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SHEPHERDING IN GREENER PASTURES:  
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE DUAL TRANSITION  
OF CELIBATE CATHOLIC PRIESTS INTO MARRIED PROTESTANT MINISTRY

by

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Ellen L. Idler

and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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of celibate Catholic priests into married Protestant ministry

By STEPHEN JOSEPH FICHTER

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Ellen L. Idler

Since the late 1960s, roughly one-quarter of Roman Catholic priests in America have resigned, motivated mainly by a desire to marry. While several sociologists (e.g., Fichter, Greeley, Hoge, and Schoenherr) have studied the motivations and actions of resigned priests (who usually maintain their Catholic identity and take up some form of non-pastoral employment after their transition), this research seeks to describe a never-before-studied subgroup that chose to re-focus their lives towards Protestant ministry. The research offices of the five mainline Protestant Churches (Congregational, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian) identified 414 such ministers, of whom 32 percent chose to participate. All 133 respondents completed a 12-page survey either by anonymous return mail or during a telephone or a face-to-face interview.

The analysis plan, designed to answer the four research questions (outlined below), consisted of three parts: 1) a detailed reporting on the frequencies of the principal variables, 2) a series of cross-tabulations, and 3) several multivariate regression models.

The first major finding confirmed that marriage was their main motivator. The distinction between those who followed their “heart” as opposed to those who followed their “head,” highlighted the fact that both emotion and intellect had a role to play. Although one could get the impression (by listening to their retrospective narratives only) that both head and heart had equal “pull,” analyzing their concrete actions revealed that most followed their hearts first by marrying before switching affiliation. Results from the second research question revealed a definite period effect that can be traced back to the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.

The third line of inquiry verified the link between parental support for the transition and current levels of satisfaction, with the added nuance that such a correlation is stronger among former diocesan priests than it is among religious priests. Finally, results from the fourth research question support the hypothesis that the obligations of marriage limit the number of hours that a minister can dedicate to his flock. These “greener pastures shepherds” follow a work schedule that is more similar to their current denomination’s average than it is to the Catholic priest model.

## Acknowledgement

Reaching this milestone moment of putting the final touches on my dissertation leads me to reflect with profound gratitude on the innumerable gifts received during the past four decades of life. Before all else, I want to thank God and my parents for bringing me into existence and for showering me with so much love throughout the years.

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Dedication

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*

In loving memory of

Father Joseph H. Fichter, S.J.,

my “famous” sociologist granduncle

on the occasion of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday (June 10, 2008)

(See Appendix F for additional personal information on Uncle Joe.)

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *1.1 Unique transitional group offers valuable sociological insights*

People make transitions every day, from the simplest commute from one town to another on their way to work, to the most sublime as they leave this life through the doors of death. The broad spectrum of transitions varies in emotional intensity and significance depending, in part, on the permeability of the boundary or what Glaser and Strauss (1971) call the degree of “reversibility” of the passage. Open borders usually go unnoticed but prohibitive boundaries command attention (Zerubavel 1991). The social status of the person in question can also modify the situation as when a journalist reports the arrest of a judge for drunk driving but ignores hundreds of other people apprehended for the same crime. As well, the nature of a boundary may evolve over time. For example, crossing the Berlin Wall two decades ago was vastly different from traversing the same locale today. The dual transition (from celibacy to marriage and from Catholicism to Protestantism) made by the participants in this “Shepherding in greener pastures” study combines these three factors of apparent impermeability or irreversibility, prominent high commitment status (DellaCava 1975), and historical timing, which when analyzed in conjunction with each other are capable of producing some valuable sociological lessons.

While this study does not focus on the actual rites of passage per se (such as the ceremonies of priestly ordination or of marriage), the three phases which van Gennep (1960) repeatedly emphasizes in his classic work on the subject serve as a useful paradigm for this project: separation, transition, and incorporation. He also uses the

adjectives preliminal, liminal (or threshold), and postliminal to describe these three distinct stages. In this dissertation, what is of most interest, although the other two are important, is the middle part: the actual transition or the liminal experience.

Given the unique characteristics of this particular subpopulation, the first fundamental goal of this study is the simple description of those celibate Catholic priests who transitioned into married Protestant ministry. Although resigned priests have frequently been the object of sociological inquiry (Fichter 1967, 1968, 1970, 1974; Greeley 1972, 2004a; Schoenherr and Greeley 1974; Schoenherr and Young 1993; Hoge 2002; Schoenherr 2002), the specific subset that chose not only to marry but also to change their denominational affiliation has not been previously studied. Even the most elementary demographic data are lacking such as how many there are, from which branch of the Catholic priesthood (diocesan or religious) they originated, and to what Protestant churches they turned in order to continue their pastoral ministry. The primary aim of this study, therefore, is to fill that void of information.

The secondary objective is to analyze some of the causes and consequences of this specific type of multiple-role-transition. These men occupied high-status roles in an institution known for demanding strict adherence to its norms and traditions. Besides personally embracing the values of Catholicism for a prolonged period of their lives, these former priests also promoted loyalty to those same principles during their years of ministry. On the long-awaited day of their ordination, after years of intensive seminary training, they made a solemn lifelong commitment to God, the Catholic Church, priestly ministry, and celibacy. Then, motivated by their dissatisfaction with the celibate lifestyle or some negative experience with an authority figure in the church (their particular

versions of role strain) and/or the adoption of a “non-Catholic” way of thinking, they chose to re-focus their lives towards Protestantism and marriage, keeping only the ministerial aspect of their previous role intact.

Achieving this secondary goal may produce some useful insights for both sociological and general audiences. For example, the ever-growing number of individuals who have gone through comparable transitions (such as through divorce and/or a mid-life career change) could learn from these pastors’ adjustment experiences, even though the cultural contexts of their lives are quite different. Ebaugh (1988a) clearly demonstrated in her study of a wide variety of “exes” (from ex-prostitutes to ex-nuns) that there are surprisingly common “exit processes” across diverse social roles.

The greatest interest in this project, however, will probably come from those who study Catholic clergy. By concentrating attention on the crossing of the clearly defined boundaries (of celibacy and of Catholic identity) that once regulated the lives of the participants in this study, it may be possible to understand better the struggles of celibate Catholic priests in general. Goffmann (1967) has shown that studying the behavior of people who live and work outside the ordinary boundaries of social expectations can be instructive also for those who remain within the usual parameters. Seventy years before Goffmann, Durkheim’s study of suicide (1951 [1897]) highlighted the value of studying “abnormal” behavior in order to shed light on “normal” behavior.

The participants in this research project have certainly traveled an uncommon path. If considered within the framework of all those who were ever ordained, the majority of whom never renounce their Catholic identity nor their celibate commitment, these men represent only a minuscule percentage. Given this small proportion, one could

ask how valuable their experiences are for the larger group of celibate Catholic priests from which they originated, (and which also happens to be my broader research interest beyond this dissertation). Just as studies on twins separated at birth can offer insights into the “nature vs. nurture” debate (Wright 1997), the stories of these men, who received the same training (i.e., socialization) as those who have remained in active Catholic ministry, can bring to the fore some ordinarily hidden aspects of the priesthood.

One specific example is the often-overlooked structural differences that exist in the Catholic priesthood between diocesan and religious priests, about which much more will be explained in Chapter Two. Most analyses of the Catholic priesthood lump these two groups together without distinction (Bleichner 2004, Hedin 1995, Ruddy 2006). This study highlights the fact that some of the structural differences between the two subsets may contribute to such important concepts as varying degrees of work/life satisfaction, which in turn may lead to differences in retention rates, a topic of great interest for the Catholic Church that has endured a continual decline in her clerical ranks in recent years. Even a seemingly trivial topic, such as the number of hours that these former Catholic priests dedicate to their current Protestant pastoral duties (a topic addressed in this dissertation) may help to paint a more nuanced portrayal of Christian ministry today.

In summary, the importance of this “Shepherding in greener pastures” project comes from the fact that this will be the first focus of a sociological lens on this particular subgroup of clerics who chose marriage and Protestant ministry over their Catholic affiliation. Here is a topic that presents a confluence of religious decisions about very intimate behavior, and links such decisions not only to professional identity but also to intermediate and large-sized social structures, and world history.

## 1.2 Clarification of terms

It is important to clarify the core concept of clerical celibacy at the beginning of this dissertation and to analyze how other major world religions and cultures, besides the Roman Catholic Church, have regarded it throughout the centuries.

The etymological root of the word “celibacy” comes from the Latin word *caelebs*, which means “alone,” “single,” or “unmarried” (either as a bachelor or as a widower). *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) defines it in the first place as “abstinence from sexual intercourse, especially by reason of religious vows” and secondly as “the condition of being unmarried.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2008) reverses the order by stating that celibacy is, first of all, the “state of not being married” and secondly the “abstention from sexual intercourse” and the “abstention by vow from marriage.”

For this project, the definition of celibacy incorporates both of these aspects. It signifies more than just being unmarried since such a description could easily apply to many other people besides Catholic priests, such as young people before reaching the age of marriage or the elderly after their spouses die. Thus, even those “marriageable adults” who for one reason or another are single at any given time in the life course (divorce, career demands, care of an infirm family member, etc.) would not qualify as celibates for this study, unless they attach religious significance to their abstention from sex.

The use of the adjective “clerical” specifies an additional religious dimension of this specific kind of religious celibacy. In summary, one could define clerical celibacy as spiritually motivated abstention from sexual activity through the renunciation of marriage for the sake of ministerial service. It must be willfully chosen (Sobo and Bell 2001) and with a strong spiritual significance if it is to fit into this definition.

### *1.3 Historical review of religiously motivated celibacy*

This historical and cultural review of clerical celibacy is divided into four parts. The first section focuses on those major world religions, principally the eastern religions that are theologically most distant from Roman Catholicism in the sense that they are not monotheistic. The so-called “pagan” Greco-Roman culture within which Christianity came into existence and flourished in the first centuries forms the second subset while the third consists of the other two major monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam. The final section highlights the divergence of opinion on this subject by the Orthodox and Protestant branches of Christianity in contrast with the Catholic position.

Starting with those world religions that are most theologically “distant” from Catholicism (such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism), one finds, for example, that while most Hindus are expected to marry, those who seek greater spiritual perfection are encouraged to remain single. As Phipps (2004) reports, in the classic *Bhagavad-Gita* (6:14), the Hindu god Krishna said, “Firm in the vow of celibacy, subdued in mind, let him sit, harmonized, his mind turned to me and intent on me alone.” Phipps also cites the Yogi Patanjali who wrote (two centuries before Christ) in the *Yoga Sutra* (2:38, 40), “Vital force is established through sexual abstinence; purity involves disdain for one’s physical body and a cessation of contact with others.” Among those Hindus who accept this particular version of religious asceticism, the retention of semen is considered a very valuable practice as it increases a man’s spiritual energies, and ejaculation results in a substantial loss of religious vigor. Despite such strong recommendations, however, celibacy is not a requirement for Hindu priests, and actually, marriage is a requirement for those conducting certain ceremonies (Phipps 2004).

The founder of Jainism, Mahavira, who lived about 600 years before Christ, was a celibate and established the renunciation of all sexual pleasure as one of the requirements for his followers. Mahavira is quoted (Phipps 2004) as saying, “women are the greatest temptation in the world. Men should not speak to women, nor look at them, nor converse with them, nor claim them as their own.” Similarly, the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gotama, (who lived in the same century as Mahavira) abandoned his wife and child because he considered family life an entrapment. Phipps (2004) reports that Siddhartha remained “celibate and aloof, and lost all desire for sexual intercourse, which is vulgar.” He was convinced that one could obtain optimal spiritual freedom by breaking free of kin entanglements and by establishing residence in a monastery. When a monk asked him for advice concerning women, the Buddha replied that it would be best to avoid the sight of them and, if that was not possible, then the Buddhist monk should avoid conversing with them as far as possible. To this day, celibacy remains a core principle of Buddhist monastic life into which the novices are inculcated from a very young age (Qirko 2002). In a recent interview (De Weyer 2006), the Dalai Lama explained, “Buddhism and Catholicism have reasons for preferring celibacy. One of those is that we can practice detachment. You see, desire and attachment can be obstacles for our spirituality.”

Turning to the Greco-Roman culture in which Christianity flourished during its first few centuries of existence, one finds support for sexual abstinence of this sort. Pythagoras, the famous sixth century Greek philosopher, created a religious movement that promised eternal life to the ritually and physically pure. As a philosophical dualist, Pythagoras taught that the soul (which was the superior part of the human being) is like a prisoner of the inferior body. In order to release their incarcerated souls, his followers

would have to avoid sexual intercourse as far as possible. He only allowed them to engage in sex for the purpose of procreation (Abbott 2000). Following a similar line of thought, Plato considered sexual intercourse an act of bestiality. The Stoics, like the Pythagoreans, only tolerated sexual activity for procreative purposes.

Moving into the monotheistic realm of religion, one discovers that Judaism promotes an eminently pro-marriage culture that consequently does not hold celibacy in high regard. This is true not only for the lay faithful but also for their spiritual leaders. In fact, Jews expect their rabbis to marry. Although there are some prohibitions against sex in the Hebrew Bible such as when Moses came down Mount Sinai and warned the people to “have no intercourse with any woman” (Exodus 19:15)<sup>1</sup>, these restrictions were only temporary in nature. The lone exception to this pro-marriage culture in the 4000 years of Jewish history comes from the Essene community that lived near the Dead Sea about the time of Christ. The Essenes, now extinct, promoted celibacy as an integral part of their monastic-like environment. This practice, however, never took root within mainstream Judaism in any major way.

Islam, the third monotheistic world religion, follows along parallel lines. Just as rabbis are expected to marry, so are imams. From the time of Mohammed until this day, Islam has been a pro-marriage religion both for laity and for clergy. The only exception to this rule is the dervish community, a minuscule proportion of Muslims.

Drawing closer theologically to Catholicism, one encounters the two other major branches of Christianity: the Orthodox and Protestant Churches. It would seem logical that if forced to choose between the pro-celibate polytheistic eastern religions in unison with the so-called pagan Greco-Roman culture or the pro-marriage monotheistic religions

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotes in this dissertation are from *The New American Bible* (1970).

of Judaism and Islam, Christians would side with the latter as indeed the Orthodox and Protestant branches of Christianity have done. The Roman Catholic Church, which represents slightly more than half of the entire Christian population, however, sides with the pro-celibacy camp and makes the practice mandatory for the vast majority of its clergy. Both Orthodox and Protestant ministers may choose celibacy or marriage, and neither status is a requirement for ordination. The only exception to this rule is that in the Orthodox Church, bishops must be celibates. The now nearly extinct Shakers, who make vows of lifelong celibacy, represent a radical exception among Protestants.

Finally, while focusing directly on Catholicism, one discovers the surprise that while celibacy is mandatory for priests of the Latin Rite, which is by far the largest rite, there are 22 other much smaller rites within the Church (e.g., Byzantine, Maronite, and Ukrainian Rites) that allow their priests to choose between marriage and celibacy before ordination. Those who marry are just as much priests as those who opt not to wed. For decades, American bishops prohibited such priests from working in the United States so as not to cause confusion among the faithful or perhaps provoke jealousy among the celibate priests of the Latin Rite. Within the last few years, however, the bishops have revoked this restriction and married men from these smaller rites are being ordained.

In summary and counterintuitively, on this issue of clerical celibacy, the Latin Rite priesthood of Catholicism aligns itself more closely with Eastern religions, especially Buddhism according to Lea (1966) and ancient “pagan” culture than it does with the other monotheistic faiths. It is understandable, therefore, that when Catholic priests have decided to marry and yet wanted to remain in ministry they have gravitated toward the Protestant Churches that are theologically closest to the Catholic Church.

#### *1.4 Catholic insistence on the holiness of celibacy*

The authorities of the Catholic Church justify their insistence concerning clerical celibacy by tracing this practice to Christ who—they assert—lived and died as a celibate. They also highlight the example of the thousands of saints (mainly nuns and priests) in their 2000-year history who have embraced this discipline both faithfully and fruitfully. When one revises the calendar of saints in the Roman Catholic calendar looking for a common denominator, besides their devotion to God, celibacy comes at the head of the list of saintly requirements. Perhaps only charity tops it as the single most cited quality of these holy people. The message seems to be that to be saintly one must refrain from marriage or, if married, refrain from exercising one's sexuality. Even among the married saints (who are acutely underrepresented in the official heavenly membership list, especially when compared to the overall population), many of them separated from their spouses to live in monasteries or convents after they raised their children.

Even while he strongly reaffirmed clerical celibacy in the landmark document *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Pope Paul VI (1967) acknowledged that Jesus did not make celibacy a requirement in choosing the Twelve Apostles nor did they, in their turn, demand it of the next generation of leaders in the church. The vast majority of Scripture scholars agree that Saint Peter, the first pope, was married as were most of the other original apostles (Ruffin 1997). In *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, the fourth-century ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, quotes Saint Clement of Alexandria (second century church leader) who said that as Pope Peter saw his wife Perpetua being led to her death he “was glad that her call had come and that she was returning home... [and] in the most encouraging and comforting of tones he called her by

name and said, ‘My dear, remember the Lord’” (Ruffin 1997:58). Given the testimony collected by Eusebius and the direct references made in the Gospels to Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:30), no one disputes that he was married. There is, however, some debate about how to reconcile the passage which states that the Apostles left their wives and children (Luke 18:29) to follow Jesus, and Paul’s letter (1 Corinthians 9:5) indicating that some of their wives accompanied them on their missionary journeys.

Although Pope Paul VI did not make reference to 1 Corinthians 9:5 (“Do we not have the right to take along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Peter?”), neither did he avoid pointing out where scripture refers to marriage among clerics in the early years of the church. He cited Saint Paul’s first letter to Timothy where among the many qualifications listed for a bishop it is mentioned that he must be “married only once” and that “he must manage his household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity” (1 Timothy 3: 2-4). Paul’s letter to Titus uses very similar terminology when referring to the conditions that a Christian man must fulfill if he accepts an appointment as presbyter or elder in the church. He must “be blameless, married only once, with believing children who are not accused of licentiousness or rebellious” (Titus 1:6).

Those who promote optional celibacy frequently cite these three letters from Saint Paul. They also dispute the meaning of the oft-quoted verse from Matthew’s Gospel (19:12) where Jesus spoke of those who make themselves “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” For more than four decades, the battle over the actual meaning of these few phrases from the Bible has become a veritable theological tug of war. On the one side, there are some who assert that optional celibacy was the original intention of

Christ, which was later distorted by influences of Neo-Platonic dualism and medieval hang-ups concerning human sexuality (Walker 2004). Their opponents aver that celibacy has been mandatory in some form from the very beginning of Christianity.

Those historians and theologians who promote clerical celibacy (Cochini 1981; Galot 1985; Heid 1997; McGovern 1998, 2002; Sammon 1993; Stickler 1993) acknowledge that in the early centuries of Christianity the focus was more on continence in marriage (husbands and wives living as brothers and sisters by refraining from sexual intercourse), rather than on actual celibacy. These types of marriage have been dubbed “Josephite” as they replicate the kind of marriage that Saint Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, had with the Virgin Mary. Eventually the church forbade even Josephite marriages for priests (perhaps because many couples found it too hard to live under the same roof without becoming sexually intimate) and hence the practice of admitting continent married men to the priesthood came under prohibition (Lowery 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Here it is useful to note—albeit very briefly—that the extraordinary popularity of Dan Brown’s (2003) bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* (and the subsequent movie) was due in large part to its challenge of the often taken-for-granted presumption that Christ was celibate. Many people were intrigued with the notion that Jesus may have married Mary Magdalene, that together they may have procreated a child, and that their biological lineage may continue down to today. While there is no evidence to support this notion (Welborn 2006), and many scripture scholars have debunked the premises of Brown’s

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that when John Paul II (1980) issued *The Pastoral Provision* allowing previously married Episcopal ministers to become Catholic priests, he did not demand that they embrace marital continence. According to Cochini (1981) and Stickler (1993), this was the norm in the first centuries of church history. Along these same lines, it is also worthy of mention that neither did the church oblige the married men who became permanent deacons after Vatican II to embrace marital continence, as also was the practice in the first centuries. Some participants at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) voiced strong opposition to the establishment of the permanent diaconate for married men as they saw it as a potential watering down of the principle of celibacy for ordained Catholics.

fictional work, it is interesting to observe how much the mass media focused on this controversial topic. The title of Heffernan's *New York Times* article (2003) "The Volatile Notion of a Married Jesus" says it all. Many devout Christians cannot even consider the notion that perhaps Jesus had not been celibate. Somehow, for them, that would make him less holy. When pressed for an explanation, their response often boils down to the notion that somehow sexuality and sanctity do not mix; they cannot coexist.

What is interesting in the wake of *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon is that for the first time in the history of Christianity thousands of believers have begun to consider, perhaps only remotely for most, that perhaps Jesus had been married. Anne Rice's latest fictional bestseller *The Road to Cana* (2008) reverts back to the image of a celibate Christ with the twist that he falls in love with a woman but renounces marriage with her for the sake of his mission. Her depiction of Christ's sexuality will probably scandalize some.

Returning to the encyclical on priestly celibacy written by Pope Paul (1967), he made it abundantly clear that he was aware of the clergy shortage throughout the Catholic world in the late 1960s, a deficiency that appears almost trivial when compared to today's reality. He concluded, however, that such a dire situation did not constitute sufficient reason to change the centuries-old discipline of demanding lifelong celibacy from those ordained for ministry in the Catholic Church. His successor, John Paul II (1993), was of the same opinion and was adamant about the importance of clerical celibacy even in the face of the continuing decline of priests throughout his 26-year pontificate.

In spite of these repeated declarations that celibacy will remain mandatory, the issue has resurfaced often during the last four decades, with or without media blitzes. Some resigned Catholic priests (Frein 1968; Vogels 1993; Kowalski 2004), a few

disappointed Catholic laity (Prince 1992; Eberley 2002), and even a highly respected celibate Catholic priest (Cozzens 2006) have all argued that the present shortage could be resolved—in large part—if only the Vatican would allow such a change. Obviously, neither Benedict XVI nor his predecessors nor the majority of those in positions of authority (i.e., the bishops) think along the same lines because they have not budged on this issue in spite of numerous petitions over the years to relax the legislation.

The debates sparked in 2006 by the controversial excommunicated Archbishop Milingo (who entered a marriage blessed by the Unification Church of Rev. Moon and disobeyed Catholic Church law by ordaining married men) and by Cardinal Hummes, the new leader of the Vatican's clergy office, who hinted at the possibility of a change (but then quickly retracted his statement), indicate that the topic is far from being put to rest.

### *1.5 The anomie that sprang from the Vatican's aggiornamento*

It is important to view the unrest concerning such a core element of the Catholic priesthood within the larger context of the transformations experienced by the Catholic Church in general and by contemporary American society during the last 40 years. This period has witnessed major societal changes whose repercussions echo to the present day. Not only have technological and medical advances (e.g., the computer and the cell phone, as well as laser and laparoscopic surgery) altered the way most people live, there have also been major attitudinal transformations in vast segments of society represented emblematically by the civil rights and ecological movements as well as by the sexual revolution. Overall, Americans today are much more racially tolerant, environmentally conscious, and open about their sexuality than they were a generation ago.

It is also obvious that attitudes and practices concerning marriage and work have also undergone substantial changes in this country since the late 1960s. What used to be almost “unheard of” in past generations (such as divorce and mid-life career shifting) has now become commonplace. This recent historical phenomenon has deeply affected such basic societal institutions and milieus as the family unit and the workplace. Lifelong commitment to another person in marriage is no longer a “given” in modern society, as the divorce rates demonstrate (Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee 2000). There has been an equally pervasive and destabilizing shift in the workplace where a young person entering the labor market today no longer expects to be with the same company until retirement. The ubiquity of these two social facts (increased divorce and frequent career changes) would seem alien to a citizen of the United States only half a century ago for whom marriage and lifelong employment were considered stable commodities.

Intimately linked to these transformations within marriage and the workplace, which constitute an essential part of the historical contextualization of this project, is the modern concept of “mid-life crisis” which Peplau (1975) describes as a kind of identity crisis that usually occurs between the ages of 30 and 55. He explains that this negative experience happens when a person’s ideal expectations collide with the harsh realities of everyday life. In summary, “a crisis occurs when the available coping strategies of an individual fail to meet the requirements of a current problem” (Peplau 1975: 1762). Cohen (1979) points out that while some researchers may debate about whether “middle age is actually a crisis rather than just a series of transitional events, there does seem to be agreement that major changes take place in the lives of individuals during middle age and that some people deal with these changes better than others” (p. 466).

At the same time that many individuals were going through identity crises, the Catholic Church experienced one of her own. A definitive watershed moment was the Second Vatican Council (held between 1962 and 1965) when thousands of theological experts and ecclesiastical leaders met in Rome to modernize the church. The buzzword was *aggiornamento*, which is Italian for the process of bringing something or someone up-to-date. It was a time of great upheaval when long-standing beliefs and practices from the most serious (e.g., the belief that “outside the church there is no salvation”) to the smallest (e.g., not eating meat on Fridays) were abolished or drastically modified.

The church’s liturgical experts called for a radical revamping of the rubrics of the Mass, which is the quintessential Catholic ritual, often referred to as the “source and summit of the entire Christian life” (Flannery 1963). Before Vatican II, priests always celebrated Mass in Latin with their backs to the people while facing the altar. Almost overnight, this 2000-year-old and profoundly meaningful rite for Catholics, so full of mystical symbolism, transmogrified. Now priests face the congregation and speak in the local language of the people (Wilde 2007). Even forty years later, many traditionally minded Catholics continue to struggle in their adjustment to such a monumental change in the liturgy. Benedict XVI (2007) recently advocated for the restoration of some of the old traditions (such as singing the “Our Father” prayer in Latin) that were jettisoned during the last 40 years and even sanctioned the restoration of the old Tridentine Mass (i.e., in Latin and the priest facing the altar) for those Catholics who desire it.

Another highly visible reform of Vatican II was that church authorities allowed priests and nuns to modify their religious garb and to live in a more relaxed manner. Nuns no longer wore habits that covered them from head to toe, with only their faces and

hands showing. Nor were they obliged to shave off their hair as they previously had done when making their profession of vows, at which time they would don the veil for the first time. Priests were no longer subjected to ecclesiastical tonsure, the shaving of the crown of their head to signify to the rest of the world that they had been set apart for priestly ministry. Besides these external changes of dress code and hairstyle, many of the controls that previously limited their contact with the “outside world” simply fell by the wayside. For example, now they are allowed to watch more television programs than before, to visit their families of origin more frequently, and to receive correspondence that is not first “screened” by their superiors, as was the practice for centuries. Only a handful of the most traditionalist religious orders maintain these practices today.

Some changes were even more radical as they went beyond the more external aspects of religious life. For example, for the first time in centuries, married men are now permitted to become deacons, which is a position of service just a step below the priest in the church’s hierarchy. The spirit of ecumenism (i.e., the acceptance and appreciation for people of different faiths), which had been dormant for many years, flourished into a passionate excitement for the reunification of all Christians. On a practical level, this meant that no longer did a Catholic have to get married in the privacy of the rectory if she were marrying a non-Catholic; she could now plan for a full wedding ceremony inside the church building. Now, in good conscience, a Catholic could also attend an occasional religious service at a Protestant church without the fear of committing a mortal sin.

The late 1960s and early 1970s was also the period when the Catholic practice of frequent confession fell into disuse (O’Toole 2000); what used to be a weekly ritual for many became a yearly—or even less frequent—event. Many lay people began to question

the moral authority of the church especially concerning sexual ethics. This became evident when the vast majority of Catholics chose to ignore (Greeley 1979) the Vatican's official condemnation of artificial contraception in the landmark encyclical *Humanae Vitae* promulgated by Paul VI (1968).<sup>3</sup>

During this tumultuous period, it seemed as though Catholics were journeying from a black-and-white world into multi-color confusion. Before Vatican II, the parish priest was typically among the most revered and respected members of the community. Father's word was final; if he said something was wrong it was wrong. There were no "ifs, ands, or buts" when it came to Catholic morality. There was a clear line demarcating mortal (serious) and venial (less serious) sin. There was zero tolerance for cohabitation before marriage and divorce was almost non-existent among Catholics, although many may have been in miserable marriages. Then, almost overnight, it seemed as if the clearly demarcated lines turned fuzzy. So much confusing change occurred during these four decades that it seems appropriate to describe the Post-Vatican II era as the anomie (Durkheim 1951 [1897]) of *aggiornamento*. Given the watershed nature of the Second Vatican Council, many scholars such as D'Antonio et al (2007) divide the Catholic population today into pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II generations.

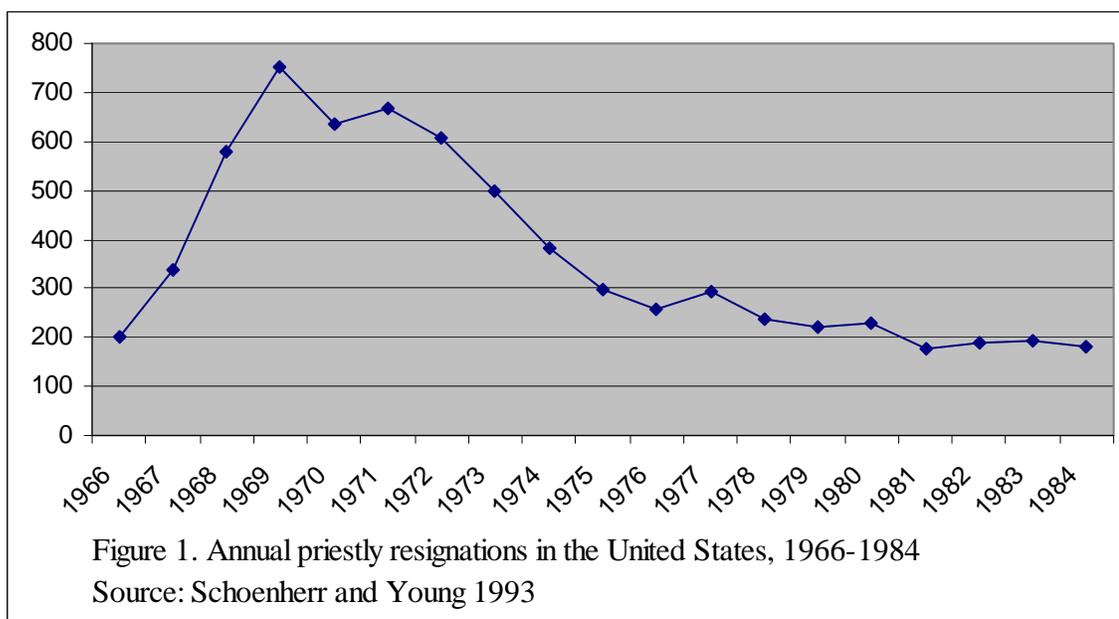
Citing the enormous impact that the upheaval of the Second Vatican Council made on the priesthood, Fichter (1968) pointed out that in the 25 years prior to Vatican II the annual resignation rate among diocesan priests did not reach even one in a thousand. Seven years earlier, Fichter (1961) had highlighted how socially unacceptable priestly resignations were (even to non-Catholics) by quoting Hughes's *Men and Their Work*:

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<sup>3</sup> Much controversy surrounded this document as the pope overrode the majority opinion of the very committee of lay people that he had assembled in order to advise him on this sensitive issue.

The true members of the aspiring profession will be thought to be those who enter it early, get the conventional training, work at the trade, identify themselves with its collective activities, and leave it only when they leave off working altogether. The person who, once in the charmed circle, leaves it, thereby slights the profession as a whole. He makes light of dedication to it and calls down upon himself that anger which reaches its extreme in the attitude toward a priest who gives up the cloth (Hughes 1958:158-9).

