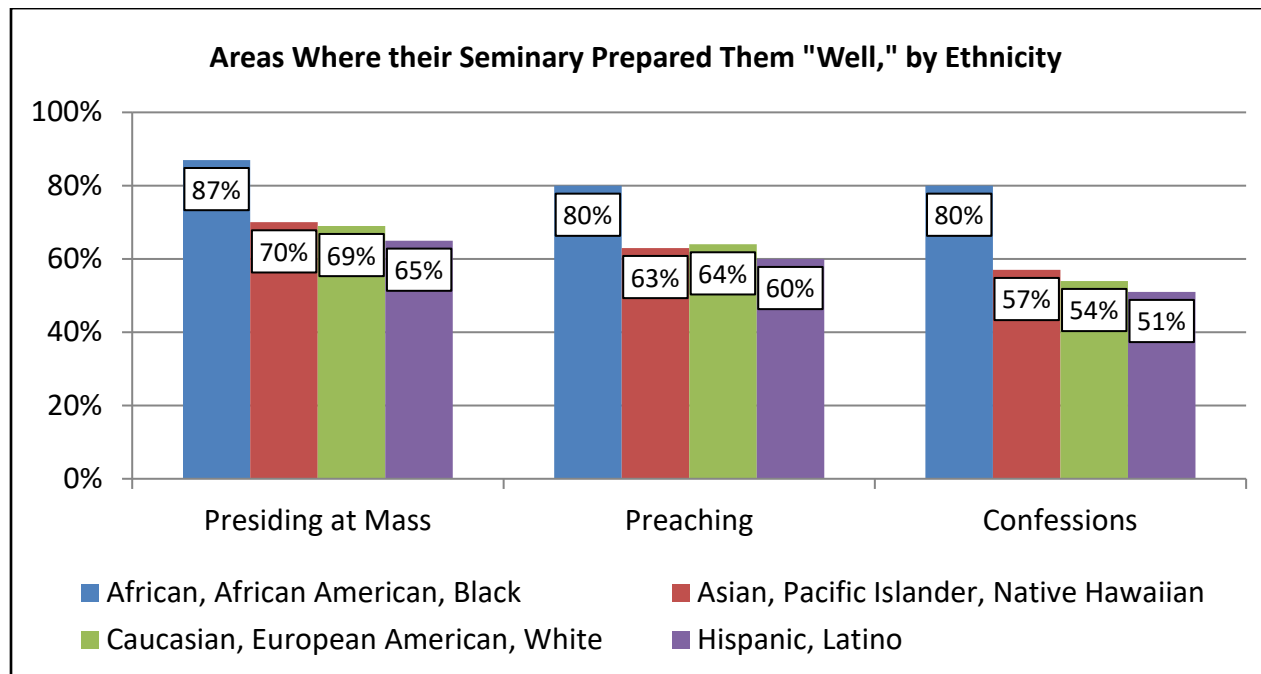
“Not at All” Satisfied in Areas

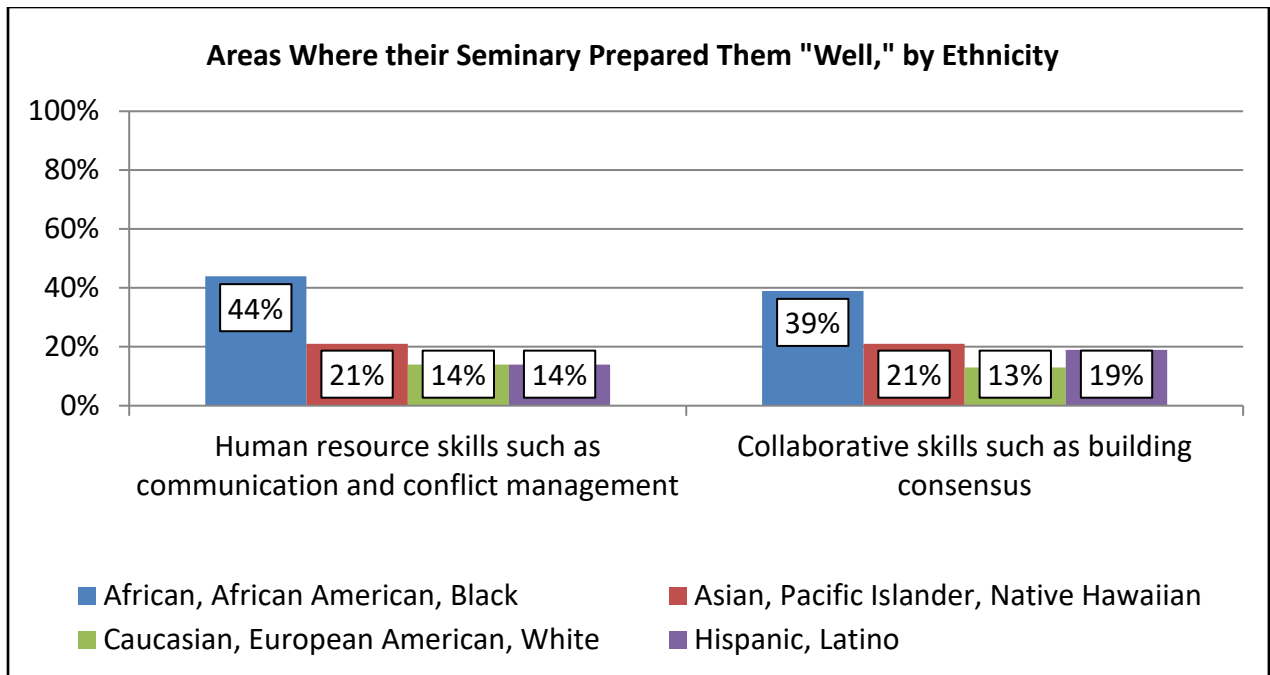
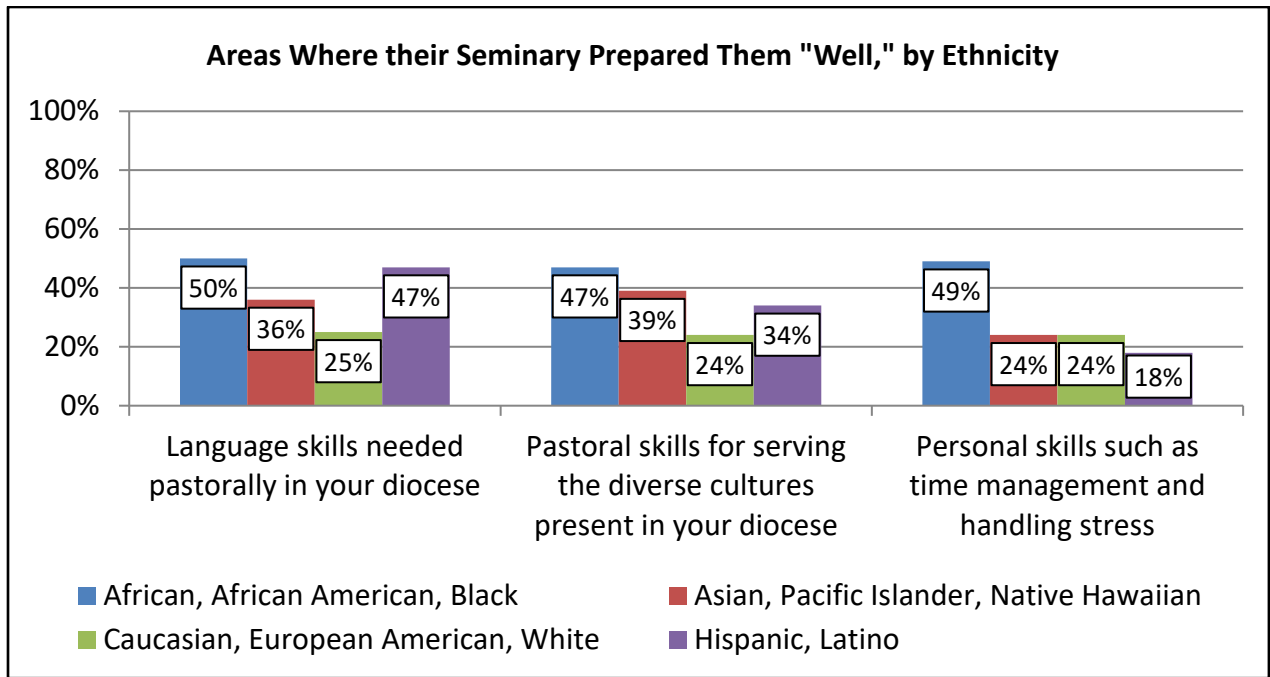
Generally, this report compares those giving the combined positive or most positive response. However, at times it is instructive to look at those giving an area the lowest rating. As is shown in the figure below, in three areas, those who are dissatisfied overall with their lives as priests are more likely to say their seminary “did not” prepare them in these three areas: administrative skills, human resource skills, and collaborative skills.

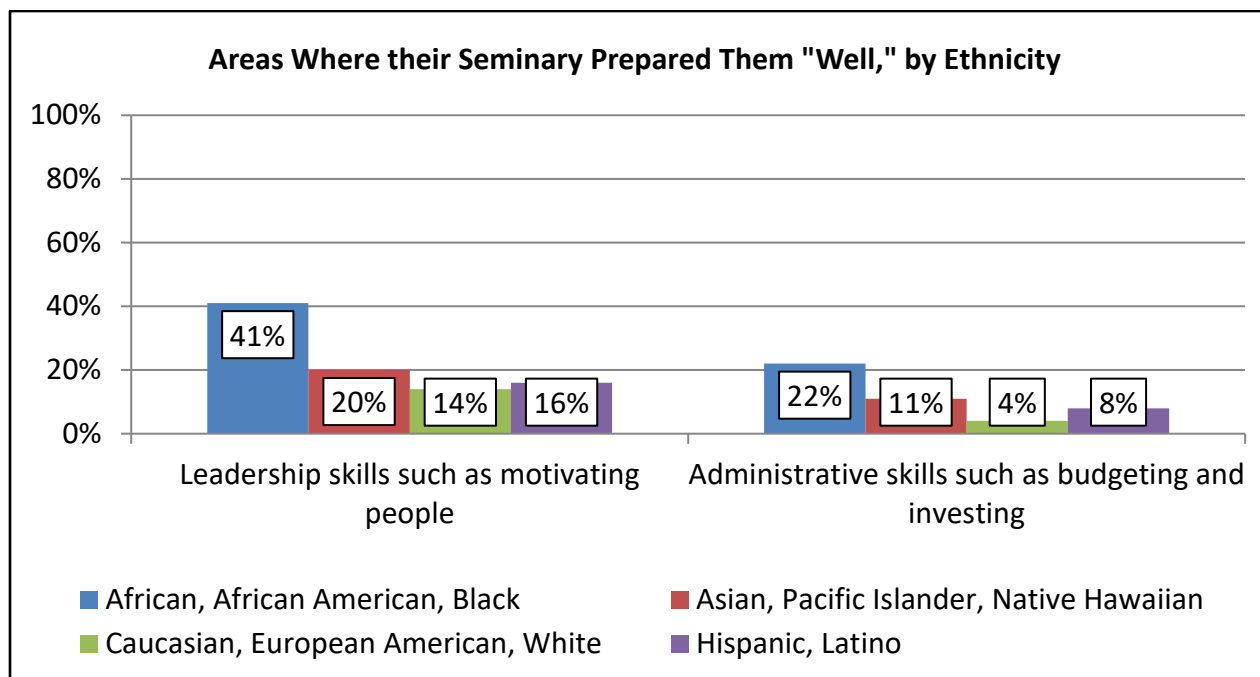


Ethnicity

African, African American, or Black priests are most likely to report that their seminary prepared them “well” in each of the areas asked about, as is shown in the figures below.



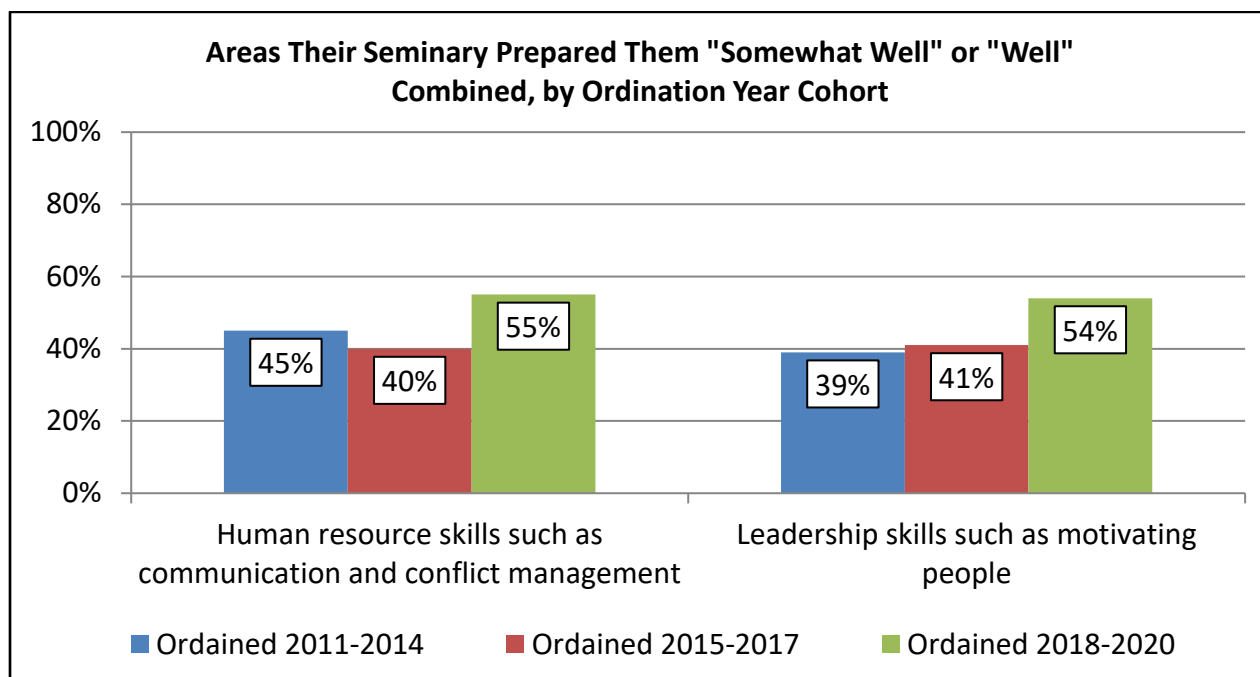




Ordination Year Cohort

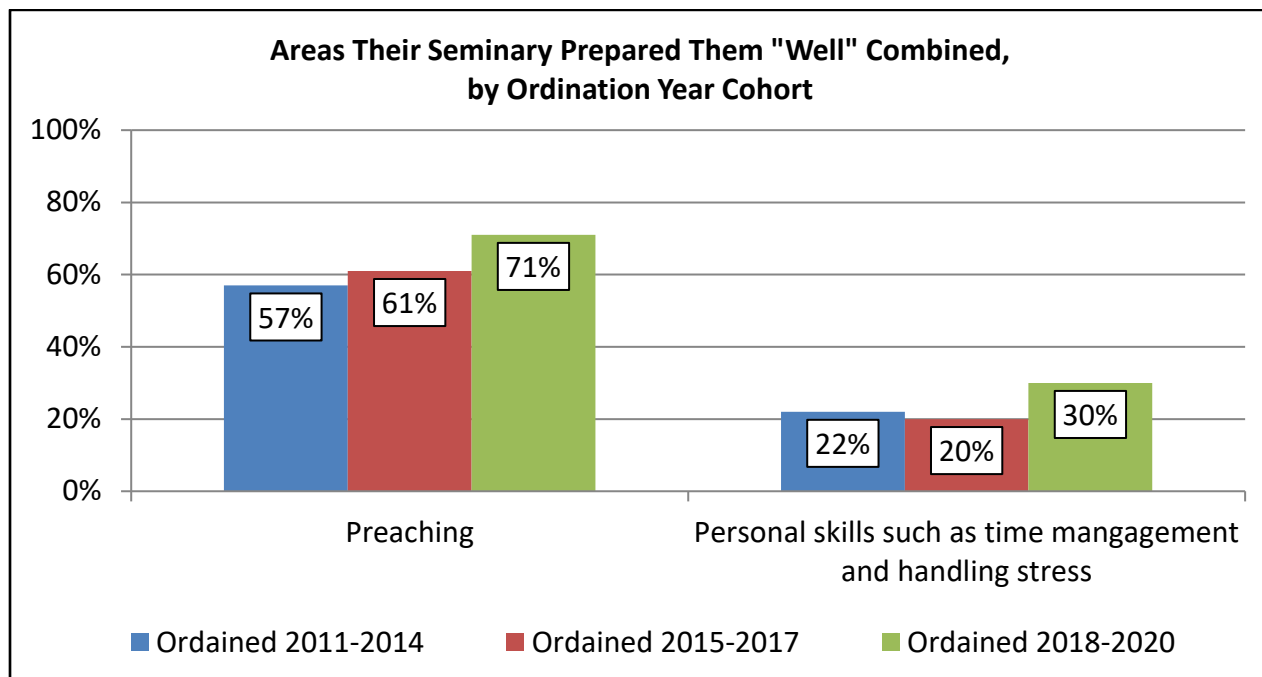
Areas Seminary Prepared Them "Somewhat Well" and "Well" Combined

Those ordained since 2018 are most likely to report that their seminary prepared them "somewhat well" or "well" in the two areas shown in the figure below.



Areas Seminary Prepared Them “Well”

Priests ordained since 2018 are also most likely to report that their seminary prepared them “well” in the two areas shown below.



Language of Response to the Survey

Those responding to the survey in English (64%) are more likely than those responding in Spanish (46%) to say their seminary prepared them “well” in the area of preaching.

Type of Priest

Religious institute priests (37%) are more likely than diocesan priests (25%) to say their seminary prepared them “well” in the area of presiding at funerals.

Opinions about Seminary Training

Priests were asked how much they agree with 13 frequent criticisms of seminary preparation. They were offered these responses: “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” The first column of numbers in the table below summarizes the positive side of the scale, showing the percentage responding “agree” and “strongly agree” combined. The final column displays the percentage saying they “strongly agree” only.⁸

A number of criticisms have been made about seminary training. Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your seminary experience?

Percentage responding

| | “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined % | “Strongly Agree” Only % |
|--|--|--|
| My formation in seminary prepared me to handle my own emotional life in relation to celibacy | 77 | 26 |
| My formation during seminary provided me with a realistic understanding of the demands that would be made on me in priestly ministry | 73 | 22 |
| If offered, I would participate in online discussions with my seminary’s faculty, formators, and alumni about the challenges we face as priests in our initial years as newly ordained priests | 72 | 30 |
| The level of support my seminary offers is adequate for my present needs | 70 | 18 |
| My formation during seminary prepared me to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry | 69 | 17 |
| During seminary, I had sufficient connection to parish life | 67 | 20 |
| The seminary formation team successfully created an atmosphere of trust in the seminary which allowed me to be honest with my formators | 66 | 28 |
| Too little attention was given to helping seminarians learn how to deal with people in pastoral situations | 40 | 10 |
| Too many topics in my seminary courses were superficially presented | 38 | 10 |
| My preparation for ordination was too theoretically oriented | 34 | 9 |
| The seminary was too sheltered from the mainstream of life, both intellectually and socially | 27 | 9 |
| Many seminary courses were irrelevant to modern pastoral needs | 27 | 8 |
| I was able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about myself that I should have made known to my formators in the external forum | 23 | 5 |

⁸ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, is presented in the Appendix.

“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined

- Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters say they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the following statements about areas where their seminary has been successful:
 - My formation in seminary prepared me to handle my own emotional life in relation to celibacy (77%)
 - My formation during seminary provided me with a realistic understanding of the demands that would be made on me in priestly ministry (73%)
 - My formation during seminary prepared me to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry (69%)
 - During seminary, I had sufficient connection to parish life (67%)
- Some two-thirds agree that their seminary formation team successfully created an atmosphere of trust in the seminary which allowed me to be honest with my formators (66%). In contrast, 23% reported that they were able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about themselves that they should have made known to their formators in the external forum (23%).
- While 70% agree that the level of support their seminary offers is adequate for their present needs, 72% agree that, if offered, they would participate in online discussions with their seminary’s faculty, formators, and alumni about the challenges they face as priests in their initial years as newly ordained priests.
- A third to four-tenths agree that too little attention was given to helping seminarians learn how to deal with people in pastoral situations (40%), too many topics in their seminary courses were superficially presented (38%), and their preparation for ordination was too theoretically oriented (34%).
- About a quarter agree that their seminary was too sheltered from the mainstream of life, both intellectually and socially (27%) and that many seminary courses were irrelevant to modern pastoral needs (27%).

“Strongly Agree” Only

Three in ten or less say they “strongly agree” with any of the statements in this subsection.

