





Towards the Altar: An In-depth Exploration of Seminarians' Aspiration Towards Priestly Vocation

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Abstract

The seminary formation of Catholic aspirants to the priesthood is a complex journey that involves careful discernment of personal aspiration and motivation. Specific formation programs were designed and formulated to abet them in their vocation discernment. This study examines different motives that keep Propaedeutic seminarians in their initial formation phase. It is a case study investigating the other areas of seminary structure and personal motivation that impelled them to pursue seminary formation. The primary data for this study was obtained from the Holy Infant Seminary of the Diocese of Pagadian, a diocese in Zamboanga del Sur in the western hemisphere of Mindanao, Philippines. Employing the case study technique, the researchers conducted direct interviews with fourteen propaedeutic seminarians to evaluate and examine their motivation. The study's findings show three significant themes which help them cope with the demands of priestly formation: seminary activities or programs, strategies to nurture vocation, and personal motivation factors.

Keywords: *Aspiration; Discernment; Motivation; Propaedeutic Seminarians; Vocation*



INTRODUCTION

Seminary formation is fundamentally regarded as the church's program bracing the aspirants with competence before being dispensed with ministerial duties (John Paul II, 1992). At the core of seminary formation is the goal of forming them to become more like Christ; it is a path of endless configuration to Christ (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017). To attain such a general objective, seminary program itineraries are crafted reckoning the integral formation of the aspirants: spiritual, academic, pastoral, and human. With the advent of the new ratio for priestly formation, more emphasis is given to human formation, which is the locus and contextual paradigm of the aspirants' motivation and intent. Seminarians' motivation is a focal point for bringing into the possibility the seminal and potential effects of seminary formation programs (Porter et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023); without their cooperation, seminary formation programs seemingly become mere codes of conduct that one can partially opt for and integrate.

The decision to pursue a priestly vocation is a complex process that requires conscientious discernment and prudent reflection on the part of the aspirants (Kelly, 2016; Weiss et al., 2003). These complexities spring from the multifaceted process imbibed by seminary formation to equip the seminarians with the necessary preparations for their vocation discernment and future ministerial duties. Such a process weaves together intellectual, spiritual, human, pastoral, and moral aspects of human development. It equips seminarians with a theological foundation, fosters a deep prayer life, hones their character and interpersonal skills, provides practical pastoral training, and forms them in the three evangelical counsels: perpetual continence, poverty, and obedience (John Paul II, 1993).

Beyond these complexities, seminarians also recognize that the path of formation bears challenges that could impede them from

pursuing the priesthood. Propaedeutic seminarians speak of six challenges they grapple with in their seminary journey. They include grappling with diverse attitudes among fellow seminarians, navigating periods of spiritual dryness and financial constraints, adapting to the structure of the seminary, striving for elevated academic performance, and contending with personal desires. These challenges necessitate resilience, perseverance, and a dedication to spiritual, intellectual, and personal discipline development. Overcoming these challenges demands a careful and resolute desire to pursue the priesthood. Hence, for many priests, their desire to become a priest is the fruit of having a profound sense of purpose and the ardent desire to offer themselves in a life of service to others and the church (Brannen, 2010; Perrin, 2021).

Considering the challenges faced by propaedeutic seminarians, it is crucial for seminary formation to instill in them the essential values that will aid in their vocation discernment and prepare them for the demands of their future ministry, particularly in multicultural contexts. As stated in the *Optatam Totius* (Paul IV, 1965), seminary formation must imbue seminarians with the necessary values to aid them in their vocation discernment and prepare them for the demands of their future ministry in multicultural contexts. Hence, seminary formation should equip seminarians with the necessary tools to navigate the diverse attitudes, spiritual dryness, financial constraints, adaptation to the seminary structure, academic excellence, and personal desires they may encounter. By nurturing these values, seminary formation ensures that future priests are well-prepared to serve and minister effectively in a multicultural world. Seminary formators must then be men of great courage and wholehearted commitment to accompany and guide seminarians in their vocation discernment (Francis, 2022).

This study primarily explores how propaedeutic seminarians describe their aspiration to a priestly vocation through the seminary formation process. It also explores the various factors that bolster their aspiration and motivation and how they nurture their motivation and aspiration to the priesthood. Vocation discernment holds a paradigmatic aspect of seminary formation. Seminarians are called to respond authentically to its demands, which helps them clarify their motivation and continue aspiring to the sacred and divine calling toward the altar.