Shortly after Vatican II ended, public outrage at priestly resignations changed due, in part, to the sheer number of resignees which had skyrocketed over 40-fold to 4 percent a year (Schoenherr and Greeley 1974). While at first this may seem like a small percentage, the cumulative effect was disastrous for the church as an institution. Before those priests who were born in the 1940s reached their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination in the 1990s, having been ordained at about 25 years of age, one out of four of them had resigned (Greeley 2004a). Schoenherr and Young (1990) calculate that for some cohorts the average resignation rate will be 37 percent. Figure 1 shows the peak period for these resignations occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s.



The problem of the plummeting number of priests during the last 40 years had (and continues to have) deleterious effects on local communities. The ripple effect of such a deep decline in the clerical workforce reverberates to this day as many dioceses face shortages. On the parochial level, this deterioration has meant that where there used to be three or four clerics working at a parish there are now often only two and, in many cases, just one. During the last few years, many American dioceses have consolidated parishes, mainly in the inner city, due not only to the demographic shift of Catholics into the suburbs but also due to the vocation crisis. Some dioceses, especially those in rural areas, are even worse off. Understandably, the risk for burnout escalates as ever-increasing demands fall on the shoulders of fewer priests. With smaller numbers of seminarians in training, many dioceses will be forced to hire lay ministers (as many have already started in recent years) to administer parishes when priests retire or die.

To people unfamiliar with the Catholic mindset prevalent before Vatican II, this kind of boundary crossing (priests resigning from ministry) may not seem very serious, but from the perspective of both priest and devout lay Catholic, it most certainly was. Even today, from the viewpoint of the traditionally minded devout Catholic, a priest who resigns his ministry commits a mortal sin, which means that if he dies “unrepentant” he risks eternal damnation. Clearly, the stakes could not be higher for someone who believes in Heaven and Hell. Given such a drastic scenario, one can understand how the exodus of so many priests created a massive cultural shock among Catholics.

Naturally, the questions arise: Why did so many resign to get married? Was celibacy really the culprit? If so, why did this practice seem to work so well for so many centuries? Certainly, there must be some period or cohort effect. The exodus out of

celibate ministry by so many Catholic priests was a unique historic occurrence. No other period in the Church's two-millennium history had ever witnessed such a mass clerical migration except during the early years of the Protestant Reformation. Human nature has not changed much during the last 2000 years and one may safely presume that celibacy must have been difficult to maintain by the thousands of men who had served as priests throughout the centuries and not just by those who lived during the last 40 years.

Finally, seeking a point of comparison outside of ministry helps to put perspective on the situation. Greeley (2004a) points to the similarities between priestly resignation rates and Catholic divorce rates. Citing Schoenherr, the acknowledged expert in the field of priestly demographics, Greeley states that, "the average ordination-class resignation rate will reach just under 25% by the silver jubilee of the class" (2004a:62). While recognizing this sizeable loss, he suggests looking at the numbers from the reserve perspective: 75% of priests persevere in their vocation. A Barna Group study (2004) actually places the divorce percentage (25%) among Catholics at exactly the same level. This concurrence hints at the existence of a possible period effect denoting a larger "crisis of commitment" among both clergy and laity starting in the late 1960s and continuing to the present day. If that is true then dissatisfaction with celibacy as one of the main causes for the decline in the number of priests takes on a more nuanced perspective.

### *1.6 Protestants and the “Pastoral Provision”*

In this study when the word “Protestant” is used, it is exclusively in reference to the liberal mainline American churches (Congregational, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian) and not the large conservative—mainly Born Again—sector of Baptists, Evangelicals, and non-denominational Christians<sup>4</sup>. Weber’s (1922) distinction between priest and prophet, between “routinized” professional religious leader and charismatic figure, can help to explain the differences among the three groups. The Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy definitely fit much more in the first category as they occupy powerful positions within their local parishes and represent very stable organizations in society. They work full-time and are “career religionists” whereas many of the non-denominational ministers have jobs outside the church and might not have attended a formal seminary. (Perhaps some former Catholic priests have transitioned to the Born Again sector but given the lack of centralized national offices it was impossible to reach them and hence they do not form part of this particular research project.)

Returning to the similarities between the Catholic priest and the Protestant minister, even a casual observer would notice that they engage in almost identical work as they care for the spiritual needs of their local congregations through liturgy, preaching, counseling, and outreach programs. Their general courses of studies and their pastoral education have become alike in so many regards that they sometimes attend classes together, and share office space in hospital, university, and prison chaplaincies.

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<sup>4</sup> This choice was made because of the evident differences between these two Protestant groupings concerning theology, Biblical interpretation, and style of worship and preaching. The mainline Protestant Churches are much closer to the Catholic Church in many outward appearances even though, in some cases, there are major differences regarding social and moral dogmas. The conservative Protestant Churches may be more in agreement with the Catholic views on abortion and other ethical issues, but are quite different in their approach to liturgy and theology.

Given these similarities and the increased sense of ecumenism that emanated from the Second Vatican Council, it is understandable and even somewhat predictable that some Catholic priests who wanted to marry ventured into Protestant ministry. It must be noted, however, that the vast majority of resigned priests did not choose this path. As will be explained in the following chapter which reviews the research conducted during the last four decades on priestly resignations, most maintained their Catholic affiliation, got married (with or without dispensations from Rome), and chose counseling, social work, teaching, or other such “ex-priest-friendly” fields as their second careers.

While the Catholic Church was going through its own transformations in this country and around the globe, not all was quiet in the Protestant world. They too experienced their own revolutions including the ordination of women that started in the 1970s and, more recently, the acceptance by some mainline denominations of publicly avowed homosexuals into ministerial positions. Far from being universally accepted, this latter issue produces much heated debate, as LaFraniere and Goodstein (2007) report. Such radical policy changes have caused a major division in the worldwide Anglican Communion (Hassett 2007), which is the umbrella group for the Episcopal Church.

Some of those Protestants who opposed these innovations have transferred to the Catholic Church (Fichter 1989; Sullins forthcoming). A number of ministers among the disenfranchised Episcopalians are now known as “Pastoral Provision” priests, which is the name of the 1980 Vatican proclamation that allowed them not only to convert to the Catholic faith but also to maintain their clerical status, while remaining married. They form a natural “comparison group” for this research project since they are so similar and yet so different from those Catholic priests who have crossed the affiliation boundary in

the opposite direction.<sup>5</sup> They are similar to the participants in this study in the sense that they have made the choice to disaffiliate from their church of origin, even though, as will be pointed out in the next chapter, their reasons were quite different. As will be seen, the “greener pastures shepherds” of this research project were liberal-leaning Catholic priests who felt that the Roman Church was not progressing fast enough whereas the “Pastoral Provision” priests were conservative-minded Episcopal priests who thought that the Anglican Church was shedding too many traditions too quickly.

When contrasting the “Pastoral Provision” priests with the thousands of resigned Catholic priests (the larger pool from which the respondents to this survey originally belonged), Fichter states that the explanation given by the Vatican for...

why the Episcopal priest may bring his wife with him, and why the resigned Catholic priest may not, has been put in the bluntest moral terms. The man who abandons the Episcopal Church to join the true Church of Rome is to be praised for his good moral behavior. He deserves commendation and rewards. The man who abandons the Catholic priesthood to take a wife is blamed for reprehensible moral behavior. He is to be scolded and penalized. In the former case, it does not matter that the priest is married; in the latter case, it is the only thing that matters. In the first case, he has to leave his Church but retains his wife; in the second, he has to leave his wife to retain his Church (Fichter 1989:57).

### *1.7 Twelve theoretical boundary crossings*

Figure 2 graphically presents both a conceptual and an actual division within Christian ministry today. The two dyads of celibate/married and Catholic/Protestant form four quadrants. The vast majority of Catholic priests are located within the top left quadrant while the vast majority of Protestant ministers are located in the bottom right corner although there are some who are celibate as well.

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<sup>5</sup> I have already had some preliminary discussions with Sullins about a future joint publication comparing the two populations of transitioned clergy.

	Celibate ministry	Married ministry
Catholic ministry	A. Majority of Catholic priests	B. Exceptional cases to celibacy rule
Protestant ministry	C. Minority of Protestant ministers	D. Majority of Protestant ministers

Figure 2. Four quadrants of Christian ministry based on marital status and affiliation  
Source: Fichter 2008

When analyzing the quadrants it becomes apparent that there are 12 hypothetical “boundary crossing” flows. Of these, as Table 1 indicates, five are in effect non-existent or prohibited. Three others represent so few people as to be negligible (celibates changing denomination) while two others (Protestant clergy marrying or becoming celibate) are not deemed problematic. Subtracting these 10 theoretical possibilities leaves two (numbers 5 and 10) that merit attention. Besides those two categories, the first group also deserves serious consideration. If those celibate Catholic priests who chose to marry were allowed to continue in formal ministry, which they are not since they renounced celibacy, they would represent the largest flow from one quadrant to another. As will be explained more precisely in Chapter 2, there are about 16,000 such men in the United States, a huge loss that is itself worthy of serious attention.

Table 1. Twelve theoretical “boundary crossing” flows to and from the Latin Rite priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States (including Pastoral Provision priests only in the tenth option), “Shepherding in Greener Pastures” (SGP), 2008

	Description of the particular boundary crossing from one quadrant to another as displayed in Figure 2	Direction of flow	Official teaching of Catholic Church	Frequency of transition
1.	Celibate Catholic priest who marries and remains Catholic	A to B†	He may marry but not function as priest	<b>Estimated at 16,000</b>
2.	Married Catholic priest becomes celibate Catholic priest	B to A	Non-existent due to celibacy commitment	None
3.	Celibate Catholic priest becomes celibate Protestant minister	A to C	Apostasy from the “true faith”	Number unknown but probably negligible
4.	Celibate Protestant minister becomes celibate Catholic priest	C to A	Conversion to the “true faith”	Number unknown but probably negligible
5.	Celibate Catholic priest becomes married Protestant minister	A to D	Apostasy from the “true faith”	<b>Number unknown prior to this study</b>
6.	Married Protestant minister becomes celibate Catholic priest	D to A	Conversion to the “true faith”	Number unknown but probably negligible
7.	Married Catholic priest becomes celibate Protestant minister	B to C	Non-existent due to celibacy commitment	None
8.	Celibate Protestant minister becomes married Catholic priest	C to B	Non-existent due to celibacy commitment	None
9.	Married Catholic priest becomes married Protestant minister	B to D	Non-existent due to celibacy commitment	None
10.	Married Protestant minister becomes married Catholic priest	D to B	Conversion to the “true faith”	<b>Pastoral Provision, estimated at 70-85</b>
11.	Celibate Protestant minister becomes married Protestant minister	C to D	Not relevant	Not relevant
12.	Married Protestant minister becomes celibate Protestant minister	D to C	Not relevant	Not relevant

† Note: The flow from A to B does not exist in reality as that particular transition places the former priest outside of the four quadrants.

### *1.8 Outline for the following chapters*

At the conclusion of this introductory chapter, it is appropriate to present the outline for the rest of the dissertation. The next chapter will focus on a three-pronged literature review that 1) analyzes sociologically, from a Weberian perspective, the Roman Catholic Church's rationale for clerical celibacy; 2) builds a five-tiered theoretical framework around the concepts of mental boundaries, the practice of abstinence, affiliation switching, role commitment process, and role exit process; and 3) summarizes the findings of the four most prominent sociologists of clerical celibacy in America.

The third chapter will explain how the participants were selected, offering a brief analysis of the data collection process employed for each one of the five denominations. There will also be a description of the research design and methods utilized in this project, including the construction of the specific questionnaire for this unique group of transitional clergy. The four main research questions and their corresponding hypotheses, divided into two sets of two, will cap this chapter. The first pair of research questions will examine the causes of such a major transition while the second will analyze some of the possible consequences.

The descriptive results, which cover a wide range of demographic descriptors concerning the participants' backgrounds and their transitional experiences, will be presented in Chapter 4. This will be followed by the inferential results section of Chapter 5 based on the four aforementioned research questions and hypotheses.

Finally, the concluding chapter will be dedicated to a discussion of the conclusions, implications, and limitations of this research project. There will also be several suggestions for future research in this specific field.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### *2.1 Overview of the literature*

As is evident from the preceding chapter, many thousands of men and women have faithfully observed clerical celibacy throughout the centuries in very diverse cultural settings. From Buddhist monasteries in Tibet to Shaker settlements in Maine, these religious virtuosi, as Weber (1922) called them, renounced marriage and pledged sexual abstinence in accordance with the specific requirements of the religious institutions to which they belonged. It is also obvious, from the information presented in the previous pages, that within the realm of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) the Roman Catholic Church stands out as the only major branch that has made this very demanding ascetic practice a *sine qua non* condition for ministry.

Given the novelty of this project and the extremely limited nature of the literature that exists concerning celibate Catholic priests who opted for married Protestant ministry, this review of previous research will approach the subject from three different angles. Guided by the perennial six interrogatives of who, what, where, when, why, and how, this chapter has four main sections. The first two deal with theoretical and analytic categories pertinent to the topic while the third presents a summary of the four most prominent investigators in the field of resigned priests.

The first part is mainly theoretical and addresses the ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions of clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church. Given the nearly complete Catholic monopoly on this particular practice in the western world, it is appropriate to begin this literature

review by examining in detail the official teaching of the Vatican. In particular, there is one touchstone document entitled *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (On priestly celibacy), written by Pope Paul VI in 1967, that clearly spells out the Catholic Church's rationale for this centuries-old practice. One of the specific contributions of this particular research project is a first-ever analysis of the central arguments of this official ecclesiastical declaration in light of the observations made by Max Weber (1922) on the very same topic.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the second overarching objective of this project is to disentangle, albeit only partially, the complex process of multiple role transitions by analyzing the causes and consequences of this particular form of boundary crossing. Keeping this goal in mind, the second section of this review presents a five-tiered analytical framework structured around the idea of boundaries and transitions across them, especially those that touch upon religious disaffiliation.

At the ground level will be Zerubavel's insights (1991) concerning cognitive delineations, on top of which will be fastened reflections from Mullaney's work (2006) on abstinence (especially as it pertains to celibacy) and Jordan's reflections (2000) on homosexual orientation in the Catholic priesthood. The building material for the third level will be collected from numerous researchers who have studied religious switching in general. The fourth tier of this analytic framework will focus on the "role commitment process" as utilized by Schoenherr and Greeley (1974) in their study of American priests while the fifth (and final) phase will draw upon Ebaugh's description (1998a) of the "role exit process," especially as it applies to religious commitments. The assembling of these five concepts together will shed light on the 'how' and 'why' questions associated with the radical life-altering decisions made by the participants in this study.

The third main section of this summary of previous research will offer a predominantly empirical report concerning the much larger group of former Catholic priests who resigned in order to marry, of which the current participants form but a very small subgroup. In other words, this final part focuses on the ‘who,’ ‘where,’ and ‘when’ questions. A review of this nature will provide the necessary historical and cultural context so that the detailed description of these “greener pasture shepherds” in Chapter 4 will be understood within the broader framework of the thousands of priests who opted for marriage after the adjournment of the Second Vatican Council. To this end, I will summarize the main findings of the four most prominent sociologists of clerical celibacy: Fichter, Greeley, Hoge, and Schoenherr. As each one of these scholars has pointed out, notwithstanding different emphases and nuances, there is a persistent association between dissatisfaction with celibacy and the numerical decline of Catholic priests.

## *2.2 Vatican position on celibacy in the light of Weberian theory*

### *2.2.1 Introduction to two fundamental texts*

Just as the mass exodus of Catholic priests from celibacy into marriage began in the mid to late 1960s, Pope Paul VI published his landmark document *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967) reiterating the Vatican’s official stance of requiring lifelong celibacy from priests ordained in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. He did not write this encyclical letter in a cultural vacuum but rather was responding to concerns that had arrived to him from people throughout the world, as he mentions in his introduction. In the classic Scholastic style of logical argumentation often identified with Saint Thomas Aquinas, Pope Paul began his reflections with a series of thought-provoking questions

such as “Has the time not come to break the bond linking celibacy with the priesthood in the Church?” and “Could the difficult observance of it not be made optional?”

Finally, after several other probing questions, he asked, “How it can be changed from a burden to a help for priestly life?” At the conclusion of this series of provocative inquiries, he listed several commonly mentioned objections to the practice of priestly celibacy. He then methodically addressed each one of them while at the same time explicating the reasons for preserving this “brilliant jewel” of clerical celibacy—as he describes it—that the Church has safeguarded across the centuries.

Almost half a century before the publication of *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Weber stated in *The Sociology of Religion* (1922) that

. . . the permanent abstinence of charismatic asceticism and the chastity of priests and religious virtuosi derives primarily from the view that chastity, as a highly extraordinary type of behavior, is a symptom of charismatic qualities and a source of valuable ecstatic abilities, which qualities and abilities are necessary instruments for the magical control of the god. Later on, especially in occidental Christianity, the decisive reason for priestly celibacy was the necessity that the ethical achievement of the priestly incumbents of ecclesiastical office not lag behind that of the ascetic virtuosi, the monks. Another decisive reason for the emphasis upon the celibacy of the clergy was the church’s interest in preventing the inheritance of its benefices by the heirs of priests. (P. 237-238)

Underpinning the three main reasons that Weber presents in this one condensed paragraph are several of his key sociological concepts such as asceticism, charisma, and the virtuoso state. For Weber, intimately related to these religious topics are the notions of legitimacy, authority, and the removal of self-interest. All six of these concepts fit in well with the reasons given by the Catholic Church for such a practice, and will be explained and developed throughout the rest of this chapter.

### *2.2.2 Asceticism, charisma, and the virtuoso state*

Weber (1922) describes asceticism as the path that people who are actively seeking their salvation choose in order to gain mastery over the conditions of this life. He contrasts asceticism with mysticism, which is the choice of those who passively resign themselves to accepting the same conditions as their means of salvation. As an example of the first path, Weber points to the monk, as an “other-worldly ascetic,” who seeks mastery over his own flesh motivated by religious incentives such as abundant rewards in the next life. Such mastery is not only over the body, but also over the entire human condition. The monk renounces all worldly pleasures (especially the sexual kind which is among the most intense) so that he may cling to God more closely. His ability to remain faithful to this rigorous commitment acts as a stamp of credibility to the lay people who belong to his denomination and who look to him for spiritual leadership.

Closely linked to asceticism is the concept of charisma, a major building block in Weber’s sociological analysis of religion. He defines charisma as the extraordinary gifts or powers that certain religious leaders possess. As Weber (1922) so often does in his creation of ideal types, he employs a dichotomous categorization by stating that religious leaders can possess charisma in two different ways. The first comes through a gift of natural endowment while the second comes into being through the extraordinary means of entering some ascetic regimen or training. The latter type of charisma would have remained dormant had it not been evoked by some demanding practice of self-denial. Applying these concepts to celibacy, one could make the case for two kinds of celibates: those who are naturally inclined towards the renunciation of the flesh and those who obtain it through ascetical training. In terms used by Christ (Matthew 19:12), the first

group are those “eunuchs from birth” while the second group are those who “make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”

Weber, however, does not seem to be interested in analyzing whether celibacy comes naturally to monks or they obtain it by dint of ascetical training. The important point for him is that their celibacy is perceived by the lay people of the same religious organization to which the virtuosi belong as proof of special powers. If monks were able to live in such a demanding way, Weber argues, parish priests were expected to do the same. Otherwise, the average people in the pew on Sunday would perceive their local spiritual leader as somehow deficient and therefore not worthy of the same level of credibility and authority. Weber points out that, be they monk or parish priest, their state as charismatic spiritual leaders requires that they be different from the rest of humanity. Celibacy certainly sets them apart from the vast majority of ordinary people.

Although he did not cite the proof explicitly, Weber’s theory appears to be grounded historically as the rise of monasticism in the Catholic Church, which began in the fourth century, coincided with the enactment of the first explicit ecclesiastical laws concerning celibacy for all priests at the Council of Elvira in 306 (Heid 1997). Until the creation of monasteries, there was no dichotomy in the Catholic priesthood.

### *2.2.3 Main differences between diocesan and religious priests*

This dichotomous categorization in the Catholic priesthood to which Weber referred is very important for this study. With slightly different terminology from that which Weber used, every Catholic priest today can be classified either as diocesan or religious. Diocesan priests (commonly known as parish priests) are also called “secular”

priests since they live in the midst of the world of the people they serve and not in some remote monastery. Both diocesan and religious priests share much in common with regard to ministry, but live and work within very different social structures.

Perhaps it is easiest to explain their differences in terms of geography. A diocesan priest belongs to a specific diocese and works under the jurisdiction of his bishop who may station the priest anywhere within the geographical confines of their particular territory. For example, a priest ordained for service in the Archdiocese of Newark will usually serve in one of the 237 parishes that are located within the 511 square miles of the four counties of northeastern New Jersey, which constitute the archdiocesan boundary lines. On the other hand, a religious order priest (like a Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, or Jesuit) can work anywhere in the world, wherever his congregation sends him from Africa to Alaska, from Singapore to Spain.

Within the religious priesthood, a further subdivision could be made into monastic and non-monastic but for the sake of simplicity both will be considered together in this project under the heading of “religious” priests. Although Weber called these men monks, we will call them “religious”, an adjective which means that these men have already committed themselves to God and to ministerial service in the church through their profession of the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, even before they were ordained to the priesthood. Diocesan priests also make promises of celibacy and obedience, but are not obliged to embrace poverty in the same radical way as religious priests do. Diocesan clergy are encouraged to live frugally but they may maintain bank accounts and they may own property.

An approach from a slightly different angle can help to clarify the distinction. Fichter (1961) speaks of religious priests as predominantly engaged in the specialized ministries of the church such as retreat centers, hospitals, and schools, whereas diocesan priests usually work in parish settings. While there are some exceptions in both directions (religious priests working in parishes or diocesan priests teaching in universities), and the introduction of such groups as the Neo-Catechumenal Way and Opus Dei have created hybrid-type entities, the general categorization holds true.

One last difference between diocesan and religious priesthood is worth noting. Religious priests are more likely to live together than diocesan priests are. For example, a typical Jesuit community could consist of several university professors and spiritual directors who live under the same roof but exercise their ministries in different locales. They usually have prayer time and meals together at the beginning and/or the end of the day. A diocesan priest, on the other hand, may or may not live in the company of other priests depending on the size of his parish. He is more likely to pray and to eat alone. It seems clear that the diocesan priest is at greater risk for loneliness and for struggling with his vow of celibacy than his religious counterpart is since he has fewer external supports. As the number of diocesan priests continues to decline, the risk of loneliness will most likely increase, thus perpetuating and exacerbating an already “vicious cycle.”

This analysis of the two types of priesthood brings to the fore a fascinating and somewhat paradoxical conclusion. Given their additional vow of poverty and the more restrictive norms that regulate their lives, religious priests appear to be more ascetical than their diocesan counterparts are. While this may be true on some levels, from the perspective of communal support, diocesan priests are more deprived. While they usually

enjoy greater freedoms than religious priests do, they do not have as easy access into the emotional bank of fraternal support during their battles with loneliness.

Perhaps Weber's distinction between an "other-worldly" and an "inner-worldly" orientation can shed light on this situation. "Other-worldly" religious people flee from the corruption of this world and usually gravitate towards secluded environments, far removed from outside influences. Surrounded by other like-minded individuals and subjected to a very strict rule of life, together the members of the religious community create an environment that is highly conducive to their lofty spiritual ambitions. One only needs to think of the centuries-old monastic communities, be they Buddhist, Catholic, or from any other tradition that highly values separation and detachment from the world. These sheltered and predominantly peaceful settings are meant to foster in the monks a sense of calm determination towards the pursuit of the highest virtue.

Those who embrace an "inner-worldly" spirituality, on the other hand, need to find a way to strike the balance between being "in the world but not of it." Without the protection of the monastery walls, they find themselves immersed in the world of family responsibilities, civic duties, work-related demands, and a much wider network of social relations that can potentially distract them as they trudge forward on their spiritual journey here on earth. Their path generally has more obstacles and pitfalls. Applying this distinction between "other-worldly" and "inner-worldly" mentalities to priestly celibacy, as it is practiced in the two major sectors of Catholic priesthood, it becomes evident that the diocesan priest (in contrast to the religious order priest) is trying to live an "other-worldly" virtue in the midst of his "inner-worldly" environment, a much more arduous task.

#### 2.2.4 *The fundamental reasons for sacred celibacy*

Although Paul VI was certainly aware of the differences in lifestyles between diocesan and religious clergy, his encyclical on priestly celibacy does not highlight this divergence and he treats the topic equally for both branches of the priesthood. In total, he mentions five main reasons for the practice of clerical celibacy in the Roman Catholic tradition. In the first place, he points out how it is an integral part of the priest's imitation of Jesus. Secondly, he speaks of celibacy as the sum of the highest ideals of Christian charity. In the third place, he underscores the charismatically empowering nature of such a discipline. He also speaks of how very practical it is on the pastoral level, and, finally, he refers to its eschatological significance. Although his vocabulary is eminently theological, and hence quite different from Weber's sociological approach, three out of the five reasons Pope Paul gives for clerical celibacy coincide in the main with Weber's point of view.

The first major justification for clerical celibacy that Paul VI mentions centers on the understanding that Catholic priests are expected to be as much like Christ as possible. In other words, since Jesus was celibate, and he is the model for all priests, so too must they embrace the celibate lifestyle in imitation of him. This direct association and identification of the individual priest with Christ the High Priest is expressed in the classic and often repeated theological maxim "*Sacerdos, Alter Christus*" which literally means, "The Priest (is) Another Christ."

For centuries, it was safe to presume that no devout Christian would doubt the celibacy of Christ and hence Pope Paul wrote without the slightest hesitation (or need for justification) that, "Wholly in accord with this mission, Christ remained throughout His

whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified His total dedication to the service of God and men.” Although there is no explicit mention in the Gospels either of Christ’s choice for celibacy or of his potential married state, the vast majority of Scripture scholars have taught—and the vast majority of Christians have believed throughout the centuries—that Christ chose the former way of life. Pope Paul and those theologians and historians with whom he consulted while drafting *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* certainly did not entertain the notion of a married Jesus.

Employing Weber’s terminology, Christ was not only a prophet who came to effect a major breakthrough in the established religious order of his day but he was also a “religious virtuoso” par excellence. As happened with other great prophets throughout the history of humanity, he gathered around him a group of followers who tried to imitate his example and put his teachings into practice.

Citing the Gospel passage (Luke 18: 29-30) where Jesus promises a more generous recompense to those who leave home, family, wife, and children for the sake of the kingdom of God, Paul VI introduces his second major reason for celibacy by stating quite emphatically that celibacy “is the sum of the highest ideals of the Gospel” (P. 23). He further declares that celibacy has always been considered by the Church “as a symbol of, and stimulus to, charity: it signifies a love without reservations; it stimulates to a charity which is open to all” (P. 24).

Referring to celibacy as “the mark of a heroic soul,” the pope claims that one of the consequences of celibacy is that it increases a priest’s ability to listen to the word of God and to pray. It also endows him with “a greater richness of meaning and sanctifying power” (P. 29). This third argument in favor of celibacy as charismatically empowering

echoes the very same reason given by Weber who views celibacy as a “symptom of charismatic qualities and a source of valuable ecstatic abilities” (1922:238). What is interesting for the sake of this project is that the pope, in agreement with Weber, presents celibacy as a highly extraordinary behavior that confers special powers to the priest who lives it. In everyday interchanges between lay Catholics and priests, this often translates into requests such as: “Father, I ask you to pray for my special intention because I know that God hears (and answers) your prayers.” Whether or not parishioners think that such power comes from the celibate condition is a point worthy of future investigation. If they do, then Weber was right from a perceptual point of view, that people really do think that celibacy gives extra power to the priest. If it is true in fact (and not just in perception) that celibacy truly grants spiritual powers, then Paul VI was right. In a future research project, one could attempt to test Weber’s theory by asking people what it is about the priest that makes them think that he is so influential. However, the pope’s statement is beyond empirical proof, at least at this stage of development of the measurement of variables in the field of the scientific study of religion. It can only be taken on faith.

Further along in his lengthy treatise, Pope Paul states that the priest’s complete consecration to Christ gives him “even in the practical field, the maximum efficiency and the best disposition of mind, mentally and emotionally, for the continuous exercise of a perfect charity” (P. 32). He further states that celibacy guarantees the priest “a greater freedom and flexibility in the pastoral ministry” (P. 32). These are the “practical” arguments in favor of celibacy. Freed from the constraints that come with marriage and childrearing, the priest can dedicate himself completely to the pastoral ministry. Weber does not mention this point, at least not explicitly.

Finally, Paul VI frames celibacy's eschatological significance (or the view of life from the perspective of eternity) around another phrase spoken by Christ and recorded in Matthew's Gospel. In Chapter 22 of this first book of the New Testament, Jesus defends his teaching on the resurrection by answering the "trick" question put to him concerning the case of a woman who had married seven brothers in succession. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, wanted to know whose wife this hypothetical woman would be in Heaven since each one of the brothers had married her, leaving her a widow each time. Paul VI takes Jesus' response ("At the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven") as the foundation for the eschatological argument in favor of celibacy. Simply stated, the priests' celibate commitment reminds all Christians that they are merely pilgrims on earth and that their true home is in Heaven. The fact that a man would give up two of the greatest joys known on earth (i.e., marriage and parenthood) must signify that there really is an afterlife filled with abundant rewards. Therefore, according to Pope Paul, celibacy "stands as a testimony to the ever-continuing progress of the People of God toward the final goal of their earthly pilgrimage." (P. 34).

### *2.2.5 The reason never mentioned by Paul VI*

As was stated in the introduction to this chapter, the similarities between what the Vatican officially teaches and the reasons put forth by Weber are, for the most part, in harmony. There is, however, one point that Weber presents that Paul VI never mentions. It is a very material concern; it has to do with money. Weber points to the "church's interest in preventing the inheritance of its benefices by the heirs of priests" (1922:237) as one of the decisive reasons for the institution of celibacy. Obviously, just because the

pope does not mention an economic reason, does not mean that finances do not play an important role. Here it is necessary to distinguish between latent and manifest functions. The manifest function of celibacy is so that the priest, in imitation of Christ, can be at the total disposition of the Catholic Church. A latent or unspoken function is that celibacy provides a cheap labor force. The inheritance issue aside, which could be resolved easily enough as the Protestant Churches have been able to do, many advocates of celibacy point out the enormous cost it would be if priests' salaries had to be augmented to support their families. Carroll (2006) has shown that even though Protestant ministers on average work eight hours less per week than Catholic priests do, they are compensated at almost double the rate. One of the evident bonuses of celibacy for the Catholic Church as an institution is that it ensures dedicated personnel that can work longer hours for less pay, and can be more easily moved around from town to town as needs arise.

Coser's description (1974) of the Catholic Church as a "greedy institution" fits in very well at this point. In his fascinating work concerning those institutions that seek undivided loyalty from their members, he often refers to the Catholic Church's practice of sacerdotal celibacy as a prime example of his central thesis. He explains that by weakening the ties to their family of origin and by prohibiting them from forming their own, the church effectively minimizes the possibly divisive pull of family obligations. As functionaries of a "greedy institution," Catholic priests become so totally committed to the church that they make themselves unavailable for anyone or anything else. Celibacy thus becomes "a prime mechanism in assuring the full devotion of the priest to the Church which he is supposed to serve with his entire personality" (Coser 1974:16).