- Priests are most likely to “strongly agree” that these areas of seminary life were successful:
 - My formation in seminary prepared me to handle my own emotional life in relation to celibacy (26%)
 - My formation during seminary provided me with a realistic understanding of the demands that would be made on me in priestly ministry (22%)
 - My formation during seminary prepared me to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry (17%)
 - During seminary, I had sufficient connection to parish life (20%)

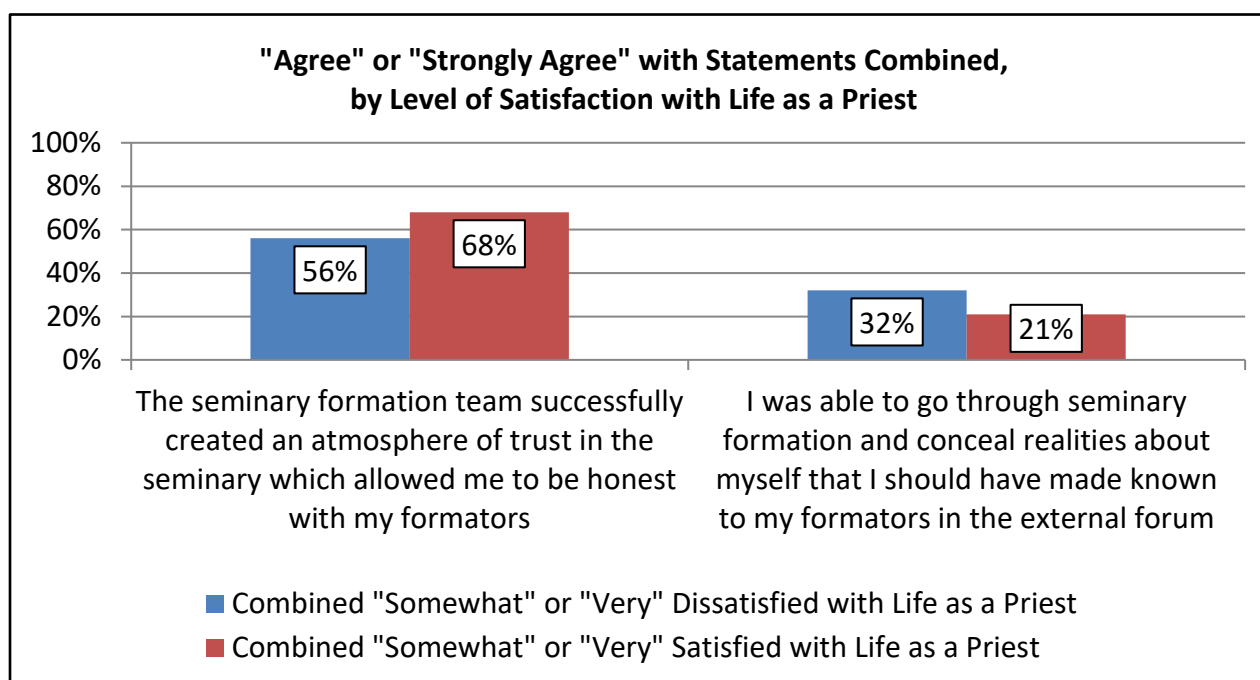
- Twenty-eight percent “strongly agree” that their seminary formation team successfully created an atmosphere of trust in the seminary which allowed me to be honest with my formators. Some 5%, on the other hand, “strongly agree” that they were able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about themselves that they should have made known to their formators in the external forum.
- Nearly two in ten (18%) “strongly agree” that the level of support their seminary offers is adequate for their present needs. Thirty percent, however, “strongly agree” that, if offered, they would participate in online discussions with their seminary’s faculty, formators, and alumni about the challenges they face as priests in their initial years as newly ordained priests.
- About one in ten “strongly agrees” that:
 - Too little attention was given to helping seminarians learn how to deal with people in pastoral situations (10%)
 - Too many topics in their seminary courses were superficially presented (10%)
 - My preparation for ordination was too theoretically oriented (9%)
 - The seminary was too sheltered from the mainstream of life, both intellectually and socially (9%)
 - Many seminary courses were irrelevant to modern pastoral needs (8%).

Subgroup Analysis Findings

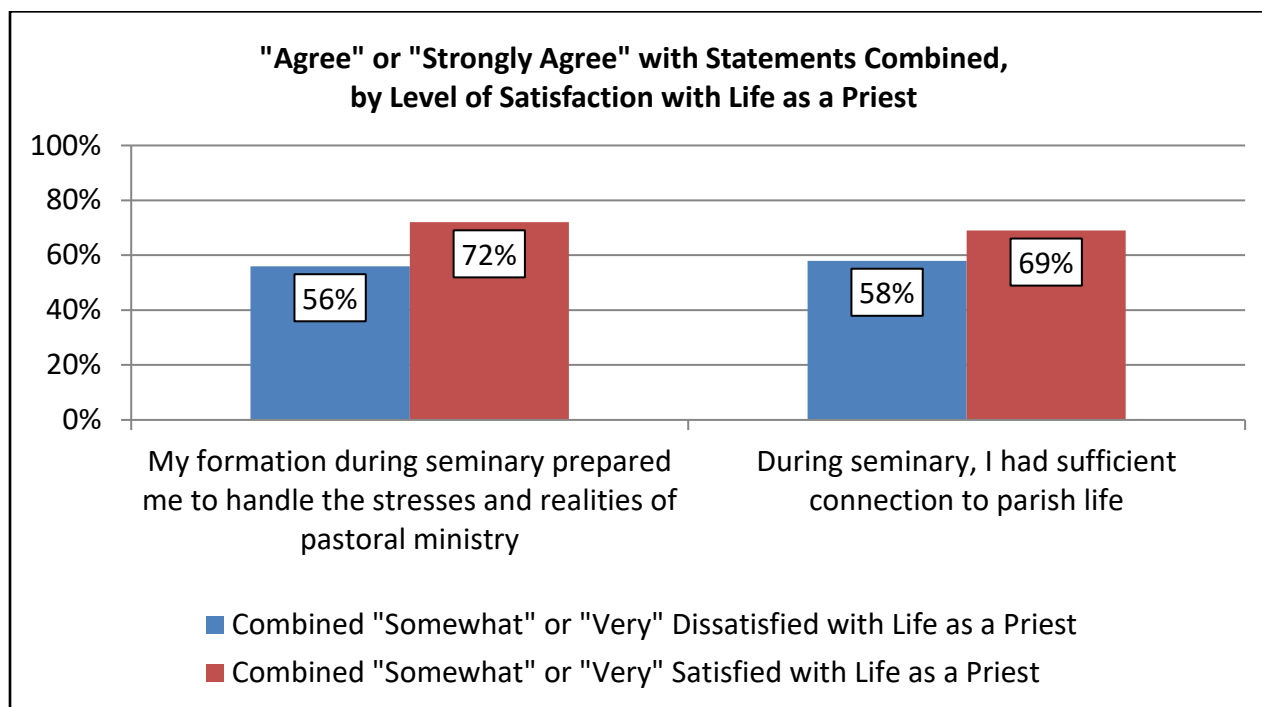
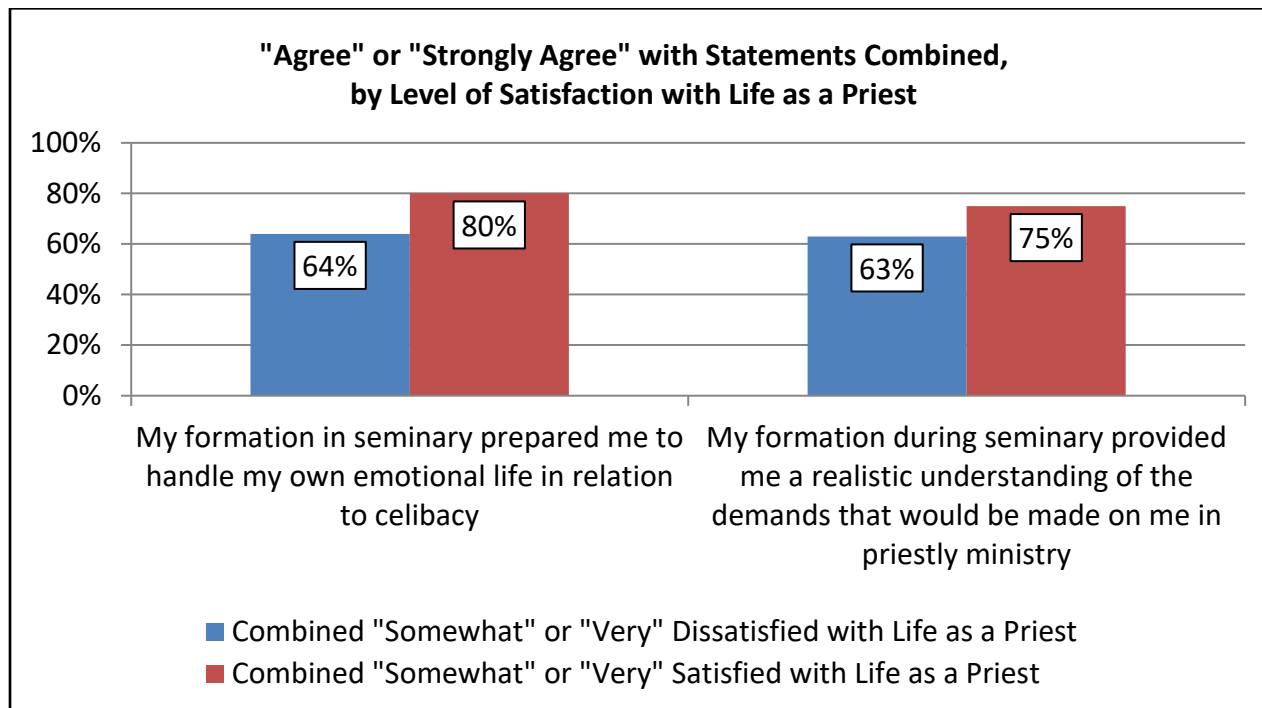
Level of Satisfaction with Life as a Priest

“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined

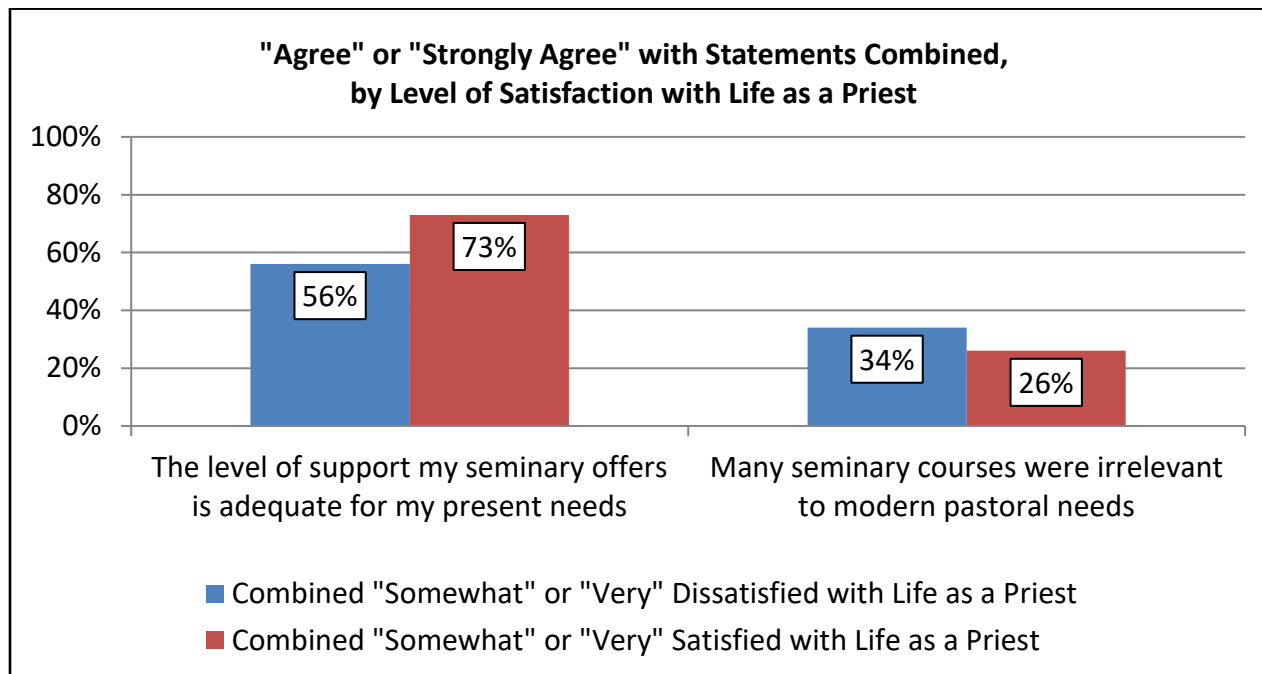
Those satisfied with their lives as priests are more likely to “strongly agree” that the seminary formation team successfully created an atmosphere of trust in the seminary which allowed them to be honest with their formators. In a related finding, those relatively less satisfied with their lives as priests are more likely to “strongly agree” that they were able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about themselves that they should have made known to their formators in the external forum.



Those who are dissatisfied overall with their lives as priests are *less* likely to “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statements in the two figures below.



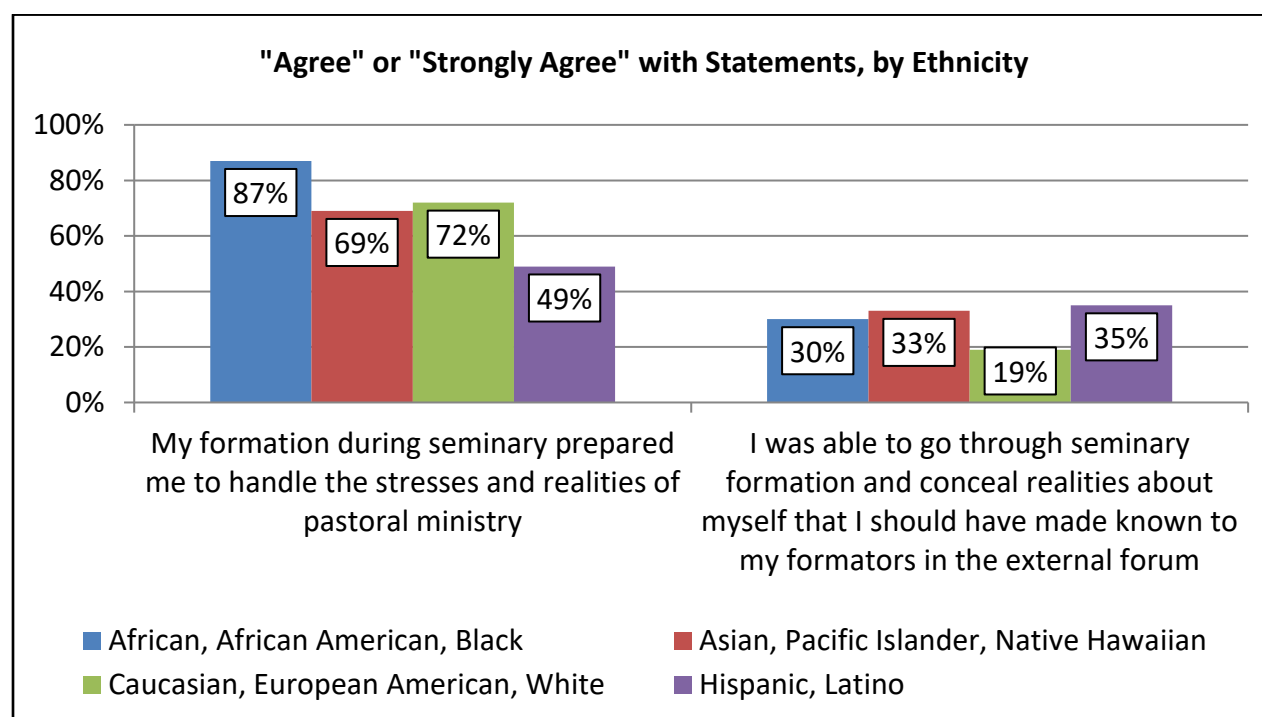
Those relatively more satisfied are more likely to “strongly agree” that the level of support their seminary offers is adequate for their present needs, but are relatively *less* likely to agree as strongly that many seminary courses were irrelevant to modern pastoral needs.



Ethnicity

“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined

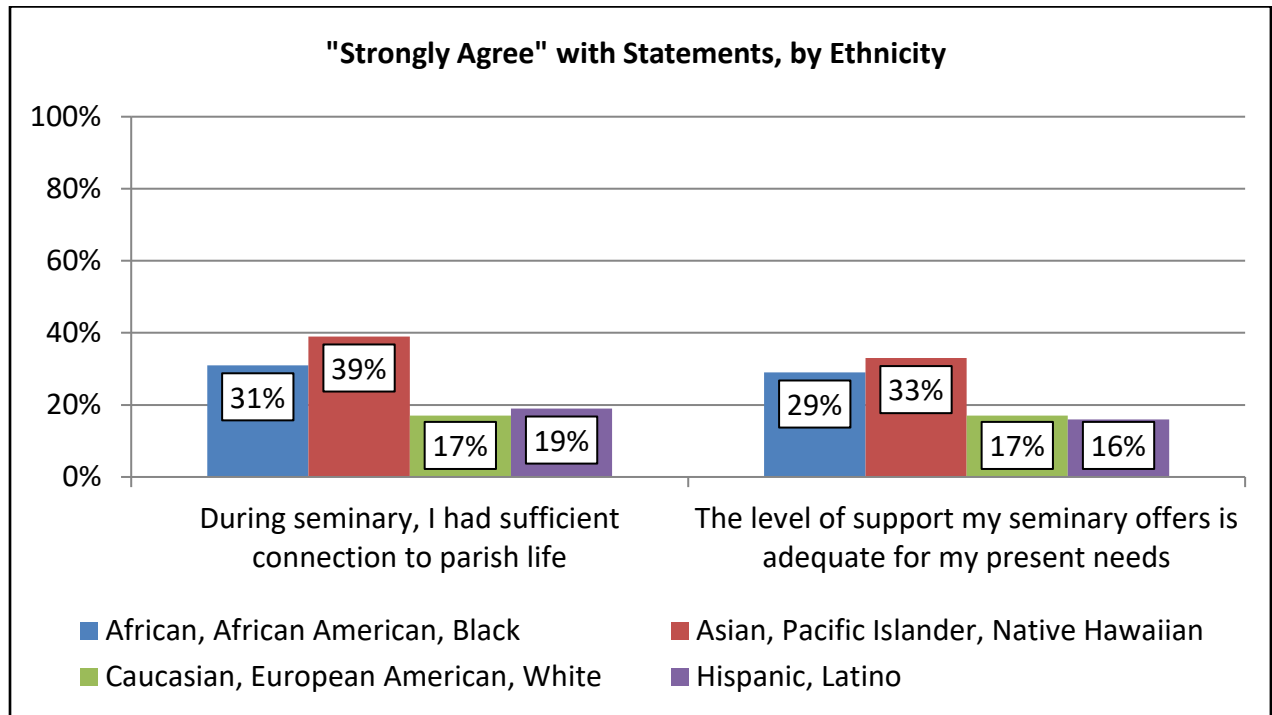
African, African American or Black priests are especially likely to “agree” or “strongly agree” that their formation during seminary prepared them to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry. Hispanic or Latino priests are *least* likely to agree with that statement.



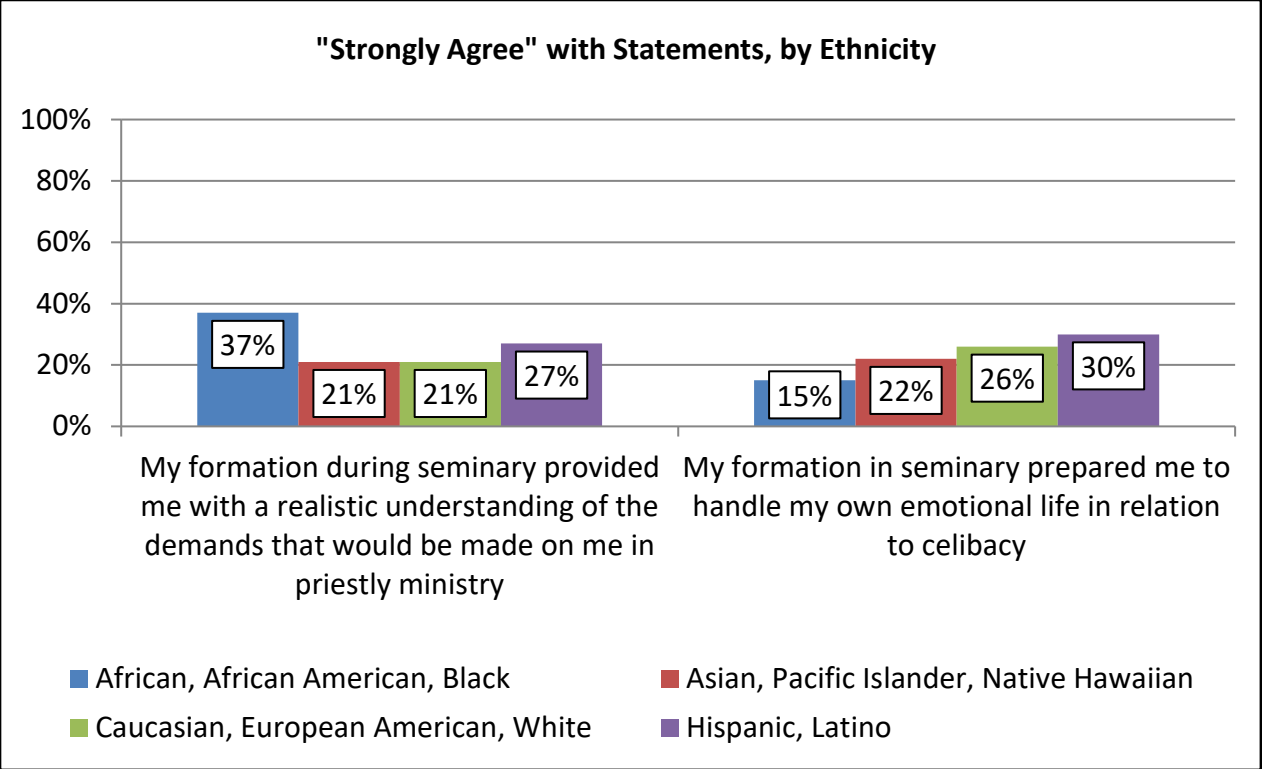
Caucasian, European American, or white priests are *least* likely to “agree” or “strongly agree” that they were able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about themselves that they should have made known to their formators in the external forum.

“Strongly Agree” Only

Priests identifying as either Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian or as African, African American or Black are particularly likely to “strongly agree” with each of the statements presented in the figure below.