METHOD

Research Design

This research study embraces a qualitative approach, specifically employing the transcendental phenomenology by Moustakas (1994). The selection of this research design is based on its ability to effectively explore and reveal the complex nature of the life experiences of seminary aspirants especially how they describe their aspiration to priestly vocation.

Research Environment

The primary data was obtained from the Holy Infant Seminary of the Diocese of Pagadian, a diocese in Zamboanga del Sur in the western hemisphere of Mindanao, Philippines. By selecting the Holy Infant Seminary as the primary source of data, this research study focuses on a specific context within the broader landscape of seminary formation. This localized approach allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of seminary aspirants within the unique cultural and religious context of the Diocese of Pagadian.

Research Participants

The research study received a response from a group of fourteen propaedeutic seminarians, whose ages range from 18 to 23 years old. These participants are still in the initial stages of their priestly formation, undergoing a preparatory year before beginning their formal college formation. Coming from different parishes within the local Church of Pagadian, they represent a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers first sought permission from the priest formators to conduct interviews with the seminarians, especially the rector. Given the rector's approval, the researchers gave the consent letter to the participants to prove their voluntary participation. Researchers explained the questions and the purposes of the study and ensured the confidentiality and privacy of the research participants. The researchers also asked the participants' permission to have them audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Employing the data analysis of Moustakas (1994), the researchers made up a data summary and categorised them into different general themes. First, they transcribed the audio-recorded interview and summarised the data. Then, they created themes quintessential to the experience and testimonies of the research participants. The researchers also interviewed the seminary formators to verify the data provided by the research participants.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers adhered to the ethical principles in conducting a study by obtaining informed consent from the participants and their rector. In like manner, the research participants voluntarily consented

to engage in the research process and were guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality of their personal data to avoid future misuse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews conducted with aspirants centred on their seminary experiences, revealing three overarching themes: seminary activities and programs, strategies for nurturing vocation, and personal motivation factors. The first theme highlighted the significance of spiritual practices, sports, socialization, and routines in fostering their vocational aspirations. The second theme elucidated their methods for sustaining motivation, including vocation discernment practices, seeking guidance from experienced priests, and countering boredom through engaging activities. Lastly, the third theme underscored the importance of community support, particularly from families and observing dedicated priests, in shaping their zeal for service and commitment to pursuing the priesthood. These insights together provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate factors influencing their journey towards priesthood.

Seminary Activities and Programs

The first general factor that emerged was the seminary schedules and programs. Seminary activities and programs play a crucial role in shaping the propaedeutic seminarians' journey towards their priestly vocation. They provide a structured framework for their spiritual growth, discernment, and development of necessary skills. Through spiritual formation programs, discernment activities, sports programs, socialization activities, and daily routinary programs, the seminarians can explore and articulate their aspirations to the priesthood within the context of the seminary formation. These activities and programs contribute to their overall formation and help shape their understanding of their vocation.

Spiritual Formation Programs and Discernment Activities. Data has shown that the spiritual formation program increases and sustains participants' aspirations to continue their seminary formation. This program includes monthly recollection, spiritual direction, scheduled daily prayers, Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) sharing, and the Eucharistic celebration. Thus, it has always been a significant factor in the amelioration of seminarians' aspiration to priestly formation is the spiritual maturity per se of the candidate. Concerning this factor, most of the participants empathically stated:

We all know that in the seminary, we have seven prayers, six including the Mass, seven prayers, and my prayer. All in all, eight. That is one of the activities that inspire me to my priestly vocation. – P1

The daily masses inspire me, especially when I look at the priests and when their homilies are good. – P3

Our prayer is because we are going to become a priest, and we are the ones who will lead the people in prayer. – P4

For me, the daily prayers, especially the midmorning, midafternoon, because I did not experience that before. Because I that a priest is prayerful. – P5

The activities that help me to aspire to priestly vocation are our prayers and meditation. I can focus through the silence and feel God's presence. Whenever I have problems, I meditate to pray, which helps me – also, the daily Mass. I always observe the priests and see them face to face; it inspires me to become a priest someday. Another thing is the GSK (BEC); it is very helpful to me because whenever I have a problem throughout this week, I just read the gospel and reflect on it. I had many realizations, and I could also listen to the stories of my companions. Hearing it inspires me to become a good listener because when I become a priest, I need to become a good listener. – P6