### *2.2.6 Legitimacy, authority, and the removal of self-interest*

Towards the end of his encyclical, Paul VI presents a brief history of clerical celibacy. While acknowledging the legitimacy of the married priesthood in the Eastern Churches united to Rome, and expressing his esteem for their clergy, he points out that even in those churches that allow marriage before ordination, celibacy is held in high esteem and is demanded of their bishops. This linking of celibacy with authority brings to the fore three sociological concepts that Weber (1922) developed around his theory of charisma: legitimacy, authority, and the removal of self-interest. Weaving these three concepts together, the Catholic priest emerges as a charismatic figure whose unique spiritual talents grant him an ascendancy over the lay members of his church. One of those qualities that radically sets him apart from the rest of humanity is his ability to live without marital intimacy and its concomitant sexual activity. By embracing such a heroic sacrifice, the priest proves the depth of his love for God and for the portion of “the Lord’s flock” entrusted to his care. He gives up the earthly attachments to wife and children so that he may more readily serve the needs of the community. In imitation of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, he lays down his life for his sheep, and can say quite literally at the highpoint of Mass, “This is my body which will be given up for you.” By committing himself to celibacy, the priest proves his selflessness and thereby earns legitimacy in the eyes of his parishioners who, thusly motivated, accept his leadership.

Inspired by the dedication of their priests, Catholics are willing (at least in theory, if not in practice) to recognize their authority. Before the Second Vatican Council when priests occupied the proverbial pedestal of absolute respect, the majority of Catholics unquestioningly obeyed their indications. In discussions about faith and morals, priests

wielded a tremendous amount of influence. Since then, much has changed. The priest's voice is now just "one of many" that a lay Catholic may (or may not) listen to when weighing ethical options. In essence, "Father" no longer has the final word. Before Vatican II, for example, if a physician recommended birth control to a Catholic woman, knowing that the church disapproved of it, she probably would have sought counsel from her local priest. Today, such consultations (either about contraceptives or any other moral dilemma) have become much rarer occurrences, as demonstrated in the recent study by D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, and Gautier (2007) where they found that the locus of moral authority for Catholics has shifted from church authority to their own private conscience.

Without a doubt, the priestly pedophilia scandal that erupted in Boston in 2002 and then spread throughout the country has not bolstered the legitimacy of either the priests or the bishops in the eyes of many people, both inside and outside church circles.

### *2.2.7 Conclusion of the Weberian analysis of Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*

As has been demonstrated in the previous pages, there is a great deal of agreement between Weber's sociological view and the Vatican's theological stance on the topic of clerical celibacy. Applying such fundamental Weberian notions as asceticism, charisma, and authority to Pope Paul's landmark treatise has helped to clarify that, while celibacy may be costly to the individual in terms of sacrifice and self-denial, it is beneficial to the church as an institution. Considered a manifestation of the highest level of virtue and one of the most preeminent ways of imitating Christ, not only do many lay Catholics perceive it as conferring special powers to their priests, but the ecclesiastical authorities have also found it to be a very practical way of removing self-interest from the priesthood.

### *2.3 Five-tiered theoretical framework concerning boundaries and transitions*

#### *2.3.1 Is it as simple as changing lanes or changing tracks?*

By means of introduction to Zerubavel's work (1991) on boundaries, it is helpful to consider at length the image of "changing lanes" while keeping in mind the work of Glaser and Strauss (1971) on the degree of reversibility (or lack thereof) inherent in certain status passages. Just as highway drivers routinely shift in and out of the lanes on the road, while maintaining the same overall direction and speed, it could be argued that the participants in this study (who transitioned from celibate Catholic priesthood to married Protestant ministry) maintained their same orientation of service to God and others but simply did so in a neighboring church. They did not exit the highway by leaving ministry entirely as did so many thousands of their ex-priest colleagues; they simply moved one lane (or perhaps two) to the right or to the left.

While this automotive analogy may be useful it could also lead one to believe that the boundaries between the churches are highly permeable, which is not the case from both a practical point of view (there is much ecclesiastical red tape involved) and from an emotional perspective. Perhaps a better image would be "changing tracks" in which we substitute trains for cars. This image makes it clearer that the change occurs at a specific juncture in time and is much more permanent in nature than a car weaving freely in and out of traffic lanes. It also highlights the concept of reversibility that Glaser and Straus (1971) mention as being the first of the six principal considerations to be kept in mind when dealing with status passages. Reversibility takes into account the direction of a particular passage. For example, it is extremely rare for the chief executive officer of a corporation to be demoted to the level of a vice president or a district manager.

For centuries, Catholics thought of the priesthood as an irreversible passage. One of the most frequently repeated phrases in an ordination ceremony is precisely, “You are a priest forever!” Given the apparently irreversible nature of such a high status role in society, bishops and superiors frequently admonish their priests to avoid situations that could undermine their definitive passage into the clerical ranks, just as a sponsor from Alcoholics Anonymous would advise a newcomer to avoid certain people and places that could jeopardize recovery. When dealing with this topic of avoiding reversals, Glaser and Strauss (1971) bring up the example of how engaging in what is generally considered a socially acceptable relationship (e.g., dating) could lead to a setback for a particular passage (e.g., for a celibate Catholic priest). If he is feeling lonely or is dissatisfied with celibacy, the priest in this case will probably not view such a romantic relationship as an obstacle. He may even regard it as a first step out of an unhappy situation.

This brings up the question of the desirability of certain passages. Glaser and Strauss point out that the strategic question about the desirability of a passage is “from whose viewpoint is the passage desirable or undesirable?” (1971:89). When both the “passagee” (e.g., a priest) and the agent (e.g., his bishop or superior) consider the passage desirable, they will work together to make the transition happen joyfully and smoothly. One example of a mutually acceptable transition could be when the bishop appoints an eager young assistant priest to be the senior pastor of a parish. In this case, when both parties view the passage positively, it becomes a “win-win” situation. Where there is a difference of opinion, however, between the “passagee” and the agent concerning the desirability of the proposed passage, it is a completely different story. Frictions and frustrations often abound in such tense situations.

Given their disapproval of a priest's decision to resign from Catholic ministry and to join one of the Protestant Churches, it is understandable that those in positions of authority in the Catholic Church would not look favorably on the aforementioned benign images of changing lanes or tracks. From the official Vatican perspective, a resigned priest who renounces his faith is an apostate, guilty of a very serious sin. It is bad enough when a priest seeks a dispensation from his vow of celibacy in order to get married in the church, but it is entirely more reprehensible if he leaves the faith. He is, according to strict interpretation of canon law, living in sin and risks eternal damnation. In the eyes of traditionally minded Catholics, for whom a wide chasm exists between the churches, these seemingly innocent "greener pastures shepherds" are deviants and traitors.

Returning to the imagery of cars traveling along the highway, from a traditional Catholic viewpoint, a passage like the one that is the focus of this study would be the equivalent to crossing the double yellow lines of a major thoroughfare and driving into oncoming traffic. How different this imagery is to the "changing lanes" concept! Those who accept the more benign metaphor consider the divide between the churches as mere intermittent white lines on the pavement. For them, transitions are permissible, almost carefree. This latter group engages in what Zerubavel (1996) calls "lumping," a process by which mental distances between entities are played down. The former group, on the other hand, engages in "splitting" or the "widening of perceived gaps between entities," (1991:27) in order to accentuate the difference between the two denominations.

By juxtaposing these two contrasting images of ministerial relocation, it becomes clear how personal cognitive boundaries, rooted in collective conceptions and practices, frame worldviews and either allow change or strictly prohibit it.

Zerubavel's (1991) comparison of the 'rigid' mind versus the 'fuzzy' mind can help shed even more light on this issue of boundary perceptions.<sup>6</sup> He explains that,

The rigid mind typically envisions a highly compartmentalized world made up of sharply delineated insular entities separated from one another by great divides. The fuzzy mind, by contrast, invokes a world made up of vague essences fading gradually into one another. Instead of mental ghettos, it features mental twilight zones. Instead of clear-cut distinctions, it highlights ambiguities. Both mind-sets entail certain costs as well as certain advantages. (P. 115)

In contemporary Catholic phraseology people with these two diametrically opposed worldviews (mental rigidity versus cognitive fuzziness) would label themselves positively as 'orthodox' or 'progressive' whereas those who disagree with them would pejoratively describe them as 'reactionary' or 'heretical.'

Taking for granted that most priests grew up in strict religious families, especially those born before Vatican II (as is the case for the majority of participants in this study), one could confidently assert that in their formative years these men grew up with a rigid mentality when it came to faith and morals. Everything was either black or white; there was little room for any shade of gray. Then, almost immediately after Vatican II, there came a collective shift among many Catholics to the 'fuzzy' category, best exemplified by the complete change of opinion concerning contraception. Before the 1960s, few Catholics would dare defy the moral teaching of the Church, especially not in areas of sexuality, especially not when the Pope made such a public statement. Now, a mere 40 years later, the overwhelming majority of sexually active Catholics in the United States practice some form of artificial birth control (Greeley 1979, 1990), in direct opposition to the Vatican's official and oft reiterated stance.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Zerubavel (1991) discusses a third category entitled flexible-mindedness, which is a *via media* between the rigid and the fuzzy mind-sets. While such a theoretical middle ground has much to offer, I found that for this particular study including a third category did not help to clarify the main point.

How does an individual transition from a rigid to a fuzzy mentality? Does it occur all of a sudden or is it a gradual process? How does a person go from cherishing clear-cut distinctions to embracing ambiguity? Even more intriguing than this individual level change, how does an entire generation go through such a radical transformation? While it is impossible in the context of this limited project to answer all these questions with the depth and breadth that they deserve, this study does offer a unique opportunity to listen to a group of individuals who have made a transition of such magnitude. Although they did not act as a unified group who traveled en masse to the Protestant Churches looking for ministerial work, most of the participants belong to the same cohort of Catholic priests who resigned in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Glaser and Strauss point out, although “each passagee usually considers himself in solo passage” (1971:135) the fact is that they often form part of an aggregate or a cohort, even if they are unaware of this fact.

### 2.3.2 *Boundary perceptions concerning abstinence and homosexuality*

Mullaney’s study (2006) on abstinence and personal identity, for which Zerubavel was the dissertation advisor, builds on his insights about mental boundaries. She writes,

Things a person chooses not to do send powerful and explicit messages about who that person ‘is.’ We notice them precisely because they are breaches of *expected doings*. So while not wearing shoes of a particular color may fail to command our attention, we would probably take more interest in a person’s deliberate refusal to engage in sexual intercourse. (P. 2)

Mullaney divided her treatise in two parts; the first section focuses on the social shape of abstinence while the second analyzes how abstainers abstain in their daily routines. Of the many valuable reflections that she offers, two deserve highlighting for this current investigation: contingent abstinence and abstinence thresholds.

Mullaney describes “contingent abstinence” as that kind of renunciation that a person must embrace in order to belong to a certain organization. She says that “religious affiliation is perhaps the most recognizable form of contingent abstinence and one that appears to offer individuals the least degree of choice in determining their abstinences” (Mullaney 2006:99). It becomes an all-or-nothing situation. Either the person belongs to the group and faithfully renounces what he must renounce or he cannot claim membership. Celibacy for Catholic priests is a perfect example. However, Catholics are not alone. Mullaney cites an example from the life of a Jehovah’s Witness but could have just as easily drawn examples from Judaism, Islam, or any other religion.

Mullaney explains how, at first glance, it seems pointless to speak of abstinence thresholds because, for example, either one does or does not drink alcoholic beverages. Based on the principle of non-contradiction, a person cannot be both a virgin and non-virgin or a smoker and a non-smoker at the same time. However, is there not some difference between a person who has never engaged in any sexual act as opposed to one who has engaged in all except full intercourse? Is the first a true virgin and the second not? How about the person who smokes pot but does not inhale? Based on this concept of thresholds, Mullaney speaks of “fire walking” and “fence building” as two diametrically opposed ways of navigating boundaries. Those who “fire walk” allow themselves to get extremely close to temptation but do not actually fully cross the line. “Fence builders,” on the other hand, try to construct protective layers around themselves.

It would seem that “fire walkers” in the field of clerical celibacy are much more prone to resign than “fence builders” are. A “fire walker” in this case would be a priest who maintains a romantic relationship with another person (sexual orientation does not

matter) but does not marry the other person. If he tenderly embraces his partner but does not have genital relations, is he still technically celibate? He may ask himself where the dividing line is between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Is he allowed to hold hands with the woman he loves as long as he does not fondle her? The “fence builder” thinks and behaves in such a way that such questions do not arise. He avoids all physical contact (even a hug) with other people. He builds a wall around his heart and his body.

In a similar vein, those who consider the boundaries between the Catholic and Protestant churches as fluid are more likely to make the transition than are those who highlight the differences, especially those who point out the deficiencies of the “other side.” From an institutional point of view, it is very important that new recruits come to identify with the “righteousness” of their organization’s point of view and in this way build up loyalty. In large part, seminaries exist for this purpose. Given the centrality of celibacy in the Catholic Church’s overall structure, it is no wonder that from the very beginning of their training seminarians are taught to appreciate celibacy as the “brilliant jewel” that Paul VI described in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967).

Seminarians are also taught that homosexuality is a psychosexual disorder and that such an orientation may be a serious impediment to ordination. Yet, it is common knowledge that many Catholic priests are gay. Greeley (2004a) places the estimate at 16 percent. Cozzens (2000) cites various studies whose estimates range much higher:

An NBC report on celibacy and the clergy found that “anywhere from 23 percent to 58 percent” of the Catholic clergy have a homosexual orientation. Other studies find that approximately half of American priests and seminarians are homosexually oriented. Sociologist James G. Wolf [who acknowledges a potential skew in his data] in his book *Gay Priests* concluded that 48.5 percent of priests and 55.1 percent of seminarians were gay. The percentage appears to be highest among priests under forty years of age. Moreover, the percentage of gay men among religious congregations of priests is believed to be even higher. (P. 99).

Jordan's work (2000) on homosexuality in modern Catholicism highlights the incongruity that exists between the Vatican's position and the practice of some Catholic priests who embrace this forbidden lifestyle. While this study does not focus on the sexual orientation of the participants per se, it is worthwhile to consider a possible association between an apparently higher-than-average percentage of homosexuals in the priesthood (as compared to the general population) and the issue of celibacy. Could it be that for men who struggle with their orientation, the celibate priesthood offers a safe haven where they can enjoy freedom from the social expectations of heterosexuality? Could it be that the context within which religious priests live provides them with more than just bonds of close fraternal support? Could it also be a reason why heterosexual men would want to leave the priesthood? Cozzens (2000) mentions that he heard from a prominent priest of a very large religious order that 80 percent of the priests in his province were gay.

In spite of this high percentage, the homosexual who wishes to remain in active ministry must either remain "in the closet" or be willing to suffer the consequences of "coming out" in an often oppositional environment. If he chooses to be open about his orientation, he has limited options (Jordan 2000). He can hope that either his bishop or his superior will follow a *laissez-faire* policy or he could decide to enroll in one of the church-approved programs that seek to reverse sexual orientation. Or he could decide to join a gay-friendly Anglican or Protestant denomination, as did some participants in this study. Jordan decides not to discuss this last option of switching religious affiliation since that kind of choice "often entails a resolution to leave behind Catholic issues and to take on a new identity. It is like learning to speak a 'foreign' language. The language may be akin to your mother tongue, but it is not the same (2000:242)."

### *2.3.3 Denominational switching in America*

While it is true that switching denominational affiliation can seem as daunting as abandoning one's mother tongue and learning a new language, Wuthnow (1988) explains that since the end of World War II, there has been a marked increase in denominational transitioning in America. He argues that this is due in part to the regional redistribution of Jews and Catholics throughout the country during the last 60 years. He gives the example of how in 1952 there was only one Catholic parish in the entire city of Atlanta. Twenty-eight years later, there were 44. Wuthnow also asserts that "the reduction of tensions between Protestants and Catholics was grounded in considerable changes taking place in the social characteristics of American Catholics" (1988:94). By the mid-1970s, Catholics had made so much progress on standard measures of social status (such as educational attainment) that they had become nearly indistinguishable from the general population. Not only were they becoming more like Protestants in their secular achievements but they were also beginning to behave like them. Much to the consternation of Vatican officials, Catholics practice birth control at the same rates that Protestants do (Greeley 1990).

Wuthnow points out that another reason why Protestants and Catholics were becoming more tolerant of each other was due to the increased sense of ecumenism that sprang from Vatican II and that trickled down to the grass-roots level during the 1970s. As a consequence of the assimilation of Catholics into the mainstream and the greater tolerance promoted by the institutional churches, Wuthnow argues that denominational affiliation has weakened and that the barriers between the churches have become more permeable. He concludes that "an increasingly large number of people feel comfortable in switching from one denomination to another" (1988:88).

Historically, Catholics have maintained higher retention rates than Protestants (Musick and Wilson 1995) but by the late 1960s this started to decline. In his study that tracks 25 years of religious mobility, Sherkat (2001) found that Catholic retention rates decreased from 83.4% in the 1970s to 77.3% during the 1990s. Newport's findings (1979) also support these assertions concerning increased mobility. In his analysis of data from 1975-1976, Newport discovered that about a quarter to a third of all Americans have switched religions in their life times. He reports that:

Given the highly differentiated, yet generally similar set of religious bodies in the United States, it would seem reasonable that we would find a good deal of movement of individuals from religious body to religious body in an American process of religious mobility. . . . These types of changes are made easy by the large number of potential sites for church memberships, and by the fact that the shift can usually be accomplished without the traumatic necessity of drastically altering one's beliefs, or rituals, or styles of religious interaction (P. 528).

Within this pattern of increased mobility, Newport (1979) highlights an important nuance: 61 percent of affiliation switching in America is intra-Protestant. Sullins (1993) confirms this and further clarifies that when Protestants switch their affiliation, they often do so "close to home." Following the model used by Roof and McKinney (1987) of dividing Protestants into four "families" (conservative, moderate, liberal, and black), Sullins concludes that as Haberman stated "transitions between similar categories are more common than transitions between dissimilar categories" (1974:215). In other words, a Congregationalist is more likely to transition to the more liberal Episcopal Church than she would to the more conservative Baptist Church. Roof and Landres (1997) have found corroborating evidence for this claim. The implication for this present study of "greener pastures shepherds" is clear: a Catholic priest will probably feel much more "at home" in the very similar Episcopal Church than he would in a Born Again denomination.

In spite of the increased religious mobility in America during the last 50 years, however, it is important to note as Newport (1979) does that, notwithstanding the above-mentioned information, “the best single predictor of an individual adult’s religious preference is still the simple knowledge of his or her parent’s religion” (P. 549).

Nooney (2006) addresses the issue of religious transmission from one generation to the next in her unpublished dissertation that focuses on the influence of families on the religiosity of individuals. Among the factors associated with a successful transmission of religious values to one’s children are an intact parental unit, religious homogamy among parents, and good parent-child relationships. When these factors are absent or weakened, the likelihood of a child apostatizing at some later stage of life increases.

Due to the negative connotation associated with the term “apostasy,” sometimes researchers, such as Nooney, will use concepts such as leaving religion, disengagement, disaffiliation, and defection. Other terms that describe the same basic action are: dropping out, exiting, disidentification, and religious leavetaking. Regardless of the specific term employed, abandoning the religion of one’s family of origin is often a traumatic event. As Nooney points out “switching is unlikely to happen unless a person is willing to sever ties and forge new ones with the new religious community” (2006:91).

Sometimes out of respect, sometimes out of filial fear, people will wait until their elderly parents die before they change religion. Meehl (1995) explains that:

Telling your family, especially your parents, that you no longer attend a Catholic church—especially if you now attend church in another denomination—is an event loaded with emotion. Catholic parents are taught that they are responsible for their children practicing the faith. So news that their daughter doesn’t attend Mass any longer, and may even be attending another denomination’s church, is greeted with fear, anger, and disappointment; also, there is often an overwhelming sense of failure on the part of the mother because the church has traditionally designated her as the caretaker of the family’s spiritual life (P. 193).

Although Meehl's study (1995) focuses on women who have left the Catholic Church, many of her insights are applicable to the men who participated in this study. She says that "To begin to have questions, even doubts, about the Catholic church—this institution that is so much a part of your life—is a frightening thing" (Meehl 1995:28). To go the next step further and actually reject the church's teachings is often excruciatingly painful, especially when Catholicism is the only known religious paradigm.

Obviously, Catholics do not have a monopoly on switching. Babinski (1995), Barbour (1994), and Bromley (1988) all relate many conversion stories from Protestantism that highlight a similar degree of angst stemming from this decision. Babinski (1995) tells the story of his own journey that included "dark nights of the soul" and a series of frustrating conversations with family and friends who attempted to bring him back into the Fundamentalist Christian fold. One of the 33 autobiographers in Babinski's collection speaks of a "traumatically painful self-excision from my 17-year relationship with a Christian community" (1995:302). A common denominator in these narratives is that the individuals who recount their spiritual odysseys often present their former belief system not only as irrelevant but, moreover, as seriously defective and/or corrupt.

Barbour adds an additional and highly interesting nuance to this finding by stating that "deconversion" narratives are "religiously significant in that nearly always a loss of faith is justified by reasons of conscience" (1994:212). The horrible stories of abuse (mainly psychological but sometimes also sexual) that the participants in Jacobs' study (1989) relate fit in well with the pattern described by Barbour. Jacobs describes in detail the painful exits of people who left "religious worlds of total meaning" and highlights how "totalizing" many religious settings can become. Many of the "exiters" in Jacobs'

study speak of the deep emotional conflict they experienced “due to their emotional and psychological attachment to the charismatic leader of their group” (1989:77). Years of intense devotion to a captivatingly charming religious guru are not easily swept aside. Some of the former devotees described by Jacobs endured years of abuse before they were finally able to wrest themselves free from the leader’s influence over them.

After a while, however, a tipping point arrives, a moment when the follower has experienced enough pain and decides that he no longer wants to be a member of the group. This moment is similar to what Fiori, Hays, and Meador (2004) call a “spiritual turning point,” an event that shapes the trajectory of one’s spiritual life. Fiori et al. report that these crucial episodes often “stem from life stressors that pose direct challenges to long-held plans and intentions and that cause severe psychological and physical distress” (2004:396). The resolution of the dilemma constitutes the turning point which usually signals “a change in a major life role, a change in perspective on life, a change in important life goals, and a change in the view of the self” (2004:396).

In closing this section of the literature review on denominational switching, it is worthwhile to note that, as Simpson explains, “leaving a religion is possible only where alternatives exist” (1997:18) and only to “where the person finds a better plausibility structure” (1997:23). The “greener pastures shepherds” in this current project did find plausible alternatives in the mainline Protestant Churches that recognized the validity of their ordination and offered them the opportunity to engage in married ministry. The option of switching relatively “close to home” (Sullins 1993) allowed them to “change lanes” without the trauma of being forced to alter substantially their core beliefs, their worship style, or their paradigms of religious interaction (Newport 1979).

#### *2.3.4 Role commitment and role exit: Moving in the hope of a better life*

Since there were not any major changes introduced in the seminary training process in the years immediately prior to Vatican II it would seem incorrect to blame so many thousands of resignations on deficiencies in the formation program. The system had apparently worked well for centuries. What had changed the most after the Second Vatican Council for priests of that generation was their post-seminary work environment. Before Vatican II, a wide array of restraints (Mullaney calls them “fences”) surrounded priests and shielded them from temptation. After the late 1960s, many of those protective walls collapsed. This sudden and anomic paradigm shift seems to have exposed a hidden flaw in the “role commitment process” of these priests, a deficiency that had gone undetected when the pre-Vatican II institutional restrictions were still in place.

Schoenherr and Greeley define the role commitment process as the “continuance in a role’s socially organized pattern of action that results from a desirable net balance of rewards over costs realized by participating in this rather than some feasible alternative role” (1974:409). In their study of American priests, Schoenherr and Greeley discovered that “the desire to marry is the single most crucial factor in judging whether the rewards-cost balance tips in favor of staying or leaving” (1974:422). A decade and a half later, Verdieck, Shields, and Hoge (1988) revisited this topic and found that Catholic priests, like most people, continued to participate in their assigned role as long as the benefits outweighed the drawbacks. Since Catholic priests make relatively little money compared to other professionals with equivalent training, their particular “cost-benefit analysis” is not based on economic considerations, but rather on satisfaction derived from ministry, social support systems, and perhaps hopes for rewards in the next life.

In their analysis, Verdieck, Shields, and Hoge (1988) echoed what Schoenherr and Greeley (1974) had mentioned earlier, that many Catholic priests consider celibacy to be the major “cost” or negative factor in their lives and ministerial satisfaction the major “reward” or positive payback. When celibacy becomes “too costly,” the likelihood of resignation increases substantially unless there is a corresponding intensification of ministerial satisfaction. Conversely, for those who experience high levels of ministerial satisfaction and who do not suffer from lonely feelings, resignation does not appear attractive since, for them, the rewards outweigh the sacrifices.

Stark and Bainbridge’s (1987) exchange theory of religion resonates deeply with the role commitment process. They define religious seekership as “the state of a person unsatisfied with currently available religious affiliation and carrying out exchanges in search of more satisfying affiliation” (1987: 225). This seeking of more satisfying conditions is exactly what the participants in this dual-transition study have done. They were willing to exchange their Catholic affiliation for the chance to exercise their ministry as married men. Not allowed to embrace all three identities (Catholic, priest, and husband) at the same time, they opted for two out of the three.

When a priest begins weighing the pros and cons of resigning, not only does his own value system come into play but also those of his family and of his colleagues. Stark and Bainbridge posit that “members of a religious organization tend to reward others who support the beliefs of the religion and tend to punish or break off relations with those who oppose the beliefs” (1987:232). It will be interesting to hear their descriptions of how the Catholic Church they renounced treated them in comparison to the Protestant Churches that welcomed them.

In the midst of so much struggle within their own heart and conscience about whether to remain or to resign, the level of support these ex-priests received from their family of origin and from their priest friends probably affected the smoothness (or roughness) of their transition, and these positive (or negative) effects probably remained vividly with them for many years. This was certainly the case for the ex-nuns whom Ebaugh (1988a) interviewed for her work on the process of role exit. Their experiences closely mirror those of the “greener pastures shepherds” of this study.

Ebaugh reports that among traditional Catholics before Vatican II, “having a daughter-nun or a son-priest was considered being ‘blessed by God’ and conferred status on the parents. It was common for Catholic parents to encourage their children to consider a ‘religious vocation’ as a nun or a priest” (1988a:75). If having a son become a priest was the greatest dream of devout Catholic mothers, having this same son leave the priesthood was their worst nightmare. Having him become a married Protestant minister was simply unthinkable.

Understandably, Ebaugh’s analysis shows that the process of role exit is heavily influenced by the interactions of the exiting individual with the most “significant others” in his/her life, which very often includes one’s parents. Although at the end of the day each person must make his/her own decision, the reactions of family members can greatly influence the decision-making process. According to Ebaugh (1988a), those people in the circle of intimate influence serve in the process of “reality testing”; they also help the person to weigh the costs and benefits of staying or leaving. Her description of how many Catholic families before Vatican II exerted pressure on their children to remain faithful to their vows is worth citing (Ebaugh 1988a) in its entirety:

. . . Defection from the convent or priesthood, besides being a rare phenomenon, was seen as humiliating for Catholic parents and perceived as scandal in the local Catholic community. The fear of disappointing parents was one factor that made many discontented nuns in our study hesitant to entertain doubts regarding their commitment. In many instances, parents picked up early cues that their daughters were unhappy. The reaction of parents was significant in whether the nun pursued her questioning and evaluation of alternatives. (P. 76)

Some parents even threatened their daughters with disinheritance should they decide to leave the convent. With that kind of pressure from close family members, it is not surprising that the exiting nuns found the transition very stressful and emotionally draining. Many reported high levels of physical and psychological distress.

To understand why this transition was so traumatic for them, it is helpful to recall the “totalistic” nature of the convents in which they resided for so long. Having been trained to eradicate all selfish desires by means of their vows in order to give themselves totally to God, these women were under constant pressure to conform to the rules of their order. To help them persevere in their pledge of complete lifelong fidelity to God, Mother Superior (as the person in charge was called) would monitor the nuns’ contact with the outside world. Not only did the thick walls of the convent surround them, but all of their exchanges with outsiders (i.e., letters, calls, and visits) were screened so that they would not be exposed to attractive alternative lifestyles. For centuries, thousands of convents succeeded at keeping resignation rates extremely low through the creation of “totalistic” milieus. They were the epitome of what Coser (1974) calls “greedy institutions.” All of that changed, however, after Vatican II when “convents began to evolve into a contemporary form of voluntary organization” (Bromley 1988:15). Almost as if they were seeing the world for the first time, many nuns began to reconsider the high price of their celibacy. Their resignation rates skyrocketed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of former nuns maintained their affiliation with the Catholic Church. Many of them took up positions of lay leadership in Catholic schools and parishes, and hundreds of them married resigned priests (Greeley 1972). “Leaving the convent in no way indicated disaffection with the institutional church for most ex-nuns. Less than three percent left the church after exiting religious life” (Ebaugh 1998b:114). This minuscule defection rate among ex-nuns is much lower than the 21 percent that Greeley (1972) reported to find among ex-priests.

From what has been described above, one could hypothesize that if a priest who is contemplating resignation gains the support of family and friends, the next step becomes easier. If those whom he esteems consider his proposed shift a mere “changing of lanes,” it seems more likely that he will cross that boundary. However, it must also be remembered that, prior to this stage, the priest in question must have experienced some type of dissatisfaction otherwise there would be no reason to consider exiting.

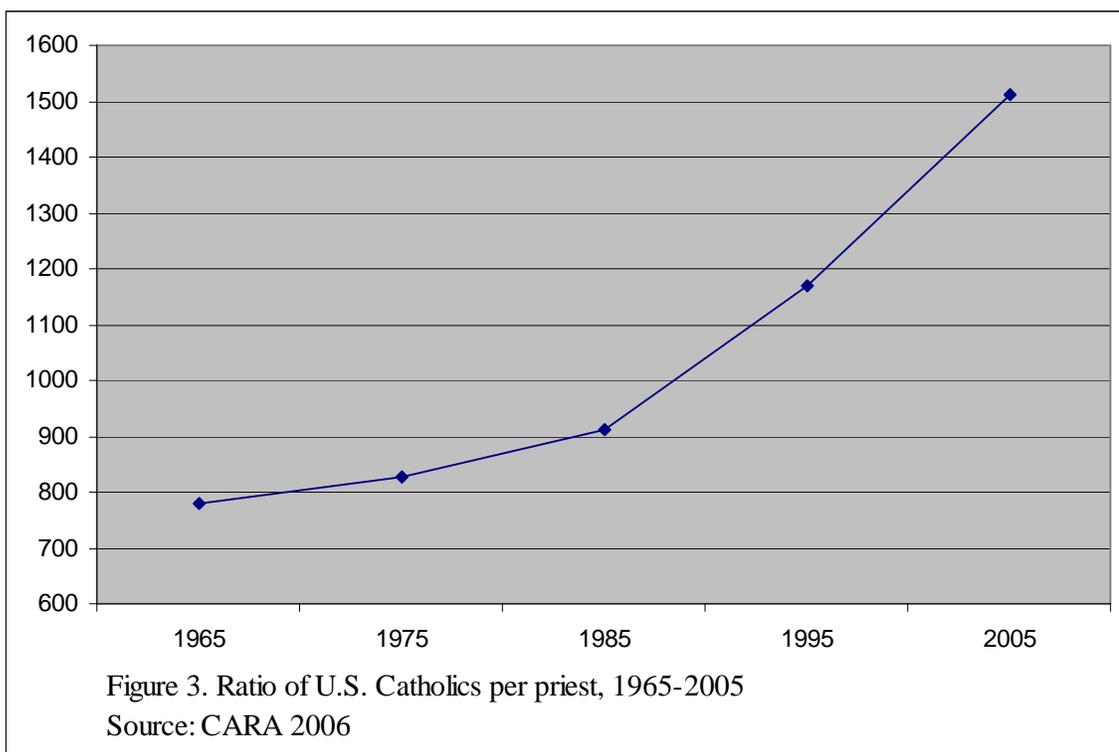
In his fascinating novel *Life of Pi* about a boy from a zookeeper family who survives a shipwreck, Martel (2001) describes how there are always animals that try to escape from zoos. If their needs are not met, they will not be at peace, and eventually they will try to escape. Martel asks, “Why do people move? What makes them uproot and leave everything they’ve known for a great unknown beyond the horizon? The answer is the same the world over: people move in the hope of a better life” (2001:98).