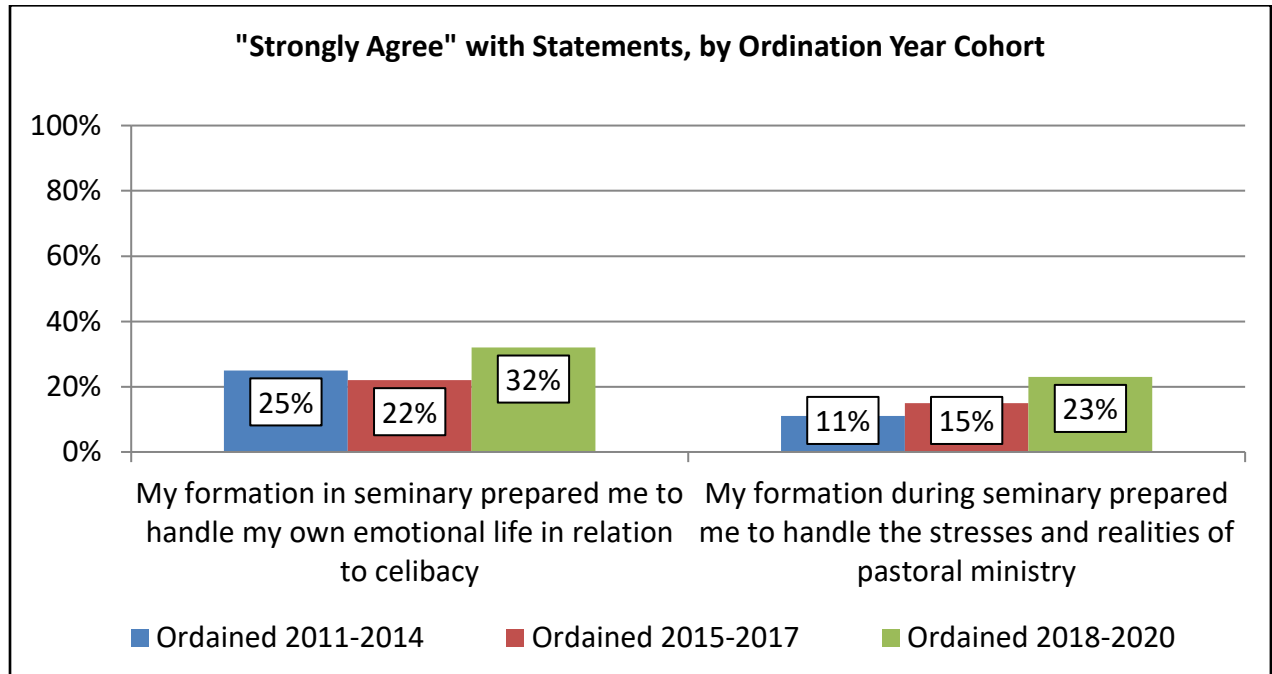


African, African American or Black priests are most likely to “strongly agree” that their formation during seminary provided them with a realistic understanding of the demands that would be made on them in priestly ministry, while being *least* likely to agree strongly that their formation in seminary prepared them to handle their own emotional life in relation to celibacy.



Ordination Year Cohort

Those ordained since 2018 are most likely to “strongly agree” with the two statements in the figure below concerning how well their seminaries prepared them for life as a priest.



Areas Where Seminaries Best Prepared Priests

Priests were asked to write in a response to this question: *In what areas do you feel your seminary best prepared you?* Some 861 provided a response. A few responding priests indicated either that they were prepared well in all areas or that they were not prepared well in any areas, leaving 853 who mentioned at least one area. Most of these 853 priests mentioned more than one area.

Responding priests were overwhelmingly likely to mention an area of their pastoral formation as where they were best prepared, with nearly two in three mentioning one such an area. A close second are areas of their intellectual formation, with more than half mentioning these areas.

Looking at the complete list, the areas in which priests say they were best prepared can be grouped into these five categories, plus one “other” category for those topics mentioned infrequently:

- Pastoral formation areas
 - Intellectual formation areas
 - Spiritual formation areas
 - Human formation areas
 - Realistically preparing them for parish ministry
-
- Other areas they felt best prepared

Each of these categories is described further below, with sample comments presented.

Pastoral Formation Areas

Nearly two-thirds of priests mention an area of pastoral formation as where they feel best prepared. This is the most common topic for those responding in both English and Spanish. The specific areas of pastoral formation most frequently mentioned are preaching, presiding at liturgies and sacraments, pastoral counseling, teaching the faith or apologetics, pastoral care and listening, and hearing Confessions. As some of the priests describe, sometimes the skills and understanding they developed came from their pastoral years or from visits they made to parishes as part of their seminary formation. Below are some of these comments.

The seminary best prepared me for preaching and teaching, though spiritual direction prepared me well for confession and pastoral counseling. The seminary also prepared me well for leadership and formal occasions through the life of the house.

Pastoral ministry and liturgical ministry. We were given ample time in parishes and opportunities to go outside the seminary often. I also thought our classes in liturgical training were excellent and I find that training very helpful as a priest, knowing the how of presiding and the why.

Preaching, confessions, basic counseling skills.

I think my seminary best prepared me to serve in my liturgical capacity as a priest. The liturgical formation was very good and the theological training was also very good.

How to celebrate the sacraments well; methods of preaching; resources to use for preaching and teaching the faith; prayer routine especially the holy hour and praying the liturgy of the hours.

Vida pastoral y sacramental. [Pastoral and sacramental life.]

My seminary best prepared me for the pastoral work of the priest. Our field education and morals programs were excellent (with the exception of one course), and they helped us to be ready for what to expect in parish life and prepared us to assist people with difficult problems they faced.

Preaching and teaching. I feel very comfortable in both areas, and I often receive praise for these, meaning that other people are responding well to the way I was trained.

Para el trabajo misionera y trabajo con comunidades pobres. [For missionary work and work with poor communities.]

Pastoral formation. Our program was grounded in reality. Participants fully in a certified CPE program really gave me the skills and confidence I needed to help people through life's most fragile moments. My team pushed me to address why I think/feel/do the way I do. I'm a better man and priest for it and them. My semester long pastoral internship was also amazing. I had a pastor who was a mentor and is a great friend in community that challenged me to grow and sustaining relationships.

The main concentration of coursework in seminary were liturgically-based. Professors who were both actively engaged in preaching/presiding in parishes and approached theology from a practical perspective was helpful. The dynamic of lay and religious students studying together and an effective balance of lay and religious professors provided a dynamic of collaboration fundamental in my seminary experience, making the transition to collaborative parochial ministry smooth.

Predicación, Enseñanza, Investigación. [Preaching, teaching, research.]

My seminary focused heavily on preaching and pastoral counseling ... almost to a fault. I am grateful for the emphasis on preaching, but we ended up having too many classes

about it. I believe we had four formal preaching classes, while still having a preaching component in most of our theology classes. Everything that was really essential with the strictly preaching courses was covered in two semesters. The other two just became a spinning of wheels and too much reading that wasn't helpful. Point is, though, we were well prepared. Same can be said about pastoral counseling.

Pastoral formation having not only weekly assignments but being in the parish on the weekends helped tremendously.

They prepared me well for how to celebrate Sacraments and for preaching. They also prepared me to be ready to answer theological questions that might be posed by parishioners. The faculty also prepared me with lots of pastoral experience in various areas.

The formation I received help me develop pastoral skills, active listening, and being present to your people. [Seminary Name]'s second year internship was life changing, confirmed my vocation, and gave me the confidence that I could lead people as a priest. [Seminary Name] really prepared me well for preaching, and the theology studies were balanced (not leaning left/right). I also had a great spiritual director and was prepared well for a life of prayer post-ordination and continue to live by these habits today.

Preaching the Scripture and Church teachings in a relevant manner, not just in homilies, but in the lived pastoral accompaniment is something that my seminary did very well. I honestly feel that we talked about every conceivable thing in seminary. And, how to do ministry. Liturgically and pastorally.

I believe the Seminary prepared me to deal with various cultures and diverse people. We were well formed in the celebration of the Liturgy, as well as the ability to teach and preach.

Seminary well prepared me for sacramental ministry (preaching, confessions, celebrating the sacraments, visiting the sick), as well as for pastoral relationships (around the parish, office, etc.).

I believe that my seminary formation best equipped me for the practicalities of ordained ministry, namely pastoral counseling and liturgy. It also opened my eyes to the fact that I will minister to diverse peoples and populations in my diocese, namely the emphasis on Spanish proficiency.

To be sensitive to the pastoral needs of parishioners. To instill a sense of the Sacred in the Church. To be able to teach and preach the Scriptures.

Relating pastorally to people, saying Mass, canon law for marriage preparation.

I was taught how to be a good preacher and confessor. I think that these qualities are very important in growing a Catholic culture in a parish. I also think that my liturgical formation was top-notch: reverent, traditional, but not alienating. Our formation in the tradition of Catholic sacred music was also top-notch.

My seminary best prepared me in pastoral care of the laity in being able to offer counseling and support during difficult times.

Entering into dialogue with people of diverse beliefs, engaging with diverse cultures, and offering the sacrament of reconciliation.

Seminary best prepared me for ministry in the parish context. I had plenty of opportunities to work with great pastors and get inspired to minister well in our modern world.

Oración, homilética, pastoral con enfermos y sacramentos. [Prayer, homiletics, pastoral care with the sick and sacraments.]

I really appreciated my preaching professor. I still utilize a lot of the tips and techniques he taught us. I value his encouraging us to be poetic and to capture the imagination of our hearers through storytelling and charismatic preaching.

En el area pastoral, el estar con la gente, el escucharlos, el darles un consejo. El estar en las buenas y en las malas en la familia. [In the pastoral area, being with people, listening to them, giving them advice. Being in the good and the bad in the family.]

My primary responsibility for my formation was in a community of religious in conjunction with the university where I did my primary theological studies and pastoral training. I think together they prepared me to be a pastoral, loving priest ready to serve the wider parish community. I was well prepared to guide others who need spiritual counseling. I was also well prepared for celebrating liturgies, devotional ceremonies, and especially preaching.

Intellectual Formation Areas

Just over half mention an area of intellectual formation as what they are best prepared for. Various areas of theology, canon law, scripture studies, and philosophy are particularly likely to be mentioned. Although a distinct dimension of formation, theological formation has much overlap with the pastoral formation above, as good liturgy, teaching, and sacramental ministry requires a sound foundation of knowledge. Below are some examples of the comments.

Intellectual formation, moral theology, ecclesiology and Christology.

[Seminary Name] best prepared me to prudently apply orthodox theology in a parish setting. They encouraged us not just know the deep theological concepts, but also how to bring others into these realities, teach them, and bring others with us.

Scripture, dogma.

Systematic and moral theology.

The area that seminary best prepared me for ministry was in giving me the tools to think philosophically and theologically. My seminary did a wonderful job of not just teaching us to know the answer in the book, but also to think how the Church thinks and to think through difficult and novel situations while looking to others and history for support.

My seminary best prepared me in the areas of theology, the sacraments and church history. They also gave me a clear description of what a member of the presbyterate is in relation to the Church.

I was best prepared intellectually. This seemed to be the main focus.

My seminary gave me a coherent theological synthesis through which I have been able to see and understand who God is, how we are called to know and love him, and what priestly life is. This understanding has been very helpful in helping me to freely and lovingly respond to God's grace, and to help call others to respond to grace.

En el estudio de los libros de la Biblia y en Derecho Canónico. [In the study of the books of the Bible and in Canon Law.]

The seminary gave me an extremely sound theological education which I utilize in my ministry.

They provided an excellent foundation in the theological tradition of the Church and the truth about Christ and the Church, which informs every aspect of ministry. It also provided a good balance of prayer and study.

On my last year, [Religious Institute] moved in to my seminary and they taught us Thomistic Theology which it made the difference in my theological perspective, than that from the modern theologians the [other Religious Institute] were much in love with.

Dogmatic and sacramental theology.

I felt best prepared academically. I knew my theology, how to celebrate the sacraments, my canon law for annulment initial paperwork, etc.

Teología Fundamental, Cristología, Gnoseología, Historia de la Iglesia, Hermenéutica, Mariología, Pastoral, catequética, Liturgia, Espiritualidad. [Fundamental theology,

Christology, gnoseology, Church history, hermeneutics, mariology, pastoral, catechetical, liturgy, spirituality.]

The theological and moral teaching of the Church.

I feel the seminary best prepared me intellectually. Human formation, spiritual formation, and pastoral formation were lacking during my time. My spiritual director helped me tremendously, but as a whole, the seminary lacked in all areas but intellectual formation.

I was best prepared in sacramental theology. Secondarily, I was somewhat well-prepared in moral theology, liturgy, and some systematic theology. I also received above average instruction for pastoral care and counseling. I attended [Name] Seminary.

Pienso que el área intelectual o académica fue donde mejor me preparo el Seminario ya que se contaba con una excelente facultad. [I think that the intellectual or academic area was where I best prepared for the Seminary since there was an excellent faculty.]

Conocer la realidad de la Iglesia en Estados Unidos; Conocimiento teológico, habilidades comunicativas. [Knowing the reality of the Church in the United States; theological knowledge, communication skills.]

Knowing the depth of the Catholic tradition and how to think with it and apply it.

The school taught us the facts. We learned the history, systematics, the dogma and we learned how to research and write about it.

Dogmatically, systematically, spiritually, orthodoxy.

Using reason to understand theological truths. Making distinctions between true and false, necessary and unnecessary.

When the focus was on the formation at the seminary, that we should spend these years reading and cultivating our minds and hearts. The analogy was often used to compare to medical school...the intellectual rigor is really important. You don't have to use big words with patients, but you need to know your stuff.

Spiritual Formation Areas

Nearly three in ten priests report that an area of spiritual formation is where they were best prepared. They are particularly likely to mention their prayer life and their regular participation in spiritual direction and Confession at their seminary. Some examples are below.

They helped me develop a strong prayer life.

It helped me be rooted in prayer and gave me a love for the liturgy that has carried me as a priest. My experiences in seminary also helped me to learn how to relate to and love the people I'm called to serve.

Spiritual formation, they helped us build up a regular prayer life which sustains apostolic work. Human formation. They helped us understand our own personalities and collaborate with it. The theological formation was superb.

The seminary did a good job of preparing us spiritually. Confessions were offered daily, daily adoration, etc. Formation conferences were on the whole very good.

Espiritual y Pastoral. [Spiritual and pastoral.]

The single greatest thing my seminary did for me was to prioritize my spiritual formation. Encouraging me to establish regular prayer habits, including a holy hour, has been a rock for me throughout my priesthood thus far. In addition, the growth in my spiritual life throughout seminary and facilitating a deeper relationship with God has been essential for a healthy priesthood.

The interior life, reverence, pastoral skills, how to be rooted in the love and mercy of Jesus Christ in all that we do as a priests. The importance of the intellectual pillar to round us out as priests in adapting to the pastoral need.

Everything to do with the interior life: attention to interior discernment, how to guide people spiritually.

Maintaining a disciplined life of prayer, particularly regarding the Liturgy of the Hours; intellectual formation.

The spiritual formation was excellent. The formators were excellent spiritual directors and offered training in direction. This is probably the most important pastoral skill that I learned. Additionally, the school offered a great program that allowed courses and cultural/religious travel experiences during the January term.

The seminary best prepared me to have an intimate relationship with the Blessed Trinity and grow in my identity as a priest of Jesus. This, along with the in-depth theological academic program, gave me the confidence to live as a priest.

Man of prayer as foremost responsibility.

I feel that my seminary best formed us in prayer, a life of simple holiness, & a deep trust in God's providence.

Keeping my prayer life, a priority.

Human Formation Areas

Two in ten priests indicate that an area of human formation is where they feel most prepared. Spiritual direction, self-knowledge, and learning to live a celibate life are especially likely to be mentioned. Below are some examples.

I was best prepared for areas of human formation: relationships, time management, being kind, handling stress, sexuality, etc.

Helped me with gaining true self-knowledge. This has helped me remain focused and dedicated to my ministry and not allow my weakness overwhelm me.

Being an integrated human being, in self-awareness and learning how to have abiding communion with God. We had great spiritual and intellectual formation.

My seminary prepared me well to be able to preach and learn more about my own emotional and psycho-sexual life.

En la humana y espiritual. [In the human and spiritual.]

We were very well prepared when it came liturgical, preaching, academic and pastoral. The human formation was good in the sense of how to interact with people in a genuine and humane way. I was pleased with the celibacy formation program. From our program I can identify the reasons why I struggle with celibacy now, but I can't seem to break through the struggle.

Human formation, how to get help when needed, building skills for living and ministering in an intergenerational context, well rounded knowledge of theology and ability to communicate this to others.

Overall, it helped me to become a better Christian man centered upon Christ. Human formation through many things like spiritual direction and counseling help me deal with my wounds and weaknesses. They also helped me to tap into my strength and develop into a public person and leader. I also thought the theological/philosophical formation was very solid and guides my ministry. My preaching formation and sacramental formation was very solid in its practical application. Finally, some administration aspects were offered in workshops as well.

The spiritual and human formation programs at my seminary prepared me very well. Time with God was greatly emphasized, and the seminary program fostered many healthy prayer habits in me. I also learned a great deal about how to handle stress and how to take care of my emotional needs. The psychologist on staff did an immense amount of good.

Seminary helped me to see the complexities of the priesthood. I can say that I did not enter with rose-colored glasses, but rather entered ready to get work carrying out ministry. Celibacy formation was very good, and recently saw that they have improved it as well. Seminary was helpful for me because I was willing to trust them and the diocese.

My seminary did a fantastic job of preparing me for the stresses and demands of daily life as a priest. I have not felt overworked or incapable of accomplishing my duties since being ordained. A priest early on in my seminary formation told me that their goal was to make us busy and put demands on us to the point that we would be able to handle parish life easily. I have found that they did that well. I also thought that the spiritual resources and emphasis placed on the spiritual life in my seminary were fantastic.

Realistically Preparing Them for Parish Ministry

About one in 20 mentions that their seminary especially succeeded at preparing them for the realities of parish life. Some of these comments are below, often incorporated into their discussion of other topics.

My seminary formation has served me well in providing me with a realistic understanding of the demand that would be on me in priestly ministry, including how to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry.

Realities of priestly life, expectations, practical course work. In short, they prepared us for diocesan life.

The preaching was excellent. Also, the seminary was very practical and pastoral...always seeking to explain where the subject would be needed in parish life.

Practical advice by priest professors and lay professors. Practical experience in the hospital and parish life, sacramental prep, human & spiritual formation.

My seminary managed my expectations very well. People often ask me: "What has been your biggest surprise in the priesthood?" I can tell them all honestly, there hasn't really been any surprises. That doesn't mean there aren't good or bad moments, but that I was ready for nearly all of them as they came. The seminary did a good job of telling me what priesthood would be like.

Other Areas They Felt Best Prepared

About one in 20 priests mentions areas that do not easily fit into any of the categories above. Included are the small number of priests who reported that their seminary prepared them

well in all areas as well as those who felt ill-prepared in all areas. Also included here are those saying their seminary formation served mostly as a negative example, teaching them what not to do in ministry. A sampling of these comments appears below.

I thought almost everything was very well done.

I do not feel that the seminary itself prepared me strongly in any areas. My perception was to follow the status quo and get ordained.

My seminary, I believe, prepared me to work in an ideal parish but, unfortunately, these kinds of parishes do not exist in the real world.

The seminary had no Kool-Aid that was disproportionate to parish life. There was no high ideal or glorious idea of what the priesthood was. The seminary by its own witness and actions prepared me to deal with incompetence at any level of governance or area of the parish/diocese system. It also taught me the importance of distinguishing between power and authority in any setting. The leader with authority does not always have or use their power. Sometimes others have the power but have no authority to use it. This can both be good and very bad depending on how it is used.

To deal with incompetence, inadequate human resources, and constant change made without critical consensus (my seminary specialized in all three). Very few seminary classes were excellent, and I learned a lot from those professors who were critical thinkers and good teachers (about 3, 4 professors total).

As a [Religious Institute], we do not have a traditional seminary experience. It was very helpful for me to study and collaborate with lay colleagues, especially women.

I think our graduate school/seminary did a great job preparing us to work with lay colleagues. I have said since beginning seminary formation that I give thanks that I attended class and much of formation alongside lay men and women who are passionate about a life of ministry. Their breadth of vision for the Church stretched me to see a new future of ministry in the Church.

Seminary continually placed me in areas out of my comfort zone by asking me to serve in new apostolates. This was a wonderful grace, as I grew in confidence in my ability to minister in a wide variety of areas through the help of God's grace.

Seminaries have a herculean task of covering an impossible amount of information across the widest field of any education program. The amount the seminary was able to cover or at least introduce us to was impressive.

Areas Where Seminaries Least Prepared Priests

Priests were asked to write in a response to this question: *In what areas do you feel your seminary least prepared you?* Some 833 priests provided a response. Eighteen of these responses indicate that there are no areas where their seminaries did not prepare them well, leaving 815 who mentioned at least one area. Many of these 815 priests mentioned more than one area.

Responding priests were overwhelmingly likely to mention an area of their pastoral formation as what they were least well prepared for, with nearly three in four mentioning one of these pastoral areas. Furthermore, there is a particular pastoral area they are considerably most likely to mention: parish administration/leadership. About half of all respondents mentioned this topic in their responses.

Looking at the larger list, the areas that priests say they were least prepared can be grouped into these six categories, plus one “other” category for those topics mentioned infrequently:

- Pastoral formation areas
- Human formation areas
- Identifying where the newly ordained can find the support needed
- Intellectual formation areas
- Unrealistic or impractical courses
- Spiritual formation areas

- Other areas they felt least prepared

Each of these categories is described further below, with sample comments presented.

Pastoral Formation Areas

As was mentioned above, more than seven-tenths of responding priests listed an area of their pastoral formation as a place they were least prepared for the priesthood by their seminary. By far, the most frequently mentioned pastoral areas are all related to parish administration, parish personnel management, and parish leadership. Notable pastoral areas mentioned less frequently include pastoral counseling, presiding at liturgies, preaching, marriage preparation and annulments, and parish catechesis and apologetics. A sampling of these comments appears below, with the theme of administration, personnel management, and leadership-related comments appearing most frequently to represent the sheer number of times those topics were mentioned by priests.

Office Management.

The soft skills of leadership and administration e.g., leading a meeting, communication and messaging, motivating others.

Limited training on how to manage human resource issues. They said we would have 6 years as parochial vicar to learn parish management. I was temp administrator of the largest parish for 5 months in my 3rd year as a priest.

There could be a better preparation for becoming a pastor. Almost nothing was taught about leading a parish on the administrative side. From budgets to HR issues, nothing was taught. Also, some of the liturgical practices were not real, from the preaching to the practicum, it was a whole different reality in real life.

Finances of parish in low income communities.

Administración y finanzas parroquiales; resolución de conflictos, liderazgo. [Parish administration and finances; conflict resolution, leadership.]

Administration, budgeting, personnel issues, and leading a parish council.

En el sacramento de la Confesión, administración parroquial y Homelética. [In the sacrament of Confession, parish administration and homiletics.]

Managing parishes which are failing financially, or in bad shape.

Business administration/finances. Personal budgeting/retirement planning.

My seminary offered virtually no training for the key skills of personnel and financial management. I also found my homiletic training embarrassingly inadequate. Above all, my seminary failed to provide the rigorous, systematic theological training, especially with respects to morality and spirituality, which a parish priest as doctor of souls must possess.

Seminary did not prepare me for collaborating with others (pastors, staff members, school principals and teachers, etc.), due largely to the fact that the formation staff failed to model healthy collaboration itself. Many practical dimensions of priestly ministry like the role of the priest in Catholic schools, how to utilize parish/finance councils, communication best practices (with staff and with parishioners), were omitted almost entirely from my seminary formation.

Total lack of training on accounting, human resources, hiring, and budgeting (which are massive parts of my job as a pastor). Instead, we received a canon law class on "temporal goods" which could have been condensed into a two-class segment of a broader "parish business" class.

Extraordinary form of the Mass and sacraments.