Time has passed, and the things that inspired me here are our liturgical activities. They inspired me and my vocation. They strengthened my faith, and I gained knowledge about my faith. – P7

Last month, I experienced a spiritual direction. It was good because it helped me to be formed. – P8

First, as a seminarian, we are always in the chapel attending prayer and Mass. – P9

The activities that help me in aspiring for priestly vocation through the seminary formation are the five aspects, especially the spiritual life. – P10

The five aspects of seminary formation, especially the spiritual life, and academics. – P12

My experience here of prayer six times a day. – P13

Essential to seminary formation is the educational process of spiritual life. It is an integral aspect of the pillars of seminary formation, which serves as the paradigm and foundation of pastoral formation (John Paul II, 1992). The new magna carta for seminary training underscores this point and even recommends that the propaedeutic stage of seminary training should be entrenched with a proper and solid educational process of spiritual maturity (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017). The testimonies of most of the participants accentuate this idea.

The rhythm of the seminary daily routine always involves the process of spiritual growth and development vis-a-vis vocation discernment. In fact, the seminary prayer schedules - whether communal or personal - such as the daily masses, the liturgy of the hours, and other devotional piety serve as the critical determinants in the discernment process, enabling the aspirants to seek divine guidance, assess their motivation to priestly vocation, and determine how best to fulfil their purpose in the ministerial service (Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, 2019; Catholic News Agency, 2012; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022).

The seminary formators have observed and confirmed that these activities make substantial contributions to the development of aspirants pursuing priesthood. “Based on their statements in the individual conference most of them said that prayer and meditation helped them. Their spiritual life really made them persevere.” (F1) And the other said, “Based on experience, some of them are sleepy during meditation but prayers really helped them.” (F2)

Closely related to the seminary spiritual program, discernment activities in the formation process, whose main goal is self-discovery, also contribute to the aggrandisement of the participants' motivation to continue. Discernment is a process of deep reflection and prayerful consideration to discern God's will and guidance in one's life. It involves seeking clarity and understanding to make decisions that align with one's vocation and purpose (John Paul II, 1993). Data have shown that some participants ostentatiously expressed their inestimable esteem for such seminary activities. Some of them stated:

Second, I was inspired by different activities here, especially in self-discovery; I discovered a lot in myself. - P1

The activities that inspire me are the class of discernment and holistic development because discernment helps me discern more on how to persevere in my vocation and holistic development. The human holistic development class helps me to know only myself, and this step is the beginning of knowing thyself. - P2

The journey of self-discovery stands as a foundational phase for individuals aspiring to embrace the priestly vocation, as it necessitates a profound and prudent reflection upon one's strengths, weaknesses, values, and desires in the context of God's invitation. Similarly, in the priestly formation, the discernment process appears as a key pillar of transformation, compelling seminarians to ardently examine their hearts and discern whether they are being called to a life of service within the Church (Hankle, 2010; Okafor, 2019). In addition, recognizing the importance of cultural background is crucial, as it shapes one's worldview and influences interactions with others. Propaedeutic seminarians are prepared to serve people from diverse backgrounds by fostering cultural sensitivity and adaptability, aligning with the Church's call to embrace cultural diversity. In the seminary context, seminarians' profound understanding of their affectivity and motivation becomes possible if they foster self-awareness among themselves and cultural sensitivity (Hydinger et al.,

2023; Radillo, 2006; Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000). For this reason, such heightened self-awareness and cultural awareness become a guiding compass for them, informing their actions and decisions in their personal lives and ministry. Therefore, by cultivating self-awareness, seminarians are prepared to attune their lives to their divine calling, enabling them to serve with authenticity, purpose, and total dedication.