Ultimately, this research project attempts to understand the reasons why these clerics switched their religious affiliation and abandoned their commitment to celibacy. The general hypothesis is that they did so in the hope of a better life, in the hope of finding “greener pastures” where they could marry and continue their ministerial work.

## 2.4 Summary of the work of four prominent sociologists of clerical celibacy

### 2.4.1 Decline of priestly ranks during the last 40 years

Before summarizing the findings of the four most prolific sociologists of clerical celibacy, it is important to recall the ecclesial context of the last four decades, known as the post-Vatican II era. This period, which represents only two percent of the church's 2000-year history, began with an unprecedented, massive, worldwide exodus of priests from celibacy into marriage. According to statistics compiled by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA 2006), there were 58,632 Catholic priests serving in the United States in 1965 and only 42,839 in 2005. Besides the demoralizing effects that this dwindling of the ranks by 27 percent, it also translated into more work per individual priest since during that same timeframe the number of Catholics in America skyrocketed 42 percent, from 45.6 million to 64.8 million. The resultant ratio of priests to lay people (Figure 3) rose dramatically by 94 percent from one for every 778 to one for every 1512.



Although this project will focus on the experience of the Catholic Church in the United States, it is important to note a similar pattern detected by Froehle and Gautier (2003), which shows that worldwide in 1950 there were 1203 Catholics per priest and that by the year 2000 that number had increased by 114 percent to 2579. The reason for the global ratios being on average 60 percent higher than North American levels is due to the even more severe clergy shortage in Asia, Africa, and Latin America where the ratios are often in the range of 6000-8000 to one. For decades, millions of Catholics in those priest-deprived nations have grown accustomed to not being able to attend Mass on a weekly basis (an elemental Catholic duty) due to the crisis. In some villages, a priest can only visit a few times a year. Oddly enough, as reported by Hoge and Okure (2006), it is often those countries, with much more critical situations, which now supply priests to the United States. Wilson (2006) questions not only the morality of this policy adopted by many American dioceses in which the personnel resources of poor countries are exhausted in favor of rich nations but also whether such a “Band-Aid approach” diverts attention away from seeking long-term solutions to the vocation crisis.

It is important to keep in mind for this project that during the same period that the Catholic Church was facing a situation of “full pews and empty altars” (Schoenherr and Young 1993), the Protestant Churches were dealing with the inverse problem of dwindling congregations shepherded by a surfeit of ministers (Hoge 2005).

As stated in the introductory remarks of this chapter, because no one has ever conducted research on this very specific subset of former Catholic priests who entered Protestant ministry, it will be necessary to see them as part of the much larger group of resigned Catholic priests whom the sociologists Fichter, Greeley, Hoge, and Schoenherr

have studied over the years. Of these four most prominent names in the field of Catholic clergy research, only Greeley is still alive. Fichter died at 86 years of age in 1994, Schoenherr at 61 in 1996, and Hoge at 71 in 2008. Fichter and Greeley remained Catholic priests their whole lives whereas Schoenherr, who had been ordained in 1962, resigned in 1972 in order to marry. Hoge was the only non-Catholic among them but had worked at The Catholic University of America for 34 years and was a recognized authority on Catholic sociology. All four of these men knew each other well and worked together on various projects throughout the years. Of them all, Joseph Fichter was the forerunner.

#### *2.4.2 Joseph Fichter's groundbreaking work*

When reviewing the titles of Fichter's sociological publications, which include more than thirty books and hundreds of articles, it is easy to see why he was constantly in conflict with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and even with the civil authorities. He tackled subjects that everyone knew were important but no one wanted to discuss, at least not in the open. While living in Louisiana in the 1950s, he wrote about and inveighed against such sensitive topics as desegregation and racial discrimination well before the Civil Rights movement began. During the 1980s, he investigated clergy alcoholism rates, which (much to the surprise of people both inside and outside the Catholic Church) were substantially lower than those found in the general population, and in a separate study found that Catholic priests were among the healthiest of men in America.

In spite of a Vatican warning against sociological studies not approved by the local bishops, Fichter launched a survey of diocesan priests and laypeople in January 1960, definitely the first of its kind in this country and probably the first ever in the

world. Almost immediately, this “act of disobedience” got him in trouble. Church politics aside, Fichter wanted to understand better the relationship that existed between priest and parishioner, “to analyze the manner in which priests and people relate to each other, and how they differ in their mutual estimation” (Fichter 1965:vii). Using *The Official Catholic Directory* list of all 31,961 active diocesan clergy (excluding Monsignors) serving in the United States in 1959, Fichter sampled every seventh name ( $N=4560$ ). In spite of opposition from two powerful American Cardinals who pressured the Vatican to have his study suppressed, Fichter obtained a 47% response rate ( $N=2183$ ) from priests around the country. Out of deference to the bishops who opposed him and due to his heavy academic teaching load, he delayed publication of his results for about five years.

During this interim period, he asked a few influential priest friends to “explain to the bishops that social scientists were not really attacking the church, that research was not only useful but necessary for the operation of the church” (Fichter 1973:165). Eventually a number of bishops came to see the value of such an undertaking, and his Jesuit superiors and the Archdiocese of Chicago allowed him to publish *Priest and People* in 1965 with the full three levels of ecclesiastical approval. While the results from this first-ever survey of American diocesan priests are fascinating, they do not deal with clerical celibacy, which is the focus of this dissertation. Fichter’s second survey of priests did address this highly sensitive subject, and created an even greater disturbance.

Just as Fichter began his five-year appointment as Stillman Professor at Harvard University, Robert Hoyt, the editor of the *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, asked him if he were interested in doing another survey of priests. In his first autobiography entitled *One-Man Research*, Fichter (1973) describes in detail the genesis of this project.

There was an air of caution and anonymity about Hoyt's inquiry. A "certain priest" had contacted him with the suggestion that *NCR* might want to underwrite and handle a survey that would get at the attitudes of diocesan priests concerning the Catholic Church's law on celibacy for the clergy. This unnamed priest, together with a small group of fellow clergy, had prepared a rough questionnaire of twelve items on which they wanted priests to check a yes-or-no answer. They felt the need for caution because the American bishops frowned on any suggestion that the law of clerical celibacy be questioned. (P. 169)

Although Fichter was well aware of the fact "celibacy had become a problem in the recruitment of seminarians and in the retention of priests after ordination" (1973:169), he was unwilling to conduct a survey with priestly celibacy as the sole topic. He was convinced that celibacy represented only a small segment of the larger array of problems that American priests were facing in the aftermath of Vatican II. During the pre-testing stage, Fichter discovered that there was widespread dissatisfaction among priests concerning their working conditions, and their relationship with the bishop and his chancery officials. He also came to recognize with even greater clarity that the lifelong commitment to celibacy was indeed a major problem for some priests.

With the final version of the questionnaire complete in September 1966, Fichter randomly sampled one-third of all diocesan priests who were in active ministry but who had not yet become pastors or monsignors. Given this restriction that he placed on the population he sampled, he obtained a much younger representation of the priesthood than he would have had he chosen to interview all Catholic clergymen. He decided to focus on these particular priests whom he considered "the forgotten men of the church," borrowing a phrase coined by Bishop Stephen Leven of San Antonio during the last session of Vatican II. He sent his comprehensive survey to 5938 priests of whom 3048 completed the survey for 51.3 percent response rate.

The “newsiest” aspect of the survey, as reported first by the *NCR* and then by all the major media outlets, was that 62% of the priests surveyed expressed their desire for celibacy to be made optional. While celibacy got the largest amount of publicity and some irritated bishops labeled Fichter’s second survey as “*that* celibacy survey,” only eight questions out of the 76 actually dealt with this subject directly.

Given the novelty and the importance of these eight questions (numbered 34 – 41 in the actual survey), they are included here in their entirety, along with the frequencies.

34. There has been much written lately on the question of married clergy in the Roman rite. During the past year have you discussed this question with your fellow diocesan priests? (*N*=3037)

1. Frequently	32.5%
2. Occasionally	53.3%
3. Seldom	12.2%
4. Never	2.1%

35. In general, would you be in favor of the diocesan priest’s freedom of choice to marry? (*N*=2968)

1. Yes, but only before ordination.	9.4%
2. Yes, but only after ordination.	5.5%
3. Both before and after	46.7%
4. No, not at all	38.4%

36. What about those priests who have left the ministry and married? Should they be allowed to return to the sacraments and remain married? (*N*=2965)

1. No, they should leave their wives first.	8.0%
2. Yes, but only if they have children.	4.6%
3. Yes, whether or not they have children.	87.4%

37. Do you think that in America the married clergy would be more, or less, effective than the celibate clergy in the parish ministry? (*N*=2972)

1. Less effective	54.2%
2. More effective	13.9%
3. Makes no difference	31.9%

38. In your own parish at the present time, do you think that the introduction of a married clergy would be approved by... (N=2953)

1. Most parishioners	8.5%
2. More than half of them	7.0%
3. About half	15.4%
4. Less than half	28.1%
5. Hardly any	40.9%

39. If there were a married priesthood, promotion to the pastorate should be allowed only by celibates. What do you think? (N=3005)

1. Yes	17.6%
2. No	62.4%
3. Not sure	20.0%

40. If there were a married priesthood, promotion to the episcopacy should be allowed only by celibates. What do you think? (N=3011)

1. Yes	39.0%
2. No	37.6%
3. Not sure	23.4%

41. If a married priesthood were permitted in the Roman rite, do you think that you would marry? (N=2996)

1. Yes, unquestionably	5.0%
2. Very likely would	8.9%
3. Probably would	17.1%
4. Probably would not	28.1%
5. Very likely would not	22.7%
6. Definitely would not	18.2%

Given the historical context of American Catholicism at the time, it is understandable that these results caused quite a stir in the media. As mentioned earlier, the headline of the *NCR* report on this research project highlighted the fact that 62 percent of the priests surveyed were in favor of optional celibacy. In Fichter's own words (1973):

This 'fearful' topic, which had been banned from the floor of debate at the Second Vatican Council, was now out in the open. Indeed, it had not been a closed question among the priests themselves—more than eight out of ten said they had discussed it with fellow diocesan priests during the previous year. (P. 181)

As Fichter himself points out it is a “peculiar historical fact” that the timing of his project coincided with the enormous spike in priestly resignations. (He did not think that his research made any significant causal impact.) Shortly after his survey was completed, a fellow Jesuit by the name of Carl Hemmer, who was a graduate student at Columbia University at the time, conducted a similar survey and obtained comparable results.

Clearly, there was an identity crisis among many Catholic priests during the final years of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Bishops across the country had to deal with thousands of priests who were seeking dispensations, which are the approximate priestly equivalent to annulments of marriage in the Catholic Church. According to Catholic sacramental theology, the “dispensed” priest, while now free to marry within the Church, remains a priest forever. However, his “faculties” (i.e., permission granted by the church authorities for the exercise of his priestly ministry) are removed and he cannot function as a priest except in extreme cases such as a roadside accident in which a person may need absolution from their sins, an action only a priest can perform.

Due to the recognition that came from his highly publicized research, the newly formed National Association for Pastoral Renewal invited Fichter to speak at a three-day symposium on clerical celibacy held at the University of Notre Dame in September 1967 (Frein 1968). In his talk entitled “Sociology and Clerical Celibacy,” Fichter (1968b) compared those respondents in his survey who favored optional celibacy to those who opposed it. He began by stating the obvious, that many Catholic priests consider celibacy a problem. He then pointed out the definite differences among the various age categories. For example, 72 percent of young priests (aged 35 and under) were in favor of optional celibacy whereas only 33 percent of those over 50 years old held the same opinion.

Of the many fascinating results that Fichter (1968b) reported, there are two that stand out for the extreme contrast they display. Of those priests in favor of a married clergy and who would marry if they could ( $N=336$ ), 52 percent of them felt that married priests would be more effective than celibate clergy in parish ministry. Of those who favor a celibate clergy and would not marry even if allowed ( $N=775$ ), only one percent agreed with that statement. A similar difference occurred in the responses to question 38, which asked whether the respondents thought that “more than half the parishioners would accept a married clergy.” Only one percent of the pro-celibacy group ( $N=755$ ) agreed whereas 47 percent of the pro-marriage group ( $N=333$ ) believed that to be true. As Fichter pointed out, the Harris poll conducted for *Newsweek* just a few months after his survey indicated that in fact 48 percent of Catholics were in favor of optional celibacy.

Although Fichter kept insisting that, in his opinion, changing the celibacy law was only one small point in the overall need to renew the priesthood, he found that journalists and interviewers kept coming back to this one issue. During those months he appeared on many radio and television ‘talk shows’ to discuss his findings and invariably discovered that the entire program was exclusively focused on optional celibacy.

A replication study financed by the National Federation of Priests’ Council a few years later obtained very similar results. “There could no longer be any doubt that the majority of diocesan priests favored optional celibacy” (Fichter 1973:194). Soon after, the bishops, who were once so opposed to sociological studies that addressed the ‘fearful’ topic, commissioned Andrew Greeley and Richard Schoenherr to conduct a study that ultimately confirmed the majority of Fichter’s findings. Like runners in a relay race, Fichter handed on the baton to the next generation of sociological investigators.

### 2.4.3 Andrew Greeley's research spans more than 40 years

One of the most prolific authors of all time, Andrew Greeley has published scores of sociological works (not counting journal articles) and more than 50 fictional books, into which he purposely incorporates his more salient research findings. Both Fichter and Greeley have been controversial figures in the Catholic Church. While no one has ever seriously disputed their scholarship, the frankness of their reporting and their liberal theological leanings have agitated many conservative Catholics, both clergy and laity. While not afraid to cry out for reform as modern-day prophets, both remained priests in good standing their entire lives. Neither one of them resigned from priestly ministry nor did they ever renounce their affiliation with the Catholic Church.

It was to Greeley and Schoenherr that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) turned when they needed sociologists to investigate the state of the priesthood in the early 1970s. In his foreword to *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Sociological Investigations* (Greeley 1972), Cardinal Krol explains how the American bishops came to the realization that it was time to launch a scientific study of this nature. The cardinal spoke about how the bishops' committee deeply admired and respected all those involved in investigating this project. He went on to say, "In obtaining extensive data through the sociological and psychological surveys, no expense was spared in retaining research agencies whose scholarly competence was generally acknowledged as being beyond question" (Greeley 1972:iv).

While this comprehensive 458-page tome offers many brilliant reflections on the Catholic priesthood in general, for the purpose of this specific study, only those points that pertain to resigned priests have been selected for this literature review.

The composition of the NCCB sample was unique for two reasons. First, besides contacting 5110 active Catholic priests, the researchers also interviewed 750 resigned priests. Secondly, 165 diocesan bishops and 155 major superiors of religious orders also participated. Table 2 displays the breakdown by age category and type of priesthood:

Table 2. Status of American clergy by age categories, NCCB study, 1972 ( $N=6180$ )

Status (percent)	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 55
<b>Diocesan</b>				
Bishops	0	3	29	68
Active priests	25	30	22	23
Resigned priests	37	53	9	1
<b>Religious</b>				
Major superiors	2	27	45	26
Active priests	17	30	24	29
Resigned priests	23	58	18	1

Source: Greeley 1972

Besides the twelfth chapter dedicated to “the celibacy issue” and the fifteenth chapter that focuses exclusively on resigned priests, scattered throughout the volume are comparisons between active and resigned clergy. This was the first time that sociologists interviewed resigned priests and allowed them to tell their own story. Besides noting that resigned priests were generally much younger than active priests were, Greeley found few differences between the two groups concerning their basic demographic background information such as ethnicity and family of origin. The only exception was the fact that resignees reported having a more strained relationship with their parents than did priests who remained in ministry. While these differences were significant, Greeley pointed out that the younger average age of resignees may account for the difference.

When analyzing their transitional experience, Greeley discovered that besides the desire to marry, the reason most frequently reported by resignees as “very important” in their decision to leave the priesthood was a difficult experience with someone in the authority structure of the church. When asked, however, what singular event may have been the tipping point in their decision, 63 percent mentioned a relationship with a woman. “Whatever frustrations and difficulties may have preceded the decision to leave, for most resignees it was the emotional relationship with a woman that tipped the scales in the direction of resignation” (Greeley 1972:281).

Similar to the results obtained by Fichter before, Greeley noted that by the time he interviewed the resigned priests, 70 percent of them had married while another eight percent were engaged. He further specified how the proportion of those who married increased with the passage of time since resignation from ministry: 41% for those who resigned within the year, 58% after two years, 77% after three, 81% after four, and 87% after five years. At least for that generation of priests, it appears that celibacy acted as a “push” factor (or that marriage was a “pull” factor) that motivated them to radically rethink their commitment to celibacy for life.

Delving deeper into the process of resignation, Greeley asked how much support resignees received from important people in their lives. He discovered that resignees were most likely to discuss their decision with priest colleagues and in two-thirds of the cases to receive support from them as Table 3 indicates. Greeley (1972) observed that:

. . . while we have no information on how much support for resignation from the priesthood was available ten or fifteen years ago, presumably there would have been much more opposition from the family in years gone by. Thus, the data . . . may represent a major change in attitude in the Catholic population, a change that one may speculate is both a cause and an effect of the increased resignation rate. (P. 282)

Table 3. Discussion and support for resignation percentages from various individuals as reported by those who resigned, NCCB study, 1972 ( $N=750$ )

Individual (percent)	Discussed with	Supportive and accepting
Mother	43	40
Father	31	45
Siblings	55	63
Priests	86	66
Pastor or superior	40	24
Bishop or major superior	64	21
Lay friends	63	75
Member of local community	32	41
Spiritual director or confessor	50	49
Relatives	18	37
Professional colleagues	48	68

Source: Greeley 1972

More than 35 years have passed since the American bishops commissioned the abovementioned study. During the intervening years, Greeley has continued to monitor the status of the Catholic priesthood. In his most recent book on the subject, entitled *Priests: A Calling in Crisis*, Greeley (2004a) dedicates an entire chapter to analyzing why priests resign from ministry. He reports that although many of those who left the active priesthood have named celibacy as their principal motivation, he has found that celibacy by itself is usually not enough to spark a resignation. His research, which has been independently corroborated by Schoenherr and Young (1993) and then by Hoge (2002), has revealed that, aside from the obvious reason of falling in love, there are two other major factors involved in a man's decision to resign from active ministry in order to get married: dissatisfaction with ministry, and loneliness.

Towards the end of the chapter dedicated to asking why priests leave, Greeley (2004a) makes the following observation about celibacy, marriage, ministry, and happiness that sums up very well his nuanced way of thinking about this issue:

Perhaps priests sense that much of what they do would not be possible if they had a wife and family. The married clergymen of other denominations claim that they are just as diligent in their work as priests and that in fact their spouse makes it possible for them to be even more diligent. . . . Yet the hours in the day are not infinitely expandable. Perhaps celibacy is valuable to priests precisely because it gives them more time to engage in work that they find inherently satisfying. (P. 70)

#### *2.4.4 Richard Schoenherr's demographic analyses and projections*

Like Fichter and Greeley, Richard Schoenherr was ordained as a Catholic priest. However, in 1972, while working with Greeley as principal co-investigator on the NCCB study, he decided that he would be happier if he were married. His resignation from priesthood did not diminish his interest in studying Catholic priests from a sociological perspective. While some may have dismissed his research as the work of a disgruntled ex-priest who simply wanted to reverse the celibacy law for his own benefit by exposing its negative effects, the professional quality of his scholarship earned him the respect of sociologists and churchmen alike. Apparently, his choice to resign did not damage the working relationship he had established with Greeley. They continued to collaborate over the years and Greeley (2004a) highly praised Schoenherr's demographic research on the Catholic priesthood, noting especially how remarkably accurate his predictions concerning the numerical decline of priests in the United States have been.

While Fichter (1961:190) described celibacy as “a relatively unusual pattern, not shared by the majority of religious personnel in other churches,” Schoenherr (2002:19) went further by depicting it as “the key organizational condition distinguishing the

Catholic priesthood from all other Christian ministries.” With the empirical evidence gathered from his meticulous studies concerning the declining numbers of Catholic priests, Schoenherr repeatedly underlined “the persistent and strongly negative impact of mandatory celibacy” on the Catholic priesthood.

Schoenherr’s main contribution was a book entitled *Full pews and empty altars: Demographics of the priest shortage in the United States Catholic dioceses* (1993) that he co-authored with Lawrence Young. It won the 1996 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. In it, the two demographers calculated that among American diocesan priests (who constitute approximately two-thirds of the priest population) there were 6,938 resignations from between 1966 and 1984. If one extends the timeframe 22 years, and uses the moderate projection series, the total number of resignees comes to 10,008 by the year 2006. If that number is multiplied by 1.5 to take into account an equal rate among religious priests, it can be estimated that a total of 15,012 Catholic priests, both diocesan and religious, resigned during the last 40 years.

Hoge (2005) calculates that the actual number of resigned Catholic priests in the United States is somewhere between 12,000 and 20,000, and so he uses 16,000 as his point of reference. Some would say that these figures are a very conservative estimate. On the higher end of speculation, the CORPUS.org website (which is an association of resigned priests) says that there are about 20,000 such men in America and 100,000 worldwide. The aforementioned controversial Archbishop Milingo (2002) who was recently excommunicated for ordaining four bishops without Vatican approval and for the establishment of the group “Married Priests Now!” has claimed that there are almost 25,000 American married resigned priests and 150,000 worldwide.

While the latter sets of numbers may be inflated for shock effect, what is beyond dispute is that there was a profound vocation crisis among Catholic priests shortly after the conclusion of Vatican II. The detailed information that Schoenherr and Young (1993) were able to collect confirmed this period effect when thousands of priests renounced their vow during the closing years of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s.

It is important to remember that the participants in this study of former Catholic priests who transitioned into Protestant ministry form but a small segment of this larger pool of resignees. When examining the stage of life during which the priests in their study resigned, Schoenherr and Young (1993) found that the vast majority of resignees were in the early thirties to mid-forties when they made the decision to change course. While this volume full of detailed demographics, including a diocese by diocese analysis, earned Schoenherr the respect of the academic community and fixed for him the reputation as “the sociologist who counted priests,” it did arouse some negative reactions from some bishops who thought that he was being overly pessimistic.

Schoenherr’s second major work (2002), entitled *Goodbye Father*, was published posthumously and was meant to be the interpretive companion to his eminently empirical first volume. As Hoge wrote in the foreword, “His first book gave us the numbers, and this one gives us his interpretation. This book answers the big questions: Why is there this shortage of priests? What will it lead to? What can be done?” (2002:vii). In answer to that all-important last question, Schoenherr suggests that the Catholic Church dismantle its exclusively celibate male power structure. While the Catholic bishops have roundly rejected this proposal, which they consider to be radical and unacceptable, it is precisely the path that the mainline Protestant Churches entered 30 years ago.

#### 2.4.5 Dean Hoge's four-fold typology of resigned priests

Of the four prominent researchers in this field, Dean Hoge was not only the only one not ordained but was also the only non-Catholic. As a married Presbyterian layman, he approached the subject with all the advantages of the “stranger”, in the Simmelian sense of the word. Yet Hoge was no stranger to the other three scholars. Fichter was his mentor during his graduate student days at Harvard during the late 1960s, and he worked in close contact with Greeley and Schoenherr throughout his career.

While he has written about various aspects of the Catholic priesthood throughout the years, his contribution that most pertains to this study is entitled *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A study of newly ordained Catholic priests* (2002) in which Hoge dedicates an entire chapter to recently resigned priests. One of the first questions he asks in the introductory chapter is whether the rate of resignations has changed. He responds, “We know from past research that the priesthood experienced a bulge of resignations in the years 1968 to 1972; then the rate subsided and remained lower for many years. Since the middle 1980s it has increased.” He cites Daly’s research (2001) which revealed the following rates of resignation within the first five years of priesthood since 1970:

Table 4. Percentages of newly ordained priests who resigned within the first five years, National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, 1970-1994.

Generation (percent)	Diocesan priests	Religious order priests
1970-79	5.5	5.1
1980-84	5.1	4.3
1985-89	7.3	5.7
1990-94	9.0	8.1

Source: Daly 2001

For his study of newly ordained priests, Hoge (2002) found it easy to contact those men who were still in active ministry through the ordinary methods of random sampling thanks to the lists provided by the central offices of the participating dioceses and religious orders. Contacting the resignees, however, was problematic. He and his team not only asked the religious institutes and dioceses with whom they were in contact to provide names, but they also petitioned the National Federation of Priests' Councils and placed advertisements in religious magazines. Although they were able to amass a list of 246 names, in the end they succeeded in interviewing only 72 such men.

Hoge reported that on average the resignees served for only four years, having been ordained at 32 years of age and resigning at 36. He had hypothesized that resignees would more likely come from larger dioceses, which turned out to be the case. "Forty-four percent of the resigned diocesan priests had been in dioceses of 200 priests or more, compared to 32 percent of the active diocesan priests. ... Possibly larger dioceses and provinces provide less personal attention" (Hoge 2002:15). In general, the resigned priests did not find the first pastors to whom they were assigned to be supportive and, for the most part, they were not very happy with their living conditions in the rectory.

When rating sources of satisfaction in a priest's life, the largest contrast between those who resigned and those who remained had to do with celibacy. Only seven percent of resignees reported being "very satisfied" with the celibate lifestyle as opposed to 53 percent of active diocesan priests. This same divergence of opinion surfaced when they responded to questions concerning what problems priests face today. Forty-seven percent of resigned priests considered "living the celibate life" to be "a great problem" whereas only seven percent of active diocesan priests responded in the same way.

As could be expected, when asked whether they thought that celibacy should be optional for diocesan priests, 94 percent of the resignees agreed as opposed to 29 percent of active diocesan clergy. Hoge mentions how surprised he was that 64 percent of active religious priests also thought that celibacy should be optional for diocesan priests. He attributes this 35-point difference between diocesan and religious clergy to either the different training they received in the seminary or to the “disparate types of persons who enter the seminaries in the first place with intentions of becoming one type or the other” (Hoge 2002:29). This discrepancy also seems to indicate that today’s diocesan priests are theologically more conservative than are the men from religious orders.

Table 5 outlines the motivations given by the resignees for their decision to discontinue their priestly service. Although they often gave several reasons, the interviewers asked them to identify the main ones; their replies were coded up to two per person.

Table 5. Main motivations for resignation, Hoge 2002.

Motivation	Percentage
Fell in love; wanted marriage or an intimate relationship with a woman	42
Celibacy was a problem	26
Dissatisfaction with church administration or trends	16
Loneliness was a problem	15
As a gay person, was not understood or supported	7
Left because of illness	7
Little room to express personal gifts or talents	7
Overwhelmed with demands of superiors	5
Overwhelmed with responsibilities toward parishioners	4

Discouragement with fellow priests	4
Discomfort with fellow priests	4
Other	8

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Source: Hoge 2002

By examining the principal motivations that the resigned priests mentioned, Hoge developed a four-fold categorization. He found that “most resignees have two levels of motivation: one, a feeling of loneliness or being unappreciated; two, an additional situation or event that precipitated a crisis of commitment” (Hoge 2002:63). Using this two-tiered model, he identified four types to which he added an “other” category for some of the more unusual cases. The five types are:

1. In Love: A lonely heterosexual priest who fell in love. (About 25 percent.)
2. Rejected celibacy: A lonely heterosexual who, without a specific woman involved, decided that he could not live as a celibate. (About 25 percent.)
3. Disillusioned: A lonely heterosexual or homosexual who was disillusioned by experiences with the church’s hierarchy or other priests. (About 35 percent.)
4. Rejected gay celibacy: Lonely homosexual priest who wanted an open relationship with a man. (About 10 percent.)
5. Other: The other five to ten percent of the cases not represented above.

Hoge underscored the fact that the one common denominator in all these cases is that the priest felt lonely or unappreciated. He considers this a necessary ingredient for a resignation to occur. “Whether a priest is heterosexual or homosexual, in love or not, it will not drive him to resign unless at the same time he feels lonely or unappreciated. This is a basic finding of our research” (Hoge 2002:64).

## 2.5 *Transitional clergy and secondary socialization*

### 2.5.1 *Never-before-studied subgroup of resigned Catholic priests*

As can be seen from the preceding pages, serious researchers have analyzed the experiences of the thousands of priests who renounced their celibate commitment during the past four decades but no one has ever examined those who went two steps further by becoming married Protestant ministers. We do not even know the basic demographic facts about them. Fichter (1961) mentioned that some resigned priests tried to re-channel their religious profession within Protestant ministry but he only gave the names of two of them, Barrois and Zacchello. Kowalski (2004) speaks of “many” former priests who have married and now serve in various mainline churches. He refers by name to five present-day Episcopal priests and bishops as well as two Lutheran ministers who were former Catholic priests. Certainly there may be “many” more but no one knows how many.

While their situation is unique and they represent only a very small segment of the clerical population in the United States, there may be valuable lessons contained in their life stories and in the analysis of the causes and consequences of their transition. Their process of multiple role transitions may shed light on the situations of so many other people who make comparable transitions during the life course.

After a thorough search for books written on this specific subpopulation, only one autobiography surfaced. Published recently, Father Hayden’s memoirs entitled *Changing Collars* (2007) traces his path from a diocesan seminary in Ireland to his ordination as a celibate Catholic priest and subsequent decision to become an Anglican married priest. While taking place in the United Kingdom, his journey is remarkably similar to that of most of the participants in this study.

### 2.5.2 *Moving in the opposite direction: the 'Pastoral Provision' priests*

While some Catholic priests were switching into Protestant ministry, there was a parallel movement in the opposite direction. During the 1970s several Episcopal priests asked the Vatican for permission to continue their ministry as married clerics after their conversion. They became known as the “Pastoral Provision” priests as that was the name of the document approved by John Paul II in 1980 that opened the doors for them. When Fichter (1989) wrote the first (and to date only) book exclusively dedicated to them, there were only 42 such men in America. Now, 19 years later, they have increased to 70 with still more requesting permission to begin the process (Goodness 2005). As stated earlier, Sullins, who is himself a Pastoral Provision priest, is currently researching this group thanks to a grant given to him by Archbishop Myers, the Vatican-appointed delegate.

In agreement with Fichter’s assessment (1989), Cozzens (2006) concludes that the overriding motivation in these conversions to Catholicism was the ordination of women. Monsignor William Stetson, the priest in charge of handling Pastoral Provision requests in the United States, stated in a PBS “*Religion and Ethics*” episode in 2001 that “the specific issue was the question of the ordination of women. I believe these men felt that that was a significant departure from the universal tradition of the church, which one branch of the church could not reach on its own.” They felt that the Episcopal Church was becoming too liberal and that they could no longer stay.

These “Pastoral Provision” priests are exceptions to the general rule of celibacy in the Latin rite of the Catholic Church (Cozzens 2006). In switching their affiliation from the Episcopal Church and entering in to full communion with the Catholic Church, the Vatican has allowed them to continue their married lives as husbands and fathers even

after their re-ordination. This was a major innovation that, according to Fichter (1989), was purposely “played down” by the Catholic bishops in this country. In an effort to avoid creating confusion (or perhaps even “scandal”) among lay Catholics, the bishops assigned these “Pastoral Provision” priests to special ministries that would limit their public exposure. The fact is that a quarter century later most American Catholics know nothing about these married clerics. From the more progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, among whom are those priests who resigned in order to marry and who joined such groups formerly known as CORPUS (Corps of Resigned Priests United in Service), voices were raised in resentment concerning this “double standard.”