Running a parish is like running a small business. The priest is in charge of firing, hiring, filing documents, overseeing the finances, organizing the structure of the different job and ministry responsibilities. I had no idea how to write up a contract. I actually don't think I should be doing that. On top of that, I am not just the pastor without a vicar. I am also the apostolic assistant to a lay community in the whole of [Island]. There is no way I can do either of my jobs well by definition. There are sick people I can't visit. I feel overwhelmed sometimes. I have to simply admit that I can't do everything that is asked of me officially. I had no preparation for dealing with being a vicar to a person that has a mental health problem. This was very damaging to my own emotional wellbeing. I have grown a lot afterward, though. The power relationships and limits working with a boss were never mentioned as a possible issue. I'm living by myself, being a religious. I came in to help as a vicar to someone else, and now I'm the pastor with no vicar. My community is 3 hours away, and I have very few friends with the local diocesan clergy. They are all too busy to socialize. I feel like the needs are so great that my superiors are risking the healthy newcomers placing us in impossible situations. I don't think they realize that this only means bad news for the future. I can see a scenario where I would have been permanently damaged in my first 5 years as a priest if I had not gotten the psychological support I needed, and demanded a change from the horrible abusive situation I was under working for a narcissist pastor.

Minimal training in preaching, which is one of the most important and necessary roles in priestly ministry.

I felt least prepared to handle the practical requirements of annulment cases, dealing with tribunals in marriage prep, handling canon law issues, and taking the historical approach to theology and applying it in practical and pastoral ways.

Our liturgical training was terrible so much so that we would disagree with the rubrics that were clearly spelled out. The spirituality of the seminary was also abysmal. We were not encouraged to be creative and often nothing that was suggest was ever implemented. Many devotions were forbidden or a fight to get approved. The lack of the devotional life has actually been a huge disservice to the people of God as I now find myself struggling to become familiar for the first time of many traditions that are commonly advocated for by the Church. Finally, I was terribly disappointed in the area of music and chant. We received no formalized training in music when the Mass is ideally meant to be sung. It is clearly evident that a lack of liturgical and devotional formation has impacted the presbyterate and further divides we since many who try such things are then deemed too traditional.

Office administrative skills. Sacramental record keeping. Budgeting and parish finances. How to be present at and conduct different parish meetings such as parish council, and finance council meetings.

Certainly, it only paid lip service to training us in being pastoral leaders who can create and present a vision, build consensus, manage people, understand parish finances, etc. The seminary also fell short of training seminarians to do an authentic theological reflection on ministerial experience. This is not because there was a shortage of mandatory theological reflection assignments, but because the leaders or teachers in charge of facilitating that reflection did not have an adequate grasp of scripture, theology, or social analysis. The seminary never required a course in marriage preparation, and the one class offered within our Canon Law course was ineffective. It did offer an elective on the matter, but why would something like that be optional? I couldn't fit this elective course into my seminary time, so I had to learn on the job how to do the paperwork and manage different types of marriage cases. But there were plenty of other courses that were mere fluff that could have easily been excised from the curriculum.

The pastoral pillar was not addressed very well by my seminary formation. There was often little discussion of how to discuss theological realities with the average parishioner.

La área que veo más debil es en la parte pastoral, claro que se brindaban oportunidades de participar pero creo que nunca hubo un interes más profundo. [The area that I see the weakest is in the pastoral part, of course there were opportunities to participate but I think there was never a deeper interest.]

Pastoral care/spiritual direction would be useful. We did not get much training in these areas, but this is something that many parishioners ask for and newly ordained are not always equipped to deal with this need.

It would have been nice to have significantly more psychology classes. We are not called to be a psychologist but you end up dealing with a lot in the confessional and people just saying "Can I talk with you." At my seminary, it was really just a class that introduced us to the idea, but really, I think I could have used just as many psychology classes as philosophy.

I believe the seminary could have emphasized ministry to diverse cultures, especially Spanish-speaking parishioners. There is a major need to serve this population, especially on the East Coast where my seminary was located (and many of the sponsoring dioceses), yet there was little in the way of preparing men to minister to these cultures.

Marriage prep and pastoral counseling. I did not and to some extent still do not feel adequately trained to lead a couple through marriage prep. Or for counseling those in struggling marriages and family life. Also our pastoral counseling was also very weak. And counseling them through difficult decisions involving bio-ethical questions.

I believe the seminary gave us the tools to know where to go and to self-learn but felt they lacked in the practical things like how to use a missal, going through various rites, a real lack on funeral, baptism, and anointing rites. Even practical would be the liturgy of the hours and the ordo. So many little things that I kept thinking they are going to teach us that soon. After a while, I began to say, "I guess I'm on my own."

Apologetics; liturgy; spiritual counseling/direction of others; preaching principles; business and administration, and least of all, prayer and spirituality.

Marriage preparation, grief counseling, other pastoral counseling, personnel management, finances (personal and institutional).

Anointing of the Sick, ministering to the sick and the homebound, and hospital ministry in general. While we had perhaps dozens of formation sessions and practice for preaching, I think we had two or three, maybe, for the anointing of the sick. Total. My first assignment was across the street from a hospital, and I went through the first month of priesthood praying that I was doing it correctly. I went into ordination with tons of confidence in my preaching and in the sacraments that I had participated in hundreds of times (reconciliation) or had attended daily for the past several years (Mass). I had almost no confidence in my ability to minister to the sick. Also: blessings, both the theology of blessings and the practical "how to" part. I realize that probably sounds ridiculous, but I am a convert, so I didn't grow up in a family where we got everything blessed, and although I literally asked every time it came up in the seminary, no one ever explained what a priestly blessing even was, or what the big deal was, or how to do it. They would just start talking about some blessing book (that again, no one explained, and just was more confusing). I actually started freaking out and almost had a panic attack at the rehearsal of my ordination when the MC reminded us that we would all be giving blessings to the bishop and our parents at the end of the Mass. Because, like I said, I had been asking about this for over four years, and had still not gotten an even halfway comprehensible answer. And certainly no one told me to expect that Catholics (especially Hispanic and Filipino Catholics) would be asking me to bless everything the day I showed up to the parish. Maybe it's the convert in me who grew up with nothing blessed, but I still struggle to understand why so many people treat random things getting blessed like it's a bigger deal than showing up to Mass on time (or at all, in some cases).

Marriage preparation and other forms of sacramental preparation (esp. Baptism).

How to evangelize. This includes not only bringing in new people to the Catholic faith in RCIA, but going further by shaping a parish community to be hospitable, generous, and eager to make new disciples for Jesus Christ.

Human Formation Areas

Areas of human formation are the next most frequently mentioned areas where the seminary did not adequately prepare the priests for their priestly life. Just over one in ten mentions an area of human formation in their responses. Among the areas mentioned, finding the right balance to one's life, coping with stress, living a celibate life, and dealing with loneliness are the four most common topics. Below are some examples.

Pastorally as well as many human formation issues such as dealing with stress and the realities that await newly-ordained priests in parish life.

I needed help outside the seminary for psychological issues around stress management and psycho-sexual development. The classes were very academic and theoretical, which I enjoyed, but I'm not sure how understanding the intricacies of scripture scholarship, for example, was supposed to help me minister to people (though it did help my preaching).

My seminary least prepared me for handling the stresses of maintaining a schedule and the stresses of celibacy and the emotions that go with it.

The seminary least prepared me for what priestly life is actually like - lack of emotional support and business skills - lack of dealing with the stress factors, etc.

What to do when you fall in love as a priest, and celibacy in general. Loneliness is a big issue that was largely unaddressed. Also, the faculty are not pastors, and to expect them to train pastors is completely naive by Church administration.

Soledad. [Alone.]

Dealing with loneliness in a religious community. Dealing with the transition from seminary life to living with priests of an older generation and period of formation.

I'm not sure it's the seminary's fault but I wasn't ready for the loneliness that sometimes comes from not being in a committed relationship. I would be struggling with the same loneliness as a single person. But again, I'm not sure that's on the seminary.

Administration and finance. I think we were not adequately prepared for it. I was fortunate I had a great teacher during my pastoral year to help me and expose me to some of those things. Even something basic as taxes was not taught. I also feel there needs to be an increase in focus on the health of a priest which includes self-care. I know myself and many other guys who struggled in the seminary with loneliness, anxiety, depression, some sexual issues too. I still am one of those priests who seminarians reach out to get some advice. I was supposed to be ordained in May [Year], but I pushed back my ordination because I felt I was not ready. I was not prepared to

deal with sexual temptation or loneliness in my priesthood; it was never talked about or addressed. How to deal with burnout. I think younger priests need a seat at the table when it comes to formation instead of just professors and those who have been ordained for a while. There is a generational disconnect sometimes.

Probably celibacy as weird as that sounds. Not that my seminary did not talk on celibacy, quite the contrary, they spoke about it often. But when I look back, it all seems so superficial and black and white. Even in conversation with many of my peers, a lot of the advice given by spiritual directors of a guy had a crush or feelings for a girl was to stop talking to her or cut her off from your life. In my mind that is teaching suppression. What happens when you have feelings for your secretary? You can't just ignore her. I wish they would've helped us to process through our emotions.

Poor personal formation: no direction on dealing with loneliness, stress, or just healthy (physical and emotional) living and building healthy relationships. Poor spiritual formation: it cannot come down to a pastoral imperative—the spirit needs to be satiated! No (concrete or abstract) spirituality was promoted and developed. Theological formation also lacking. The formation we received is more akin to lay-level Theology than to a minister with an MA.

Dealing with stress, exhaustion, time management; Finding priest support/prayer group after ordination; being prepared to join much divided presbyterate (theologically, politically, and culturally.)

There were some issues related to formation for celibacy. Some of my peers expressed that they were uncomfortable disclosing struggles with pornography.

Identifying Where the Newly Ordained Can Find the Support Needed

Seminaries failing to identify where newly ordained priests can find the support they need is also mentioned by just over one in ten responding priests. The two most common areas of disappointment are the support and mentoring they receive from the pastor they serve under and the lack of cohesion and fraternity among their brother priests in the diocese or religious institute. Some examples of these comments appear below.

Identifying psychological problems that one may be dealing with while not knowing. How to understand your own feelings and searching for what is true. How to deal with jealous priest and a pastor that is controlling and over bearing. How to deal with the loneliness you experience.

If there were weaknesses in the seminary, it was perhaps in lacking a degree of honesty in terms of the actual and real state of the Church in which we live. For example, we never really talked about what to do if one's pastor is difficult to work with (I found that

in my first assignment, I had a pastor who has not been supportive--this was not a scenario that we honestly considered at the seminary). I believe that the seminary could have encouraged a more studious environment. At times the seminary could seem "overly practical" which meant a certain disdain for the study of theology.

In dealing with pastors and/or priests who are so individualistic...and selfish...in the name of being introvert; in dealing with pastors and/or priests who are filling their lives

The only area I was not warned about was the possible difficulties in relation with a pastor, but this is a small issue.

I feel that we were least prepared how to work alongside a pastor with whom you may not agree on some very fundamental things. There was perhaps too much of a "one size fits all" outlook on the Church that did not give the tools to be able to approach the reality of difference in a truly substantive way. Moreover, I think a culture of fear did not help me to address some personal issues in regards to chaste celibacy that have been a struggle.

It did not prepare me to collaborate with other [Religious Institute Members]. Collaborating with lay people is the best part of my job. However, there is a real generational divide. The pastor does not know what to do with me, so he avoids all conflict by leaving me alone rather than having a conversation. It's interesting because it seems that a lot of pastors have the idea that the younger generation of priests are conservative, however if you don't fit that stereotype and are more progressive then they are, then very much resembles the tensions in the outside world in which the younger generation pushes for change and the older generation resists. For people who think of themselves as always having been progressive, this is disorientating. I try to "up manage", however more attention could be given to this in formation.

The seminary really cannot prepare for all things. For example, as I mentioned earlier, the political machine that is the presbyterate and episcopacy, is something one must navigate on his own. I was very much not prepared for the amount of nepotism, narcissism, and "good-old-boy" network that still is very much alive and well in the clergy.

Dealing with stress, exhaustion, time management; finding priest support/prayer group after ordination; being prepared to join much divided presbyterate (theologically, politically, and culturally.)

I think the seminary least prepared us for the difficulties within the presbyterate, and especially with the diocesan offices. I think there was an over emphasis on the support and love of the laity as a means of enduring those moments.

Finding your own spirituality, different Post Vatican 2 Schools of Theology -i.e. Concilium, Communion, and Traditionalist movements and the theological tensions between them. So much of my time in seminary was sporadic theology and not systemic theology. We abandoned St. Thomas Aquinas and I was left with each professor coming up with their own standards for what we need to know. The fruit of this is a mixed bag presbyterate with different theological views. It is very difficult to be a unified presbyterate when we all learned differently in seminary.

Intellectual Formation Areas

About one in ten priests mentions a deficient area of seminary preparation related to their intellectual formation. While specific areas of theology were often mentioned, the areas of canon law and scriptural studies were also brought up relatively frequently. Below are some examples of these comments.

Overall, the program of human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral formation was poor, especially the intellectual formation.

Intellectual formation, that translates to the real world.

Moral theology: My professor/institute relied too heavily on Thomistic thought and didn't allow other strands of moral discipline to be introduced.

I did not feel like seminary helped me to discern in parish life among various goods. There are a lot of good things to do in a parish. Into what areas do I involve myself? What are ways to discern where I should spend my time in a parish? I felt like there was not sufficient value judgment education in terms of parish ministry. I also felt like it would have been helpful to have more intellectual assignments be to prepare presentations for a parish, specifically on Catholic morality, spiritual theology, and Scripture.

Some notable problems in handing on Church teaching in morals, including in fundamentals. A too a-critical approach to inter-religious dialogue and related studies. Lack of a sense of the importance of good dogmatic in sacramental theology for future priests (i.e., not just a functional and minimalist view of sacramental theology for ministry).

Liturgical studies were a bit lacking. It was all practical of how to celebrate Mass, but none of the theology behind it. Scriptural theology was also lacking at times, as we delved deep into historical critical discussions rather than anything that can be preached fruitfully.

Administrative leadership, systematic theology, Church history.

In terms of the practical things, I could have used another class on canon law (the requirement is 6 hours but we only got 3) and marriage preparation in general. A class on HR management, budgeting or catechesis would have been helpful. In my philosophy training, a lot of the philosophy could have been oriented more specifically toward its use in theology. In terms of the theology, some of the systematics classes could have been realigned toward pastoral needs. A class on community organizing or interfacing with local NGOs or charities (how to build relationships outside of the community) could have helped.

Canonical knowledge.

As one of the questions alluded to, I feel we spent too much time on academic courses that are irrelevant to pastoral ministry. The courses were good, but it they wouldn't make or break you as a priest. I wish we would have spent more time covering practical topics, such as counseling, ministering to grieving families, especially if it's a tragic situation, canon law, and a better course on the history of Catholicism. Most of my priesthood these 5 years have been on the fly training.

Unrealistic or Impractical Courses

About one in 20 mentions how unrealistic their coursework was, especially having their courses stress the theoretical side of topics rather than the practical side. Some of these comments appear below.

They didn't give me a sense of what being a priest would really be like. The professors, especially those who have been in the seminary teaching for many years, were very theoretical, and didn't really connect their teaching to parish life. Of course, I knew that there would be some things I'd just have to learn as a priest that no one could tell me, but I wish the priest faculty would have talked more about their daily schedule in a parish, or how they handled various pastoral issues.

Our formation program was far too theoretically-focused, and little emphasis was placed on day-to-day pastoral skills. Our pastoral counseling class was exceptionally poor and I was in no way prepared by the seminary to handle the myriad of such issues that present themselves in parish life. Human formation consisted mostly in talks on topics that were theoretical and disconnected from normal life. Pastoral formation was more of an after-thought. Few of our formators were pastors, and I did not always get the sense that they knew the reality of parish life well enough to teach us how to be parish priests.

At times classes were too theoretical, so I would have liked more connection to the lived experiences of the poor.

In practical day to day things, especially administrative tasks. I didn't know what was all needed for marriage preparation when I first began at the parish (which documents needed to be filled out and compiling documentation for each couple).

We were poorly prepared for practical daily parish administration, as well as the common difficulties/challenges/issues we would encounter at the parish. My formation in Canon Law was very poor, so I had to learn a lot of the rules/laws regarding sacraments, rituals, governance (baptisms, weddings, funerals, territories, delegations, etc.) on my own.

Spiritual Formation Areas

About one in 20 mentions areas related to their spiritual formation as those they left the seminary least prepared for. Included in this category are the comments below.

I feel the seminary least prepared me spiritually. It was presumed that I had a great spiritual life, which is why I was in the seminary. Growing in the spiritual life was something I had to do very much on my own with my spiritual director. There were not many opportunities from the formators in this area. The seminary taught us that having a spiritual life was very important but did not teach us what a spiritual life can/should look like.

Afectivida, sexualidad, espiritualidad, pastoral, liturgia. [Affectivity, sexuality, spirituality, pastoral, liturgy.]

Spiritual formation struggled with too much of an influence from IPF. The proposed universality and heavy-handed (i.e. this is the essence of diocesan spirituality, and if you don't like it, tough) approach turned me off, and I was left to my own devices to find a way to grow spiritually. Human formation since I left my seminary has improved greatly. Though it was lacking in my time, it has gotten much better!

My seminary prepared me least for the theological and spiritual needs of a priest. Our program, I would suggest, did not emphasize theological studies enough. Studies were either superficially presented or absorbed in novelty, skipping over essential doctrinal explanations. The scriptural program, specifically, consumed by historical-critical scholarship, was nearly entirely unhelpful for the mission of a parish priest. The spiritual program also needs tremendous work. Priests are not social workers in a collar, and if we forget our identity in Christ and our relationship to the Holy Trinity we risk becoming secular. Priests must pray. Priests must learn how to pray. My spiritual life has grown tremendously, thanks be to God, after ordination under the guidance of an excellent spiritual director.

Other Areas They Felt Least Prepared

About one in 20 priests mentions areas that do not easily fit into any of the categories above. Included are comments regarding the negative examples their seminary presented, the poor atmosphere of trust for them to confide their problems to their formators, and their priestly identity formation. A sampling of these comments appears below.

Everything apart from intellectual formation. Probably the worst problem that we had was that most of the priests who were involved in our formation were terrible examples of priesthood. I would like to be able to say that I learned from them as "negative examples" -- don't be like this! -- But their behavior was so dysfunctional that it was already perfectly obvious that no one should behave like they did. Their methods were unabashedly Stalinist. Living in formation was basically like living in East Germany. More than one of our formators likely had diagnosable psychopathological disorders. There was a shadow formation program that created problems for many people. It got so bad that student brothers had to explain to younger student brothers how to deal with formations. "They are not there to help you. Treat them like you would treat opposing counsel." This was the advice, for example, of one senior student brother who had been a lawyer. In terms of human formation, there wasn't any. I belong to a religious order, and our human formation had two themes. First, our province decided that its brand was to minister to upper middle-class and rich, well-educated, white-collar, "John Paul II" Catholics. So, our human formation was focused on being the kind of person who could represent the brand. We were taught to be the "right sort" of person, and to look down on those who were not the "right sort" of person. Second, our formation occurred in the context of living in a particular religious community. So, the focus in human formation was not on being a priest or religious in general, but how to be a good student brother in our community. The emphasis was on not being "uppity" and showing the proper deference to priests in our community. In short, we learned how to play the game of being good brand representative and being good student brothers, but developing the moral life of a disciple of Jesus, or the human qualities of a Good Shepherd.

During my time there was an extremely divided community. There was a culture of distrust because of overthrowing of structures in the seminary. The rector, though a very holy man, did not model conflict resolution. Politics played too much of a role in the day to day decisions that were made in the seminary. Fortunately, as I have returned a couple times since being ordained, this had changed under new administration.

Some more guidance on priests and their relationship with their bishop, and how to navigate the political side of the Church. I believe that a robust celibate/chastity formation is lacking. Honest conversation about how celibacy is a gift from God was

rare. It seemed the vaguest of topics. It also did not help that trust was lacking here. If guys really wanted to grow, they had to be careful about how they sought that formation. To put it bluntly, if you struggled in the area of chastity that was a major formational issue, but if you were mean-spirited, disrespectful to peers, professors, or others it was not as much of an issue. It seemed disproportionate. In sum, chastity issues in the seminary felt like a witch hunt while other major concerns on whether someone can truly be a humble pastoral minister to others were minimized.

My seminary did little to nothing to prepare me for living a healthy life. Years of living under the watchful eye of formators ready to pounce on any flaw made me fearful to be honest about my struggles. The Formation Team saw themselves (from my perspective) as detectives, trying to find my flaws and punish me for them. I wish I would have had a forum in which to be guided into growth.

There was a shift in my time at seminary when a huge emphasis was placed on "forming parish priests." This is what I feel least prepared me...my identity is rooted in being Jesus' priest, and from that place I serve in a parish because that is what the Church has asked me to do (and I love it!). But the whole emphasis solely toward "parish priesthood" instead of priesthood I thought made the formation flounder and not translate to real life in my experience so far.

How difficult it can be to truly understand one's identity as a priest.

Interviews of Priests Regarding Areas of Satisfaction with their Seminary Preparation

As was mentioned in a previous section, at the end of the survey CARA asked responding priests: *Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone interview with a researcher about the challenges facing recently ordained priests?* Of the 503 priests who volunteered for an interview, CARA selected 16 for in-depth interviews about how satisfied they are as priests and how satisfied they are with their seminary preparation. To dig deeper into why some priests leave the active priesthood – which especially happens nationally within their first five years after ordination – CARA oversampled priests for the interviews who reported feeling dissatisfied in their priestly life⁹ and/or who were not sure if they would remain priests in the future.^{10 11}

The interviewer raised a number of topics with every interviewee, including: (1) How would you characterize your seminary experience overall? (2) In what ways did your seminary best prepare you for the priesthood? (3) In what ways did your seminary least prepare you for the priesthood? (4) How well did your seminary create an atmosphere of trust between the seminarians and formators? (5) How well did your seminary prepare you for living a life of celibacy after ordination? (6) Did your seminary give you a realistic picture of what your life as a priest would be? (7) Did your seminary teach you how to keep a proper balance in your life between the demands of your ministry, your spiritual life, and your personal life? (8) How well did your seminary reach out to you after ordination? Beyond these, the questions and topics asked about were most often follow-up questions to the topics raised by the interviewees.

To present this analysis, some general measures of newly ordained priests' experiences of the seminary are presented first, followed by a presentation of each of the four dimensions of seminary formation. The dimensions are ordered from those mentioned most often to those mentioned least often. Finally, opinions about what kind of relationship the priests would like to have with their seminaries after ordination are presented.