Sports Programs. The participants audaciously expressed that seminary sports activities were also significant factors that inspired them to pursue the priesthood. Psychologically, sports activities help them relieve stress and temporarily forget the problems and pressure in the seminary formation per se. A good number of them stated:

As a player, I always look forward to the schedule for P.E. (sports activities). P.E. helps me to release my loads or emotions. I forget all my problems when I am playing. - P3

Yes, also P.E. - P5

First, P.E. inspires me to enter here. - P7

In addition, there are some activities here inside the seminary sports. - P9

Other activities here, like P.E. and HIS Talents, can inspire me to cooperate in the community. - P10

One of the activities in seminary that can help me is HIS talents, prayer, and P.E. - P11

And the other activities like the P.E., HIS talents, and MBMG visitation. - P12

Seminarians must be physically efficient because it opens them up to the high possibility of serving the community wholeheartedly and performing their future ministerial duties properly. Similarly, regular exercises, such as playing basketball and jogging, can significantly improve seminarians' health and help them develop a healthy lifestyle that will serve them well throughout their priesthood (Fowler, 2017; Livingston et al., 2009; Muth, 2013; Prusak et al., 2021). One formator emphatically said, "*They feel strained when they can't play*

even in a short time of playing" (F2). Seminary life frequently entails tremendous pressure and stress, and it is generally known that physical activity is an excellent way to reduce stress and foster sanity. Seminarians can relieve stress and improve their mental and emotional well-being by engaging in sports like basketball and other hobbies. This proactive self-care approach can significantly enhance their capacity to manage the demands and pressure of seminary formation while enjoying a state of sanity (Baruth et al., 2015; Bopp et al., 2013; Chiarlitti & Kolen, 2020; McClanahan, 2018; Morse, 2011).

Socialization Activities. The participants find socialization activities inspiring to continue their formation to the priesthood. Certain socialization activities ameliorate their aspiration for the priestly vocation. These activities bolster their confidence to interact with others, develop their talents and skills, and even become a source of bond within them, inspiring their vocational discernment. Such were the emphases given.

The HIS Got Talent... I built my confidence in that activity. - P3

The HIS Got Talent helped me perform well and bolstered my confidence. It is a practice for me in the future. I must be confident in the future. - P7

In addition, some activities here inside the seminary include sports and HIS talents. - P9

And also, other activities here, like P.E. and HIS Got Talent, can inspire me to cooperate in the community. - P10

One of the activities in seminary that can help me is HIS Got Talent. The other activities are playing sports and also solidarity night meals - P11

Also, the HIS Got Talent. - P14

Involving in socialisation activities can significantly enthuse seminarians in their pursuit of the priestly vocation, as these opportunities enable them to cultivate essential interpersonal skills and foster healthy and meaningful relationships with others. Activities like "The HIS Got Talent" and "HUDYAKA HIS" significantly foster brotherhood, self-discovery, talent enhancement,

and nurturing confidence. One formator said, "HIS Talent and solidarity night made them discover themselves, and even made them more cohesive as brothers in faith" (F2). These factors hold great importance since priests are entrusted with a duty to serve and minister to people. Strong social skills, honed talents, and self-assurance equip them to carry out their pastoral duties effectively.

Moreover, celebrations such as the seminary fiesta and Mother Butler Mission Guild's visitations also aggrandize seminarians' aspiration to ardently pursue the priestly vocation by offering invaluable opportunities for connection, renewal, and joy. Festivities and celebrations are significant in the vibrant tapestry of seminary life, as they foster a profound sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and provide fertile ground for spiritual growth and renewal. These joyous occasions create a vibrant sense of community and solidarity among the seminarians and stimulate deeper connections. Some participants stated:

Seminary fiesta and Simbang Gabi is the big activity in the seminary. - P4

And the other activities like the P.E., HIS talents, and Mother Butler Mission Guild visitation. - P12

Through shared experiences and heartfelt laughter, these celebrations cultivate an environment brimming with support and encouragement, heaving the seminarians on their path to fulfill their sacred call with joy, utmost respect, and dedication ([Baker, 2003, 2004](#); [Smith, 2007](#)). It is also worth noting that the bond these socialization activities foster among them proper behaviors and mutual understanding and mitigates the loneliness experienced in seminary life. Some ostentatiously said:

The community life, together with my brother seminarians. Journeying with thirty-nine different attitudes develops me and helps me understand more. - P1

Bonding with each other inside and outside the seminary. Through bonding outside the seminary, I feel not lonely. I feel a lot of companions. – P4

Research has shown that lacking companionship is the principal cause of loneliness in seminary formation (Naparan et al., 2022). Engaging in batch bonding activities can significantly contribute to honing crucial social skills and emotional intelligence required for effective ministry. Through group activities and shared experiences, aspirants can learn and practice effective communication, collaborative synergy, and the ability to sympathize with others (Legada et al., 2020; Loughlan & Dierendonck, 2012). These activities ameliorate the bonds among the batch members and equip them with effective interpersonal tools to face the challenges and demands of their future ministry with empathy, competence, and compassion.