Currently, Sullins is conducting research about this specific subset of American clergy about which so little is known. Cozzens (2006) highlights the need for such research, stating that:

What is of interest here is that so little is known about this phenomenon. We don't know the number of these married priests. Estimates range from 200 to 500 in the U.S. alone. [*Note: These figures are grossly overestimated, which only confirms the need for research in this area.*] We don't know the number who have received parish assignments and those who have been assigned as chaplains to church institutions. We don't know how their remuneration has been adjusted to meet their family expenses. (P. 48)

What motivated both the “Pastoral Provision” group and the men who are the focus of this study to renounce their original denomination—and how they handled such an emotionally charged and significant religious transition—is at the heart of this project. The topic of motivations will be addressed in the following chapters but for now, in an effort to round out the necessary background information, one last and very important topic—which may seem trivial at first—, needs to be addressed to close this literature review that has focused on the intersection of marriage and ministry.

### 2.5.3 *Secondary socialization and an effect of marriage on ministry*

Whenever someone changes jobs, relocates, or changes marital status (through marriage, death, or divorce), a secondary socialization process begins. For those people who are easily adaptable by temperament, such changes come relatively easily. For others, even the slightest modification of their *modus operandi* can be bothersome.

The Protestant lay people whom these “greener pastures shepherds” serve expect different behaviors from them than did the Catholic lay people to whom they ministered in their previous assignments. Adjusting to unfamiliar expectations can be difficult. For example, Catholic priests are used to having the final say in the daily administration of their parishes. Although there may be a parish council of lay people with whom they may consult, the final decision always rests with them. They answer to the bishop alone but he often lives many miles away and he certainly does not have the time to be a micro-manager anyway. Protestant Churches, on the other hand, tend to create structures in which the lay people have more power and control. The Protestant minister has a built-in “oversight committee” living right next door. A former Catholic priest will probably need a few months (or even years) to adjust to this new paradigm. Some may find it deeply frustrating to have to “answer” to so many people; others may find it invigorating.

Not only did the participants in this study have to adjust to their new status as Protestant ministers but also to their new and oftentimes demanding roles as husbands and parents. No longer were they bachelors who could make up their own schedule, coming and going as they please. Now they must consult with their wives before making even some of the smallest decisions. Sometimes, for the sake of peace in the family, they may have to forego their own personal plans.

One of the major differences between Catholic priests and Protestant ministers is precisely their “master role” in life. For the Catholic priest it is a singular focused role; for the Protestant minister it is usually a dual role. As Coser (1974) explains, the Catholic Church set up “a most powerful instrumentality for securing the exclusive loyalty and allegiance of its sacerdotal officialdom” through the establishment of clerical celibacy. “Cut loose from previous territorial attachments and ties to families of origin, unable to establish families of their own or permanent ties to stable sexual objects, the priesthood bent all its energies to the service of the Church” (Coser 1974:158).

Freed from the “distractions” of wife and children, the Catholic priest is supposed to focus all his attention on the ministry. The Protestant minister, on the other hand, must juggle his obligations to the parish with the needs of his family. A clear indicator of this difference comes from Carroll’s research (2006) that highlighted the fact that on average Catholic priests work 56 hours per week, a full eight hours more than Protestant ministers do, which is already 20 percent more than the average 40-hour workweek.

Is this difference between Catholic and Protestant clerics’ average workweek schedule due to the demands of marriage and family or is it due to a certain “celibate Catholic priest work ethic” that prides itself on its “ever-availability” (Zerubavel 1981)? The “greener pastures shepherds” of this study provide a unique opportunity to explore this issue. If, in fact, they work the same number of hours as celibate priests then it would seem that marriage does not interfere in the amount of time one can spend in ministry. It is hypothesized, however, that given their additional commitments as husbands and fathers they will follow the slightly lighter Protestant workload since, as Greeley (2004a) explained so correctly, “the hours in the day are not infinitely expandable.”

## *2.6 Summary of the entire literature review*

After 58 pages of literature review, it is helpful to summarize the most important points and show how they relate to the four research questions. The Weberian analysis of the Vatican's decree on clerical celibacy, presented in the first section, highlighted the fact that while celibacy is costly to the individual priest, it is beneficial to the church as an institution. This relates directly to the fourth research question, which will attempt to analyze how celibacy affects pastoral availability in terms of hours spent in ministry.

The main thrust of the second section, which focused on boundary transitions concerning religious affiliation, demonstrated how a personal motivation can become so strong as to make a seemingly impassible collective boundary become permeable on a personal level. This relates to the first research question that will try to disentangle the participants' motivations, i.e., whether they followed their "heads" or their "hearts."

The third part of this literature review, which summarized the findings of the four most prominent sociologists in the specialized field of priestly resignations, gave an overview of the larger group from which these "greener pastures shepherds" came. They all hinted at a possible period effect immediately following Vatican II, which will be the focus of the second research question. Finally, as Greeley (1972) and Hoge (2002) analyzed in their independent studies, support (or lack thereof) from family members and significant others can deeply affect the transition experience of resigned priests. This information will be of great use in the third research question.

Finally, Hoge's (2002) four-fold typology of resigned priests, the distinction between diocesan and religious order priests, and the previous studies on the Pastoral Provision priests (Fichter 1989) all have helped to set the context for this specific study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### *3.1 Introductory outline*

As the subtitle of this dissertation clearly indicates, there are two distinct foci in this research project. First, there are the causes of this dual transition from celibate Catholic ministry to married Protestant ministry, and, then, the consequences. The two main overarching questions are, therefore: 1) What motivated these Catholic priests to renounce their celibate commitment and to switch their denominational affiliation while maintaining their dedication to pastoral ministry?, and 2) What are some of the long-term effects of such major life-altering decisions?

Besides providing a first-ever collective forum for the participants to recount their personal experiences, this study will also abstract from their particular life stories insights that may prove useful to other clergymen and even to people in the general population, especially to those who have gone through transitions of comparable magnitude such as through divorce or a mid-life career change.

Following the conventional format for a methods section, this chapter has three main parts. The first will focus on the sample population, i.e., how the participants were identified and contacted for this anonymous survey. The second part will describe the components of the research instrument (Appendix A), which was forged in large part by the fusion of two previous questionnaires. The third section will explain the analytic procedures used to analyze the data gathered from the participants.

### *3.2 Selection of participants*

Before all else, it must be noted that this was an anonymous survey, and not merely a confidential one. With the added level of security that anonymity provides, one could suppose that not only would more respondents be inclined to participate but also that they would feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information about their lives. One of the drawbacks to anonymous studies, however, is that there is no way for the researcher to follow up with respondents.

In order to facilitate the highest response rate possible, the participants were offered three ways to collaborate: 1) by return mail, 2) over the telephone, or 3) through a face-to-face interview. In all cases, there would be no linkage between their answers and their real identities. These three options were offered to cater to as many dispositions as could be foreseen. For those worried about maintaining their anonymity, in spite of the precautions provided, they could easily mail their answers in the postage-paid return envelope and remain completely unidentifiable. Those who preferred a more personal interaction, or perhaps did not want to be bothered filling out the 12-page survey by themselves, could choose either one of the two remaining options.

Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rutgers granted approval, formal petitions were sent to the five mainline Protestant denominations (Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ) for the list of all their ministers who had been previously ordained as Catholic priests. Even though the Baptist Churches and the many small independent non-denominational and Evangelical churches are among the most numerous in this country in terms of membership and clerical workforce, they were not contacted for this research project for two main reasons.

Firstly, I had hypothesized that the vast majority of former Catholic priests would not be inclined towards that end of the Protestant spectrum due to the stark differences they present when compared to the greater proximity of the mainline traditions. Secondly, Dean Hoge, the renowned veteran sociologist in the field of clergy research who gave me the contact names and numbers for the five participating mainline Protestant Churches, kindly but firmly warned me that such an attempt would be futile. He said that during his many years of experience in this field of research and from his knowledge of their autonomous structures, he was certain that those particular churches, bereft of central offices, would not be able to provide lists of this nature.

As it turned out, even among the well-organized mainline denominations, three of the five did not have such information readily available. Given that the total number of Protestant ministers in the United States has been estimated at nearly 600,000 (Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2007) and the five participating denominations report a total of only 115,871 ministers, it is quite possible that there may be many other former Roman Catholic priests serving in Protestant communities across the nation.<sup>7</sup> For now, however, that remains a matter of pure speculation.

### *3.3 Data collection by denomination*

The data were collected during the months of May to September 2007. Each of the five Protestant denominations responded differently depending on whether they could easily gather such information and whether or not they were comfortable sharing it with

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<sup>7</sup> If the publication of this study becomes well known in Evangelical circles, perhaps those ministers who were previously ordained as Catholic priests will contact me and provide material for an interesting follow-up project. It must be understood, however, that it would have been nearly impossible to contact even a handful of these ministers, if in fact they even exist.

someone outside their organization. Only the Episcopal and the Lutheran churches (specifically, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) kept records indicating whether one of their ministers had been ordained in the Catholic Church prior to their transition. I was most interested in these two particular denominations since I had hypothesized, based on Sullins' theory (1993) that people switch affiliation "close to home," that the majority of former priests would have gravitated towards them, attracted by the myriad theological and liturgical similarities. The other three denominations reported that they did not keep this kind of information at their headquarters but only at the regional level, which complicated the process of locating the participants.

The legal department of the Episcopal Church decided that to protect the privacy of the 361 former Catholic priests currently serving in their churches they would not release their information but rather would send their own cover letter (Appendix B) with my IRB-approved "informed consent" letter (Appendix C). Given that access to these ministers was not direct—those interested had to contact me first in order to obtain a copy of the survey—, the two main researchers at the Episcopal Church did not anticipate a response rate higher than the standard 25 percent that they achieve when they mail out surveys directly. Besides this indirect method of getting the survey into the correct hands, there was also no way to adhere to the common research procedures of making follow-up calls or of sending reminder postcards. In spite of these inconvenient restrictions, over one-third of the Episcopalians ( $N=121$ ) responded to the original invitation, and 88.4 percent of those who did ( $N=107$ ) completed the survey. Of these 107 participants, 81 responded by mail, 22 chose the telephone method, and four of them opted for the in-person interview format.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) offered more direct access to their ministers by providing a complete list of the mailing addresses and telephone numbers of the 33 clerics from their denomination who qualified for the study. Of the 15 who chose to participate (45.5 percent response rate), nine did so by mail, five chose the phone option, and one wanted a face-to-face interview. (I also contacted the central office of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. At first, they thought that one or two of their ministers had been previously ordained in the Catholic Church but, upon further investigation, they found that none of their ministers fit the profile.)

As stated earlier, the other three denominations reported that they did not keep on file at their headquarters lists like the ones the Episcopalians and Lutherans had. Since each denomination handled the request for names slightly differently, they will be presented here separately, starting with the Congregationalists (United Church of Christ) who produced eight candidates. The head of the Congregational research department published the following message (entitled “Search for UCC ministers who were previously ordained as Catholic priests”) in his monthly electronic newsletter that circulates among all their clergy nationwide:

At the end of May we received a request from Stephen Fichter, a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Sociology at Rutgers University, for a list of our clergy who were previously ordained as Catholic priests. Stephen is working on a dissertation that focuses on clergy who have relocated from one denomination or faith tradition to another. As far as he has been able to ascertain, no researcher has ever conducted a study that has focused on clergy who have transitioned from Catholic ministry to Protestant ministry. As in all scientific studies of this nature, his research will be conducted within the parameters of absolute anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information will be recorded on the surveys and the results will be reported for the group as a whole, and not individually. This is a unique opportunity to make your voice heard, to tell your life story. If you are interested in participating in his survey, please call him at 201-925-3814. He will then mail you his survey and offer you three ways in which you may participate. Thank you.

Of the eight Congregational ministers who contacted me, five preferred the mail option and three asked to be interviewed by phone. The same denominational official who sent the electronic request estimated that there would be about 15 in total although he had no way of verifying that number. If the Congregationalists' response rate was similar to that of the Lutherans and Methodists, one could reasonably estimate that there are approximately 17 such men serving in United Church of Christ congregations today. As it is impossible to corroborate this information and the difference between the two estimates is so small, the more conservative estimate was used.

The next most numerous group of former Catholic priests came from the United Methodist Church whose Assistant General Secretary (Division of Ordained Ministry) sent out a similar email to his regional assistants asking them to send me the contact information of anyone whom they knew who fit the profile. This request produced six potential participants to whom I mailed my survey. When I made my follow-up calls a week later (to verify that they had received the surveys), I discovered that one of the six was very ill. He died a few weeks later. Another one returned my call to let me know that he did not qualify for this study since, although he was ordained as a Catholic priest, he never became a Methodist minister. He explained that the confusion about his status may stem from the fact that he has been very actively involved in the Methodist Church for many years. He could understand why some people may think he was a minister but, in fact, he has always maintained his lay member status. Of the remaining four ministers, three chose to respond via return mail, yielding a 75 percent response rate.

The chief researcher at the Presbyterian Church thought that there might be two former Catholic priests among their clergy but, in the end, he was only able to locate one.

He reported consulting the Research Office of the General Assembly Council, the Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, and two retired Directors of the Ecumenical Office of the General Assembly. I left voice mail messages for the minister he identified, having already mailed the survey to his work address, but never heard from him.

I sent the same cover letter (Appendix D), plus the actual survey, to all the non-Episcopalian participants. Then, within two weeks of mailing the surveys, I called those participants for whom I had contact information, offering them the opportunity to conduct the survey over the phone or in person if geography and schedules allowed. In total, five ministers asked to be interviewed in person while 30 chose the phone option. The other 98 participants sent their responses by return mail. The average length of the face-to-face interviews was two hours and the phone interviews 75 minutes.

Table 6 summarizes the actual numbers and response rates by denomination. As can be seen quite clearly, the Episcopal Church was by far the most popular choice.

Table 6. Number and response rates of former Catholic priests serving as Protestant ministers by denomination, *Shepherding in Greener Pastures, 2008 (N=133)*

	Total number	Total percent	Number contacted	Number participated	Participation rate total/contacted	Percent of participants
Episcopal	361	87.2	121	107	29.6 / 88.4	81.1
Lutheran	33	8.0	33	15	45.5 / 45.5	11.4
Congregational	15	3.6	8	8	53.3 / 100.0	6.1
Methodist and Presbyterian	5	1.2	5	3	60.0 / 60.0	1.5
Total	414	100.0	168	133	32.1 / 79.2	100.0

### 3.4 Construction of the survey instrument

For the most part, this “Survey of Relocated Clergy in the United States” (Appendix A) mirrors the “Pastoral Provision Priests” questionnaire developed by Paul Sullins of the Catholic University of America. His research (forthcoming) focuses on those former Episcopalian ministers who since 1980, with the Vatican’s approval, have not only converted to Catholicism but have been allowed to work—as an exception to the general rule—as married priests. Given the many similarities between the “Pastoral Provision” clergy and the participants in this “Shepherding in greener pastures” study, the logical choice was to replicate Sullins’ survey, making modifications where necessary. Although in opposite directions, both sets of transitional clergy moved along parallel lines. Sullins granted permission to use all or selected parts of his instrument.

As well, ten questions from the survey developed by Jackson Carroll of Duke University for his nationwide study of Christian clergy (2006) were selected for inclusion. Carroll’s questionnaire, which he also gave me permission to use, touched on several topics that were relevant to this project such as the amount of time ministers spend at their various pastoral duties. Given the fact that his data are publicly available both in his publication *God’s Potters* (2006) and on the Internet ([www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com)) meant that I would be able to compare my participants with a randomly selected and nationally representative sample of Christian clerics in the United States.

Once the merger of these two instruments was complete, it was necessary to tailor the questions so that they reflected the typical life journey of this very particular pool of respondents who began their private lives and their public ministries in the Catholic Church and now serve in the various Protestant Churches.

The final product of this merger and adaptation was a 12-page survey that incorporated 75 closed-ended and 13 open-ended questions into a research instrument that covered a wide range of relevant topics. Since the participants were offered the option of completing the survey on their own (which is the mode of participation that most of them, in fact, chose), it was advantageous to favor the predominance of so many closed-ended questions. The addition of the open-ended questions meant that a qualitative character of analysis could be injected into a largely quantitative project.

Closely following Sullins' general outline, the six main sections of this survey are: 1) general background, 2) religious background before transition, 3) transition process from Catholic to Protestant ministry, 4) ministerial environment and levels of satisfaction, 5) attitudes concerning doctrinal, moral, and ecclesial issues, and 6) related issues, including their own explanation for why they relocated.

The purpose of the first section (that contained 19 questions) was to collect basic demographic information about their age, race, ethnicity, marital status, and current living arrangements. Questions concerning their family of origin, such as number of siblings and birth order, were also included. Although not all of this information would be used in the analyses to be described later, it was deemed worthwhile to gather such elementary background information that could be utilized in future studies.

Data were also collected concerning the ethnic heritage of their family of origin. My intention was to discover whether being German or Irish, or Italian or Polish, would somehow affect the participants' choices and experiences. Although remotely, this ethnic difference question was inspired in Granovetter's "the strength of weak ties" theory, which chronicled the plight of the Italian community of Boston's West End (1973).

A few questions about their spouses (A7 to A14), that Sullins had placed in a separate survey for the “Pastoral Provision” wives, were included in this first section as there was no plan to interview the partners of these particular participants. When asking about marital status, hypothesizing that there might be some homosexual respondents and others not officially married, the two additional categories of “committed same-sex relationship” and “committed opposite-sex relationship” (that Sullins did not include in his instrument) were added. Keeping in mind the findings that Fichter (1992) and Greeley (1972) had reported concerning the many former nuns who had married resigned priests, question A9, which inquired whether their spouse had been a Catholic nun, was inserted. The respondents were also given the opportunity to share information about any children they may have adopted or brought into the world themselves.

Finally, the last question of the first section inquired about their highest level of academic attainment. The six choices they were given took into account the general course of studies that any Catholic priest or Protestant minister would ordinarily follow in seminary and after ordination.

Keeping in mind that the best predictor of an individual’s religious preference is his parents’ religion (Newport 1979), the second section of the survey entitled “Religious background before transition” focused first on their parents’ denominational affiliation. Not only was the participants’ age at Baptism and at Confirmation established in this section, but also their age at entry into the seminary. This section of only 11 closed-ended questions also provided information concerning one of the key variables in this study: whether the participant was ordained as a diocesan or as a religious order priest.

The 19 items of the third section, which focused on the transition process from Catholic to Protestant ministry, were organized in chronological fashion. Starting with the year when they experienced their first doubts about their commitment to the Catholic priesthood and leading up to the year when they officially began their ministry as Protestant ministers, this section sought to pinpoint the various intermediate stages. Through these questions it could be established how long they struggled with their doubts before they decided to resign from the priesthood. In particular, question C2 focused on the Vatican process of dispensation, asking them whether they had chosen to follow that route, as had many thousands of their colleagues who left Catholic ministry in order to marry. By simple subtraction, it could be determined how many years elapsed before they began to seek a return to ministry. They were also asked what kinds of employment they engaged in during those “in-between” years. The open-ended C10 question provided them with the opportunity to express why they choose the denomination they did.

The information gathered from question C16 (concerning perceived levels of support from significant others during the time of transition) was of vital importance for the analyses that will be described at the end of this chapter and that will be fully reported about in Chapter 5. The last three questions of this third section were all open-ended prompting the respondents to articulate what their greatest losses and their greatest gains were during this process of relocation, and to offer suggestions to the authorities in the various Protestant Churches on how to improve the transition process.

The fourth section (containing 21 questions) focused on ministerial environment and levels of satisfaction. The first seven questions aimed at establishing the amount of hours they work and the official positions they occupy. Many of these items were taken

directly from Carroll's survey. They included, for example, the amount of hours that each pastor spent in various ministerial duties (D5) and the amount of time allotted to other non-pastoral activities (D6). Questions D14 to D21 inquired about their levels of satisfaction (a key variable), potential family conflicts, health, and overall happiness.

The fifth section of the "Shepherding in greener pastures" survey contained 12 items that centered on a series of doctrinal and moral issues that have been asked of national samples of American Catholic priests. Their responses will indicate how theologically liberal or conservative they are. It will also show how much confidence they have in the Catholic Church and in their own denomination, and what they think of their bishop (or equivalent leader). The only new question appended to this section, as compared to Sullins' version, solicited their opinion regarding the ordination of women in their current denomination. The last question was an open-ended inquiry into what they consider the greatest challenges facing their denomination today.

The final section of the survey consisted of six open-ended questions that asked for the respondents' views on a wide variety of related topics. The first question gave them the opportunity to explain in their own words why they made this dual transition. They were also asked what they thought of the "Pastoral Provision" group of married Catholic priests. Given the current historical context, a question about the priestly pedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church could not be omitted. With only slight adjustments, these items were almost identical to the ones that Sullins utilized. As a simple example, in question F5 instead of asking "What, if anything, has surprised you about the Catholic Church?," the question was changed to "What, if anything, has surprised you about the Protestant Church in which you minister?"

### 3.5 Analytical procedures

The overall analysis plan is tripartite. First, a detailed report on the frequencies of the principal variables will help to fulfill the descriptive goal of this project. Secondly, a series of cross-tabulations will highlight differences, for example, between diocesan and religious priests. The outline for the descriptive results section (Chapter 4) is as follows:

1. Basic demographics: age, race, marital status, religious affiliation, number of children, and current living situation.
2. Family of origin: birth order, number of siblings, parental affiliation, and childhood religious attendance patterns.
3. Catholic milestones: age at entry to seminary, years spent in seminary, age at ordination, length of ministry, amount of years spent considering resignation, and age at resignation.
4. Transitional experience: years between ministries, length of transitional process, types of paid employment during interim phase, and levels of support from various significant others.
5. Spouses' profile: age, age at marriage, former and current religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and employment.
6. Catholic generation: Pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and Post-Vatican II cohorts compared across several variables.
7. Type of priesthood: Diocesan and religious priesthood participants compared across several variables.
8. Protestant denomination: Analysis of differences when considering which Protestant denomination they joined.

Finally, in the third phase of analysis, multivariate regression models will create the opportunity to discover how factors, such as parental support for their transition, affect current ministerial satisfaction. Out of these increasingly sophisticated levels of analysis there will emerge certain types of “greener pastures shepherds,” such as the dichotomy presented by those who followed their “head” as opposed to those who followed their “heart,” to name a particularly interesting pair of differentiating descriptors. To transmit their unique experiences in the most accurate way possible, direct quotations from their interviews will be interspersed throughout the analyses.

### *3.6 Four research questions and their corresponding hypotheses*

#### *3.6.1 First research question: Motivated by head or heart?*

All the background information from Chapter 2 has helped to set the stage for the four research questions selected for analysis. As stated earlier, the first two deal with causes while the second two focus on consequences. The first question asks what motivated these former Catholic priests to resign. The following quote from Cozzens (1999) sums up well the main reasons most often given:

The reasons for leaving active ministry really aren't many, but they are complex. Most often they are personal: the overwhelming discovery that they are in love, the persistent feeling that they are called to marriage and fatherhood, the almost unbearable sting of loneliness, the acknowledgement that the priesthood no longer make sense to them, the bone weariness of worry and work that saps reserves of energy and leaves the priest feeling spent and confused. Sometimes the reasons are theological in nature—the church's position on issues relating to women or ecclesiologies that challenge their sense of priestly identity. Seldom is it an issue of belief—belief in God or in the church. In one way or another, personally and professionally, they are struggling to maintain their integrity. Very few leave in bad faith. (P. 108).

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter by the four most prominent sociologists of clerical celibacy (Fichter, Greeley, Hoge, and Schoenherr), it

could be hypothesized that most of these former priests resigned for “reasons of the heart” rather than for “head” or rational reasons. In other words, one could hypothesize that the desire to marry is a greater predictor for resignation than an intellectual rejection of certain teachings. A secondary hypothesis pertinent to this research question states that diocesan priests are more likely than religious priests to make this kind of transition due to the more solitary nature of their living conditions. Even though they live “out in the world,” they often feel isolated. Given their greater risk of loneliness, it seems plausible that they would be more attracted to a change that would satisfy their need for intimacy.

Since the main criterion for participation in this survey of Protestant ministers was their previous ordination as Catholic priests, the outcome variable for the first hypothesis is already given and is common to all, given the fact that all respondents made the same transition. Therefore, the testing of the first hypothesis is simply an analysis of the independent variable, i.e. the rationale they presented for their decision.

As explained earlier, the first question of the last section of the survey allowed participants to explain in their own words why they made this dual transition. The exact wording was: “People may ask you, ‘Why did you convert?’ or more specifically ‘What issues, conditions, or experiences led you to leave the Catholic Church and join your denomination?’ How do (or would) you respond to this question?” Given the open-ended nature of this item, a team of five research assistants, including the primary investigator, coded the wide range of responses into seven categories. The categories were (1) celibacy or the desire to marry; (2) unhappy with living conditions or poor treatment by colleagues or authority figures in the church; (3) burnt out or disillusioned by ministry; (4) began to think in a more Protestant way; (5) disagreed with some official Catholic moral precept;

(6) disappointed with the conservative reversal of Vatican II; and (7) other reason not included above. (The results of this particular analysis and the other research questions to follow will be presented throughout Chapters 4 and 5.)

For the second dimension of this first question, it must be remembered that there are two types of priesthood in the Catholic Church. In this country, diocesan clergy have usually outnumbered religious priests by about three to two. Given that proportion, one would expect to find three former diocesan priests for every two former religious priests among these “greener pastures shepherds.” However, given the previously mentioned loneliness issue, one could hypothesize that diocesan priests would opt for this kind of transition at higher rates than priests from religious orders would. Another potential contributing factor to this particular direction could be the fact that the day-to-day work of Protestant ministers is more similar to that of diocesan priests than it is to that of religious priests. This dichotomous independent variable concerning type of priesthood was ascertained by asking the participants to specify the name of the diocese or of the religious order for which they were ordained. Since diocesan priests were in the majority, they were coded as 1 and the religious order priests were coded as 0.

### *3.6.2. Second research question: Is there a distinct period effect?*

Keeping in mind the age and cohort effects that will be discussed respectively in sections 4.4 and 4.7 of the subsequent chapter, this second research question (to be explored in Chapter 5) will test for a potential period effect. These three analyses of the particular timing of the participants’ transitions within their own life course, and within world and church history, will help to paint a more complete picture of this phenomenon.

Perhaps there was some kind of “*anomie of aggiornamento*” period effect (as described in Chapter 2) stemming from the tumultuous years after Vatican II, when thousands of Catholic priests resigned, and which coincided with the sexual and cultural revolution of the late 1960s. Could it be that the participants in this study just happened to reach the typical period of mid-life crisis (that occurs between 30 to 40 years of age) just when this major societal and ecclesial upheaval began to arise? Perhaps their crisis of commitment to celibate Catholic priesthood was part of a larger crisis that also included thousands of lay Catholics who started to divorce during that same timeframe.

Whenever a social scientist attempts to sort out an age-period-cohort problem, it quickly becomes apparent that it is not easy to do so. As Settersten (1999:123) points out, “the problem of disentangling age, cohort, and period comes down to the fact that each one is a function of the other two”. This interdependence makes it difficult to distinguish one effect from the other. As Bengtson, Cutler, Mangen, and Marshall (1985) indicate, all three hypotheses (age, cohort, and period) can be plausible at the same time.

Concerning a possible age effect, which focuses on the individuals’ location within the life course, I hypothesize that most of the participants will have faced this major crisis in their mid-thirties, which is the obvious time for individuals to reevaluate their life trajectory. In theory, their relocation experiences fit the description that Carr and Pudrovska (2007:175) give for a mid-life crisis: “a transition that deprives an individual of a meaningful role, status, or relationship and thus requires the restructuring of and adaptation to one’s new environment.” These two researchers also describe how at mid-life many people reach a turning point when they begin to evaluate their past, decide to give up all or part of their previous plans, and forge a new map for the second half of life.

Although later-life crises also occur, it seems that the likelihood of resigning from priesthood would decline as the prospects for marriage and a second career diminish. This question of timing within the life course (or age effect) will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Analyzing a potential cohort effect can be complicated for several reasons. As Settersten (1999:112) explains, a cohort is an “aggregate of individuals who experience the same event within the same time interval.” The purpose of cohort analysis is to see if year of birth (or age when certain events occur) produces different life experiences. One of the perennial difficulties of cohort analysis is choosing where to draw the line between one cohort (or generation) and another. Thankfully, there is a consensus among scholars of American Catholicism concerning this essential factor. Given the watershed nature of the Second Vatican Council, and based on the work of D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, and Gautier (2007), the participants in this study will be divided into three generations or cohorts: Pre-Vatican II (those born in 1940 or earlier), Vatican II (those born between 1941 and 1960), and post-Vatican II (those born after 1961). It is useful to remember that as members of a cohort grow up, “they carry with them the impact of their early historical experiences—and consequently their interpretations of and orientations toward a variety of social issues” (Bengtson et al. 1985:307).

The other complication that often arises in cohort analyses (as well as in studies of age and period effects), and that unfortunately could not be circumvented in this project, has to do with the nature of cross-sectional data. As Settersten (1999) explains:

With cross-sectional data, one can never be certain whether the age differences they find are a result of genuine age change (due to maturation) or whether those differences are instead the result of either period or cohort effects. In cross-sectional data, age, period, and cohort effects are hopelessly entangled (P. 123).

Given these cross-sectional entanglements, Thornton, Freedman, and Axinn (2002) stress the value of longitudinal work. Two studies that they cite (Thornton 1985, 1992) show, as was explained in Chapter 2, that the uniqueness of Catholic behavior has been steadily declining since the close of Vatican II. With each passing year, Catholics are becoming more and more like their Protestant counterparts.

This particular research question will test the hypothesis of a distinct period effect that influenced the life trajectories of these participants. Knowing the age at which they resigned and the exact year in which they made that choice, it will be possible to see, albeit partially, how these three effects interact with each other.

### *3.6.3 Third research question: Parental support and ministerial satisfaction?*

Moving from causes to consequences, the third research question asks how parental approval (or disapproval) for their decision to renounce both celibacy and Catholicism affects long-term ministerial satisfaction while paying close attention to how differently diocesan and religious priests react to parental approval rates. In order to understand better how the key independent variable (parental support) is related to the main dependent variable (current satisfaction) and may be moderated by type of priesthood (diocesan or religious), I will analyze the bivariate relationships between each one of these predictor variables and the main outcome variable. Then, by means of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, I will analyze how type of Catholic priesthood and level of parental support, plus their interaction terms, affect the current levels of ministerial satisfaction. Finally, I will add controls for age and number of years spent doubting as well as for levels of support from priest colleagues and bishop/superior at the

time of transition to see whether any of these additional factors alter the association between parental approval and ministerial satisfaction.

In the section of the survey that focused on the transition process, participants rated the level of support they received at that time from various sets of important people in their lives. The exact wording was: “Consider a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the absolute worst and 10 is the absolute best. All things considered, where on this scale would you rate the support you received during your transition period from Catholic to Protestant ministry from your parents, your siblings, your spouse, your friends, your former parishioners, your Catholic priest colleagues, and your Catholic bishop or religious superior at the time of your resignation?”

Four items inquired about current levels of ministerial satisfaction: “Using the responses (1) ‘very satisfied’, (2) ‘somewhat satisfied’, (3) ‘somewhat dissatisfied, and (4) ‘very dissatisfied’, what is your level of satisfaction with:

- (A) your overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader in this particular congregation?
- (B) your current ministry position?
- (C) your relations with the lay leaders in your congregation?
- (D) your relations with other clergy and staff members at your church?”

All responses will be reverse-coded, so that higher values indicate greater satisfaction. By taking into account these multi-dimensional relationships, this scale will comprehensively gauge ministerial satisfaction. The overall score will be calculated by summing the responses, dividing by four, and rounding to two decimal places. In the few cases where the respondents reported scores on only two or three items, the results will be added together and then divided by the appropriate denominator. Before the scale was

created, each item was analyzed separately. The correlations between them ranged from .460 to .677, and the composite scale registered an .826 alpha coefficient.