- General evaluations of seminary formation
- Evaluation of the pastoral dimension of formation
- Evaluation of the human dimension of formation
- Evaluation of the spiritual dimension of formation and of maintaining a balanced life
- Evaluation of the intellectual dimension of formation
- Desired relationship with the seminary after ordination

Each of these areas are discussed further below.

⁹ Recall from a previous section that four-fifths of responding priests report being satisfied (“somewhat” or “very”) and one-fifth reports being dissatisfied (“somewhat” or “very”).

¹⁰ As will be presented later in this report, 94% of priests report that they “probably” or “definitely” will not leave the priesthood, with 6% saying they “probably will leave” or are “uncertain about [their] future.”

¹¹ See the table describing the characteristics of the priests interviewed on p. 49.

General Evaluations of Seminary Formation

Included here are priests' overall assessment of their seminary experiences and how well the seminary created an atmosphere of trust where the seminarians and formators could be honest with each other.

Characterization of their Seminary Experience Overall

One of the general questions was: *How would you characterize your seminary preparation overall? Was it positive, negative, or mixed?* Six of the priests rated their overall satisfaction as positive, with ten saying they had a mixed experience and none characterizing it as negative overall.

Positive Assessments: The six priests characterizing their seminary experience overall as positive are most likely to mention these aspects of seminary life: the great role models for priesthood among the faculty, the academic rigor, the inclusion of lay students in their classes, and how their seminary life was an extension of their living in community (for those studying for a religious congregation). Excerpts from three of the interviews appear below.

Interviewer: *Thinking about your overall seminary experience, would you characterize it as positive, negative or a mixture of the two?*

Respondent: *Overall positive. I mean I think, of course, there were some things during seminary that naturally should have felt negative. But, ultimately, I know it was to make sure that on the day of ordination, I was as prepared as I could be for ordination. I think some of the greatest strengths would be the academic preparation. I mean of course when a man enters seminary he's there for six to eight years. Most of that time is spent during the academic year taking classes. I would say at both seminaries I went to, my academic formation was great. I mean of course there were some courses, as is life, that were drier than others, just like high school algebra class, I thought I'm never gonna use this in ministry. Some classes where I would go to the class no matter how I was feeling, if I was sick, if I didn't feel good because I didn't want to miss anything that was gonna be of great value to me, regardless of who is gonna share notes with me. I think another very positive aspect would have been academic formation. Another positive aspect I guess would be how the faculty priests that I had, the vast majority of them, I felt were very good role models of what diocesan priests should be, what diocesan priesthood looks like even if they weren't priests of my diocese. They very much modelled priestly fraternity and spiritual fatherhood to me. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *I would say overall positive, definitely. Yeah, I thought that our...I mean obviously nobody's perfect. That includes the formation team. But overall I just found them to be extremely capable priests themselves. I found them to be extremely open and honest about what to expect. I felt that there are those certain things that you just can't be prepared for until they happen, like a suicide funeral or something like that. Even those things I felt like they prepared me well for – the fact that I couldn't be prepared for that if that makes sense. Really, over the past two years, I feel like I've seen quite a bit but I honestly have felt like I was prepared for all of it. There were some challenges along the way for sure, but there was never a time that I felt totally unprepared.*
(Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *Positive, very much positive. Admittedly for us it's an unusual situation because our seminary is the [Religious Residence]...It's in-house formation. It is not the typical experience, I think, even many religious are usually sent to some other Catholic seminary. I think that the best part of my experience there was it was an integrated experience of religious life, which involves fraternity and the liturgical life with the life of study. It was a sense in which I was being formed as a whole person, as a priest and religious. I think that on a particular level I value the high caliber and total mystic foundations of the program which is distinctive. I think it is a very quintessentially [Religious Residence] in that sense. It's strongly grounded in Saint Thomas.* (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, responded to the survey in Spanish)

Mixed Assessments: The ten priests characterizing their seminary experience overall as both positive and negative also mention many aspects of seminary life and formation that greatly benefitted them. They also list areas where they felt their seminaries could improve, however, including better utilizing the backgrounds of those studying there who had careers before entering the seminary, being at seminary at a time of great change, not feeling welcomed in the United States, and not having the theological knowledge necessary to answer parishioners' questions.¹² Excerpts from four of the interviews appear below.

Interviewer: *Overall, how would you characterize your seminary experience? Was it positive, negative or was it mixed?*

Respondent: *Sure, I think it was a mixture. We had a lot of change in rectors and then some of the other faculties and administrators. I think that led to confusion at a number*

¹² Note that some of the interviewees started off saying that it was an overall positive experience but then went on to bring up some negative experiences as well. Such respondents have been categorized as having mixed assessments.

of different points. We had one rector well, what I should say is that we had two rectors in the four years that I was in theology. I think things have become quite a bit more stable and unified since then. [...] All these changes were good but they...I think they directly impacted my experience at seminary and I think one of the byproducts of that was, I think, it took a while to combat some of the cynicism that was often present among the seminarians. I found that very off-putting from the time that I entered. However, I'm a very extroverted person so it didn't prevent me from making friendships, it just led me to give in and to choose to exhibit behaviors that I didn't necessarily agree with, just in terms of expressing cynicism or even speaking in a manner that really didn't become a man pursuing the priesthood. I had, certainly on my part, a lot of immaturity to leave behind, which I found the seminary to be kind of not really capable of bestowing maturity on our younger guys. I think that experience carried over a little bit from when I moved from college to theology, that I just felt that the guys hadn't quite left high school yet mentally and maybe even spiritually in some ways. But I was really grateful that during my time in theology they did bring back the spiritual year which I think has done a world of good for the men to mature and to grow, just taking that full year to really look at who God has made them to be and who they are in the eyes of God.

Interviewer: *Would that be more in the human development pillar or is it a mixture of human and spiritual? How would you characterize that spiritual year?*

Respondent: *I think that out of the four pillars that we talk about, I would say that you have the human, the spiritual, the pastoral, the intellectual, I think there was pretty large dose of intellectual for them during that time. Reading the whole Bible and the whole catechism and having courses and stuff was definitely part of it. But the human was easier addressed I think because you're in a smaller group. You really couldn't hide and just find people that were agreeable to you. You really did have to relate with others who have a very different viewpoint. Then they had poverty immersion experience, and long retreats, those kind of covered the pastoral and the spiritual. The long retreat too, eight days. Actually, the men that are doing it right now are finishing up their 30-day. It really engaged all of them at the different points in the year which I think is the biggest strength of that vision to the program for formation. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Starting with the seminary overall, would you characterize your time at the seminary as very positive, very negative or was it more mixed?*

Respondent: *Yeah, let me just make sure that we have the same understanding of seminary. I'm a religious and I studied at different times, in different places. Before coming here, I already had a bachelor's in business from a community college. Then I*

did enjoy my time, it being my first experience in the US, with a lot of new things for me to learn. A bit challenging, my accent was a little stronger than it is now and all of that. All of that, the new things, new learning made life a little bit more challenging for me. Then after two and a half years of being in [State], I came to [City] and I studied in [Seminary Name] for a year. Lots of readings. I never had so much reading than I had that year. It was very challenging for me. I then went to, as a religious, I had to go to novitiate but I had to learn Spanish. I was moved from studies to learn Spanish and I stayed with a family in [Foreign Country] for about three months. They didn't speak any English, I learned Spanish that way. My novitiate was in [Foreign Country]. [...] Within my community there were times when I felt like this is very frustrating. This is very difficult. In fact there was one time I decided that I was leaving. Especially when they insisted that I have to learn Spanish before I could continue. That was the most difficult time for me in that formation process. I prayed overtime. I did a lot of discerning. [...] The other thing I was thinking about is culture...But anyways, just American culture. I think even in a situation like that there's still a need to deliberately introduce culture into that space. I look for ways to actually form the student in culture because sometimes I look at the way people either talked to me or reacted to me. I mean it can be very completely prejudiced, things like racism, I thought, like that. Well, I think beyond seeing racism, sometimes people just lead me to actually learn that this way of talking, or this way of reacting is not good. Things like, I don't like the smell of your food. It might just be just commenting on the smell of the food but you are not taking in the whole picture in terms of...okay, did I tell you that I always like the smell of your American food? You have some kind of a sense of a right over me that I should be accepting of the odor of your food but you cannot accept the odor of my food. Little, tiny things like that can be very upsetting, can make life very uncomfortable. Even though the person doing it might be completely: "Oh I'm not racist," "I'm not this," but no, they don't realize that. Education on culture is key even for people, as I said, who are of the same culture. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, not born in the United States)

Respondent: *I really think that there is something with the second career vocations that the Church is not tapping into. There's a lot of experience, and there's a lot of knowledge that people are bringing into the vocation of priesthood that is only going to help. I think there's got to be an openness to that.*

Interviewer: *Okay, and so for example with you, what types of knowledge did you bring in that you wish they were using better?*

Respondent: *Well before I entered the seminary, I grew up on a dairy farm but then I had too much ear. But, no, I actually was a high school teacher and started teaching in*

the public high school. New life and some of that knowledge. Perfect example, the seminary, when I was there, went into a teaching distance learning. They had a whole distance learning room set up. I actually taught distance learning when I was at the high school. I'd let the professors know that, like, I taught distance learning if you have any questions or issues, don't ever hesitate to ask. I'd be happy to tell you how different it is teaching things like that. They were not interested at all. They brought somebody in to teach them how to teach. I said, okay, not even willing to just hear my experience. That's something I'll never forget. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *I'd say it was more of a mixed bag. So in terms of the positive aspects, I received a good philosophical formation and I did receive good liturgical formation there at the seminary. At least when I was there, I would say that under the pastoral pillar we did have a particular parish member who took charge of really sort of covering all the bases in terms of what we should have in terms of our ministry. It was very structured, this year we would do hospital ministry, this year we would do, well, let's see...third year was always hospital ministry. The pastoral year was, of course, serving in a parish. Second year we had some forum for adult formation. First theology was something associated with youth or younger formation.*

Interviewer: *Okay, all right. That was positive. What was not as good as you hoped?*

Respondent: *Okay, well in terms of things that we're not as good as I hoped, reflecting back, I think we could have had a better formation in the life and reality of celibacy in the priesthood. We could have had a better formation in the spiritual pillar and in our prayer. Definitely covering it more as something that really needs to be cultivated in the life of a priest, not just up to personal preference or whims. Then also a greater instruction on the difficulties that come with priestly obedience and the realities of the financial world in a parish setting, I mean, how you balance both the spiritual mission of the Church with also just having the ability to be able to take care of the finances appropriately and understand those things. Then another thing that was more mixed was, while I did have a good philosophical formation, I did discover that the formation particularly in more systematic and dogmatic areas of theology, was limited at my first seminary. We had good formation, I would say, but more theology and scripture. We were given a good overview of it drawing from the resources of the historical, critical method but trying to be open to a more spiritual reading of the facts as well.*

Interviewer: *Well I'd like to cover all those topics but one I'd like to immediately ask about, so you noticed after ordination that the systematic and the dogmatic theology were not as good as they could have been. In what particular area?*

Respondent: *Well that was two-fold. I would say on one level it was parishioners asking questions, particularly in the area of sacramental theology, that were not adequately covered in the materials that were presented in classes. Then the second area – which is partly related to the faithful but it's also in terms of other priests and just the general situation in the Church as a whole – there wasn't a clear exposition of ecclesiology, of the relationship between the local Churches and the universal Church. I have encountered many priests, but also members of the laity, who are confused by some of the behavior that's been, especially in the last few months...that we've seen from people who either are in it within the hierarchy or somehow tangentially related to the hierarchy. I mean, Cardinal Vigano's letters and some of Cardinal Burke's disputes with the Holy Father, and just the sort of, there's a lot of confusion on the part of both priests and the laity in terms of dogmatic and systematic theology. I mean some of those things, at least in my own research, are there within the traditions of the Church. It's just we were not instructed on how to understand the reality of these relationships between the local and the universal Church. Also, how the bishops and how the Holy Father relates in terms of ecclesiology. Individual priests, I mean. I know a lot of priests have expressed frustration at the fact that their voice is not being heard and just sort of feel that there's a lot of neglect there. There's certainly theological resources in both systematic and dogmatic theology that help clarify or help understand things a little bit better. At least that's my opinion of it. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Atmosphere of Trust

Respondents also were of mixed opinions about how well their seminary created an atmosphere of trust where seminarians and formators could honestly dialogue about issues related to formation and the priesthood. Six of the priests report a positive atmosphere of trust, six report a mixed atmosphere, and four report a negative atmosphere. Two examples of the positive atmosphere they experienced are presented below.

Interviewer: *Would you say that the seminary created the kind of atmosphere where you felt like you could trust your formators and be very honest with them?*

Respondent: *Yeah, I was always able to be very honest with all of them and bring up any issues that I was having and discuss them very frankly with them. I never experienced anything but a positive reception of whatever I brought up. It was always more of, like, I would bring up issues that were going on in me. It was, like, well we're seeing no issues in the [seminary] community because you generally get along with everybody. But I was free to bring up struggles or things that were going on with myself very, very freely. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *Yes, I think, yeah, a large part of that [the atmosphere of trust] is the rector. Does he put persons in charge who engender that trust, build that trust among the students? I would say I was really fortunate, yeah, during my three years there. We had a rector who just had, like, really strong leadership skills and really strong pastoral skills. He was not afraid to be a leader. He could set a direction and a vision. He just like invested so much pastoral care into each man who was there, and even a lot of the women who studied with us would go to him for spiritual direction or for counsel because he just, yeah, he was a man of many skills. I definitely trusted him. He was really there for me during some really crucial moments. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

The two excerpts below are from two of the six priests who described a mixed atmosphere of trust. For one of them, he himself had a good experience but his co-students had a rough time.

Interviewer: *Did the seminary create an atmosphere of trust where you felt you could be honest with the formators?*

Respondent: *With trust, I think it depends. For me, in my experience there, it depended on the priest that you were working with. So I had two formators. One was this guy, the first few years, one was this priest who, he wasn't that old, but he'd been a priest for a long time, but he was just a really nice guy who...one of those...when you think of a priest, this is who you would think of, you know. Like an Italian guy who loves having dinner all night and, you know, talks to anybody. This is a good dude, you know, I trust him. But then they transferred him somewhere else. And then this other guy came in, who, I didn't trust him with anything. And I think it's less to do with the seminary than it had to do with him and his personality. And once he came in, it was just like, you know, he'd been there three years and I think he just was reassigned to prove himself. And so everything became this huge production and, you know, anything that could be possibly construed as being negative was like, well, you know, if you have this, then that must be—you should be afraid or something like that. So, it was just I didn't trust him, but that had nothing to do with the seminary. But when he came in, there was also changes in the administration of the seminary. And it just became a place where, like, I didn't feel comfortable speaking to anybody about anything, other than close friends.*

Interviewer: *So, were there areas that you would have liked to have brought up because it would have been good to have gotten an experience formator's opinion about them?*

Respondent: *Not—honestly, no, I think, but that's just with me because, you know, in my case, like I knew or had made a real effort to get to know priests outside of the seminary. And one of the concerns I had, too, was like, I don't want to talk to these guys at the seminary because with the people there, all I was getting was the company line. And, you know, they'll say, oh, you ask him about this. And it's like, oh, well, you know, they're kind of—at least I got the impression that in the back of their mind, they're thinking, well, what should I say about this? What would the Bishop want me to say? But then I talked to priests, you know, in the “real world”, and they're going to tell me what's actually true. So yeah, I didn't—there was people I could go to talk to about things that weren't there. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Did you feel like the seminary created enough of an atmosphere of trust that you were able to be very honest with your formators?*

Respondent: *I don't know that I'm the good test for that question only because I had to be taught when to be quiet. In a sense of, like, you know, where my vulnerability might not be helpful, or my honesty might not be helpful. I learned that in high school and I'm moving into college and just kind of making sure that I'm in the right place for my vulnerability and my honesty. I definitely know that other men struggled with that either on account of their formator or whatever. I really did latch on to the fact that it seemed to be like my responsibility to take what it was in the internal form, and bring it into a light in the external form. I had a really good experience with that, but I know a number of guys that struggled. They had less interaction with their formator than I did. My formator was very diligent about meeting with his advisees. It wasn't a once a semester thing. We met just about every month and that was great. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Finally, the two excerpts below are from two of the four priests who report having experienced a negative atmosphere of trust.

Interviewer: *When you were there, would you say the seminary created an atmosphere of trust where you could be honest with yourself and your formators?*

Respondent: *Not so much. It was a lot of, in many ways, there's some disingenuousness there. On the one part it's important we were told to be open and to be honest and to be disclosive formally and informally. Internal forum and external forum, who you are and who God made you to be, into the person whom God is making you ultimately someday as a priest. That was all very good. Part of it, I think with me was my personality type. I'm sort of a Type A personality, what you see is what you get.*

I did not try to not be disclosive in terms of who I was. When I say who I was, everything from my theological leanings to my political beliefs, to my interpersonal senses in judgment and also in the manner in which I communicate. My attitude is people deserve the truth. They deserve to be treated like adults. Quite frankly, I treated my friends and my colleagues and also my formators with the same respect that I was hopefully expecting from them. Where the line got a little blurry, of course, was when it came to those times when I would get, during formation, indication that someone had said something about something that I'd said or did that was bothersome. I'm thinking, well, first of all, where the hell did that come from? Secondly, who said it. And, in both cases, "Well, we're not able to tell you but this is what was said and please respond. I found it to be a little bit of a big switch, quite frankly. I found that you were always, in a certain sense, whether you had suspicion of others around you, and if I were really, really hyper-concerned about always making a good impression then I would have always been on pins and needles. My attitude sort of was, to hell with it, I'm going to be who I am. If they like me, great, if they don't like me great. If they want to kick me out, great. If they want to keep me in, great. I mean I'm not going to play that game. I think for many seminaries, those who survive oftentimes are good at playing games. (Diocesan priest in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, had left the priesthood at the time of the interview)

Respondent: *My experience with that was that there wasn't a culture of trust. I mean some formators tried to hold that level of trust with their seminarians. I know I had two different external formators when I was there at the seminary. One of them did try to cultivate that relationship. The other one basically would just, he would inform me of half of what the external formators were discussing. He wouldn't bring things to my attention until the very end of the seminary years, things that we could have worked on together. Not just seeing a report at the end of the year that none of the points have been discussed with me and in some cases the report was not even given to me to sign until three months after the semester. That's one thing. Then in terms of more looking at things from the administrative level, I know that there was a culture of secrecy on the part of the main administrative leadership. When there were problems within the seminary population, and things that were in the external forum that were concerning, they wouldn't...they were reticent to discuss how we can proactively work together in a unity of trust to not allow these living situations to go on. I mean, one example that comes to mind immediately was while I was there at the seminary there was a pre-theologian who ended up being arrested for various sex abuse related actions. Some of us, myself included, we raised these issues with our external formators. We were concerned about this individual. We don't know what's going on but we want to make sure that things are being taken care of. That we're moving forward together to have*

the best possible seminary environment. Universally the response was, “Well, we don’t want to talk about this when this particular seminarian was arrested.” We did have a formation conference but beyond that there were no actual steps that were really taken to change some of the contributing factors in the environment. That created a level of distrust among the seminarians toward the administration. I know that that was certainly my response. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Evaluations of the Pastoral Dimension of Formation

Several questions were asked of interviewees concerning their pastoral formation, including: (1) How well do you feel your seminary prepared you for priestly ministry overall? (2) Did your seminary provide you with a realistic portrait of what life as a priest would be like? (3) Did your seminary give you enough exposure to parishes during your time there? (4) How well did your seminary prepare you for administrative and leadership-related duties? (5) How well did your seminary prepare you for working with and ministering to lay persons?

Four of the 16 priests interviewed had very positive experiences of their pastoral formation, with the remaining 12 having mixed experiences. The 16 priests’ positive experiences and negative experiences are presented in the two subsections below.

Positive Assessments of Pastoral Formation

Priests report positive experiences of pastoral formation in areas like: administration and leadership, being given a realistic portrait of what their lives as priests would be like, receiving adequate time in parishes and pastoral settings during their time in the seminary, working with lay staff members, ministering to the laity, dealing with difficult pastors, and receiving proper mentoring. The excerpts below give the reader an idea of what these positive experiences were.

Positive Evaluations of Administrative and Leadership Training: Two of the 16 priests describe having been given good training at their seminaries in the areas of administration and/or leadership. The successful programs are described below.

Interviewer: *What about two other topics, leadership and administration? Did you feel like the seminary did an adequate job of preparing you in those areas?*

Respondent: *Yeah, so I think we had the opportunity. We collaborated with Church Management, the Church Management course setup or curriculum. We did a summer with them. We actually did some sort of leadership stuff with the school business at [University Name], then regularly had formation workshops with the Catholic Leadership Institute. We’re blessed in this area that we have these resources. I really*

think that they were lost on me in some ways. It did become a bit of an information overload. I just had a really bad experience with the [University Name] one which had nothing to do with the program and almost everything to do with my own nonsense and shortcomings. I had a bit of resentment about the way the summer was going. I had to really address that. But, for example, one concrete thing I took away from that was a lot of security stuff. We had one presenter from GDC, he gave us a really good rundown on some major mishaps that churches make with regard to the security of the buildings in the grounds, and the sacred vestments and vessels. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *What about administratively? I'm thinking both leadership skills as well as administrative skills like budgeting and investing.*

Respondent: *We had discussion of those topics and even, like, there was some kind of leadership program that helped you sort of understand how different people work. They did that with us. They also did a course for that specific parish administration-type of thing and had a guy who was not only a pastor but he was also like the guy who was the administrator of Catholic Charities in the diocese, too. He kind of had both the specific parish experience but also, like, the houses and entity experience. It's good but we could always use more. That's kind of what was always being said, you know, like there's a good amount but you could always use more. I think that's something that a lot of seminaries really have to work on is just that level of preparedness for what amounts to essentially running a business. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Were Given a Realistic Portrait of What their Priestly Life Would Be: The two excerpts below are from priests who believe their seminary did provide them with a realistic sense of what their lives as priests would be like.