Daily Routinary Programs. The daily schedule of the seminary, such as classes, study periods, household chores, siesta, and more, bears significant repercussions for those aspiring to the priestly vocation. Some participants echoed these sentiments and expressed their admiration for these routines.

I consider the study period; it helps me a lot. Reading and studying are important. – P7

The other activities are cleaning, siesta, playing sports, and solidarity night meals. The activities that inspired me and helped me in the formation are prayer, being with the community meetings, and HIS talents. – P11

The daily schedules in the seminary are profoundly significant and beneficial for those aspiring to the priestly vocation, as they entail essential elements of formation, structure, and spiritual nourishment. These schedules are crucial in facilitating the discernment process and preparation of seminarians for a life of radical service within the church's pastoral concerns. As highlighted by Robert Cardinal Sarah (2015), the ordinariness of seminary schedules bears a fundamental

aspect of priestly formation, as it enables seminarians to explore the profound mystery of God and embrace the inherent beauty of their vocation.

The discussion examines various facets of seminary life, including spiritual formation, sports programs, socialization activities, and daily routines, and their profound influence on propaedeutic seminarians' descriptions of their aspirations to a priestly vocation. Through spiritual practices, such as daily prayers and Mass, participants find inspiration and a deepening connection to their vocation. Sports activities offer stress relief and a holistic sense of well-being, complementing their dedication. Socialization activities foster interpersonal skills and a sense of belonging (De Sisto et al., 2022; D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Drolet & Arcand, 2013), while structured daily routines provide a foundation for disciplined growth. This multifaceted exploration illuminates how these diverse experiences collectively contribute to their understanding and commitment to the priestly calling.

Strategies to Nurture Vocation

Vocation, in the Catholic Church, is a unique calling from God to fulfill a specific purpose in life. It encompasses various forms such as marriage, religious life, priesthood, or dedicated single life, and involves living in accordance with God's will to bring forth His Kingdom (John Paul II, 1993). The vocation to the priesthood in the is a divine calling to serve God and His people. It involves a commitment to a life of holiness, administering the sacraments, and shepherding the faithful (John Paul II, 1992).

As part of their formation journey, the propaedeutic seminarians must reside inside the seminary; in their case, they have been in the formation for nearly a year. However, undergoing seminary formation for months does not only provide enriching experiences and a sense of elation; it also entails challenges and pressures as they

adjust and adapt to the new schedules and give up certain activities they hold dear. Amidst the challenges, they employ various approaches to nurture their aspirations. These strategies include vocation discernment practices, seeking counsel from competent priests, and finding constructive ways to contend with boredom to maintain focus on their vocational journey.

Vocation Discernment Practices. Most participants highlighted that vocation discernment practices such as prayer, meditation, and personal reflection are notable spiritual activities that nurture their aspirations for the priestly vocation. Some participants reverberated the importance of those practices, accentuating their immense impact on their vocational journey. Through dedicated prayer, some aspirants find solace, clear direction, and a profound connection with God, strengthening their resolve to pursue the call to the priesthood.

My strategy here is to ride on their jokes. I won't entertain but go along with their jokes. During prayer and meditation, I pray for those who mock me. - P4

Discerning and spending my time in silence. - P9

I have three strategies for nurturing my formation: reflect, refresh, and renew. In reflecting on what is good for my vocation. These strategies helped me in my priestly vocation in times of confusion and anger. - Pa10

...and also praying and meditating. - P11

I nurture it by reflecting on my vocation in prayer. These strategies help my priestly vocation through reflection. - P12

Seminary is widely recognised as a school for profound spiritual development, offering an environment conducive to prayer, meditation, and reflection. The inherent silence of the seminary serves as an impetus that provides an ambiance that forms a mind dedicated to contemplation and discernment and fosters a deeper relationship with God.