As stated earlier, this third research question explores how type of priesthood may act as a moderator. The hypothesis is that those ministers who enjoyed more parental support during the time of transition will report higher levels of current satisfaction (due to the long-term impact of parental approval) and that this relationship will be stronger for diocesan priests (who remain geographically close to their parents) than it is for religious priests (who often move away from home). I also hypothesize that number of years spent debating about resignation (calculated by subtracting the year they began to doubt from the year of resignation) may influence this relationship.

#### *3.6.4 Fourth research question: Does marriage limit pastoral availability?*

Keeping in mind the material from the final section of Chapter 2 that highlighted the potential “intrusion” of marriage commitments on the amount of time that clerics can dedicate to their ministry, this fourth research question focuses on the number of hours these “greener pastures shepherds” spend ministering each week. As mentioned in the literature review, Carroll (2006) has already demonstrated that Christian clergy in the United States (both Catholic and Protestant), on average, work more hours than most people. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1998), clergy and physicians topped the list of long-working occupational groups by logging an average of 52 hours per week. Firefighters came in second with a median of 51 hours per week.

In his very insightful explanation of the temporal organization of professional commitments, Zerubavel (1981) focuses on physicians as models of “ever-availability.”

While he points out that this social quality of being always accessible is a “symbol of a rapidly dying traditional social order” and “is becoming more and more of an anachronism,” he nevertheless highlights the fact that “within the more traditional spheres of life, it is strongly cherished” (p. 146). He mentions that besides physicians, those who are involved in religious ministry, police work, or military service are also expected to be always “on the job.” For example, while it would be inappropriate to call the family accountant at 3 o’clock in the morning, no matter how pressing the financial situation, no devout Catholic would hesitate to call the parish priest if a family member was in need of “last rites” at the very same hour. Perhaps his celibate condition makes the Catholic priest seem even more accessible to his parishioners than the Protestant minister whose wife may be awoken by the phone call in the middle of the night.

Emergency situations aside, Carroll (2006) has demonstrated that on average Catholic priests work eight hours more per week than Protestant ministers. Could this difference be attributed to the fact that Catholic parishes are usually much larger than Protestant ones and thus, by force of sheer volume, require more attention? Or could it be that the ministers’ family commitments impede them from being as available as priests who, thanks to celibacy, are unencumbered by competing claims on their time?

The participants in this study provide a unique opportunity to explore this issue because they have occupied both social roles, as celibate Catholic priests before and as married Protestant ministers now. If their transition from their former singular roles (as celibate priests) to their current double roles (as ministers and married men) has not negatively affected the amount of time they devote to their pastoral ministry, then it could be argued that marriage does not interfere in the exercise of one’s ministry.

Data for this final research question will be gathered from the participants' responses to survey questions D1 and D5. The exact wording for the first item is, "Considering all your duties of any type, in a typical week, about how many hours total do you work/minister?" They were asked to subdivide their answer into three blocks: 1) Monday through Friday, 2) Saturday, and 3) Sunday. The second item requests that they estimate how many hours during an ordinary week they devote to 1) preaching, 2) worship leadership, 3) teaching outside of worship, 4) training others, 5) trying to convert others to the faith, 6) pastoral counseling, 7) visiting sick and shut-in members, 8) visiting prospective members, 9) supervising staff, 10) attending meetings, 11) promoting the congregation's future, 12) participating in denominational or interdenominational affairs, and 13) participating in organizations and issues beyond the congregation.

By comparing their answers to those who participated in Carroll's study (2006), i.e. a national sample of Catholic priests and Protestant ministers who have never changed their affiliation, it should be clear whether their workweek schedule is more similar to the 56-hour Catholic priest model or to the relatively lighter (but still very demanding) 48-hour Protestant minister model. My hypothesis is that these former Catholic priests now work fewer hours per week than they used to, and that their averages will be much closer to the workload of the average married Protestant minister.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

#### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter serves as a bridge from the research questions presented at the end of the previous chapter to the inferential results that will be explained in the next. It is hoped that a clear picture of these “greener pastures shepherds” will emerge from these pages. As was stated at the very beginning of this dissertation, no sociologist has ever conducted any formal research on this particular subgroup. The detailed description of their main characteristics, therefore, could act as a point of reference for future studies.

Upon review of their responses, two of the 133 respondents (1.8 percent) were identified as outliers and their information was removed from subsequent analyses. The first minister in question had not been raised Catholic as everyone else had been, and the second had been ordained as a married Catholic deacon before becoming Episcopalian. (Confer Appendix E for a more detailed explanation.) These two men aside, all the others were baptized and/or confirmed as Catholics and were ordained as celibates. Eventually they would all renounce their Roman Catholic affiliation and the immense majority of them would marry or enter a lifelong same-sex committed relationship.

Although they form a homogeneous set of human subjects in terms of race and gender, some interesting variations among them are worth noting. This chapter, as was outlined previously, will feature eight subsections: 1) basic demographics, 2) family of origin, 3) Catholic milestones, 4) transitional experience, 5) spouses’ profile, 6) Catholic generation, 7) type of priesthood, and 8) current Protestant denomination.

#### 4.2 Basic demographics

This section deals with such basic demographic information as age, race, marital status, number of children, current religious affiliation, and living situation.

There is a 40-year age range among the participants ( $N=131$ ) with the three youngest being 42 years of age and the eldest one 82. The mean age is 62.8 with a standard deviation of 9.4 years. The median age is 64, and there are two modes at 60 and 73. The average age of the former religious priest is 63.7 whereas the former diocesan priest is 62.4 years old. Figure 4 reveals the nearly bell-shape type of distribution.

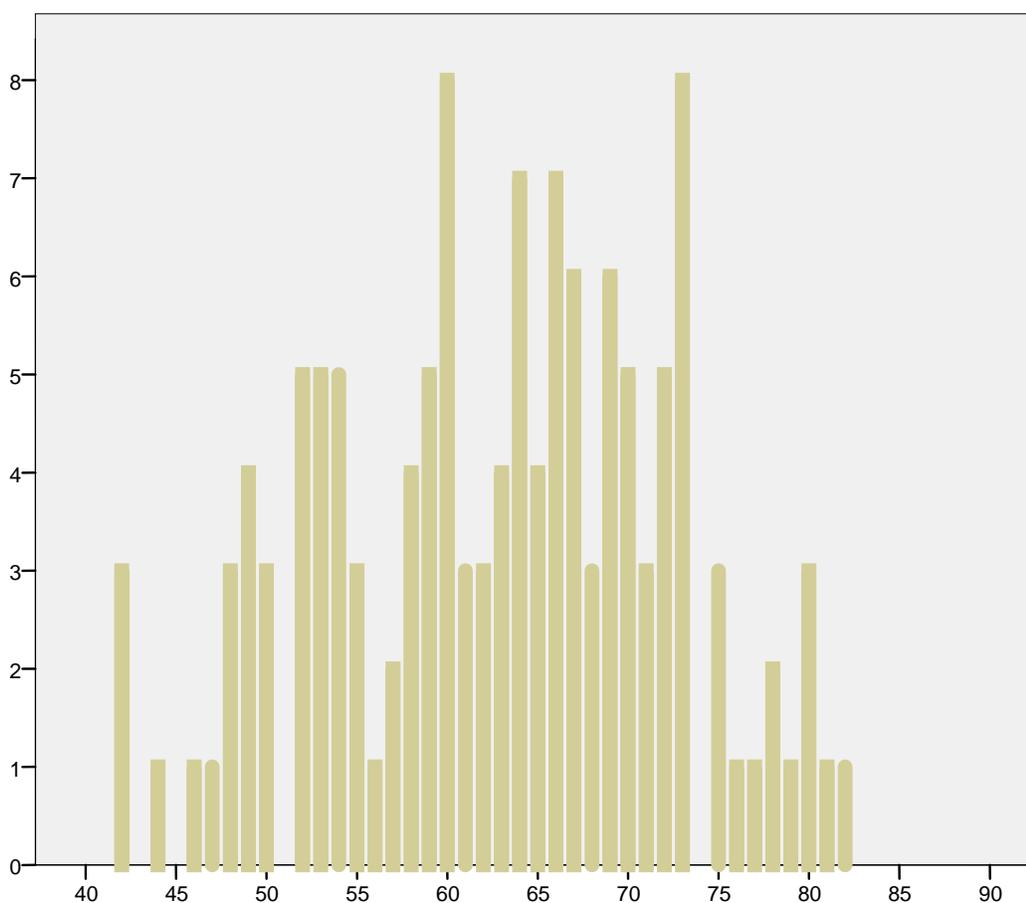


Figure 4. Current age of participants, SGP 2008

If consolidated into age brackets by decades, the normality of the distribution becomes even more apparent, as demonstrated in Figure 5. There are 13 participants (9.9 percent) in their 40s, 33 (25.2 percent) in their 50s, 51 (38.9 percent) in their 60s, 29 (22.1 percent) in their 70s, and 5 (3.8 percent) in their 80s.

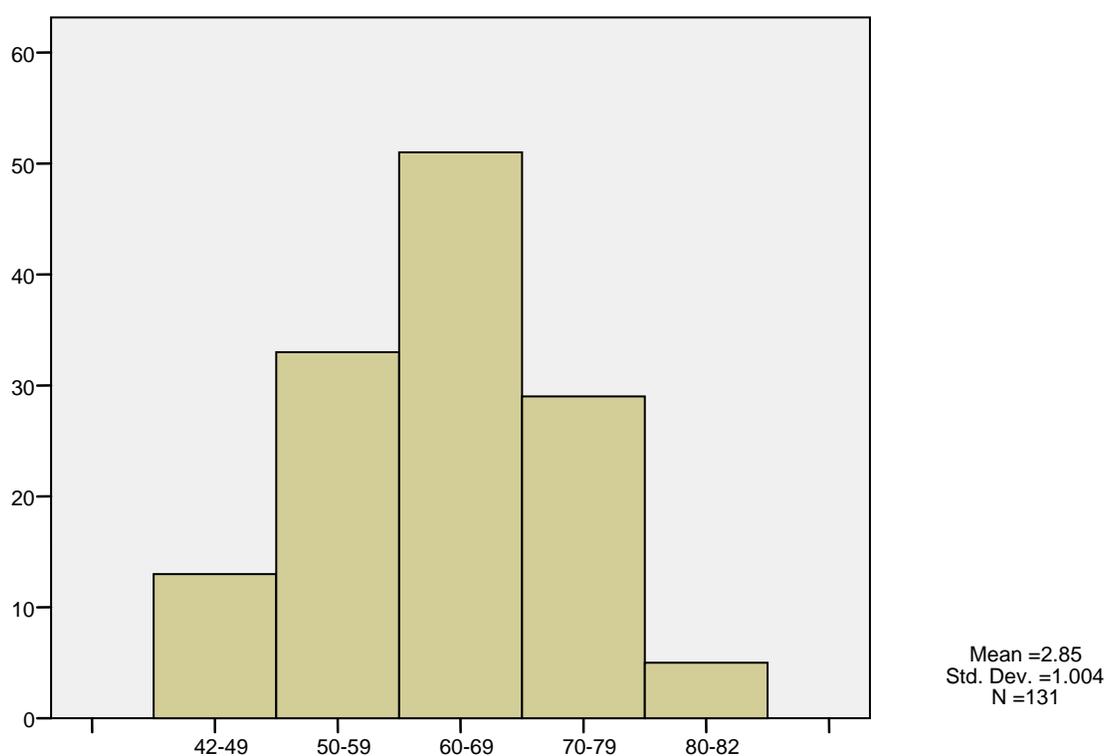


Figure 5. Age of participants by decade, SGP 2008

As stated previously, there is great homogeneity regarding race with 127 whites (96.9 percent), three Hispanics (2.3 percent), and only one respondent who did not answer this item. It could be reasonably presumed that even the one participant who did not identify his ethnicity was also white since he listed his national heritage as Irish, Welsh, and Italian. No one in the survey identified himself as black or Asian.

Although most of the respondents provided information concerning their national heritage, it was difficult to interpret these data. I had hoped to report on differences between the Irish and the Germans or between the Italians and the Poles but due to the “melting pot effect” in their parents’ generation, few respondents reported being 100 percent of any one nationality. A typical response was, “I am one-half Italian, one-quarter Irish, and one-quarter German.” In spite of the complexity of their responses, one fact stood out: a preponderance of respondents traced their roots back to one or more of the European nations of France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Portugal. Given the history of immigration to America, this was to be expected.

The majority of participants (87.8 percent) are currently married. One is a widower and seven more are either separated or divorced. Adding these four categories together, brings about a total of 123 participants (or 93.9 percent) who are or were married at some stage. Four others (3.1 percent) are in committed same-sex relationships. Only four have never married. Table 7 shows their average ages.

A one-way ANOVA test, revealing “nearly” statistical significance at the .065 level, indicated that those respondents who never married or are currently in a same-sex relationship are younger than those who are or have ever been married.

Table 7. Median age by marital status, SGP, 2008 ( $N=131$ )

Marital status	Median age	Standard deviation
Married or widowed ( $N=116$ )	62.9	9.3
Separated or divorced ( $N=7$ )	68.9	10.2
Committed same-sex relationship ( $N=4$ )	56.8	9.0
Never married ( $N=4$ )	55.3	5.6

For the 98 participants (74.8 percent) who have children, four out of five of them have had two or three children. Ten percent have had only one child and another ten percent have had four or more. Almost one out of five (19.4 percent) have stepchildren. The average ages of their first three children are 28.4, 25.9, and 23.5 years old. Only four respondents have children under the age of ten.

Although more will be described in the final subsection of this chapter concerning the differences between denominations, for now I summarize what was already presented in Chapter 3 concerning their current religious affiliation. There are 105 Episcopalians (80.2 percent), 15 Lutherans (11.5 percent), 8 Congregationalists (6.1 percent) and 3 Methodists (2.3 percent) in this sample. (The two outliers were both Episcopalian.)

Finally, concerning their current living situation, 121 participants (92.4 percent) live with their spouse and/or children. Of the other 10 respondents (7.6 percent) who live alone, six are separated or divorced and the other four never married. More than three-quarters (77.1 percent) own their own home while 15.3% live in a rectory or other church-supplied housing. Only 10 of them (7.6 percent) rent an apartment.

### *4.3 Family of origin*

This section of descriptive data deals with number of siblings, birth order, parental affiliation, and childhood religious attendance patterns. The average number of children in their families of origin was 4.33 with a 2.38 standard deviation. The range went from 1 to 15 with a median of four and a mode of three. When grouped into small, medium, and large families (Table 8), a normal distribution results. More than two-thirds of all the respondents were the first or second eldest in their families of origin.

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Table 8. Characteristics of their families of origin, SGP, 2008

	Number of cases	Percentage of sample
Family size		
Small (1 - 2 children)	28	21.4
Medium (3 - 5 children)	73	55.7
Large (6 or more children)	30	22.9
Birth order		
First born	60	45.8
Second born	28	21.4
Third born	18	13.7
Fourth or higher	25	19.1
Mother's religious affiliation		
Roman Catholic	126	96.2
Protestant	5	3.8
Father's religious affiliation		
Roman Catholic	118	90.1
Protestant	13	9.9
Participants' affiliation at baptism		
Roman Catholic	127	96.9
Protestant or Greek Catholic	4	3.1
Participants' affiliation at confirmation		
Roman Catholic	130	99.2
Greek Catholic	1	0.8

These men came from predominantly Catholic families where 96.2 percent of the mothers and 90.1 percent of the fathers were Catholics. Almost all the participants were baptized and confirmed as Catholics. Only four were not baptized Catholic (Figure 6). Two of these were baptized Episcopalian but were later confirmed as Catholics. A third respondent reported being baptized Methodist at birth but then “rebaptized” as a Catholic at two years of age. Finally, a fourth participant was baptized and confirmed in the Greek Church but since his father was Roman Catholic, he was ordained in the Latin Rite.

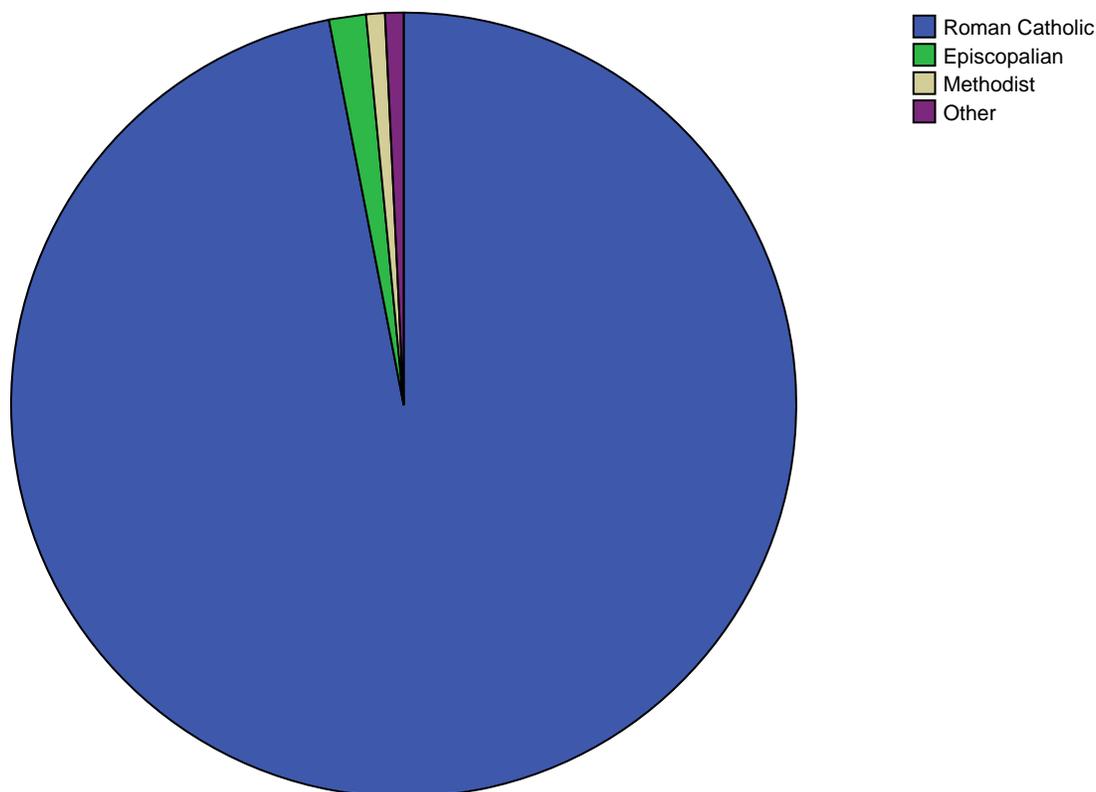


Figure 6. Denomination at baptism, SGP 2008

When asked how often they attended Mass (the prescribed weekly Catholic religious service) during their early adolescence, 47.3 percent reported attending once a week while another 44.3 percent reported attending several times a week, combining for a total 91.6 percent attending at least once a week. Those who attended Mass more frequently were often enrolled at local parochial schools, which were usually run by Catholic nuns. Six percent reported going to church a few times a month, but not weekly. Only three participants (2.4 percent) reported monthly or less frequent attendance.

#### 4.4 Catholic milestone moments

From within the framework of such predominantly Catholic families, it is not surprising that so many of these young men entered the seminary. This section deals with such major Catholic milestone moments for the participants as age at entry to seminary, years spent in the seminary, age at ordination, length of ministry, amount of years spent considering resignation, and age at resignation. Data from Table 9 (which will also be referred to in the next subsection) give an overview of the average life course of these former Catholic priests who decided to become Protestant ministers.

Table 9. Age at diverse transitional moments, SGP, 2008

Milestone moments in the life course	Mean	Standard deviation
Age at entry into seminary ( $N=131$ )	18.43	3.71
Years spent in the seminary ( $N=128$ )	8.74	2.87
Age at ordination ( $N=129$ )	27.30	2.41
Years spent in ministry before doubt ( $N=128$ )	5.93	4.99
Age at which they began to doubt ( $N=129$ )	33.41	5.56
Years spent working through doubt ( $N=129$ )	2.50	3.81
Age at resignation from priesthood ( $N=131$ )	35.88	6.48
Years elapsed before marriage ( $N=127$ )	2.79	5.17
Age at marriage ( $N=127$ )	38.59	7.40
Years spent between ministries ( $N=131$ )	8.05	7.25
Age at beginning of Protestant ministry ( $N=131$ )	43.93	8.97
Years working as a Protestant minister ( $N=131$ )	18.85	10.42
Current age ( $N=131$ )	62.78	9.38

It is helpful to study several of these milestone moments separately. For example, the average age at entry into the seminary (18.43 years) is about ten years lower than the current average due to the many respondents in this study (17.6 percent) who entered the minor seminary at 14 years of age or younger. (Most high school seminaries in the United States, which had been very popular during the 1940s and 1950s, have closed during the past 40 years. Gautier (2008) charts this precipitous decline from 15,823 high school age seminarians in the United States in 1967 to only 536 in the year 2007.)

Figure 7 shows that besides the beginning and end of high school, the other two peak moments for entry into the seminary for these participants were after two years of college or after completing college.

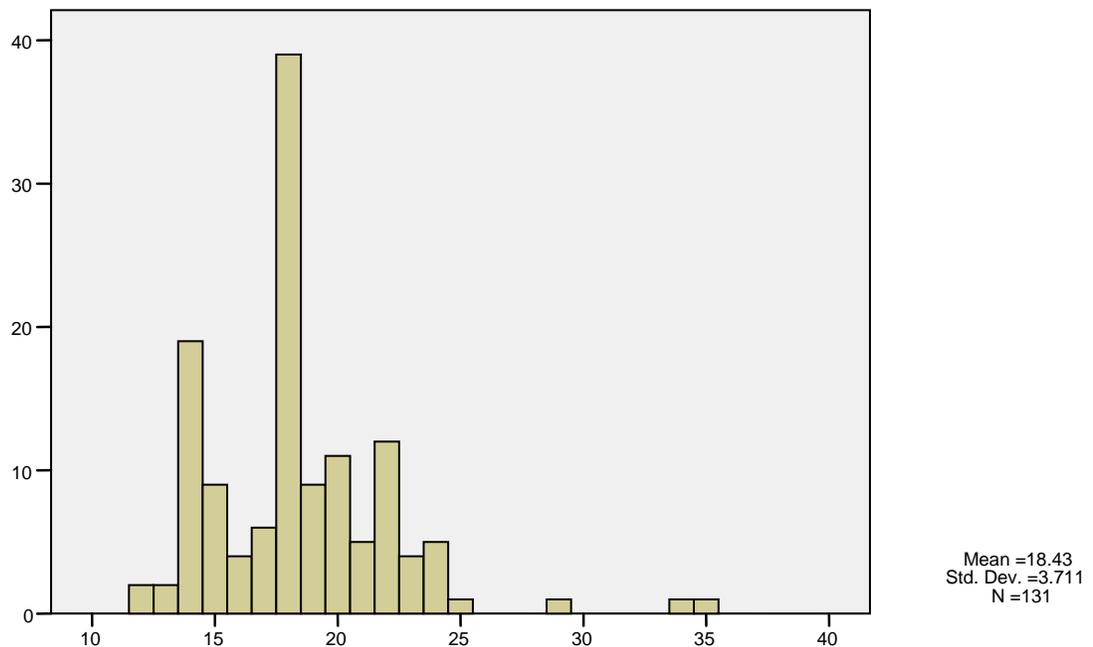


Figure 7. Age at entry to seminary, SGP, 2008

Table 10 shows that most of the participants were ordained in their mid to late 20s. On average, the religious order priest spent two more years in the seminary (10.26 years) than did the diocesan priest (8.20 years). When both groups are combined, the average stay in the seminary is 8.74 years. The median and the mode are both 8.

Table 10. Age at ordination, SGP, 2008

Age	Frequency	Percent
23	1	0.8
24	1	0.8
25	12	9.3
26	45	34.9
27	28	21.7
28	19	14.7
29	10	7.8
30	3	2.3
31	3	2.3
32	3	2.3
33	1	0.8
37	1	0.8
38	1	0.8
40	1	0.8

While on average they report having been engaged in ministry for about six years before they began to doubt their vocation, a closer look at the data (Table 11) reveals that within four years half of them had already begun to doubt, a quarter of them within two. Perhaps some experienced doubts before ordination but, unfortunately, the wording of the questions on the survey only captured post-ordination doubting.

The data from Tables 10 and 11 lend support for the “age effect” hypothesis that stated that the participants probably entered into this mid-life crisis of doubting their priestly calling during their mid-30s.

Table 11. Years before doubt, SGP, 2008

Years	Frequency	Percent
0	4	3.1
1	13	10.2
2	17	13.3
3	16	12.5
4	14	10.9
5	8	6.3
6	11	8.6
7	11	8.6
8	6	4.7
9	3	2.3
10	4	3.1
11	6	4.7
12	6	4.7
14	2	1.6
15	1	0.8
16	1	0.8
20	2	1.6
22	1	0.8
25	1	0.8
26	1	0.8

Once doubt about their calling set in, for many of them it was a quick discernment process. On average, these men spent two and a half years struggling with their doubts. The histogram in Figure 8, however, reveals that 58.9 percent of the participants ( $N=76$ ) resigned within the first year of experiencing doubt.

As Table 9 (on page 117) revealed, the average age at resignation was 35.88 years old. By the time they resigned, they had spent almost eight and a half years in active Roman Catholic ministry: the first six in relative calm, the last two and a half usually in emotional turmoil. Religious order priests were only about one year older (36.67 years) than their diocesan counterparts (35.65 years) when they resigned.

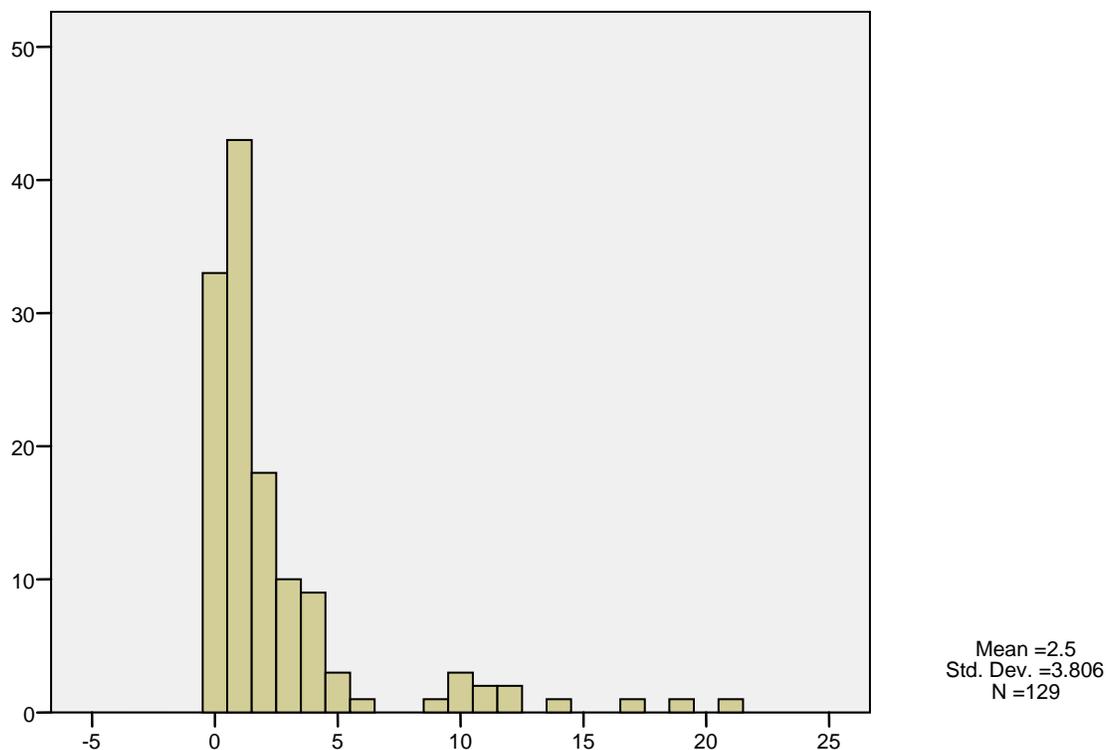


Figure 8. Number of years spent doubting, SGP 2008

Many of the respondents who chose to be interviewed over the phone or in person elaborated on this critical juncture of their lives. Most spoke of an agonizing decision-making process. A former diocesan priest, who now serves in a Congregational Church, and whose example is paradigmatic of many others, said:

I had such a nervous encounter with both my bishop and with my parents. It was a period of constant headaches. It was a very difficult decision. I was so torn between Sally (pseudonym) and celibacy. When I finally resolved the dilemma, the headaches stopped... I still recall how poorly the bishop treated me. I felt that he really didn't care about me. It truly was an agonizing decision. I remember my mother saying, "But you are one of the good ones!" I told her that I just couldn't do it anymore. In the end, both of my parents were very supportive; I was blessed with two great parents. It was an agonizing decision especially after spending eight years in the seminary and nine years in ministry.

This former priest's particular experience closely mirrors the average timeframes described in Table 9 as he spent eight years in the seminary, five years in ministry before he began to doubt and then needed almost four years to come to a decision. He spoke warmly and at length about his time in the seminary as being "the best eight years of my entire life." He described the Catholic monks who ran his seminary as being men of great kindness and acceptance. "They gave me a good theological education and a positive spiritual foundation." His problems began during his first assignment:

"I was doing really well in my ministry but the rectory life was killing me. The pastor, who was great with the parishioners, had this notion that you need to treat the young priests harshly. He was really hard on us. He made all the rules. There was no discussion. I began to lose weight. I asked the bishop for a transfer. My second pastor was an alcoholic. Besides that, he had his 'boyfriend' over at the rectory so often that it made me feel uncomfortable. I asked the bishop for another transfer and this time I was assigned to a truly great pastor. He was so kind to me and he was someone that I deeply admired. I have often thought that had Father Michael (pseudonym) been my first pastor, I might still be a Catholic priest today. . . . My main issue was with celibacy, however. I always thought that it was unjust, especially when the Pastoral Provision came through. I thought that such a decision was a double standard. I was battling loneliness. . . . I think that I would have stayed as a Roman Catholic priest if celibacy had been optional."

#### *4.5 Transitional experience*

For some, the transfer from Catholic to Protestant ministry was almost immediate while for others it was a secondary idea. The average length of time between ministries was 8.05 years but with a standard deviation of 7.25 years. The median was six years and the mode only two. Figure 9 shows this lop-sided distribution.

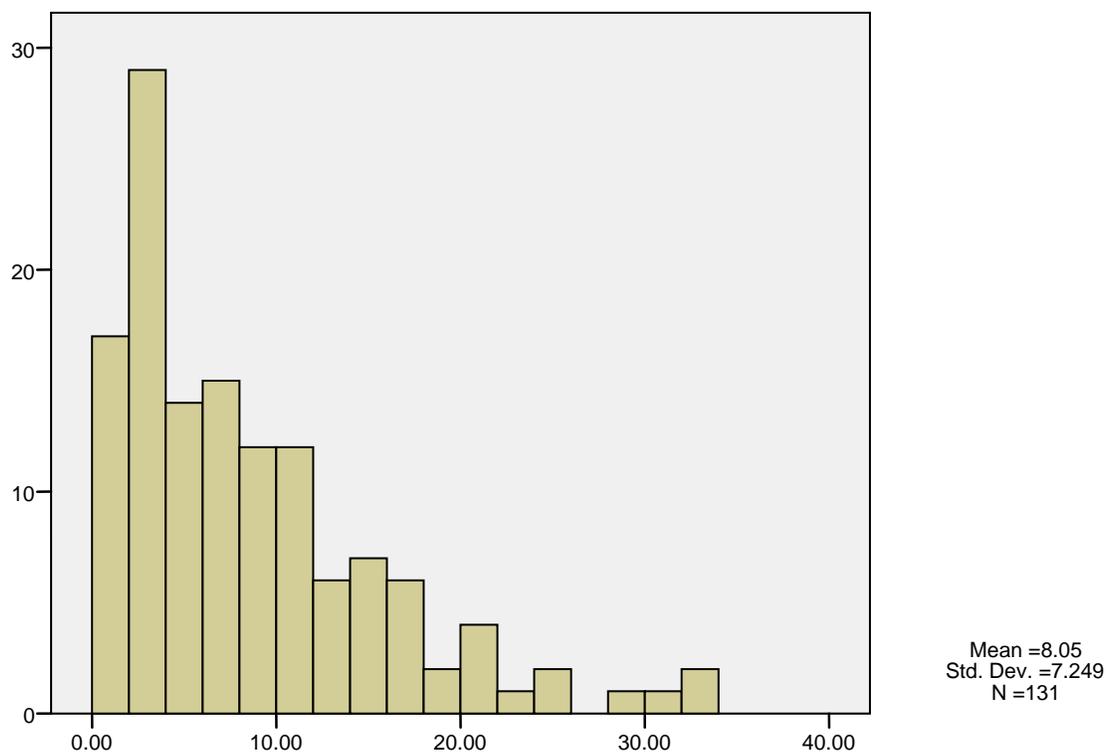


Figure 9. Number of years spent between ministries, SGP 2008

While some contacted the Protestant Church of their choice right away, others entered the secular work force first and then, only after a number of years, decided to return to ministry and began looking for a church. Once the official process of transfer began, the average transition time to full Protestant ministry was only 2.97 years.