Interviewer: *In terms of preparing you for your post-ordination life, do you feel like they gave you a realistic understanding of what life was gonna be like after the seminary?*

Respondent: *I think so, with the caveat that there were several times always in whatever you were learning that was like, you know, this is still not out there in the parish. We can't give you every possible scenario but we're gonna try to do our best with it. I think they did just about as good as you could hope to do with that sort of preparation. The addition of having formation conferences, so they would be once a week. There were occasions where we had men come in who were graduates from the year before and talk about their life, they were in the middle of their first year, they*

completed their first year. I think they limited it to the guys who were only in ministry for one or two years depending on who's available. Some guys, I mean, really got a lot of work almost immediately, so they weren't able to come. They try to do it within the first year to sort of get their experience of what their day-to-day life was like. We had plenty of people for retreat days or spiritual conferences that were diocesan priests and possibly also from the area that would naturally incorporate their on the ground, so to speak, experience into their reflections and stuff. Yeah, I think we got a realistic expectation, at least as much as that's possible. It's gonna be kind of radically different sometimes depending on what diocese you're in and what your situation is, but I think they did as good as I would hope they would do. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *As far as kind of preparing me for the realities of the priestly, and religious life, I feel like I, for better or for worse, especially during summer experiences throughout my own province, I feel like I saw the whole gamut and so I can't claim that anything that has happened since was a surprise to me. (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, responded to the survey in Spanish)*

Received Adequate Time in Parishes and Pastoral Settings during their Time in the Seminary: The priest in the excerpt below believes that he did have adequate exposure to parish life during his time in the seminary.

Interviewer: *Did the seminary provide you with very much experience in the pastoral area, in parish life?*

Respondent: *Yep, I think a lot of it actually. I mean, so we had ministry assignments starting our second semester the first year, scaling up into more and more priestly or clerical roles. It starts with initial service to the poor, and then it kind of takes on more with a sassier character. During each summer we were assigned two different houses of the province for ministry or for further language formation if that needed to happen. I feel like I got a great range of everything from direct service for hospital chaplaincy, college chaplaincy, parochial ministry. Basically the full gamut.*

Interviewer: *Was the mentoring in those certain situations also done well?*

Respondent: *That varied by the person. I mean by the priest who was, or by the friars and priests who were present at any place. I would say that structurally the structures of mentoring existed. I don't think that in every instance it was a success, but that's just because of the nature of realities here. I always learned by example. Sometimes it was*

positive, sometimes it was not. (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, responded to the survey in Spanish)

Learned to Work with Lay Staff Members and Minister to Lay Persons: The priest below describes how well he felt prepared to work with and minister to lay persons.

Interviewer: *Did they give you a lot of exposure to working with and ministering to the laity?*

Respondent: *Yeah. There were a number of lay professors there, there are a number of lay staff there. Yeah. And I think that's one thing that they, you know, when you went out and had all these assignments, I think that, you know, they were very particular about that. And when they asked supervisors to fill out feedback, they wanted to know, like, how you actually did with, you know, relating to laity. So, I think they actually did—that's something they did a good job with. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Learned to Deal with Difficult Pastors: The priest below describes how his seminary prepared him for dealing with difficult pastors during his first assignments.

Interviewer: *What about handling difficult pastors as supervisors?*

Respondent: *Yeah, especially when preparing us in doing sessions of reflection on our weekend assignments. Now, again those guys who we were assigned with were handpicked. They kind of knew they weren't gonna be a problem. But you never know, the personalities and stuff, are they clashing? Sometimes, those personnel never know how they're gonna mix. But that was talked about and a lot of times, well, they endured their different styles. They have a different style than you. Don't go in there if you're trying to correct the guy, and everything he is doing because you don't think it's the right way or whatever. I think it was a very sound approach, as long as the guy is not lighting the place on fire or something like that. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Received Proper Mentoring: Finally, one priest described the positive mentoring he received during his assignments at parishes.

Interviewer: *All right. During those times when you did go for the summers, did you get much mentoring? Was it time well spent?*

Respondent: *Yeah, it was time well spent. I mean, the one summer I lived with a priest who had just been ordained and then there was the pastor. I really did feel that I was well tended to. That was my first summer. Then my deacon summer I was blessed with*

one of those priest priests. He really took the time to mentor and encourage me. I thrived. The difficulty the first summer was there was a well-intentioned but somewhat ill-conceived apostolate that they had set up. We were basically gonna go door-to-door and evangelize in one of the toughest areas of our city. Lots of drug use and things but the goal was to make contact with those who have no connection with the faith, and just show our faith, so to speak. Then also to connect with the recently immigrated. It was a good experience but it was quite a bit stressful because they had a lot of us taking courses at the same time with Church Management. I mean if anything, if I could offer anything in that regard I think they tried to do too much with the summers. I don't know if they slowed that down or not. I've lost track. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Negative Assessments of Pastoral Formation

Twelve of the 16 priests interviewed give mixed or negative assessments of their pastoral formation during their time at their seminary. The areas of pastoral formation mentioned include: not being given a realistic portrait of what their lives as priests would be like, inadequate training in administrative and leadership skills, not learning how to work with lay staff members and to minister to the laity well, receiving inadequate time in parishes and pastoral settings during their time in the seminary, not learning how to deal with difficult pastors, inadequate preparation for presiding at liturgies and hearing Confessions, and not learning how to minister to parishioners electronically or on social media.

Not Given a Realistic Portrait of What their Lives as Priests Would Be Like: Four priests indicate that their seminary did not give them a realistic picture of what their lives as priests would be like. Included here are two priests who say they were given good skills, but had no idea of the demands that would be made of their time.

Interviewer: *So changing the topic a little bit, when you were ordained, did you feel like you left the seminary with a realistic understanding of what your life would be?*

Respondent: *No, but they actually told us that, specifically. I'm thinking of the head spiritual director at the [Seminary Name], used to say to us a lot, our last year when we were all deacons, "You guys have no idea what the life of a priest is like until you're a priest. We can tell you all we want about how busy you're gonna be and how many demands there will be on you, but you'll not have experienced it. You won't know what it's like until you're actually ordained." I mean all throughout seminary I would hear that priests are busy, that priests are stretched for time, that priests X, Y, Z. But then I would also hear people say a priest is only as busy as he chooses to be. Some priests, we've seen examples of it, they don't do extra things. They won't take on extra funeral Masses. If there's a funeral, "It's gonna take place with the daily Mass." "I'm not*

doing two Masses in a day,” or whatever it may be. “Oh, I don’t have meetings after 5PM.” Okay, well, most of your people work until 5PM so you’re gonna have to have night meetings. I think that was kind of drilled into us, like you won’t know the full extent of what priesthood is like until you’re a priest. I say no, I wasn’t prepared, but not in like a good way because I was prepared to be unprepared if that makes sense.
(Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: Do you feel like that you left the seminary with a realistic understanding of what the demands of your post-ordination life would be?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Why not?

Respondent: Well, when I got into the job, I had no idea of the endless waves of meetings that would be coming my way. That the demands of...for instance I went to a parish with 5,000 people. Normally, four priests serve that parish. Now it was one and a half priests. It was myself – a brand new priest – and the 80-year old pastor with very limited energy. It was so wildly overwhelming. I would certainly talk to my other classmates who experienced very similar experiences that even though the number of priest is diminishing the demand has not diminished. I was not prepared, not at all.
(Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: That makes perfect sense. Do you feel like you emerged from the seminary with a realistic understanding of what your priestly life was going to be?

Respondent: No, I don’t.

Interviewer: How so? Can you give me some examples?

Respondent: I think they tried to, in some ways, tell us what parish life was going to be like, and then of course the summer assignments, pastoral year, helped us to really see what the parish was like. But the seminary, I don’t think helped to really prepare us for, like, the scheduling of it. How to maintain your sanity with all of the different things that are going on. The seminary I didn’t think was good at helping with that. I think they were just much more stuck in a little bit older mind-set of the, how the Church used to be at the time.

Interviewer: Is that how it is for a time of fewer priests, where there’s more demands?

Respondent: *Correct, where you have three jobs that you are responsible for. That's just being the pastor of the parish, but now you've got the school, you've got this committee, that committee. There wasn't really ever a good discussion about that. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *Yeah, I think, you know, I think at a place like where I was, there's a lot of good people there, like you're gonna find anywhere. A priest, I know put it really well. He said that [Seminary Name] prepares priest to work really with like two and a half percent of the Catholic population. Because they're preparing priests to work at parishes that are very traditional, where there's a lot of stuff going on and, also, it just seems like it's preparing you for the ideal situation. And, you know, you're preparing yourself for this ideal situation. Well, that never really happens. So that was some of it. Also, you know, I was old, I was 30 when I started. So, I mean, that's not that old, but still like going back to school when I was 30, it wasn't really something of a great joy, I guess. And then with the classes, I think, you know, a lot of these classes, it was like, honestly, it felt like being back at a high school class, you know? It's just like: here's the facts, memorize the facts and giving it back to me on a test. And there's minimal intellectual engagement with some of this material. And, you know, why does the Church think this? It's like, well, the Church says this and so that's it. Well, you don't need to go to school for that. You can just read and memorize the facts. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Inadequate Training in Administrative and Leadership Skills: Three priests mention that they did not feel like they were given adequate training in administrative and leadership skills. Excerpts from their interviews are presented below.

Respondent: *So, in terms of that, actually, I asked for some of that stuff from the seminary to have like a real substantive discussion on that and a real class. We ended up getting one class called, like, Parish Administration and Leadership, but it ended up being just, I mean, really a waste of time. And then there was very little discussion on, you know, how to raise money or how to manage money, property, or, you know, how to work with a staff if you're a pastor and you're a supervisor of a staff. What do you do with somebody that's not doing their job? Or what do you do with somebody who got hired because they're, you know, the previous pastor's friend and now that pastor is gone? They're there and they think they're entitled to a job and they're not doing anything. So, there was no – there was some good stuff to it, but there was not anywhere near enough. And, you know, I remember a friend of mine actually was ordained, he had worked in banking for a bit out in [City] and he wanted – and it made very good sense –*

to have like personal finance classes, just on his own for these guys. 'Cause some of these guys are 22, 23 years old and never had a bank account before. And the thought that these guys would go from that to running an organization in six, seven years potentially, that's...I mean, that's how little preparation there was for how to do the practical financial side of a parish. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *Not really. I think there was a pretty big lack in the seminary formation process, with trying to either discuss or cultivate those kind of leadership skills. I mean we didn't have a class on leadership. To my recollection I don't think we ever even had a day of recollection, or a seminar or something on leadership specifically. I think we had a little bit in the pastoral assignments in the summers and stuff but it wasn't ever formalized or structured. It was just kind of like you learn as you go. You learn a job, you observe if you're observant. But yes, that's something they could...that that was a lacking area they could grow in. Some other dioceses would send their guys to different programs in the summers and things, they did some of that. Mine didn't. As a general comment I think part of it is because the priesthood, I mean your priestly formation, that's...I mean it's really not about developing you as a leader. I think partly it stems from that I don't think we have a lot of strong leaders among priest and bishops in particular actually. I mean I don't mean to be negative but I just, I mean, I know my bishop is not a strong leader. The previous bishop was not a strong leader. Almost all of them are guys who have been working in chanceries for most of their life. It's sad but it's true. I just don't think there are a lot of leaders at the episcopal level and as many leaders among the priests as there should be. It would just make perfect sense that the seminary program doesn't do that well either. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *What about leadership skills like building consensus, conflict management?*

Respondent: *It was largely absent. They didn't talk about leadership styles. They didn't talk about how a priest serves as a leader both with staff and of his faithful. They didn't cover the nuts and bolts of what a priest does in terms of being able to make decisions for community and in particular situations without seeming authoritarian, without seeming autocratic. None of that was covered in the seminary setting. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Not Learning How to Work with Lay Staff Members and to Minister to the Laity Well:
Three priests mention that their seminary both did and did not prepare them well for working with and ministering to lay persons. Their descriptions appear below.

Interviewer: *Did you feel like you had enough exposure to work with lay persons, you know, non-clergy during your time with the seminary?*

Respondent: *I think there could have been more of that on a regular basis. There is a lot of times where in seminary we could feel a little insular even though we had a college right next door. There were some opportunities to do things with the college campus ministry and groups over there which was a huge advantage and then apostolic work and work in the parish provided that opportunity as well. But I think that would have been something to increase generally throughout, would be working with the laity and trying to plug into something, how that would work though.*

Interviewer: *I was asking about staff, what about the parishioners as well? Did they prepare you well for working with parishioners, not peers on your staff?*

Respondent: *I think so. A lot of concerns that were big pastoral concerns that they had either encountered or had heard of were brought up in scenarios brought up as well. But individual interactions with parishioners come mostly in the similar assignments and then in the last year when you're working at the parish on a regular basis.*
(Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *Did the seminary do an adequate job in preparing you for working with laity and with the demands the laity would put on you as a priest?*

Respondent: *I guess, yes and no. One of the things that they did is lay proper boundaries and stuff like that. I think they did a good job on that. In terms of how you relate to parishioners, I don't know if they did a lot on like how to work with staff. Yeah, I guess in terms of collaboration not as good of a job as I would have liked. There were some laity in our pastoral formation program at [Seminary Name]. We had a pastoral assignment. Every once in a while, we had to write, like, a little report. That was part of the questions, working with volunteers and staff people, and other clergy and stuff like that. I think that it wasn't entirely absent. Similar thing in the summer, your pastoral assignments in summers and what not. But a lot of it was more focused on the whole boundary thing, basically how to not get into trouble, which is having the ordained having to briefly work with staff volunteers.* (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *No, I do not feel that they covered that very well in the seminary. It was certainly there in the background. For me, before seminary I had worked for a parish for a number of years. I've been on the side of being a member of the laity, working with the priests and leadership. They didn't discuss any of those dynamics. They just sort of said, "Well, when you're a priest you'll be doing this," and then actual, real situations of working with laity directly were few and far between. I mean there were some in terms of instructing people in developing formation, as I mentioned. That was one of my assignments. But actually, collaborating with members of the laity was not covered. One of the areas, especially that I think it would have been beneficial to cover more was the relationship between a priest who is leading a community and his ministers, especially liturgical ministers. The approach that was communicated to me in seminary was that, and this is to an extent true, the priest is the one who bears the responsibility of the liturgy and the sacraments. But that being said, you also have to know how to work with people's different gifts and not just present our own personal approach to music or to the celebration of the sacraments in settings where the laity has had a much more active role in those areas. I mean, it's important that the laity has that active visitation and engagement with the life of the Church. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Receiving Inadequate Time in Parishes and Pastoral Settings during their Time in the Seminary: One priest reports that his seminary did not assign him in parishes or in pastoral ministries enough during his time there.

Respondent: *I think part of my deficiency for my seminary experience is I didn't spend very much time in a parish. While our seminary boasts an all-day weekly apostolate that we go out to parishes and other ministries, it happened that my assignments were specialized. From the time that I entered really up until my deacon assignment, I wasn't at very many parishes. I went to one. Part of the reason, what happened is because it's a very strong Mexican population, so being there on Thursdays was helpful. I think that apostolate was helpful but I think, in the end, I did feel a little bit deficient. We don't currently, but we have in recent years, have had a full-time apostolate for a year, the pastoral year. We don't have that in our formation at the moment. But we do give men summer assignments. There is a young man in the seminary who's been living with us this summer at my parish. I really didn't have a thorough experience like he seems to be getting. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, will remain a priest)*

Not Learning How to Deal with Difficult Pastors: One priest indicates that his seminary did not prepare him and his fellow seminarians well about what to do should they be assigned to a difficult pastor.

Respondent: *No. No. Honestly, the impression I got from the seminary is that if you go to your first assignment and, you know, you don't have a good experience of the pastor, you don't get along well with the pastor, that probably means there's something wrong with you. And there's no sense of engagement and like, okay, how do we have like a real substantive discussion on, you know, what's actually the problem. Yeah, there was no discussion of that. Like if you had any kind of a bad first assignment with somebody, there was no preparation for that. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Inadequate Preparation for Presiding at Liturgies and Hearing Confessions: One priest mentions his seminary not having prepared him well for presiding at Masses with a microphone or for how to handle difficult Confessions.

Respondent: *Yeah, I think this might sound silly but this is like a very practical thing. When you preside at Mass in a big parish, you have to learn how to use a microphone. You have to learn how to use the little device and how to turn it on and turn it off at the right times. It's like, wow, you were never told how to prepare for this. It's just, like, the mic adds a whole new dimension in one's comfort or discomfort with the space and how you move around and how you preside at liturgy. That was a very practical thing I was unprepared for and had to learn how to do. I would say, maybe somewhat, with hearing Confessions. Yeah speaking generally, the seriousness with which sexual abuse is raised in the confessional and I just felt like I had other life experiences that prepared me to respond like compassionately and effectively. But I don't think we got a whole lot of training in that ourselves. I'm not talking about people even confessing as being an abuser, but people who would just within the context of the sacrament, share that they had been abused themselves. What is, yeah, what is the most helpful thing a priest can do when something like that has been revealed? That just seems...and I wrote to my rector and I said, "Yeah, this should really be addressed because it comes up sometimes." But it's just so important that a priest gets that right when a person is in such a vulnerable place and willing to share that. That's probably one of the most important things. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Not Learning How to Minister to Parishioners Electronically and on Social Media: Finally, one priest mentions that he wishes his seminary had taught him more about how to effectively use technology for communicating.

Interviewer: *Given your experience during this pandemic and the quarantine, do you have any recommendations for seminaries about what they could have done in terms of formation to make this easier?*

Respondent: *That's a good question. I don't really know because it kind of caught everybody by surprise as far as what difficulties would arise. I'm still trying to think about in the fall what more we could do. But one of the things would be to make sure we know – even as a millennial, I consider myself a pretty bad millennial – because I've been taught by a guy in his 70's how to do YouTube livestream. I think just in general you could do one of those things. I think that's just gonna become more prevalent. You could have like a tutorial on some internet stuff like how to do or ideas of what to do online, how to provide different things when you're not able to connect with your parishioners. Honestly what it would probably look like would be like a cheat sheet. Like here's some things to go through. Did you ever consider doing this? Did you ever consider doing that? Getting ideas from different sources. Different people who have done different things that they've heard about or have implemented and it worked really well. Just hearing about an idea sometimes is great. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Evaluations of the Human Dimension of Formation

While some interviewees brought up an aspect of their human formation on their own (most often concerning the great friendships they had while at the seminary), all were asked about how well their seminary prepared them in the area of celibacy. Six priests saw their formation in that area as effective, with ten giving it mixed reviews.

Effective Preparation for Living Celibately

Six priests describe their seminary's preparation in the area of celibacy and coping with the loneliness of a celibate life as being effective. It was taught through various means, including celibacy workshops/conferences, discussions with formators, the friends they rely on for support, and outside influences. Excerpts from some of the interviews are presented below.

Interviewer: *How well were you prepared for living a celibate life?*

Respondent: *Definitely, yes, I would. I mean, several conferences where I believe the PPS said that at least once a year the rector is supposed to give a seminary wide formation conference on celibacy, or an aspect related to celibacy. That was always, that was my experience at [Seminary Name], that the rector did that every year. But also throughout the year, specifically as you're getting older, as you grow through the seminary, I don't remember a lot of it being stressed in pre-theology. I mean certainly they weren't saying, you know, go out and date while discerning the priesthood. They*

weren't saying that. But it wasn't like focused in pre-theology of what is celibacy, how do you live celibacy, how do you deal with loneliness? It was basically if you're pre-theology student, you should be chaste and as you get older we'll talk to you more about what that means. In my theology studies there was something every year. When you get to the end of your second year, the beginning of your third year, it's, okay, you know, if certain things are still an issue, you need to go forward now to your spiritual director, to the house counsellor to the extent that its external formation to your formation adviser. You need to start working on these things now because you can't get to be on the third year and not have really entered into what loneliness is, what really celibacy is going to demand and expect of you. The challenges that might arise. I think I was very well prepared. Of course you don't know what it's gonna feel like, that loneliness, until you actually experience it. But then falling back on that preparation was huge to say like, "Okay, I remember them saying that this would happen. Now how do I deal with it? What do I do? How do I make sure that it's done in a natural, healthy way?" (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: Very good. Just speaking about the seminary, did you feel like it prepared you well for celibacy and chaste life?

Respondent: Yeah, I would say as well as I can be. Because there's really, I think it's always gonna be a challenge but I'm grateful that, yeah, we did every year we would have something on healthy celibate living, and there would be small group conversation and discussion questions. I feel like that event each year would be sort of a springboard for like further conversations with friends who are also preparing to be priests, about celibate life, masturbation, use of pornography, negotiating relationships with men or women. Yeah, I felt like, yeah, it was like addressed. In our community life there was like fairly open conversation about it even though it's difficult to talk about. It's still hard even with good formation. That just sort of has to be ongoing in one's life. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: Do you feel like the seminary did an adequate job of preparing you for celibacy, chastity and your emotional life in relationship to that?

Respondent: Yeah, I mean all those topics that you listed were covered and covered multiple times. That was specifically planned in formation conferences. It was also incorporated by individual professors who were priests and knew what parish life was like. It would almost be like, an aside sometimes where he'd say, "Well, you know guys,

let's talk about this for a little while." There was a lot of good sense of trying to integrate sound psychological advice into things, too, to make sure that we knew that that was coming, that that was a possibility, that we would experience the difficulties. I think they did a great job with that. All the things were addressed many, many times in my time there. I also went, I did pre-theology there so I was there a total of six years. I definitely experienced a lot of that talk multiple times. But more times the better.
(Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *Did you feel like the seminary prepared you well to live a celibate and chaste life?*

Respondent: *Yes. I think so. I think that in many ways the house of studies was a school of friendship, and I think that the best thing I learned there was the importance of strong friendships with my brothers. There's both fraternity of being able to live a life in common, and feeling supported, and of being able to entrust oneself to your fellow religious and priests. Then there's the more intimate friendships that I think are necessary in order to be able to thrive as a chaste celibate.*

Interviewer: *That's something that was brought up in workshops?*

Respondent: *I think the best way: it was lived. I mean there was this strong sense of camaraderie and of fraternity. Again, because the seminary wasn't just seminary in the traditional sense. It's a religious house. The bonding that was created there by the shared experience was intense. There were lots of discussions about it. There were workshops and presentations but you can't really teach someone how to be a friend. You model it and you experiment with it, and you live it out. In a certain sense I'm not sure if any seminary could teach men how to be friends but I think that when you enter into an environment like that, if there's a strong bond in the common good, if there's a strong sense of we're one heart and one mind, that lays the foundation. It makes possible the environment in which friendship can emerge. That's what I think is the most important role institutionally for the seminary, to create the environment, because you can't force friendship. (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, responded to the survey in Spanish)*

Interviewer: *Okay, well very good. What about in terms of living the celibate life and chastity? Did you feel like the seminary prepared you well for that?*

Respondent: *Yeah, absolutely. I think that they gave us every opportunity to prepare well for that, but I think also that that really can come down to the individual guy. I think, like I mentioned, there were trade-offs with [Seminary Name]. I think one of their real strengths is that it is so far away from home, it is so far away from everybody that you know and that you're comfortable with. It really does pull you out of yourself in that way. Loneliness was a real thing there and they helped me deal with it which was great. Then since being in the parish, I found that there has to be bigger efforts. In seminary, your buddy's next door and that's great. In the parish my buddies tend to be all over the place. I will say that I have a bunch of friends all over the country and I'm spoiled rotten in a sense. [Seminary Name] is pretty small geographically. All the young priests, because it is such a small diocese, we all know each other and get along great. I mean I'm with my brother priests probably one to three times per week and we just make a real point of looking out for each other and becoming kind of that priestly brotherhood. I know I got a buddy further down south who would like it if they would post priests out his way. I think that would be really tough but I've found that dealing with the loneliness is yeah, there's lonely nights, some days that are lonelier than others. [...] I do think that emotionally I was prepared very well to handle those days when they do come, go off with buddies when I need to. Then also the parishioners, they kind of, I remember in seminary they really stressed that boundary between like not becoming buddy-buddy with parishioners, still being Fathers but then allowing your parishioners to be your family as well. I mean, they're just so good to me. It's just been awesome to be able to have those families invite you over for dinner, participate in their lives in that way. I haven't found that a struggle at all, to form those relationships. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Ineffective Preparation for Living Celibately

Ten priests say their formation in celibacy was ineffective. They are especially likely to mention the difficulties of going from a seminary environment where friends are down the hall to a lonely living situation in a rectory, grieving and then embracing the losses entailed in a life of celibacy, formators not being honest enough about how difficult celibacy is, not being taught how to cope with loneliness well, not learning how to set appropriate boundaries in counseling situations. Below are some of their reflections.