In his work, Fr. Brannen (2010) succinctly pointed out the value of retreats and other means for spiritual growth in the life of a

seminarian. He argued that these experiences provide invaluable opportunities for seminarians to temporarily step away from their daily preoccupations and distractions, enabling them to focus fervently on their relationship with God. Through dedicated reflection and prayer, seminarians can delve into the depths of their being, gaining a profound sense of their vocation and cultivating the essential spiritual disciplines indispensable to effective ministry. The moments spent for reflection and communion with God contribute to the seminarians' spiritual growth (Fidler, 2020; Pang, 2016; Van Tongeren et al., 2018), preparing them to embrace their future and complex roles as dispensers of divine mysteries.

Seeking Guidance from Priests. Nurturing the priestly vocation alone can be onerous; it needs a community. Many seminarians express that the counsel of experienced priests helps them foster and nurture their vocation. The participants themselves ostentatiously expressed the significance of seeking guidance. P1, for instance, regarded the priests-formators as instruments of the Holy Spirit. He said, "I allow the Holy Spirit through my formators to guide me." Such a point is affirmed by the formators themselves. Both of them verified, "Individual conference helped them" (F1), and "I handled them (propaedeutic seminarians) the topic Enneagram. At least in a small way, they know themselves and how to reach out their companions in formation." (F2) Such a sentiment implies the idea that God speaks through authority. Moreover, priests can be spiritual mentors to seminarians; They can help the aspirants in their discernment process and spiritual growth (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). Priests are efficient witnesses to a state of life dedicated to God by offering advice and guidance based on their wisdom and erudition (John Paul II, 1993).

Aside from seeking guidance from their formators, some propaedeutic seminarians also find solace in the seminary formation

by listening to their homilies. P11 emphatically revealed that he continued to aspire through priesthood meditation and by "listening to the homily from our priest. These strategies motivate me to persevere and give me moral support." Priests can offer support and encouragement during the ups and downs of their seminary journey. They can be a listening ear and a compassionate heart to seminarians struggling with doubts and challenges in their journey. Through their guidance, priests can help seminarians to develop the resilience and perseverance necessary to navigate the challenging demands of the priesthood (Adriance, 1991; Lount & Hargie, 1997; Schnabel & Koval, 1979).

Constructive Ways to Combat Boredom. The seminary schedule adheres to highly structured and repetitive routines that sometimes leave seminarians feeling bored and lacking stimulation. However, it is important to note that various factors contribute to boredom. Notably, while facing boredom, participants have acquired diversionary strategies to overcome boredom while improving their aspirations for the priestly vocation. They recognise the need to engage with their formation programs cautiously and seek further avenues for personal growth and spiritual development.

When boredom excruciatingly strikes them, some participants find consolation in the soothing rhythm of music, propelling them to go beyond the external distractions and delve into the interior journey of the soul. P6 strikingly stated, "I always play instruments like guitar and piano. They are helpful because I play these kinds of instruments whenever I feel lonely. Also, singing is beneficial to me." The same goes true with P2, who said, "I am always playing the keyboard to replenish my tired body and enjoy my life here in the seminary."

Parallel to music and singing is the relief brought by reading and writing for the bored participants. Some participants find them instrumental in easing boredom in their formation. This idea

underscores the soothing power of literature for a soul in perturbation.

Three participants unfetteredly mentioned:

I sometimes draw or write a story, even without sense. – P3

I nurture it (priestly vocation) by reading spiritual books. –P13

... and recreation like reading. – P14

Aside from reading and writing, some participants find comfort and relief from boredom in doing proactive work and in their dialogue with their companions, underlining the fundamental need of human nature for a community. Such a strategy is so external by nature, for this is purely a diversionary method. Significantly, three participants stressed this out.

If I am bored, I find some activities to ease my boredom, such as feeding the pigeons. – P1

When I feel bored, I find some seminarians to talk to. In this way, it eases boredom. – P5

I find someone to talk to if I feel bored. – P14

Those constructive ways to combat boredom prove effective by the experience of the participants themselves. Fascinatingly, such ways help them cope with the monotony of the routinary and dull schedules of seminary formation. Such ways allow the seminarians to recharge and renew their zeal. Additionally, engaging in hobbies and other interests can help seminarians develop important skills in life, such as time management and creativity. Finding ways to cope with boredom and challenges in the seminary can help seminarians develop resilience ([Skinner et al., 2014](#); [Vîrgă et al., 2022](#)), a necessary virtue for priests to imbibe. Pursuing through difficult times and remaining steadfast in their vocation is necessary for a successful and fulfilling life as a priest. Engaging further in activities that challenge one's skills and provide clear goals can help individuals enter a state of flow. People experience a deep sense of concentration, timelessness, and enjoyment in this state. By achieving focus, individuals can reduce

boredom and find fulfilment in their daily lives (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