During the interim period between ministries, most of the respondents worked in the “ex-priest-friendly” job sectors of social services and education. About a sixth of the participants got involved in some form of business administration and only five percent got involved in the healthcare professions.

Eventually, they all began their second career in ministry. The average age at this milestone moment, as reported in Table 9, was 43.93 years of age. Figure 10 shows that the median was 43 years old and the mode 42.

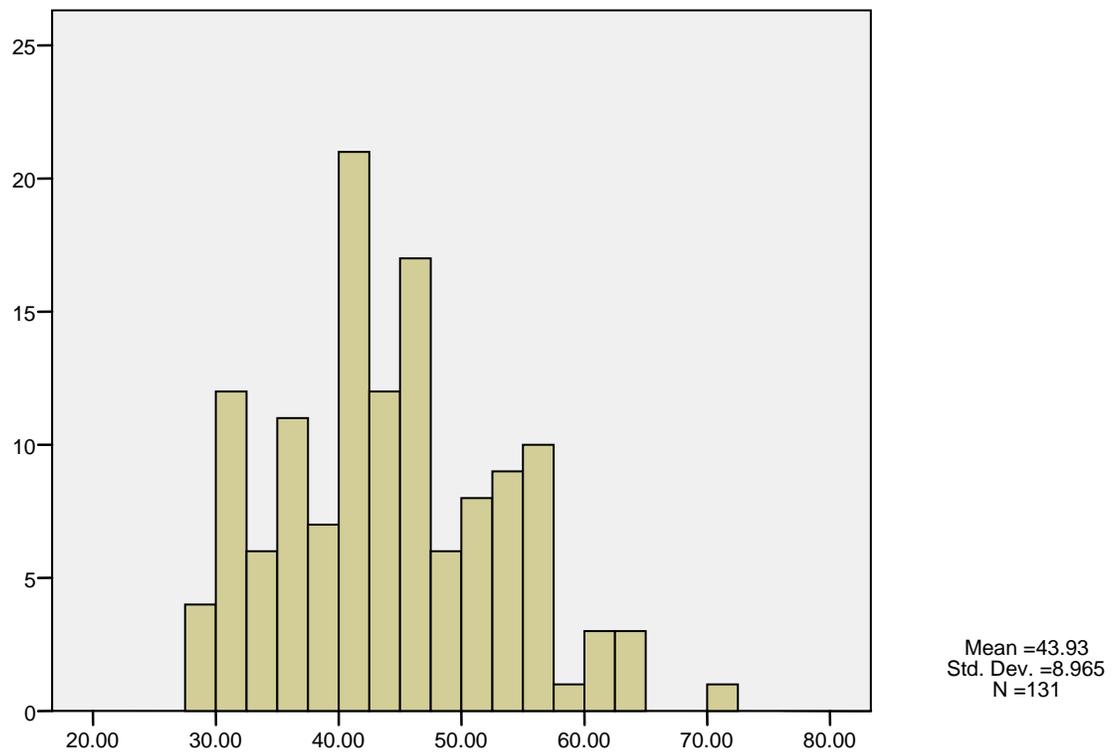


Figure 10. Average age at beginning of Protestant ministry, SGP 2008

On average, these men have spent 19 years in Protestant ministry, which is more than twice the amount of time during which they exercised their Catholic priesthood. It would be interesting to know how their exposure to both traditions helps to define their identities today. Unfortunately, that specific question was not posed to them.

As mentioned in the literature review, the level of support from significant others plays a major role in the transition process. Table 12 shows that the most supportive person was their spouse, followed by the laity of their new church community. The least supportive person was their bishop or superior, followed by their priest colleagues and former parishioners. Overall, siblings were slightly more supportive than were parents.

Table 12. Level of support (on a scale of 1 to 10) from significant others, SGP, 2008

Specific group	Mean	S.D.	Diocesan	Religious
Parents ( $N=115$ )	6.07	3.27	6.01	6.14
Siblings ( $N=123$ )	6.75	2.86	6.64	6.93
Spouse ( $N=114$ )	9.51	1.26	9.42	9.77
Friends ( $N=129$ )	7.68	2.33	7.54	8.00
Former parishioners ( $N=102$ )	5.84	2.82	5.85	5.82
Priest colleagues ( $N=127$ )	4.36	2.85	4.13	4.93
Bishop or superior ( $N=128$ )	3.57	3.21	3.10	4.76**
Protestant leadership ( $N=131$ )	9.03	1.43	9.01	9.06
Protestant clergy ( $N=131$ )	8.69	1.72	8.61	8.92
Protestant laity ( $N=130$ )	9.27	0.96	9.22	9.39

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

When comparing the responses of diocesan and religious priests by means of a series of one-way ANOVAs (Table 12), the only statistically significant difference was on the level of support from their bishop (in the case of diocesan clergy) or their superior (in the case of religious). While still retaining the lowest rank on the scale, the religious superiors were 50 percent more supportive than were the diocesan bishops. This increase of compassion probably stems from the more family-like environment of religious orders.

One of the participants who had been a member of a religious order that he entered at 18 years of age and in which he was ordained to the priesthood 12 years later spent three years in the formal process of becoming an Episcopal priest. He contacted the authorities in the Episcopal Church while he was still serving as a Catholic priest. He too spoke of angst saying, “I thought I would go nuts with an affair or with alcoholism. I thought that if I stay in, I will crash. I would act out inappropriately...”

When he finally made his decision, he experienced great relief. He felt that he was at home in the Episcopal Church and could freely proclaim, at last, all that he believed.

When speaking of the reaction of the significant others in his life, he said:

“My dad was happy that I was going to get married but my mother was not very happy at first. She was losing her bragging rights of having a priest-son. I would give (on a scale of 1 to 10) my dad a 9 and my mom a 5. My siblings would get an 8 and my spouse a 10. My friends and former parishioners were a mixed bag. My Catholic priest colleagues would get a 4 or a 5. My superior was surprisingly good. . . . I would give him an 8.”

Not all former priests made such a quick transition, as did the abovementioned man who managed to do so in just three years. One diocesan priest who was ordained at 27 years of age (and ministered as a Catholic priest for six years) decided to work as a funeral director for seven years before he even considered applying to the Episcopal Church. He continued to labor in the undertaking business during the four years of his transition. While he mentioned a lack of security and identity as the main losses of this period of his life, he also reported a sense of greater personal satisfaction that came from his newfound sense of freedom. Similar to the example cited of the Congregational minister (on page 122), this respondent spoke of a difficult and unhealthy rectory situation as being a persistent source of dissatisfaction and a major contributing factor for his ultimate resignation from the Catholic priesthood.

#### 4.6 Spouses' profile

This subsection deals with some basic demographic information concerning the spouses/partners of these men, such as age at marriage, current age, former and current religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and occupational history. On average, these former Catholic priests chose spouses who were approximately four years younger than themselves. The exact mean age for their partners at the time of marriage was 34.31 years with a median of 33 and a mode of 32 years. They have been married for an average of slightly more than 24 years. The spouses' mean age now is 58.71 years with a 9.35 standard deviation. Table 13 shows great variation between their denomination of origin and their current affiliation.

Table 13. Denominational switching by their spouses, SGP, 2008

	Number of cases	Percentage of sample
Original denomination ( <i>N</i> =127)		
Roman Catholic	77	60.6
Baptist	9	7.1
Episcopalian	8	6.3
Methodist	8	6.3
Lutheran	7	5.5
Presbyterian	6	4.7
Congregationalist	3	2.4
Other	9	7.1
Current denomination ( <i>N</i> =124)		
Roman Catholic	7	5.6
Baptist	1	0.8
Episcopalian	85	67.5
Methodist	4	3.1
Lutheran	14	11.1
Presbyterian	0	0.0
Congregationalist	7	5.6
Other	6	4.8

As can be clearly seen in Table 13, among the spouses of these “greener pastures shepherds” not only did affiliation with the Catholic Church drop substantially (almost 91 percent) from 77 to seven but it also declined among the Baptists who went from nine to one, and the Presbyterians who started with six and ended with none. Not surprisingly, the three denominations that gained the most were the Episcopalians who increased more than ten-fold from eight to 85, and the Lutherans and Congregationalists who doubled from seven to 14, and from three to seven, respectively. It is also interesting to note that among the 15 Lutheran participants, 14 are married to Lutherans. Similarly, all three Methodists are married to Methodists and all seven married Congregationalist ministers (one is unmarried) share the same affiliation with their spouses.

Among the 77 spouses who began as Catholics, 22 of them (28.6 percent) were former nuns. Considered as part of the entire group of spouses, these ex-nuns represent 17.2 percent of the sample. As might be expected, given the overall predominance of the shifting towards the Episcopal Church, more than two-thirds of the former Catholic nuns have become Episcopalian. Even more fascinating, however, is the fact that not one of the former nuns affiliates with the Catholic Church today.

By far, the most common professional occupation among the spouses was within the educational arena. The next three most popular occupations were that of homemaker, nurse (or other medical-field related position), and religious ministry.

As stated earlier, only four participants (3.1 percent) stated that they were in a same-sex committed relationship. In all four cases, the participant is Episcopalian and three of their four partners are also members of the Episcopal Church. Two of the four respondents who have never married mentioned that they are homosexual.

#### 4.7 Catholic generation

As explained previously, the Second Vatican Council marked a major watershed moment for the Catholic Church and, hence, it makes sense to analyze how the Pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and Post-Vatican II generations compare to each other. Following the partition used by D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge and Gautier (2007), the Pre-Vatican II generation includes those born in 1940 or earlier, the Vatican II generation comprises those born between 1941 and 1960, and the Post-Vatican II cohort encompasses all those born in 1961 or after. Dividing the participants into these three cohorts will shine light on any potentially different life experiences brought about merely by year of birth.

Table 14 shows that more than six out of ten respondents belong in the Vatican II generation and nearly one-third belong to the Pre-Vatican II era. Less than five percent fit in the Post-Vatican II cohort. As expected, the difference in age from one group to the next is 15 years. Beyond this age gap, it is noteworthy that there was no major variation across the three cohorts in terms of family background and current affiliation.

Table 14. Distribution and average age of the three generations, SGP, 2008

Generation	Number of cases	Percent	Average age	S.D.
Pre-Vatican II	43	32.8	73.05	3.93
Vatican II	82	62.6	58.78	5.86
Post-Vatican II	6	4.6	43.83	2.23

Table 15 follows the outline of Table 9 concerning the various transitional moments for the three specific generations. As expected, due to the fewer numbers entering high school seminaries, the average age at entry rose across the three cohorts. This also cut down on the amount of total years spent in the seminary.

Table 15. Age at diverse transitional moments for three generations, SGP, 2008

Milestone moments	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II
Age at entry into seminary	17.33	18.90	19.83*
Years spent in the seminary	9.57	8.35	8.17+
Age at ordination	27.21	27.30	28.00
Years spent in ministry before doubt	8.67	4.63	3.33***
Age at which they began to doubt	35.88	32.24	31.33***
Years spent working through doubt	2.44	2.68	0.50***
Age at resignation from priesthood	38.33	34.89	31.83**
Years elapsed before marriage	2.12	3.04	4.33**
Age at marriage	40.44	37.76	36.17
Years spent between ministries	10.00	7.18	6.00+
Age at beginning of Protestant ministry	48.33	42.07	37.83***
Years working as a Protestant minister	24.72	16.71	6.00***
Current age	73.05	58.78	43.83***

+ $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

It is fascinating to note that the Post-Vatican II generation spent on average five fewer years engaged in ministry than did the Pre-Vatican II generation before they began to experience doubts. They also began their ministry in the Protestant Churches at a much younger age, a full 11 years earlier than the Pre-Vatican II generation. They spent much less time (half a year as opposed to two and a half years) agonizing over the decision and yet they waited double the amount of time before marrying (4.33 years compared to 2.12 years). The delay in marriage is probably due to an overrepresentation of homosexuals in this group who continue to struggle with the lack of legal recognition for their unions.

Given the fact that resigning from the priesthood was less acceptable in earlier generations, one could hypothesize that the Pre-Vatican II generation would have received less support from their parents, siblings, and other significant others. However, as Table 16 demonstrates, levels of support varied little across the three cohorts.

Table 16. Level of support (on a scale of 1 to 10) from significant others, SGP, 2008

Specific group	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II
Parents ( <i>N</i> =115)	5.65	6.35	5.33
Siblings ( <i>N</i> =123)	6.63	6.88	5.83
Spouse ( <i>N</i> =114)	9.55	9.62	7.80**
Friends ( <i>N</i> =129)	7.52	7.83	6.83
Former parishioners ( <i>N</i> =102)	5.98	5.77	5.83
Priest colleagues ( <i>N</i> =127)	4.68	4.25	3.67
Bishop or superior ( <i>N</i> =128)	4.00	3.49	1.50
Protestant leadership ( <i>N</i> =131)	9.35	8.86	9.00
Protestant clergy ( <i>N</i> =131)	9.02	8.51	8.67
Protestant laity ( <i>N</i> =130)	9.55	9.12	9.33

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

It must be noted that there are only six participants in the Post-Vatican II generation. One of these six men did not have a very happy marriage. His wife did not support him at all in his choice of entering the Episcopal priesthood. She said that it was fine for him but she did not want to have anything to do with it. Eventually, they divorced. If this one particular case was removed, there would be no statistically significant difference across the three generations.

#### 4.8 Type of priesthood

As was described in the literature review chapter, although they share much in common, diocesan and religious priests in the Catholic Church differ in many ways. It is useful, therefore, to analyze how they compare to one another. Only one participant did not indicate his former status and thus was excluded from the following analyses. As Figure 11 shows, almost three-quarters of the participants (72.3 percent) were diocesan priests, which is ten percentage points higher than the national average (Kenedy 2008). I will explore some potential causes of this overrepresentation in Chapter 5.

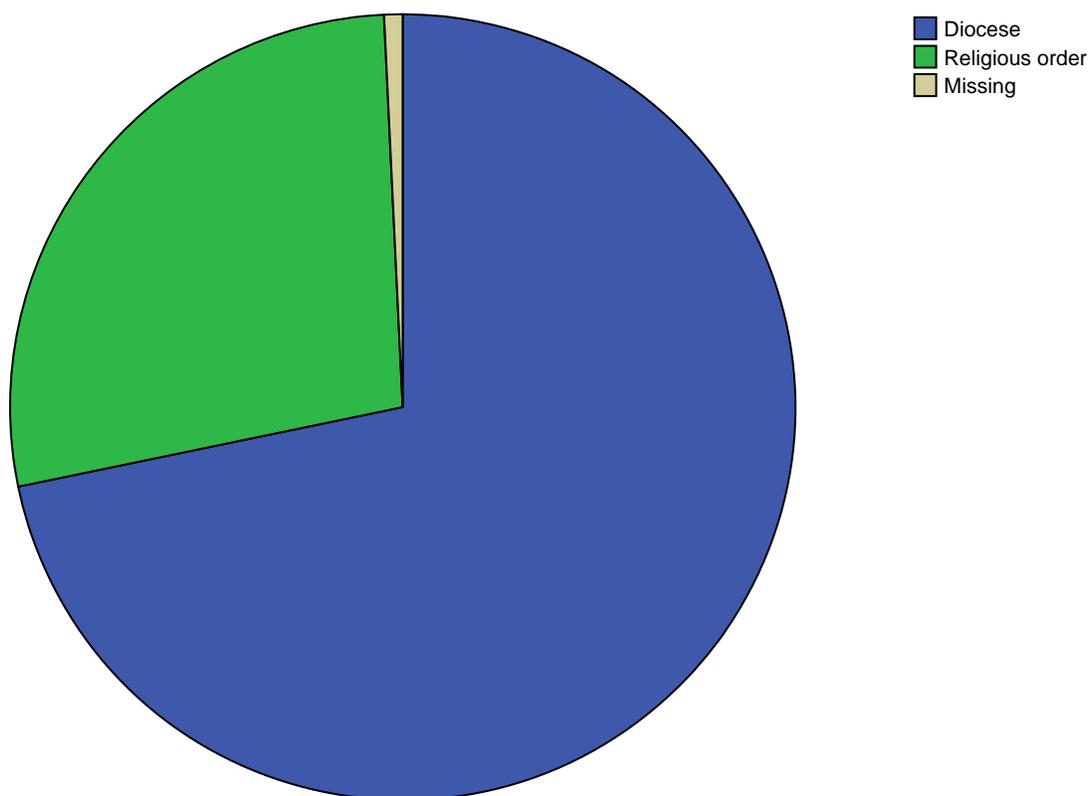


Figure 11. Diocesan or religious order, SGP 2008



The two dioceses with the most participants were Saint Louis and Green Bay with four each. There were six dioceses with three each: Atlanta, Columbus, Detroit, Paterson, Springfield, and Worcester. The rest had only one or two. It is interesting that the largest dioceses (Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles) were not represented more substantially.

Among the religious priests, I hypothesized that the largest number of participants would have been members of the two most numerous religious families: the Franciscans and the Jesuits. In fact, there were six former Franciscans and four former Jesuits in the sample. There were three Holy Ghost Fathers and three Augustinians. The Benedictines, Carmelites, Salesians, and Vincentians had two each while the remaining groups had only one representative each. These were the Basilian Fathers, Capuchins, Crosier Fathers, Glenmary Home Missioners, Maryknollers, Missionaries of Sacred Heart, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Passionists, Paulists, Redemptorists, and a member of the Society of the Precious Blood. Given the large number of Dominican priests in the United States, one would have expected to find at least one or two of them in this study.

#### *4.9 Protestant denomination*

Finally, this last section looks at the participants from the perspective of their current denominational affiliation. Given that four out of five of the participants belong to the Episcopal Church, the logical point of reference is to analyze how the other denominations as a group compare to the Episcopalians. This dichotomization led to some interesting results. As Table 18 demonstrates there seems to be a five-year gap between the two groups. This seems to indicate that the second wave of former Catholic priests was not as attracted to the Episcopal Church as was the first.

Table 18. Period of doubting and year of resignation by current denomination, SGP, 2008

Demographic characteristic	Episcopalians	Non-Episcopalians
Year of first doubt about Catholic ministry	1978	1983**
Year of resignation from Catholic ministry	1980	1987***
Current age	63.68	59.30**

Table 19 shows little variation in the levels of support they received except for the final item, which indicates that lay Episcopalians are perceived as being slightly more warm and welcoming than the Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Methodists.

Table 19. Level of support (on scale of 1 to 10) from significant others, SGP, 2008

Specific group	Episcopalians	Non-Episcopalians
Parents ( <i>N</i> =115)	6.20	5.58
Siblings ( <i>N</i> =123)	6.79	6.60
Spouse ( <i>N</i> =114)	9.44	9.77
Friends ( <i>N</i> =129)	7.62	7.92
Former parishioners ( <i>N</i> =102)	5.77	6.11
Priest colleagues ( <i>N</i> =127)	4.27	4.71
Bishop or superior ( <i>N</i> =128)	3.70	3.08
Protestant leadership ( <i>N</i> =131)	9.05	8.93
Protestant clergy ( <i>N</i> =131)	8.71	8.59
Protestant laity ( <i>N</i> =130)	9.36	8.93*

\**p* < 0.05.

When asked why they chose their current denomination, the vast majority spoke of the strong similarity between their present church and the Catholic Church in terms of liturgy, ministry, and theology. This was especially true for the Episcopalians. This also explains why so many of them gravitated towards the Episcopal Church rather than the other mainline churches. Most participants said that with only slight adjustments they “felt at home” from the very beginning. Some emphasized the “liturgical affinity of bread, wine, and candles.” Others spoke about how the denomination of their choice was the closest one to the Catholic Church, with which they were so familiar. They felt comfortable not having to change any of their core beliefs in such matters as the Resurrection of Christ or the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Of course, they would have to modify their views on other subjects such as the infallibility of the pope and the exclusion of women from ordination but many of them had already begun to think in this more Protestant way even while they were ministering in the Catholic Church. All of them, with the exception of only one, said that they favored the ordination of married men in the Catholic Church.

When asked what surprised them the most about their new church, the two most common responses were about the relatively smaller size of Protestant congregations and the power the laity exercises. One minister spoke about how as a Catholic priest he was used to preaching to thousands of parishioners every Sunday and had a hard time adjusting to having less than 100 people listen to his sermon. As Catholic priests, they were used to having the final word as the pastor. Now many of them would have to answer to a board of laypeople. While they seem to have adjusted well to this new paradigm, many of them mentioned that it was a bit of a cultural shock at first.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INFERENTIAL RESULTS

#### *5.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter has provided a detailed description of this unique sample of former Catholic priests who decided not only to renounce their vows of celibacy but also to switch their denominational affiliation in order to continue their ministerial roles in society. The “typical” participant is a 63-year-old white married Episcopal priest who has been serving his denomination for more than 18 years, more than twice the amount of time spent working in the Catholic Church. If his life were divided into seven nine-year blocks of time, the first two were spent as a devout Catholic young man leading up to his entry into seminary at 18 years of age. The third period was dedicated to preparing for priestly Catholic ordination around the age of 27. The fourth phase was spent in active Catholic ministry and involved a fair amount of struggle with doubts concerning his commitment to celibacy. Around 36 years of age, at the beginning of the fifth period, he adjusted to life as an ex-priest, got married, worked for a few years in a non-ministerial job, and began his denominational transition journey. The last two nine-year segments in his life course correspond to his current stage of married Protestant ministry.

The present chapter will focus on some of the causes and consequences of this dual transition. The two main research questions, already presented at the conclusion of the third chapter, are: 1) What motivated these Catholic priests to make this decision?, and 2) What are some of the long-term effects of such major life-altering decisions? From these two lines of inquiry, the four specific research questions emerge:

1. Were these men motivated more by reasons of the heart (desire to marry) than by reasons of the head (thinking in a more Protestant manner)?
2. Besides the age and cohort effects described in the third and sixth sections of Chapter 4, is there a distinct period effect that influenced their decision?
3. Is their current level of ministerial satisfaction linked somehow to the level of support they received from their parents during their time of transition?
4. How have their new roles as spouses (and parents) affected their role as pastor?

### *5.2 First research question: Motivated by head or heart?*

The first question asks what motivated these former Catholic priests to make this dual transition. Based on the previously presented research of Fichter, Greeley, Hoge, and Schoenherr who found that most priests resigned in order to marry, my hypothesis was that for most “greener pastures shepherds” marriage was the initial “pull” factor. For the majority, I hypothesized, becoming Protestant was a secondary consideration.

While each individual voiced his own unique and sometimes complicated reasons, certain common characteristics surfaced during the interviews. Some stated clearly that the reason they resigned was to marry, and the reason they became Protestant was so that they could take up their ministry again. Not necessarily persuaded by the theology of the denomination they joined (although they found that it was “close enough”), these men sought what they could not obtain as Catholics: married ministry. If the Vatican had allowed them to marry while continuing their pastoral work, presumably many would have remained Catholic. I describe this group as those who followed their heart. Celibacy was their central concern and, in the end, it was the overriding “push” factor.

Others followed a different path, one that was more intellectual than emotional. They found themselves disagreeing with certain Catholic moral teachings, especially Paul VI's encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (1968) that forbade artificial birth control. These men felt that they could not preach from the pulpit what the bishops were demanding of them. They did not want to work in such an awkward position and, for the sake of not violating with their own principles, decided that they could no longer serve as Catholic priests. These “dissenters,” as conservative Catholics would describe them, were the ones who followed their “head” out of the church, who started to think more like Protestants.

Table 20 presents the responses to the question: “People may ask you, ‘Why did you convert?’ or more specifically ‘What issues, conditions, or experiences led you to leave the Catholic Church and join your denomination?’ How do (or would) you respond to this question?” Their answers were coded into seven categories. Participants were allowed to give as many reasons as they desired; most gave one or two.

Table 20. Reasons given for making the transition, SGP, 2008 (N=130)

	Number of cases	Percentage
Difficulty with celibacy or desire to marry	77	59.2
Disagreed with Catholic moral teaching	47	36.2
Began to think in a more Protestant manner	37	28.5
Disappointed with the “reversal” of Vatican II	26	20.0
Unhappy with living conditions or poor treatment	16	12.3
Disillusioned by ministry or “burnt out”	7	5.4
Other reason not already mentioned	13	10.0

Six out of ten respondents mentioned celibacy. A few typical statements were: “I wanted to be a married priest” or “I became a priest in the Episcopal Church because I wanted to have the option of being married.” Others manifested their deep attachment to the Catholic Church: “My only reason was so that I could get married. Otherwise, I would have stayed.” A few men offered detailed information such as this former diocesan priest from the Midwest who now serves in the Episcopal Church:

“During my first three years of ordained ministry as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, I fell in love with a single woman (the youth minister at my parish). Even though I had questioned the discipline of celibacy before, I began to seriously question and struggle with it. I began to feel that God was calling me in a different direction, that celibacy might not be my calling. Coupled with the struggle over celibacy, I seriously questioned the Roman Catholic Church’s treatment of women, laypeople, and homosexuals. The establishment in Rome was becoming more rigid and moving the church backwards. The reforms of Vatican II came under fire. Newly ordained priests were doctrinaire and rigid. Being a ‘liberal’ Catholic priest meant more conflicts with the bishop, young clergy, and conservative parishioners. It came to the point where I could not imagine being happy in 20 years if I remained in ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. I felt God was calling me to pursue something else. I dreamed of finding a denomination where I could continue to minister with my wife, a gifted youth and family minister. The sexual abuse ‘crisis’ (cover up) that shortly followed my departure has only confirmed my decision to walk away.”

One participant sent his own 78-page autobiographical memoir in which he spoke very fondly of his early years as a devout Catholic schoolboy who entered the seminary at 14 years of age. After 12 busy but joy-filled years, he was ordained as a religious order priest. After the death of his beloved parents, when he was about 40, he began to doubt his calling, and after a few years of counseling and soul-searching, he concluded that God was calling him to the Episcopal Church and to marriage. He wrote, “It became a matter of extreme importance to me that I could exercise my priesthood and still be married.” His marriage, which he entered at 46 years old, has lasted now for more than 32 years.

The second most frequently cited reason for making the transition out of Catholic ministry focused on disagreements with certain Vatican pronouncements, given by 36 percent of the participants. In similar fashion, three out of ten expressed how they had begun to think in a more Protestant manner. This was the third most prevalent motivation. One such explicit example was, "I could no longer accept the consequences of papal infallibility." Another former priest wrote, "I left the Catholic Church because I believe that its authority structure is theologically flawed. The church continually places itself as a barrier between the individual and God. It leaves no room for reasonable dissent." Many others mentioned their disapproval of the official stance of the Catholic Church regarding women and homosexuals. They also spoke about their dislike for dogma. In particular, as mentioned earlier, many of these men pointed to the publication of Pope Paul's *Humanae Vitae* (1968) as a major turning point in their lives. One former diocesan priest, who is 80 years old now, said, "*Humanae Vitae* pushed me off the edge. . . . I saw that act as the refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to enter the modern world."

The fourth reason (disappointment with the "reversal" of Vatican II) was similar but slightly different from the two aforementioned reasons. It seems that many of these "greener pastures shepherds" thought that the liberalizing trends that began at the Vatican Council in the 1960s would continue indefinitely so when they encountered what they labeled the "conservative backlash," they became disappointed and disillusioned. Many of them pointed to the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 as a moment of "victory" for the conservatives and the death knoll for the "authentic spirit of Vatican II."

Only a small percentage mentioned unhappy living conditions in the rectory or ministerial "burn-out" as reasons for their resignation from priesthood.

Due to the similarity between the second and third reasons (Table 20), I combined them into one group including anyone who mentioned either one or both of those motives for resignation. This amalgamation made the “head” group ( $N=71$ ) almost as numerous as the “heart” group ( $N=77$ ). While it may seem like a clear-cut dichotomy, it must be remembered that respondents were answering an open-ended question to which there was no limit on the number of responses. Most gave only one or two reasons; some gave four or five. As could have been expected, some participants ( $N=38$ ) cited both “head” and “heart” motives. The overlap contained in Figure 12 illustrates how only 39 participants resigned solely for marriage and 33 for exclusively theological considerations.<sup>8</sup>

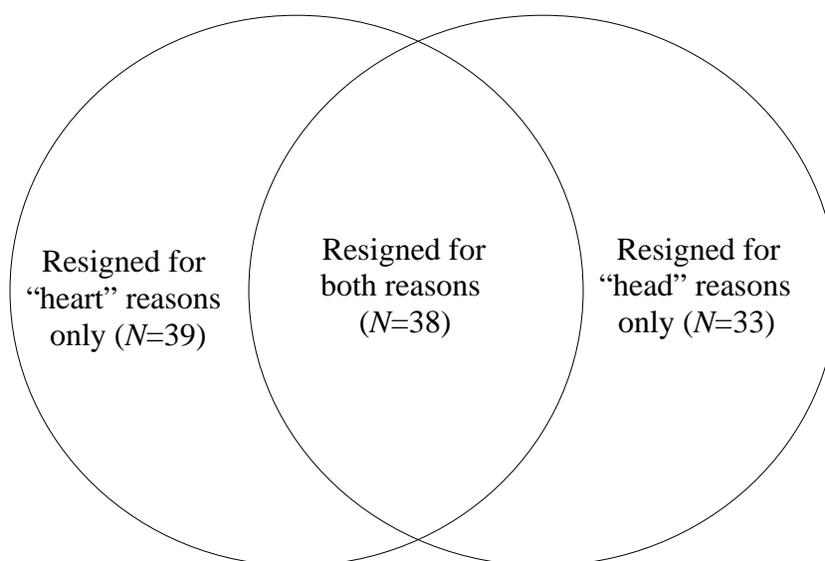
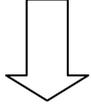
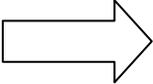


Figure 12. Reasons given for resignation, SGP 2008 ( $N=130$ )

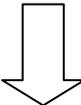
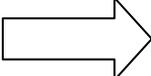
<sup>8</sup> Analysis of basic data (e.g., age, marital status, and denomination) as well as the major milestone moments according to this three-fold typology (of those who followed their head, their heart, or both) revealed no statistically significant differences.

Table 21, which is similar to the table presented at the end of the introductory chapter, provides an overview of the pathways of transition. Those who indicated that they had followed their “heart” should have moved, in theory, from quadrant A to B first and then eventually to quadrant D. Those who said they had followed their “head” should have moved from quadrant A to C before crossing into D. Finally, it could be presumed that those in the overlap section of Figure 1, would have moved directly from A to D.

Table 21. Transition pathways	Celibacy	Transition based on desire to marry	Marriage
Catholic affiliation	A.	(N=39) 	B.
Transition based on differing theology	(N=33) 	(N=38)  Dual reasoning	
Protestant affiliation	C.		D.