Respondent: *I would say overall not very good. I think the friendships that I developed have been very helpful, especially on some things. My friends were also priests. I think the seminary...at a certain point you kind of have to agree that it is a loss, because it is a loss. I think the seminary could do a better job with kind of helping guys formally embrace the loss and grieve it. I think we talked a lot about how to make friendships to help you do that. Help hold each other accountable, having healthy prayer lives and having healthy friendships and then trying to turn...we talked about turning the*

loneliness into aloneness with God and developing sort of the intimacy with God. That's all very helpful. There was a lot the seminary gave me that was very helpful but I think actually think, you know, this is a huge loss. You need to understand that. You need to embrace that and you need to grieve that. That would help a lot, I think, with kind of letting it go. I think the seminary could do a better a job on that aspect of it. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *Okay, good. Would you say that your seminary prepared you well in the areas of chastity and living a celibate life?*

Respondent: *I think as well as it could. I think there's an element of really not knowing what it's like for somebody in my position. I was living with other men my age during all that time in seminary. I think that really you can't experience some of the aspects of rectory living while that continues to be the case. I'm an extrovert, so just walk down the hall and knock on somebody's door or send a text and get the attention of one of your classmates and hang out and talk. I don't know that I really confronted that until my first full year as a priest. As good as that living situation was, getting acquainted with the fact that, well, after 8:00, 8:30 in the evening there's not anybody around. We kind of turn in for the night if we finished our meetings and so forth. Having that time alone is something that I have learned to treasure. What I would say, too, is that I needed to grow up in that area of just living out celibate chastity. Unfortunately I had a lot of bad examples just in and out of the priesthood. It was really kind of the timing was just awful, we had a class formator. He was clearly not content being on the faculty at the seminary. He was often missing classes due to illness. It wasn't necessarily restricted to physical illnesses, but it seemed like that was just an aspect of his discontent. He actually was in charge of our class for formation, our third year theology. Shortly before we were supposed to discuss the oath of fidelity and the vow of celibacy on the curriculum in those weekly meetings with the whole class, he actually left the priesthood and within a calendar year was married with the blessing of the Church, which was just so unsettling. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Yeah, sure, very good. Thinking about your life now as a celibate chaste person, do you feel like the seminary did an adequate job of preparing you for your emotional life in relationship to celibacy, as well as tolerating periods of loneliness and such?*

Respondent: *It is hard to say. Yeah, I guess, I don't know. It's hard to say because I think the seminary tried, but I don't think that the seminary...you know, because of what it is you're living with a bunch of peers. I mean, you have to be intentional about finding time for yourself a lot of times. It's very unlike what living in a rectory is or working in a parish is. I definitely think that the language was there. We talked about it a lot. Certainly any internal forums, spiritual direction, any external forums, we had some pretty good workshops and different things about it and I think, so I think the outward stuff was pretty good. I think, I don't know, I guess I wish to some degree that the faculty formators might have been a little bit more open, honest, realistic about what it's like about living on your own or living in a rectory where you don't have any kind of shared life with the other men you're living with. Stuff like that. I think they could have done a better job but it's hard to know how to do that when you're in the seminary environment. You go from one extreme to another when you leave seminary. I mean you go from living and being surrounded by likeminded peers, friends, praying together, eating together, socializing, all that. Leading to another extreme, which is living in a rectory. Yeah, I think they tried but I think it's a hard thing to do and I honestly don't know exactly how to have improved it. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *What is most frustrating in your life as a priest?*

Respondent: *...I've realized over time that even though I want to be a priest, I've wanted to be a priest, I want to remain a priest, that there's a part of me that does desire some, I mean, like an intimate kind of an exclusive relationship, like a marriage. Because at the end of the day as a priest, you come home and you're by yourself. [...] Even a rich prayer life in ministerial life, and good relationships with family and friends and so forth, it doesn't get rid of that. It doesn't get rid of the loneliness. That for me is something that I'm, I mean, I'm still trying to figure out and address. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like the seminary prepared you well for celibacy?*

Respondent: *No, I do not. [...] I mean there would be formation workshops and spiritual and other formation workshops on the topic. I remember one for celibacy, choosing that and making sure that it's a part of our life, obviously. But there was not much talk about the struggle of it and how do you get through those avenues of loneliness or when you're alone or how to reach out or things like that. There wasn't real conversation. It was just almost like another topic that was presented. A formation*

workshop and then it was done. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *Then one other area in terms of the realistic aspect of priestly ministry is how a priest is able to form healthy friendships both within the presbyterate but also within the wider community, in order to help stave off some of the difficulties that come with solitude and loneliness at times. I know several of my classmates have particularly struggled with how they remain grounded in their humanity, in their expression of priestly identity. We weren't prepared for those in the seminary. I remember being told in terms of having friendships with people within the priesthood and the wider community, being told, "Well, a priest should never have friends who are members of the laity" or "A priest's only friends should be other priests." Which in my experience is not...that's neither healthy nor is it really beneficial for somebody. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *Okay, well in terms of what the seminarian provided in those particular areas, we would have occasional formation conferences where the topic would come up, normally once or twice a school year. It would just be the same talk about, well in the area of celibacy, just make sure that you're staying away from members of the opposite sex. They didn't address situations...I know from my other classmates, unfortunately, have had bad situations with in terms of members of the same gender or same sex. That was not even a topic that was addressed in the area. Then in terms of those formation conferences, they touched at least once on forming healthy boundaries and having sort of healthy emotional and psychosocial interaction with others. Those things were exceptional. I mean, they were done once or twice a year. Ongoing external formation, at least for me didn't come up in conversation. There was a reticence to engage that in the external forum. I think that some of the formators, that was more of a situation for the internal forum especially when there were some seminarians who were there at the seminary who were struggling with particular issues, with their own sexuality or with pornography, and those sorts of things. I mean in some cases, yes, that is wholly in the internal forum. But it also can affect the external forum as well. It needs to have a better, that was one of the things that was sort of missed in all this. Looking back at it now, just in terms of my own experience of ministry in the three years, there are situations where you're dealing with various individuals who may or may not be flirtatious, or seem flirtatious, or be flirtatious with you as a priest. For me the question was, well, how do I respond? I mean I was able to respond appropriately. But I thought, well, this is something that we should have covered in seminary. It should have been an area for the session. In terms of just dealing with...also sometimes the*

particular individuals who are coming to you with individual needs – sometimes and this has been my experience, when you have somebody who wants to be with a priest, either a walk-in or somebody who calls the office and asks to make an appointment – they’re sharing with you being in a situation of domestic abuse or various other situations, I means there’s the reality of transference there. There’s the reality of countertransference. There’s all sorts of psychological areas that enter into that setting. While the priest is not there as a counsellor, a more thorough coverage of maintaining a sense of your own identity in celibacy, your own identity in your ministry, is essential because it can be very easy to fall into the trap of wanting to either, sort of, be overly present to some of these people. There are trainings to deal with the difficulties that come when somebody has been wounded, and when an individual, especially somebody who’s in a position of trust, like a priest, is there. They open themselves up more and there can be, it can become a very tricky situation. That’s been my perspective on this. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Respondent: *With emotional stuff? So this is the thing, like, you know, the part of the issue was when the second priest that I mentioned came in as the second formator, he came in and he was head of all [Diocese] seminarians. He changed it where there were counselors and psychologists involved, and you can go see them, if that's helpful. But, you know, when you go see those people, you want it to be private, right? It should be private. But then he made it a condition if you going to see these people that you signed a form waiving your right to confidentiality, and that the formators can call the counselor and get anything that you've discussed. So, you know, if you go see those, you know, some of these people, it's like, well, you're not gonna feel very... you're not gonna—I mean, the person may be good, but like, you're not going to trust them because, you know, this person gets turned around and tells somebody something that, you know, like, that's not their business. And also a lot of, you know, the impression I had from a lot of these priests was, you know, these guys are in their twenties, a lot of these guys are in their twenties. It's the first time they've ever been away from home, they really need somebody to help them kind of deal with some of these things and figure out their sexuality or something. And it was just like, you know, a priest is going to be this and these things. And if you're not these things, then there's something wrong with you. And, you know, it's just... there, there was very little engagement with people on real issues and helping somebody grow as a person, rather than just trying to get somebody to grow to meet this completely subjective ideal of what a priest should be.* (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Evaluation of the Spiritual Formation and of Maintaining a Balanced Life

Similar to the discussion about celibacy above, six priests rated their seminary as effective in forming them to maintain a proper balance between one's ministerial, spiritual, and personal lives, with ten rating their seminaries as ineffective. This topic also touched upon their spiritual formation.

Effectively Taught and/or Modeled How to Maintain a Balanced Life

Six priests say their seminary was effective in teaching and/or modeling how to live a life balanced between one's ministry, spirituality, and personal lives. Religious priests are particularly likely to have been prepared in this area. Excerpts of some of the interviews of these priests appear below.

Interviewer: *Okay, what about the balance that one needs to have in light between your ministry, your personal life and your spiritual life post-ordination? Do you feel like the seminary was effective in preparing you to find that kind of a balance?*

Respondent: *Yeah, I think so. Yeah, again, I think it's another advantage of being a part of a religious community. The spiritual formation is so strongly emphasized and we're constantly receiving formation in our spiritual tradition, Ignatian spirituality. We're expected to make an eight-day annual retreat. We're expected to see a spiritual director monthly. All of those things are emphasized and expected of us in seminary and post-ordination. Yeah, there's a lot of emphasis on human formation and encouraging friendships. I would say the general environment of the seminary and the fact that in class and doing ministry with lay classmates, building friendship was encouraged, and celebrated and welcomed. It was always important to have guests in our communities. Yeah, I would say that was, like, emphasized in a good way alongside of the sort of theological and ministerial formation. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Some priests when they get out, have a hard time finding the right balance between their ministry, their personal life and their spiritual lives. Did you feel like your seminary prepared you well for being able to do that?*

Respondent: *Yeah we talked a lot about the need to take a day off. We talked a lot about the rhythm of prayer at the seminary which helps. I think it did, yeah. It's just a matter of me actually doing what I'm supposed to do. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Thinking of the balance that there is between your ministerial life, your personal life and your spiritual life. Do you feel like the seminary prepared you to find the right balance?*

Respondent: *I think so. I mean it's difficult for any academic institution to fully prepare you for the realities or demands of parochial work, simply because you can try to model it as best you can, but I mean they're different tasks. Especially for religious. We're in a contemplative religious order. But I think that there's a strong structure and routine of prayer, of wisdom, or worship and of personal prayer that I think basically is the structure which you rely on afterwards. In our case it's not like I think many dioceses and seminarians experience it as, like, we're in the seminary, we'll do this communal prayer and then I have to get ready to do this individually when I leave. For us it's very different. I mean what we're doing at the house is what we're intending to do our whole life. There's not that same of like, okay, let's just punch through or clock out in this. It's easier at the house because it's institutional and it's bigger, and you don't have competing parochial demands as much. I mean the basic structure is the same. (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest, responded to the survey in Spanish)*

Not Effectively Taught and/or Modeled How to Maintain a Balanced Life

Ten priests say their seminary was ineffective in teaching and/or modeling how to live a life balanced between one's ministry, spirituality, and personal lives. They are especially likely to mention the seminary not being structured in such a way that they lived balanced lives, the seminary not having the seminarian develop the self-discipline of a prayer life, or the seminary just superficially telling them to have a balanced life with no instruction on how to do so. Excerpts of some of the interviews of these priests appear below.

Interviewer: *How well did the seminary prepare you for having a balanced life between your ministry, your personal life and your spiritual life?*

Respondent: *Yeah. In formation they emphasized to us the importance of a day off. Even if most times we didn't get one as seminarians. Part of a reason for that is Saturday was really supposed to be our day off. But it didn't model what a day off would look like as a priest. As a priest our policy manual says that a priest is entitled to a day off once a week with the understanding that that should include an overnight, the evening before. Once he's finished his duties, he's free to go. That gives you a full 24 hours. Really, I mean with all that goes on, the academics and everything, it's hard, and the fact that we had a full day of apostolate – and they would often boast about being somewhat unique in that way – that we would spend a full day at the parish. The schedule really did kind of get tight. However, we had breaks that wouldn't really be*

present in a priest's life that were a bit more extended, and rector's weekends and things like that. There was a pattern there. They would put days of recollection in, right before we would leave for the break. Guys would groan and say, "Oh come on, just let us go." (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *Thinking about what the right balance is between your ministerial life, your personal life and your spiritual life, do you feel like the seminary prepared, gave you the tools to maintain the right balance?*

Respondent: *That is a tough one. No, I have to say no. I was pretty much left on my own for that one. They mentioned that we would just strike a balance, but not specifically how to strike that balance. It was just put your nose to the grindstone and just keep working until you drop, kind of thing. I did. After my first year I had to take a leave of absence because I was so completely overwhelmed. I was considering leaving the priesthood and the order. I had to go away for a couple of months to pull myself together. I had very little help, that's for sure. (Religious priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Is that something that you're referring to that your seminary didn't prepare you well to keep that balance?*

Respondent: *I think they tried to, particularly when it comes to spiritual direction and things like that, to make sure that we were set. But I don't think they were realistic in the other demands that are put on you, or the pull on you, so that when it comes time to...it's the end of the day, that's the time that you're scheduled for spiritual direction because of your own personal growth. Then the diocese is going to not be okay when you say, "I can't do that." Like there wasn't enough conversation about that.*

Interviewer: *Is it that need to be able to being comfortable saying no to things in some ways?*

Respondent: *Correct. Then, then, next it's having the higher ups be okay with that because you are trying to care for your spiritual nature. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Interviewer: *Did your seminary prepare you for having a life balanced between your ministry, your personal life and your spiritual life?*

Respondent: *No, I didn't find that they did. They certainly encouraged all priests to make time for the Holy Hour and time for prayer, but in terms of how we balance that with the other realities in priestly life, the ministerial aspect and all the other dimensions, other personal dimensions, they just sort of said, "Well, you just need to make time for them." Sometimes you have to help mentor people or present them with opportunities to learn those skills of balancing things within the seminary setting.*

Interviewer: *Would that involve learning how to say no to certain things and not feeling guilty for saying no, like you feel like you need to be available but sometimes you need to say no and set some of those boundaries? That was suggested by another interviewee.*

Respondent: *Yes, yeah. That's exactly what I'm talking about. Learning how to say no. I mean sometimes there are situations where I have had to say, "Okay, well I'm going to interrupt my prayer for the moment here because there's a more pressing reality that needs to be taken care of." If I stayed there in my Holy Hour, it would magnify the difficulties both for the faithful and for myself. I mean I have faced a number of difficulties at parishes with utilities, emergencies. Those cases, yes, yeah, you have to step away. Yeah. Those are some things, that learning how to say no and learning how to discern which things were essential, which things were not essential are, they could be better covered. In relationship especially to the spiritual and the personal dimension, I know that they could have covered the importance of just basic human realities like physical exercise and those sorts of human realities, and balancing that with prayer. Because I know that's one area where I have struggled at times. We're prioritizing prayer, but then recognizing, and it took me a while to recognize, no I need to be aware of the physical reality of who I am as well. Balancing those sorts of things is very important. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *I think there was enough, you know, balance there. There's gotta be a challenge academically, there has to be a challenge. There was a good balance with that. Now I think, you know, when you get—I think one of our—let's put it this way though. I think there was a balance, but I think it was a more of an imposed balance. It felt like, you know, the seminary felt like being in the military. So, I talked to a lot of guys who went to like prep schools for the Military Academy. And it felt like being at one of those places where, you know, you're 17, 18 years old and, you know, you need somebody to kind of structure your life and tell you what to do all day. And then, so it was like they're taking at the seminary, you have all these requirements. You have to come to this, you have to come to this, you have to come to this, you have to come to this. And there's somebody taking attendance all the time. Well, you know, what that*

does is, you've never developed any habits and practices on your own. And, you know, you need to be doing these things because—prayer, for one thing, you need to be doing that because you want to do it, not because you have to do it. And if you're going to be a priest and you don't go to Mass cause you want to go to Mass, well, that's probably not the right life for you then. So while I think there ended up being enough balance, I think there needs to be more, you know, latitude for self-direction on some of these things because then people can kind of identify, right? (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Evaluations of the Intellectual Dimension of Formation

How effective the intellectual formation was at their seminary was not a question directly asked. Instead, the subject came up when responding to other questions, most commonly when asked how they would characterize their seminary preparation overall. Four cited the intellectual formation or the academics at their seminary as generally good and three gave examples of how it could be improved.

Effective Intellectual Formation

Respondent: *I think some of the greatest strengths would be the academic preparation. I mean, of course, when a man enters seminary he's there for six to eight years. Most of those time is spent during the academic year taking classes. I would say at both seminaries I went to, my academic formation was great. I mean, of course, there were some courses as is life that were drier than others from that I thought just like I thought in high school algebra class like I'm never gonna use this in ministry. Some classes where I would go to the class no matter how I was feeling, if I was sick, if I didn't feel good because I didn't want to miss anything that was gonna be of great value to me regardless of who is gonna share notes with me. I think one very positive aspect would have been academic formation.¹³ [...] Yeah, well I thought one of the great aspects of our seminary is that we attended a graduate school of theology where there were a number of lay students and religious women as well. It was not closed off at all but we were in class and engaged in ministry with lay men and women which is what we are gonna be doing for the rest of our lives. I felt like we were getting really good preparation for that during the seminary. Also, even though there was an intellectual rigor in the classes, a lot of them had a really strong pastoral focus, so we would be asked to work on projects or write papers that kind of like reflected on some of the pastoral implications of what we were studying, in terms of whether it's sacramental*

¹³ This quote appeared in an earlier part of this subsection as well.

theology or church history or scripture. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)

Interviewer: *Would you say overall that it was a positive experience, a negative experience or more of a mixed experience?*

Respondent: *I would call it a positive experience in preparing for the call. Just thinking about the seminary and the resources that were available to me. I think that I utilized a lot of those resources that were available. They were very, very accommodating with everything I needed. I thought the academics were sound. Thought the apostolate, you know like the assignments where you go out to do something at a certain point each week, I thought that was excellent. I got a lot of great experience with those, what they call, apostolate works. The community was a small one so you got to know pretty much everybody. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Intellectual Formation Could be Improved

Respondent: *That's okay. I think the seminaries' intellectual formation could have been better in the sense of, I think, it got bogged down in a lot of details sometimes. There's a lot of basic theology that we didn't get into. It's kind of hard to explain, but I think, to put my finger on it exactly, just the basic theology and history of the Church could have been better. We could have been better prepared, better formed in all that.*

Interviewer: *Do those kinds of topics come up because of conversations with parishioners or questions they ask? Does it come up when you're thinking about your ministry, you wish you had more of a background to understand it yourself?*

Respondent: *I think it's both. It's both. I mean for example the other day, or actually today, I was talking to one of my staff members about the restored order of the sacraments. I'm not familiar with that, but it's basically a restorative written order of sacraments which was Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion. Now we have it for First Communion then Confirmation. We were talking about the history of that. Just certain basic history and some theological questions, liturgical questions and things like that. I think I've answered a lot, but there's a lot more I should know about for myself and for ministry. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Desired Relationship with the Seminary after Ordination

Finally, interviewees were asked about what role they would like their seminary to play in their lives after ordination. Most report that they hear some from their seminary at present and that level of contact is sufficient. Fewer wish they had more of a relationship. Samples of each type of comment are presented below.