The provided discussion reveals the strategies propaedeutic seminarians employ to nurture their aspirations towards the priestly vocation, directly addressing the research question. Engaging in vocation discernment practices such as prayer and reflection, seminarians deepen their spiritual connection and discernment. Additionally, seeking guidance from seasoned priests emphasizes the indispensable role of mentorship and shared wisdom in their vocational journey. The seminarians also proactively combat the challenges of boredom inherent in the structured seminary routine by indulging in constructive activities like music, reading, and interpersonal interactions. These varied strategies underscore how seminarians actively shape and articulate their aspirations within the seminary formation context.

Personal Motivation Factors

In their journey of vocation discernment, participants made some profound discoveries regarding the personal motivation factors that heightened their resolve to pursue the priestly calling. Through in-depth interviews and consultations, specific individuals candidly voiced these insights, bringing to light two specific and highly relevant factors related to the theme, as mentioned earlier: community support and zeal for service.

Community Support. During the interview, a prevailing sentiment among the participant emerged as they ascribed their motivation to the invaluable support they received from their community. A significant finding reveals that the sense of community and support helps them sustain their dedication and commitment.

One dominant factor is the support they receive from their family. In a recent study published in *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, financial support from their families bears a consequential

impact on aspiring seminarians, enabling them to sustain their motivation and prosper throughout their seminary formation (Naparan et al., 2022). Such a significant idea is reverberated by some participants.

First of all, my family was always supportive, especially of my desire to become a priest, and they motivated me to continue. – P3

One of my motivations is my family. - P4

One of my motivations is my family. – P7

My family is one of my motivations, and aside from my family, the Mother Butler Mission Guild and vocation promoters. – P8

It is, however, worth noting that family support extends far beyond financial means, even though it is undoubtedly a significant factor. Above all, the profound solace they perceived from their families' moral encouragement and support provided them with a profound sense of security and stability in their resolution (Hankle, 2009). Some participants ostentatiously echoed such sentiment.

One of my motivations is my family. – P11

One of my motivations is my family and friends. – P13

My family is the one that still motivates me. – P14

Apart from the financial and moral support from their family and friends, a significant result also shows that the support they received from the seminary community per se and some church organisations, such as Mother Butler Mission Guild and Vocation Promoters, contributed to the escalation of some participants' motivation. Some of them reverberated that when others in the community express their support, they perceive an enduring sense of affirmation of their vocation that reinforces their motivation and resolve. Some said:

My family is one of my motivations, and aside from my family, the Mother Butler Mission Guild and Vocation Promoters. – P8

Those who still motivate me are the people who support me, MBMG, Vocation promoter, their support for me, and their prayers. -12

Above all, nothing so inspiring is when priests- those in the ongoing formation - extend their financial, moral, and spiritual support to those in the initial stage of formation. Such a gesture by priests reinforces validation, impelling the participants to continue their formation. One participant emphatically said:

My motivations to continue my priestly vocation through the formation of the seminary are the community, the people around me, my mother, and the love and mercy of God. And the support of our priest in the parish. It affected me to be inspired to continue in my vocation; amid difficulties, I saw their support for me; they always make me encouraged. - P9

Zeal for Service. The question of why one chose the life of priesthood bears numerous reasons; it has no definite and universal response (Jaskowak, 2019). However, a common recurring reason shows that being a priest opens the path to becoming a role model, a man of prayer, a living witness renowned for good works, an efficient preacher, and a man wholeheartedly devoted to service. Some participants have honestly expressed that their motivation to become priests is driven by their deep desire to serve and be a source of change to the community. Some sincerely stated:

In serving people, especially the youth. I realize here that I become a prayer angel to the people outside the seminary. - P2

Aside from that, I want to serve others and become Christ's disciple. - P6

The factor that moves me to consider priesthood is the desire to serve others, especially in our community, and to be a good preacher and model for others. - P8

Notably, some participants expressed that such motivation, springing from their zeal for service, is a product of their deep appreciation for some priests whose lives are eminently entrenched with a total dedication to the ministerial service. They find so uplifting those priests faithfully and honestly witnessing the life of perpetual

continence, total self-denial, and total self-giving. Two participants audaciously expressed:

I always look forward to the priests I idolize; they inspire me to continue. -P4

I was inspired by the kindness and effort of a priest in our parish. -P5

In essence, within a supportive community, seminarians can witness the lives of the ordained ministers who serve as role models. Observing their dedication and service escalates the motivation and commitment of the aspirants to their vocation. Psychological research on priestly discernment has shown that inculcating the idea of oneself as a Catholic priest is the first step in the discernment process. However, it comes about early in a person's faith journey, coupled with a strong desire to serve others and see one's family live out the faith and a good relationship with priests ([Hankle, 2010](#); [Knox et al., 2005](#); [Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013](#)).

The discussion closely relates to the experiences and aspirations of propaedeutic seminarians within their seminary formation. It underscores the important role of community support in bolstering their commitment to the priestly calling. The participants reveal that family support, both financial and moral, significantly influences their dedication, while support from the seminary community, church organizations, and experienced priests reinforces their sense of purpose. Additionally, the seminarians' deep zeal for service emerges as a driving force. They articulate how observing priests who embody a life of service inspires them to pursue the priesthood, becoming role models they aspire to emulate. Together, these factors reveal how their personal motivations, and the influences of their surroundings shape their journey toward becoming priests.

CONCLUSION

The path toward the altar is a sacred and dynamic journey marked by profound self-discovery, spiritual growth and development, and firm commitment and dedication to service. Propaedeutic seminarians derive steadfast motivation and strategies from their experiences within the seminary formation, where community support, particularly from family, fellow seminarians, and experienced priests, plays a pivotal role in sustaining their commitment to the priestly vocation. Alongside this, a profound zeal for service propels their pursuit of the priesthood, driven by a strong desire to serve, become role models, and emulate the dedicated priests they admire. These personal motivations are complemented by strategic practices like vocation discernment, seeking guidance from mentors, and engaging in activities to combat boredom, collectively shaping their transformative journey within the seminary and towards their priestly calling.

In the context of seminary programs, the motivation augmentation process necessitates the prudent refinement of program itineraries. Within the walls of the seminary, a vibrant tapestry of activities and conscientiously curated programs intertwine; each thread of the formation program must be carefully woven to shape the person of future priests, ensuring that the four pillars of seminary formation be well integrated: spiritual, academic, human and pastoral formation. As a result, a meticulously structured and harmonious curriculum must emerge—one that remains responsive to the ever-evolving and complex demands of human development. This entails promoting regular physical exercise and recreational engagement, adapting purposeful and enriching socialization activities, and nurturing personal reflection and growth while discarding outdated programmatic frameworks that no longer serve their purpose.

In tandem with the refinement of seminary programs, the study's finding also suggests solid and well-structured initiatives aimed at promoting role models within a seminary setting. As highlighted in the research, the example of character such as dedication, faithfulness, justice, and holiness by experienced priests serves as an impetus that impels aspiring seminarians to persist in their pursuit of the priestly vocation. Consequently, the comprehensive formation itineraries within the seminary must undertake a transformative endeavor to eliminate any prevailing subculture of seniority, ensuring an inclusive environment. This process could further be fortified by instituting a system of constructive evaluation for the formators, a mechanism that draws insight from the collective wisdom of the community and facilitates continuous improvement in the formation process.

The finding suggests that community support systems within the seminary be well-structured and enhanced to provide a nurturing environment for seminarians. Community support serves as a foundation that helps them sustain their vocational aspirations and so become resilient and versatile to the pressures and demands of seminary formation, delineating the benefits that mentorship programs, peer support groups, and opportunities for spiritual guidance from experienced priests brought them. The study reveals that family, friends, priests, and the seminary community contribute significantly to bolstering the motivation of seminarians. In both financial and emotional aspects, family support preserves seminarians, allowing them to flourish in their formation journey. Hence, seminaries should find ways to involve families in the formation process. Workshops or sessions that educate families about the seminary journey and encourage their continued support can contribute to seminarians' overall well-being and commitment.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Data curation: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Formal analysis: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Funding acquisition: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Investigation: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Methodology: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Project administration: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Resources: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Software: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Supervision: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Validation: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Visualization: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Writing – original draft: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S.; Writing – review & editing: M.C., R.K.S., E.R.G., & J.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent for this study was obtained through verbal agreement to participate in survey.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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