Currently Have an Appropriate Amount of Contact with their Seminary

Interviewer: *Has anyone from the seminary ever contacted you? Are you looking for that kind of follow up with the seminary.*

Respondent: *Sure. It has actually. I had relationships with most of my faculty and I have maintained relationships with a couple of them. I've reached out for answers on different things to a couple of faculty members. I think that's been good. There's partly just kind of a culture at [Seminary Name]. There wasn't like a very hierarchical sense of, like, the faculty are way up here and we're down here. There was more of a...I mean there was some of that. But there were also friendships developed, closeness develops over time. Especially towards the end, third, fourth theology. It was more like a peer kind of relationship. I've had a good experience with my former formators after ordination. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *There are three priests who I can say either I am comfortable reaching out to them or I have. I mean [Person's Name] who taught in law and my seminary. We've been in touch. He reaches out. He discusses how things are going with me occasionally as things related to specific questions about how we interpret things. But that's been a good, healthy interaction. Another of the formators, my external formator, well my final external formator, I've been hearing from him occasionally. I never took any classes with him so I haven't reached out on that end. But in terms of just some practical questions, yeah, we've been in touch. Then there's one other one that I do feel comfortable enough to keep in touch with. It's just he has decided to go into monastic life. He's hard to get a hold of but that's another of the professors that I would, or not priests who I would reach out to. I haven't heard from them. But beyond that, a lot of the other professors I just wouldn't feel comfortable or, well either come to them or I'd be kind of surprised if some of them contacted me. But that's just the way things go. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *Yeah, that kind of thing is an interesting idea. I'm not a very good idea person. Especially when it comes to this kind of like electronic stuff. I get emails regularly from them and they have online resources and multimedia stuff like that. But I just sort of delete. I don't go into a lot of that stuff, but I think I got enough to go through. That's nice, I'm glad they're sending the email. They may be providing that, and I'm just like an idiot deleting it. But yeah, those are good ideas, like sort of, I guess you call it, like, a alumni kind of connection type of forum, or something like that. Dealing specifically with the challenges and all that. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Priests Wishing They Had More Contact with their Seminary after being Ordained

Interviewer: *Okay. Well great. Thinking about the last three years, is there a way that your seminary could have supported you post ordination that it hasn't been? Is there a better way that they could have done it better than they have?*

Respondent: *Yeah, I mean there's really from the seminary, there's really nothing that they have for us after ordination. Other than alumni day. We can go back to alumni day. But once we're ordained, you're like its kind of like see you later. Maybe some materials we can read or some sort of contact from them once a year or so would be nice. (Diocesan priest, in his 30s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, unsure if he plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *In general, I got the feeling it was "Okay you are done with the seminary. Now go find what's going to get you through in priesthood." Like my spiritual director dropped me like a fly. There was a little, there was too much to handle. It was too much to think about in the first year. Like the administration director at that point for every three years that switched to the seminary. As soon as I was ordained, not be able to carry through with somebody. You've got to relearn everything and that's not the time to be relearning it, rebuild that trust. (Diocesan priest, in his 40s, satisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)*

Respondent: *But the seminary, technically I did graduate from [Seminary Name] after pre-theology. I got a degree in philosophy. But then my major seminary was the [Seminary Name] where I got my other degree, my theology degree. Well, I never got a dang letter in the mail from [Seminary Name] throughout my entire time at the [Seminary Name]. Less than six months after being ordained a priest, I'm getting letters from [Seminary Name] but asking for donations as an alumnus. Give me a break. I*

mean but to be fair the same is true with the [Seminary Name]. I spent my first year as a priest at the [Seminary Name], getting my license degree. That fifth year there, there was a program for priests, the mentoring program. There was a priest that was assigned my mentor. We went out for coffee a few times, talked about my thesis, talked about what it's like to be a newly ordained priest, but to be living in a seminary. That was good but since coming home the only time I've really been reached out to by anybody from the [Seminary Name] is for money, or when I reached out to them first. For example, we had two seminarians at my parish this summer, from the [Seminary Name]. We had four seminarians in total. Two from [Seminary Name] and two from the [Seminary Name]. I emailed the rector of the [Seminary Name] telling him so and such came up in conversation the other day. I just wanted to reach out to you, let you know I'm praying for you for the men, et cetera. We have these guys for the summer. They're great so thank you for the work that you're doing. I got an email back from him. Oh [Person's Name] it's always great to hear from you. Please keep alma mater in your prayers. Tell them that I said hi. It shouldn't take me reaching out. I do get that the rector of the seminary is appointed rector of the seminary. He's not rector of alumni relations. But seminaries should do more to have a director of alumni relations where they do more than just ask for money, but actually check in on the guys. They need to do a study like hey, you've been ordained for five years now, what is something that you didn't get from our formation program that you wish we had given you? How do you see us being able to implement it into the program of formation for the current men? That doesn't exist. My pastor and I joke about it all the time, everywhere else in the world the self-evaluations, peer evaluation. Once you're ordained a priest, it's like nobody thinks to ask like hey, let's ask our recent grads what we did or didn't do that prepared them for this ministry. But instead, hey, we're having our capital campaign. You're an alumnus, please donate. (Religious priest, in his 30s, dissatisfied overall with his priesthood, plans to remain a priest)

Correlations between Seminary Preparation and Satisfaction with Priestly Life

No correlations emerged between how much the priests interviewed enjoyed their seminary overall and how satisfied they are in their priesthood. Similarly, no strong correlations are apparent between an interviewee's positive or negative assessment of any aspect of seminary life and his satisfaction with his priestly life.

Appendix I: Response Frequencies to All Questions



SURVEY OF RECENTLY ORDAINED PRIESTS
 A STUDY BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS
 IN COLLABORATION WITH
 CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE APOSTOLATE



DIRECTIONS: Your responses are very important to us! Please be assured that all survey information will be completely anonymous and confidential. Results are reported only in aggregate, statistical form. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. **If you do not know the answer to a question or it does not pertain to you, please leave it blank.**

There were 1,012 respondents to the online survey, 988 in English and 24 in Spanish. Unless otherwise identified, the percentage giving each response, calculated out of 100 percent, is shown below. The percentage not responding (NR) is shown separately, also calculated out of 100 percent.

YOUR CURRENT MINISTRY

1. I am a: 76 1. Diocesan priest 24 2. Religious priest **NR=0**
2. Year you were ordained _____. **Avg=2017; NR=1**
3. *Please describe your primary and secondary ministries.*
(Check one box corresponding to your primary ministry in column one. If you are also engaged at least part time in another ministry, check the box(es) corresponding to it in column two.) **NR=2**

| | <u>Your Primary</u> <u>Ministry</u> | <u>Your Secondary</u> <u>Ministry</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| a. Parochial vicar | 52 | 5 |
| b. Pastor with a parochial vicar | 7 | 1 |
| c. Pastor without a parochial vicar | 17 | <1 |
| d. Diocesan administration | 4 | 4 |
| e. Other (describe:)_____. | 23 | 18 |

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life as a priest? **NR=1**
- 13 1. Very dissatisfied 22 3. Somewhat satisfied
- 6 2. Somewhat dissatisfied 59 4. Very satisfied

5. In what areas are you *most* satisfied in your life as a priest? *[Please note: Any identifying information (such as your parish or bishop's name) will be omitted in any published findings.]*
NR=4

6. In what areas are you *least* satisfied in your life as a priest? **NR=9**

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=Not Satisfied

3=Somewhat Satisfied

2=A Little Satisfied

4=Very Satisfied

Blank=Don't Know or Not Applicable

*How **satisfied** are you in the following areas?*

1 2 3 4 NR

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 12 14 31 43 5 | 7. The support you receive from your bishop |
| 10 15 34 41 5 | 8. Your relationship(s) with your immediate superiors or pastors |
| 2 7 28 63 1 | 9. The respect you receive as a member of the clergy from lay persons |
| 34 27 29 11 4 | 10. Your training in administrative areas like budgeting and managing staff |
| 7 18 43 33 1 | 11. Finding enough time to attend to your spirituality and prayer life |
| 11 21 47 21 1 | 12. Finding the right balance between your work, personal, and spiritual life |
| 5 9 26 60 3 | 13. Your present financial situation |
| 5 10 29 56 1 | 14. Your present living situation |
| 7 16 39 38 1 | 15. Having enough time to have meaningful relationships with your family |
| 8 19 41 32 1 | 16. Having enough time to have meaningful relationships with your friends |

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=This is not available to me

2=This is available but I have not participated

3=This is available and I have participated somewhat

4=This is available and I have regularly participated

Please indicate whether the following are available to you and your level of participation in each:

1 2 3 4 NR

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 19 16 28 37 2 | 17. Priest support groups |
| 37 21 23 20 3 | 18. Priest prayer groups |
| 16 8 26 50 4 | 19. Regular deanery/vicariate meetings |
| 16 13 31 41 5 | 20. Diocesan on-going formation |
| 46 9 20 25 3 | 21. A priest mentor program for newly ordained priests |
| 10 11 25 53 2 | 22. Spiritual direction for priests |
| 2 9 21 69 1 | 23. Retreats |

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=Not a Problem 3=Somewhat of a Problem
2=A Little Problem 4=Very Much a Problem
Blank=Don't Know or Not Applicable

*Many problems confront priests today. How much of a **problem** are the following to you on a day-to-day basis?*

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | NR | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 69 | 16 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 24. Lack of a clear idea of what a priest is |
| 34 | 27 | 22 | 17 | 7 | 25. Not feeling you have input into the decision-making process at the diocesan level |
| 23 | 33 | 25 | 20 | 2 | 26. Theological differences among your fellow priests in their concept of the priesthood |
| 26 | 27 | 27 | 20 | 4 | 27. Differences among different age cohorts of priests in your diocese |
| 58 | 19 | 13 | 10 | 8 | 28. Differences among priests with different sexual orientations in your diocese |
| 41 | 27 | 20 | 12 | 3 | 29. Having been assigned too many ministries and duties |
| 63 | 13 | 14 | 10 | 14 | 30. Ministering at more than one parish |
| 39 | 32 | 19 | 10 | 5 | 31. Being so busy that you cannot meet the pastoral needs of those you serve |
| 91 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 32. Not feeling comfortable ministering to women |
| 52 | 34 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 33. Conflicts with parishioners or other lay persons |
| 38 | 33 | 20 | 9 | 3 | 34. Unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people |
| 40 | 34 | 18 | 8 | 2 | 35. Loneliness of priestly life |
| 47 | 35 | 14 | 4 | 2 | 36. Living a life of celibacy/chastity |
| 60 | 29 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 37. Resolving any personal psychosexual issues |
| 42 | 29 | 19 | 10 | 4 | 38. Finding as much fraternal support as you would like among your fellow priests in the diocese |
| 79 | 14 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 39. Being expected to represent Church teachings you have difficulty with |

YOUR SEMINARY PREPARATION

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=This was not offered in my seminary
2=This was offered but I did not participate in it
3=This was offered, I participated in it, and it was not helpful
4=This was offered, I participated in it, and it helped me somewhat
5=This was offered, I participated in it, and it helped me a great deal

Please indicate whether the following were offered in your seminary and your experience with each:

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | NR | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 34 | 8 | 6 | 25 | 27 | 10 | 40. Mentoring during your pastoral year |
| 12 | 32 | 6 | 24 | 27 | 4 | 41. Counseling with a psychologist |
| 24 | 15 | 5 | 34 | 22 | 4 | 42. Prayer groups/Prayer teams |
| 50 | 9 | 5 | 20 | 15 | 5 | 43. Peer accountability partnering |
| 62 | 19 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 44. Chastity support group |
| 24 | 3 | 11 | 37 | 25 | 4 | 45. Formation in chaste celibacy program |
| 45 | 4 | 1 | 14 | 36 | 3 | 46. 8-day spiritual exercises |
| 74 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 4 | 47. 30-day spiritual exercises |
| 44 | 26 | 4 | 8 | 18 | 6 | 48. Summer programs of formation at the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) |
| 40 | 17 | 3 | 11 | 29 | 6 | 49. Pastoral Year Internship |
| 77 | 8 | <1 | 3 | 12 | 8 | 50. Propaedeutic or Spiritual Year |

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=My seminary did not prepare me in this area
2=It prepared me a little
3=It prepared me somewhat
4=It prepared me well

*In light of your current experiences, how well did your seminary **prepare** you in the following areas?*

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | NR | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 2 | 7 | 27 | 64 | 2 | 51. Preaching |
| 2 | 14 | 29 | 55 | 2 | 52. Confessions |
| 2 | 9 | 21 | 69 | 2 | 53. Presiding at Mass |
| 4 | 22 | 38 | 36 | 2 | 54. Pastoral counseling |
| 6 | 21 | 33 | 40 | 2 | 55. Presiding at funerals |
| 11 | 17 | 30 | 43 | 2 | 56. Hospital ministry |
| 19 | 25 | 27 | 30 | 6 | 57. Language skills needed pastorally in your diocese |
| 14 | 26 | 32 | 28 | 5 | 58. Pastoral skills for serving the diverse cultures present in your diocese |
| 22 | 32 | 30 | 16 | 2 | 59. Human resource skills such as communication and conflict management |
| 22 | 32 | 30 | 16 | 3 | 60. Collaborative skills such as building consensus |
| 26 | 29 | 29 | 16 | 2 | 61. Leadership skills such as motivating people |
| 41 | 36 | 18 | 6 | 3 | 62. Administrative skills such as budgeting and investing |
| 15 | 29 | 32 | 24 | 2 | 63. Personal skills such as time management and handling stress |

Please use these responses for the questions below.

1=Strongly Disagree

3=Agree

2=Disagree

4=Strongly Agree

Blank=Don't Know or Not Applicable

A number of criticisms have been made about seminary training. Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your seminary experience?

- 1 2 3 4 NR**
- 23 43 24 9 3 64. My preparation for ordination was too theoretically oriented
- 6 21 51 22 3 65. My formation during seminary provided me with a realistic understanding of the demands that would be made on me in priestly ministry
- 7 24 52 17 3 66. My formation during seminary prepared me to handle the stresses and realities of pastoral ministry
- 6 17 51 26 3 67. My formation during seminary prepared me to handle my own emotional life in relation to celibacy
- 18 16 38 28 3 68. The seminary formation team successfully created an atmosphere of trust in the seminary which allowed me to be honest with my formators
- 35 43 18 5 5 69. I was able to go through seminary formation and conceal realities about myself that I should have made known to my formators in the external forum
- 17 45 28 10 3 70. Too many topics in my seminary courses were superficially presented
- 22 51 20 8 3 71. Many seminary courses were irrelevant to modern pastoral needs
- 15 44 31 10 3 72. Too little attention was given to helping seminarians learn how to deal with people in pastoral situations
- 30 44 18 9 4 73. The seminary was too sheltered from the mainstream of life, both intellectually and socially
- 10 23 48 19 3 74. During seminary, I had sufficient connection to parish life
- 7 23 52 18 7 75. The level of support my seminary offers is adequate for my present needs
- 10 18 42 30 5 76. If offered, I would participate in online discussions with my seminary's faculty, formators, and alumni about the challenges we face as priests in our initial years as newly ordained priests

77. In what areas do you feel your seminary *best* prepared you? *(Please note: Any identifying information (such as your seminary's name) will be omitted in any published findings.)*
NR=11

78. In what areas do you feel your seminary *least* prepared you?
NR=13

YOUR SATISFACTION WITH THE PRIESTHOOD

79. If you had your choice again, would you enter the priesthood? **NR=4**

- 1 1. Definitely not 16 3. Probably yes
4 2. Probably not 80 4. Definitely yes

80. Which of the following most clearly reflects your feelings about your future in the priesthood? **NR=4**

- 1 1. I probably will leave
5 2. I am uncertain about my future
18 3. I probably will not leave
76 4. I definitely will not leave

81. If you have ever thought about leaving the priesthood, what were the primary reasons?
(Please note: Any identifying information (such as your diocese's name) will be omitted in any published findings.) NR=39

82. Do you personally know someone who has left active ministry / priesthood within five years of their ordination? **NR=4**

79 1. Yes 21 2. No *[If no, skip to Question 83.]*

82a. *If yes to #82*, did this person(s) tell you why he was leaving? **NR=24**

39 1. Yes 61 2. No

82b. *If yes to #82a*, what was / were the reason(s) given?

Please select up to three primary reasons.

- 11 1. Loneliness
12 2. Disillusionment with the actual life of ministry
10 3. Longing for a romantic partner
11 4. Meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or to marry
2 5. Same-sex attraction
3 6. Lack of emotional intimacy
7 7. Discouragement
3 8. Lack of connection to the diocesan presbyterate
5 9. Sexual acting out
2 10. Emotionally dependent relationships
1 11. Porn addiction
7 12. OTHER (please write in box below):

82c. *If no to #82a*, what do you suspect was / were the reason(s)?

Please select up to three primary reasons.

- 18 1. Loneliness
22 2. Disillusionment with the actual life of ministry
15 3. Longing for a romantic partner
16 4. Meeting someone he would like to be his romantic partner or to marry
4 5. Same-sex attraction
6 6. Lack of emotional intimacy
11 7. Discouragement
6 8. Lack of connection to the diocesan presbyterate
7 9. Sexual acting out
3 10. Emotionally dependent relationships
3 11. Porn addiction
2 12. OTHER (please write in box below):

83. In your opinion, how much have the recent media stories of sexual misconduct by Catholic priests hindered your effectiveness in ministry? **NR=14**
<1 1. Don't know 64 3. Hindered slightly
22 2. Had no effect 14 4. Hindered greatly

ABOUT YOU

84. In what year were you born? _____

AVG=1982 NR=4

85. In which country were you born? **NR=4**

_____.

86. What best describes your racial or ethnic background? **Please select only one. NR=5**

- 4 1. African American, African, or black
8 2. Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Middle Eastern
74 3. Caucasian, European American, Anglo, or white
12 4. Hispanic or Latino
0 5. Native American or Alaska Native
2 6. More than one race or ethnicity:

_____.

1 7. Other: _____.

87. Was the major seminary (theologate) in which you were enrolled prior to ordination located in the United States? **NR=4**

82 1. Yes 18 2. No

88. What was the highest level of education you completed before you entered the seminary?

- 18 1. High school diploma **NR=4**
13 2. Some college credits
3 3. Technical college or Associate degree
47 4. Bachelor's degree
15 5. Master's degree
5 6. Doctoral degree

89. Did you earn any degrees after ordination to the priesthood? **NR=4**

25 1. Yes 75 2. No

If yes, please identify the type and field of study:

a. Master's or Licentiate. Field of study:

b. Doctorate. Field of study:

90. Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone interview with a researcher about the challenges facing recently ordained priests?

52 1. Yes 48 2. No **NR=4**

If yes to #90, please provide your contact information: (The information you provide will be used for this purpose only)

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

If you have completed a paper version of this survey, please either:

(1) Mail it to:

CARA

2300 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Suite 400A
Washington, DC 20007

(2) Scan it and email it to CARA at
cara@georgetown.edu

(3) Fax it to CARA at 202-687-8083

**CARA/Center for Applied Research in the
Apostolate at Georgetown University
2300 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 400A
Washington, DC 20007
Phone: 202-687-8080 Fax: 202-687-8083
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Appendix II: Interview Protocol and Schedule

Protocol for Interviews with Recently Ordained Priests

Phone Interviews of Priests; Beginning Wednesday, June 28, 2020

Interviewees

In 2018, the National Association of Catholic Theological Schools (NACTS) commissioned CARA to study the factors that may contribute to discouragement among recently ordained priests and how seminaries might better prepare them for their ministry. A survey was conducted in 2020 that contained a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questions regarding their experiences of their seminaries and their experiences as ordained priests.

Two survey questions of special note are how well their seminary prepared them for their priestly life and how likely they are to leave the priesthood in the future. In addition, the priests were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Using those three questions as guideposts, 14 interview volunteers were chosen who represent the spectrum of experiences: from those satisfied with both their seminary experience and priestly life to those dissatisfied with both.

Research Objectives

- Gather information about how their seminaries prepared and did not prepare them well for their priestly life and ministry.
 - In what areas did your seminary prepare you well? Not prepare you well?
 - What surprised you most about your life and ministry post-ordination?
 - How could your seminary have prepared you better?
 - What advice do you have for seminary rectors and/or formators based on your experiences?
- Gather information about their experience of the priestly life and ministry since their ordinations in the last ten years.
 - What about priestly life do you most enjoy? What do you least enjoy?
 - What do you wish you had known going in to your first assignment that you did not?
 - What was/is your experience with the initial mentor and/or immediate superior you were paired with?
 - Where have you found support? Where is support lacking?
 - How well has your diocese or religious order supported you post-ordination?
 - How much support have you found among your fellow priests?
 - How could your seminary best support you post-ordination?
 - What advice do you have for bishops and diocesan staff based on your experiences? For religious superiors?

Timeline

| Topic | Time (in minutes) |
|--|-------------------|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Feedback about how well your seminary prepared you | 23 |
| Your experience of priestly life and ministry | 20 |
| Closing | 2 |
| Total | 50 |

Introduction (5 minutes)

Moderator

- Introduction of interviewer, NACTS, and CARA
- **Explanation of the purpose of the discussion:**
 - To gather information to help seminaries better prepare men for their lives and ministries post-ordination
 - To gather information to help dioceses and religious congregations to better support recently ordained priests
 - Explain that all identifying information will be masked in any reports that result from the interviews
 - Obtain their consent for the interview
- **Structure of the Session:** The interviewer will be asking about:
 - Your experiences in the seminary in light of your life post-ordination
 - Your experience of priestly life and ministry
- **Interviewee Introductions – some of which will not be included in transcript**
 - Major seminary attended
 - Length of time since ordination
 - Current ministry/ministries

Feedback about How Well Your Seminary Prepared You (23 minutes)

- How would you characterize your overall seminary experience? Was it a positive experience, a negative experience, or a mixture of positive and negative? *Examples.*
 - Did the seminary create an atmosphere of trust where you felt you could be honest with your formators? *Examples.*
 - Do you feel you left with a realistic understanding of the demands of priestly ministry? Of priestly life? *Examples.*
 - Did you have enough experience of pastoral life or your future first assignment that you felt prepared for it? *Examples.*
 - In what ways were you mentored during your pastoral year? *Examples.*
 - What kinds of challenges did you find in your initial assignments that you weren't expecting? *Examples.*

- How well did your seminary prepare you in the following areas?
 - Living a celibacy and chaste life?
 - Your emotional life in relation to celibacy? *Examples.*
 - How to tolerate periods of loneliness? *Examples.*
 - Finding the right balance between your ministerial, personal, and spiritual lives? *Examples.*
 - Finding the support necessary in your priestly life? *Examples.*
 - Handling difficult pastors/immediate supervisors? *Examples.*
 - Human resource skills such as communication and conflict management? *Examples.*
 - Collaborative skills such as building consensus? *Examples.*
 - Administrative skills such as budgeting and investing? *Examples.*
 - Interacting with lay persons who are parish leaders/staff? *Examples.*
 - Handling the demands/expectations of lay persons? *Examples.*
- Given your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, what recommendations do you have for seminary formation? *Examples.*

Your Experience of Priestly Life and Ministry (20 minutes)

- How much support do you receive from your bishop (or your major superior)? *Examples.*
 - From your diocesan staff (or provincial staff)? *Examples.*
 - From your first immediate supervisor or pastor? *Examples.*
 - From your current immediate supervisor or pastor? *Examples.*
 - From the priests in your deanery/area? *Examples.*
 - From your fellow recently ordained priests? *Examples.*
- How well has your diocese or religious institute supported you during the Covid-19 pandemic? *Examples.*
- What gives you satisfaction in your priestly life and/or ministry? *Examples.*
- What frustrates you in your priestly life and ministry? *Examples.*
- How can/could your seminary have better supported you after your ordination? *Examples.*
- What could your diocese do to make it less stressful for recently ordained priests? *Examples.*
- What does your future likely hold in terms of you remaining a priest? *Examples.*

Closing (2 minutes)

Were there topics you wish had been brought up that didn't arise during this session?
Thank you!!!