Source: Fichter 2008

Table 21 could give the impression that the “head” and “heart” motivations were of equal strength. This may be the case at the level of cognition but Table 22, which analyzes concrete actions rather than *ex post facto* explanations, paints a different picture. Focusing attention on the dates of their marriages and of their entry into Protestantism supports my hypothesis concerning marriage as the initial “pull” factor. Almost two-thirds of all participants ( $N=81$ ) moved in a “horizontal” direction by marrying prior to switching affiliation. Their journey passed through quadrant B before arriving at D. Only one in five ( $N=26$ ) made the “diagonal” transition of contemporaneously getting married and becoming Protestant, i.e., going directly from quadrant A to D within the same year. The smallest group of participants ( $N=20$ ) moved “vertically” by becoming Protestant before they married. They moved to quadrant C first en route to their final destination.

Table 22. Actual pathways	Celibacy	Horizontal transition	Marriage
Catholic affiliation	A.	( $N=81$ ) 	B.
Vertical transition	( $N=20$ ) 	( $N=26$ ) 	
Protestant affiliation	C.		D.

Source: Fichter 2008

As Table 22 indicates, marriage was the strongest “pull” factor at the beginning of their transitional experience. On average, the men who belong to this “horizontal” subset (akin to the previously mentioned “heart” group) were married 6.96 years before joining the Protestant denomination of their choice. The range of this interim period was wide from one year to 27 years, with a median of six years and a mode of two. Conversely, those who became Protestant before getting married (the “vertical” or “head” group) ranged from one to 12 years with a mean of 3.15 years. The median was three years and the mode was one. Figure 13 summarizes the information from all three groups including the 26 participants who made the “diagonal” contemporaneous dual transition.

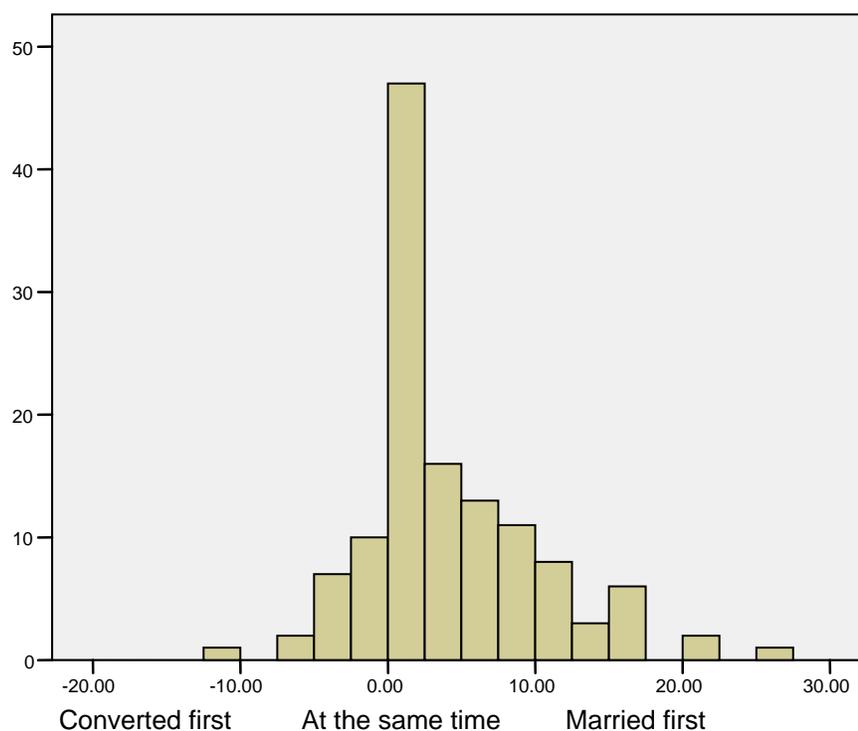


Figure 13. Years married before becoming Protestant, SGP 2008 (N=127)

This three-fold typology of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal boundary crossing offers some interesting insights. First of all, the difference in the median age among the three groups, as displayed in Table 23, is statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. This indicates that the relatively younger “greener pastures shepherds” were more inclined to follow their “heads” into Protestant ministry than the earlier generation.

Table 23. Median age by initial direction of dual transition, SPG, 2008 ( $N=127$ )

Initial direction of transition	Median age	Standard deviation
Horizontal towards marriage ( $N=81$ )	64.1	8.6
Diagonal towards Protestant marriage ( $N=26$ )	63.2	9.7
Vertical towards Protestantism ( $N=20$ )	58.3	10.9

Chi-square analysis of marital status (Table 24) indicates a significant difference at the  $p < .001$  level. The expected count for the “same-sex” participants was 2.6 for the horizontal movers, 0.8 for the diagonal, and 0.6 for the vertical. What stands out is that all four participants in this subgroup converted to Protestantism before entering either a civil union or a domestic partnership. In part, this could be explained by the relatively recent (and still tentative) acceptance of gay marriage in American society.

Table 24. Marital status by initial direction of dual transition, SPG, 2008 ( $N=127$ )

Direction of transition	Married Percent ( $N$ )	Divorced Percent ( $N$ )	Same-sex Percent ( $N$ )	Total Percent ( $N$ )
Horizontal	65.5 (76)	71.4 (5)	0.0 (0)	63.8 (81)
Diagonal	21.6 (25)	14.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	20.5 (26)
Vertical	12.9 (15)	14.3 (1)	100.0 (4)	15.7 (20)
Total	91.3 (116)	5.5 (7)	3.1 (4)	100.0 (127)

A few interesting comparisons can be drawn from Table 25, such as the fact that only 8.6 percent of the religious priests moved in the vertical direction first as opposed to 18.7 percent of the diocesan priests. It is also fascinating that all ten Congregationalist and Methodist ministers married prior to converting to their current denomination. Most of the Lutherans either married first or did both at the same time. Only the Episcopalians differed in this regard, with 18.6 of them converting prior to marriage.

Table 25. Initial direction of dual transition by type of priesthood and denominational affiliation, SGP, 2008

	Horizontal (marry first) Percent (N)	Diagonal (at same time) Percent (N)	Vertical (convert first) Percent (N)	Total Percent (N)
<b>Type of Catholic priest</b>				
Diocesan	60.4 (55)	20.9 (19)	18.7 (17)	100.0 (91)
Religious	71.4 (25)	20.0 (7)	8.6 (3)	100.0 (35)
<b>Current denomination</b>				
Episcopal	60.8 (62)	20.6 (21)	18.6 (19)	100.0 (102)
Lutheran	60.0 (9)	33.3 (5)	06.7 (1)	100.0 (15)
Methodist	100.0 (3)	00.0 (0)	00.0 (0)	100.0 (3)
Congregationalist	100.0 (7)	00.0 (0)	00.0 (0)	100.0 (7)

Finally, the data from this survey offer some tentative support for the hypothesis that diocesan priests, who appear to be at greater risk for loneliness in comparison to the religious order priests, are overrepresented in this population. Based on the historical average ratio of American diocesan clergy to religious priests contained in *The Official Catholic Directory* (Kenedy 2008), one would expect 61.5 percent diocesan priests in this sample. Instead, there are 72.3 percent indicating that, in fact, they may be more inclined to make this kind of dual transition.

### *5.3 Second research question: Is there a distinct period effect?*

Keeping in mind the results from the sections of the previous chapter that focused on an age effect (i.e., a mid-life crisis) and a cohort effect (i.e., differences among the Pre-Vatican II, the Vatican II, and the Post-Vatican II generations), this second research tests the hypothesis concerning a possible period effect at work in this phenomenon.

The Vatican II generation (those born between 1941 and 1960) were the largest subgroup representing 62.6 percent of the entire sample. The “typical” member of this cohort was born in 1949 and was confirmed as a teenager in the early 1960s, at the same time that the Second Vatican Council began. He joined the seminary in 1968 precisely as the church was entering one of the most tumultuous times in its history when people were beginning to adjust to the new style of Mass in the vernacular and the rift between liberal and conservative Catholics (that endures to this day) first appeared. Continuing to follow the “typical” journey of a man of this cohort, we find that he was ordained at 27 years of age in 1976, resigned at 35 in 1984, married at 37 in 1986, and began his ministry in the Protestant Church at 42 years of age in 1991. He is now 59 years old.

A participant who fits this profile in certain important key dates, such as year of birth and year of ordination, wrote about his decision to leave in this way:

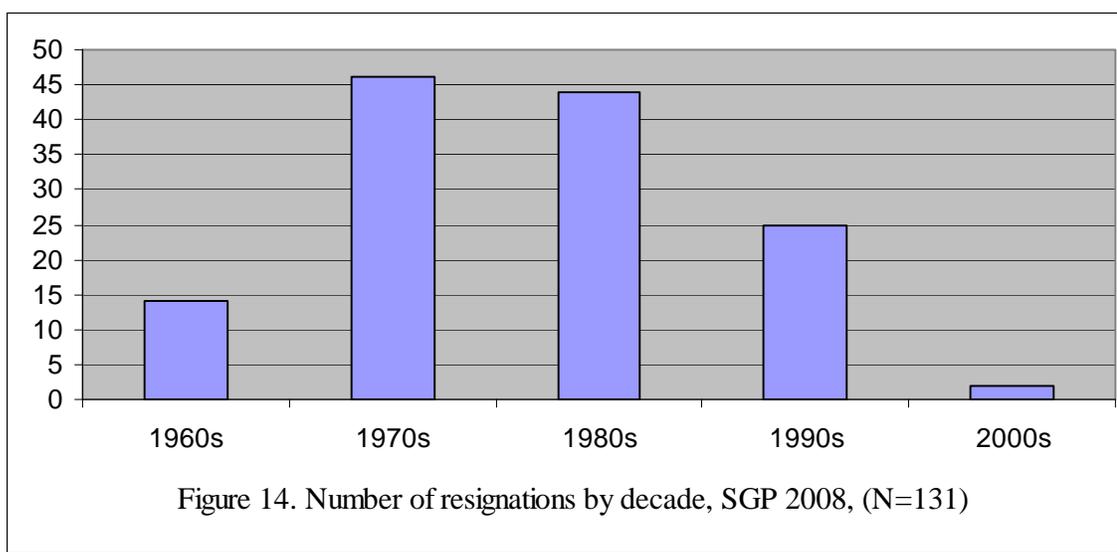
“I left the church after one year as a deacon and three years as a priest. . . . Though celibacy was difficult, the profound loneliness was more than I could bear. The expectation that we would work 60 to 80 hours a week and be available 24/7 led to several breaks when I would just get away and camp for a week or so to recover. I got tired of having to refuse to marry couples who had been divorced and yet being able to turn around and marry someone who had been divorced but since they had not been married by a priest [previously] . . . could, for a \$50 fee, have that marriage annulled. Too many double standards. I left as well, for the same reason I could not be a fundamentalist; I like to think and form my own opinions and not have everything dictated from Rome. The ‘company line’ regarding birth control, for instance, was something I could never teach. It was all becoming more and more rigid, in my mind.”

It is interesting to contrast the Vatican II cohort's experience with that of the pre-Vatican II generation, which comprises almost a third of all participants. The "typical" member of this older cohort was born in 1935, entered the seminary at 18 years old in 1953, was ordained in 1962 at 27 (when Mass in Latin was still the norm), and then resigned at 38 years of age in 1973, at the tail end of the six-year spike in priest resignations that began in 1967. He only took two years to get married but more than ten years before he became Protestant. Now at 73 years of age, he has spent more than a third of his life (24 years) in Protestant ministry. If he has not retired already, he is about to do so.

A former diocesan priest whose life journey closely mirrors the abovementioned description spoke about the three greatest losses he experienced when he transitioned away from the Catholic Church. They were "1) internal conflict because I did not live up to my promises; 2) I was no longer part of that unique brotherhood of priests; and 3) the disappointment I caused friends and parishioners." When recounting the three greatest gains that he received from entering Protestant ministry he mentioned "1) being able to be a celebrant at the Eucharist again; 2) no longer required to uphold the Roman Catholic Canon Law; and 3) the opportunity to be married and serve as a priest." He has been married for 22 years now and reports being very satisfied with his life. He retired from full time ministry two years ago and currently does "supply work" on Sundays at his local Episcopal Church. He is one of only three respondents who report that they still pray the Rosary, a typically Roman Catholic practice, every day. He also reports having more confidence in the Catholic Church today than he has in his own denomination, which he thinks lacks a teaching authority. He appears to have been one of those men who would have remained a Catholic priest had he been allowed to marry.

As stated in Chapter 4, the Post-Vatican II cohort is very small ( $N=6$ ) and hence any comparisons must be made with an ample dose of caution. The “typical” member of this subgroup was born in 1964 and so was too young to have experienced the tumult that ensued in the immediate aftermath of Vatican II. He entered the seminary at 19 years of age in 1983, was ordained at 28 years old in 1992, and resigned at 32 in 1996. When compared to the other two cohorts, he took the longest amount of time (four years) before getting married but the shortest amount of time (six years) between ministries. He is now 44 years old and has been in Protestant ministry for six years. He is more likely to be in a same-sex relationship than are the men from the previous two generations.

As Figure 14 clearly indicates, this particular dual transition was a phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, the number of resignations was down by almost 50 percent. Although the decade of 2000-2010 is not complete, this survey included information up until 2007. Even if the number were to double, it would still indicate a substantial decline. The information for the 1960s took into account resignations from 1964 until 1969. Before that time, priestly resignations were almost non-existent.



When comparing the average ages at the time of resignation during the five different decades during which the participants resigned reveals a steady increase in age, as Table 26 indicates at the  $p < .001$  level. This trend is probably a factor of the rising average age at ordination coupled with the broader societal trend of delaying marriage.

Table 26. Mean age at resignation by decade of resignation, SGP, 2008 ( $N=131$ )

	Mean age	Standard deviation
Resigned in 1960s ( $N=14$ )	32.8	3.6
Resigned in 1970s ( $N=46$ )	34.2	4.5
Resigned in 1980s ( $N=44$ )	36.4	7.4
Resigned in 1990s ( $N=25$ )	39.2	6.9
Resigned in 2000s ( $N=2$ )	45.5	13.4

The cross-tabulations of Table 27 (which approach significance at the  $p=.059$  level) reveal that all 14 priests who resigned in the 1960s did so primarily for reasons of marriage. By comparing the ratios of “horizontal” to “vertical” transitions during the 1970s (6.2 to 1), 1980s (2.3 to 1), and 1990s (3.3 to 1), one discovers that, while marriage continued to be the primary “pull” factor during those three decades, the later cohorts manifested a growing inclination towards an intellectual embrace of Protestantism first.

Table 27. Initial direction of dual transition by decade of resignation, SGP, 2008

	Horizontal Percent ( $N$ )	Diagonal Percent ( $N$ )	Vertical Percent ( $N$ )	Total Percent ( $N$ )
Resigned in 1960s	100.0 (14)	00.0 (0)	00.0 (0)	100.0 (14)
Resigned in 1970s	67.4 (31)	21.7 (10)	10.9 (5)	100.0 (46)
Resigned in 1980s	53.5 (23)	23.3 (10)	23.3 (10)	100.0 (43)
Resigned in 1990s	59.1 (13)	22.7 (5)	18.2 (4)	100.0 (22)
Resigned in 2000s	00.0 (0)	50.0 (1)	50.0 (1)	100.0 (2)
Total from 1964-2003	63.8 (81)	20.5 (26)	15.7 (20)	100.0 (127)

Finally, another way to look at the potential period effect of this phenomenon is by analyzing what percentage of their ordination class these resigned priests represent. Unfortunately, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, which maintains the most reliable sources of priestly data, was unable to provide the exact number of ordinations from 1953 until 1964. They did supply data (Table 28) from 1965, 1975, 1985, and then from 1986 onwards. Since the men in this survey represent one third of the entire population of “greener pastures shepherds”, the third column is simply a multiplication of the actual number of participants by three. Clearly, the mid 1970s was a peak moment.

Table 28. Percentage of dual transition clergy from their ordination class, 1965-1993

Ordination year	Number in sample	Projected total	Number of ordinations	Percent
1965	5	15	994	1.5
1975	9	27	771	3.5
1985	3	9	533	1.7
1986	4	12	670	1.8
1987	2	6	461	1.3
1988	1	3	482	0.6
1989	2	6	641	0.9
1991	1	3	620	0.5
1992	2	6	864	0.7
1993	2	6	605	1.0

Source: SGP 2008 (for first and second columns) and Froehle 1997 (for third column)

All this information seems to indicate that the “*anomie of aggiornamento*” period effect in the years immediately following Vatican II did play a role in the decisions these men made. As Greeley (2004a) has pointed out, and was mentioned in the literature review section, the priestly resignation rate during the past four decades is very similar to the divorce rate among lay Catholics. This comparison points to a potentially broader crisis of commitment during this specific period of world and church history.

*5.4 Third research question: Is current level of ministerial satisfaction linked to level of parental support received during the time of transition?*

As described at the end of Chapter 3, the third research question asks how parental approval (or disapproval) for their decision to renounce both celibacy and Catholicism affects these former priests' long-term ministerial satisfaction. This is a question about consequences. As was reported earlier, participants rated the level of support they received from various sets of important people in their lives such as parents, siblings, spouses, former colleagues, and bishops or superiors. They provided information as well about their current levels of satisfaction in a variety of areas in their lives. This specific third hypothesis tests whether those ministers who enjoyed more parental support during the time of transition report higher levels of satisfaction and whether this relationship is stronger for diocesan priests than it is for religious priests.

In order to understand better how the key predictor variable (parental support at the time of transition) is related to the main outcome variable (current satisfaction in Protestant ministry) and may be moderated by type of priesthood (diocesan or religious), the bivariate relationships (Table 29) between each one of these independent variables and the main dependent variable was analyzed. Then, by means of OLS regressions, an analysis of how type of priesthood and level of parental support for the transition, plus their interaction terms, affect the outcome variable was conducted (Table 30). Finally, controls for age and number of years spent doubting as well as for levels of support from priest colleagues and bishop/superior at the time of transition were added to see whether any of these additional variables would alter the positive association of high parental approval with current levels of ministerial satisfaction (Table 31).

Table 29. Bivariate associations among independent variables (parental support and type of priesthood) and dependent variable (current ministerial satisfaction), SGP, 2008

Percent ( <i>N</i> )	Parental support ( <i>N</i> = 114)		Type of priesthood ( <i>N</i> = 128)	
	Low	High	Diocesan	Religious
	31.3 (36)	68.7 (78)	72.3 (93)	27.7 (35)
Ministerial satisfaction				
Mean ( <i>scale 1-4</i> )	3.479	3.753	3.643	3.736
S.D.	.744	.367	.572	.303
F-statistic (df)	6.965 (113)**		.840 (127)	

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The data from Table 29 confirm the hypothesis of a positive correlation between parental support (which in most cases dates back more than 20 years) and current ministerial satisfaction. The data reveal (at the  $p < .01$  level) that those former priests who had high levels of parental support report more than a quarter-point higher on the four-point ministerial satisfaction scale than those who experienced lower levels of approval. This corresponds to a 9.3 percent difference in satisfaction. The disparity between the scores of diocesan and religious priests was not significant in this regard. (It should be kept in mind that there could be some retrospective reporting bias affecting the parental support scores. Also, perhaps those who are doing better today simply see the past more positively than those who are struggling with the consequences of their decision.)

It is important to note that parental support was measured originally on a 10-point scale. Given the strong skew of this continuous independent variable where the mean score was 6.07 and the median 7, but the mode was 10, a multi-categorical model was constructed in an attempt to reduce some of the skew. The selected cut-off points for this multi-category model, based on the observed frequencies, divided into three nearly equal

parts. The low support category included scores from one to three, the medium ranged from four to eight, and the high end went from 8.5 to 10. This tripartite reconfiguration of the independent variable reduced the skew from  $-.195$  to  $-.049$ , representing a 75 percent improvement, bringing this key variable closer to a normal distribution. The result was that 36 participants reported low levels of parental support whereas 39 reported medium support and another 40 high parental approval. After running a regression model in which those with medium parental support reported slightly higher satisfaction than those with higher parental support, a decision was made to dichotomize this variable into non-supportive parents (scores from 1 to 3) and supportive parents (scores from 4 to 10).

The “baseline” regression model in Table 30 includes both level of parental support and type of priesthood as the independent variables. As was expected, parental support was a significant indicator of ministerial satisfaction but type of priesthood was not. This means that even controlling for type of priesthood, those who received support from their parents reported higher ministerial satisfaction levels on average.

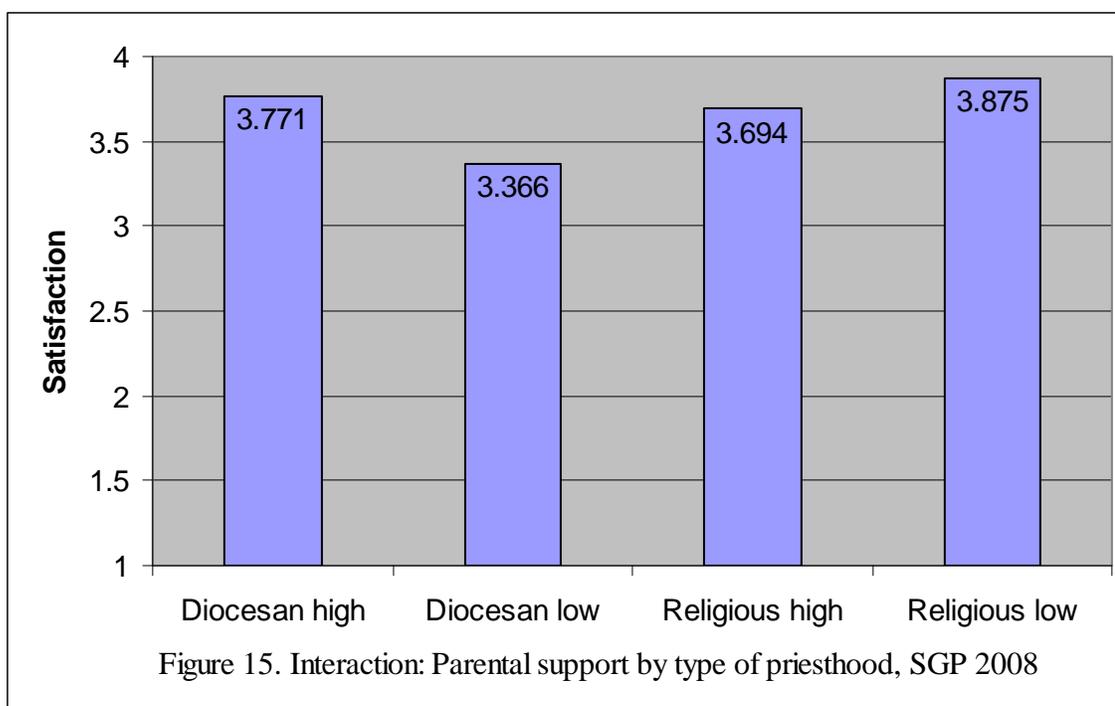
Table 30. Estimated coefficients from OLS models of ministerial satisfaction by level of parental support and type of priesthood, SGP, 2008 ( $N = 112$ )

	Baseline		Interaction	
	B	SE B	B	SE B
Parental support (1= <i>high</i> )	.269*	.105	-.191	.213
Type of priesthood (1 = <i>diocesan</i> )	-.093	.114	-.509*	.203
Interactions: support and type of priest			.596*	.243
Intercept	3.552	.124	3.875	.179
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.046*		.087**	

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

What is fascinating in Table 30 is that the interaction term, added in the second model, besides being statistically significant, almost doubles the  $R^2$  from .046 to .087. This result would seem to indicate that, as was hypothesized, type of priesthood is a moderator that partitions parental support into two subgroups that affect the dependent variable in different ways.

Calculating the mean scores for the four possible combinations of this dummy-dummy interaction reveal that lack of parental support affects diocesan priests more than religious priests (Figure 15). The average score for diocesan priests with low parental support is 3.366, whereas diocesan priests with high support averaged 3.771 on the same scale of ministerial satisfaction. The results from religious order priests, which were not statistically significant, showed an unexpected reversal with those with high support reporting lower satisfaction (3.694) than those with low support (3.875).



Besides overall high levels of satisfaction, with only minor variations among the four subgroups, the results from Figure 15 demonstrate how parental support exercises more influence over diocesan priests than it does for religious priests. These results seem to indicate that for diocesan priests parental support weighs more heavily in their psyche than it does for religious priests. This makes sense since diocesan priests live in close proximity to their families of origin while most priests of religious orders move abroad at some stage of their lives. These results appear to demonstrate that religious order priests, who have usually differentiated psychologically from their parents more than diocesan priests have, seem to be less dependent upon parental approval. It could also indicate a fundamental difference in filial attitudes between those who enter diocesan priesthood and those who enter religious life. Unfortunately, the limited nature of a cross-sectional study such as this cannot measure that particular dimension of the question.

When controls were added for age and number of years spent doubting as well as for levels of support from priest colleagues and bishop/superior at the time of transition (Table 31), the interaction term remained statistically significant (at the  $p < .05$  level) although somewhat reduced. Level of support from priest colleagues and from former bishops or superiors was dichotomized in the same manner as was parental support. The results from Table 31 indicate that even when controlling for other kinds of support as well as for age and the amount of time they spent doubting their decision to resign or not, parental support still produces the greatest impact on diocesan priests in comparison to religious order priests. The fact that the  $R^2$  is reduced in half and is no longer statistically significant means that this control model accounts for less of the variation in ministerial satisfaction than does the model with the interaction term alone.

Table 31. Estimated coefficients from OLS models of ministerial satisfaction by level of parental support, type of priesthood, and various controls, SGP, 2008 ( $N = 112$ )

	Interaction		With added controls	
	B	SE B	B	SE B
Parental support (1= <i>high</i> )	-.191	.213	-.173	.196
Type of priesthood (1 = <i>diocesan</i> )	-.509*	.203	-.377*	.190
Interactions: support and type of priest	.596*	.243	.473*	.225
Age			.006	.005
Number of years spent doubting			-.005	.012
Support of priest colleagues (1= <i>high</i> )			-.005	.098
Support of bishop/superior (1= <i>high</i> )			.050	.103
Intercept	3.875	.179	3.493	.350
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.087**		.043

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

All the abovementioned findings support the argument that parental approval does have long-term effects in adult children, especially among those who have not differentiated as much as others have. Given the small sample size and the very specific type of transition that these former Catholic priests went through, it is impossible to generalize these results to a broader population. Nonetheless, these findings merit attention. Future studies, conducted with a larger sample of people from the general populace, could test if this relationship exists among individuals who have entered a profession against their parents' wishes or who married a person who did not meet family approval.

*5.5 Fourth research question: Practical conflict of master roles?*

Finally, the fourth research question analyzes one particular ramification of these ministers' transformation from their former singular role (of total availability to their parishioners as celibates) to their current double role (of limited pastoral availability as married men). Carroll (2006) has demonstrated that on average Catholic priests work eight hours more per week than do mainline Protestant ministers. I hypothesize that the participants in this study will have a workload similar to that of other married Protestant ministers and not that of celibate Catholic priests, due to their familial responsibilities.

While this question may seem trivial, it does have value. One of the arguments in favor of clerical celibacy is that it frees the Catholic priest to work longer hours without the distractions of wife and children. If the results from this analysis were to show that these former priests (now married) work just as much as celibates, then it would lead one to believe that some "Catholic priest work ethic" is at play, regardless of marital status and denomination. If they report the same number of hours as other married Protestant clergy, one could postulate that marriage does in fact restrict the number of hours spent in ministry. This question has nothing to do with ministerial effectiveness (which would be extremely difficult to measure) but simply the number of ministry hours logged.

It is clear what these "greener pastures shepherds" think about this issue. When asked to share their views on the following statement ("Some have suggested, that for practical reasons, married priests are generally less able to be fully devoted to the care of the parish than ones who are unmarried"), exactly 80 percent of the participants said that the statement was simply not true. Many gave short but direct negative responses such as "ridiculous", "hog wash", "red herring", "bull shit", "simply not true", etc. Some went

into more detail by saying, “Tell this to the people who call the rectory and get an answering machine or parishioners in the hospital who look for their pastor but only get the chaplain of the day.” Another wrote, “Some of my married (minister) friends do way more work than some of the ‘Lord-of-the-Manor’ Roman Catholic clergy who were more interested in not doing pastoral work.” One 67-year-old Congregational minister said, “Having served in both areas, I disagree with this whole-heartedly. Yes, married clergy have to share time with their families and parishioners. Frequently, this in itself affords contact for ministry. It builds trust. A helping spouse is an enormous asset.” A former diocesan priest who is now a bishop in the Episcopal Church wrote, “My own 32 years as a priest and a bishop in the Episcopal Church is contrary testimony [to this statement].”

Even the 18.5 percent of the respondents who agreed that celibates are able to be more fully devoted to the parish all nuanced their responses in some way. A 75-year-old Episcopal priest said, “Family can consume an enormous amount of time, yet it enables one to identify with those in the pew.” A 59-year-old Lutheran minister with two teenage sons wrote, “Catholic priests have more freedom to do as they please, but married clergy have to be more responsible.” A recently married Episcopal priest said that he would agree with the statement if the person in question were truly called to celibacy. He said, “If you are a celibate, there is nothing else to compete with your ministry. When you have marriage vows, you have competition. If you want a top-down system, it is much easier to direct people who are not divided with two different vows.” An Episcopal priest who has been married for 18 years wrote, “I believe there are certain times when an unmarried clergyperson can focus on pastoral care more intentionally than a married clergy. However ... I haven’t seen this as a problem over the past 12 years...”

Participants in this survey were given two opportunities to report the amount of time that they devote to ministerial duties. Firstly, they were asked how many total hours they work during a typical week, differentiating between weekdays and weekends. Table 32 presents the averages of the entire sample ( $N=123$ ) and of those among them who specified that they are engaged in full-time parish ministry ( $N=77$ ). This distinction between full-time parish ministers and the rest of the sample was made for two reasons: 1) many of these transitional clerics were involved in other forms of ministry other than the parish, and 2) a fair number mentioned that they were semi-retired, about to retire, or in fact fully retired. It was necessary to select only those respondents who reported working full-time in parish ministry if an equitable comparison was to be made between them and those ministers from the Carroll study (2006) who were thusly engaged.

Table 32. Average number of hours spent in ministry per week, SGP, 2008

	Mean for entire sample ( $N=123$ )	Standard deviation	Mean for full-time parish work ( $N=77$ )	Standard deviation
Monday–Friday	34.67	15.98	38.93	10.53
Saturday	2.75	2.66	3.55	2.74
Sunday	5.65	2.52	6.51	1.84
Total week	43.09	17.62	48.99	11.07

Clearly, there is a difference between these two groups. Those who are currently engaged in full-time parish ministry work almost six hours more per week than the entire sample taken as a whole. For the remainder of this chapter this specific subgroup will be the focus of the remaining analyses such as the ones contained in Table 33, which show the exact breakdown in how they spent their time engaged in specific pastoral tasks.

Table 33. Hours spent in pastoral tasks per week, SGP, 2008 ( $N=77$ )

	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D.
Preaching (including preparation)	7.05	6.00	5.00	3.47
Worship leadership (including preparation)	4.98	4.00	4.00	2.47
Teaching (including preparation)	3.33	3.00	2.00	2.75
Training people for ministry	1.58	1.00	2.00	1.52
Working to convert others	0.86	0.50	0.00	1.09
Pastoral counseling	3.97	3.00	2.00	3.90
Visiting members, sick, and shut-ins	4.56	4.00	5.00	3.65
Visiting prospective members	1.07	0.50	0.00	1.87
Administering congregation's work	8.34	6.00	10.00	7.05
Attending congregation meetings	2.94	2.00	1.00	2.46
Promoting goals for congregation's future	2.90	2.00	1.00	3.53
Involvement in denominational affairs	1.66	1.00	1.00	1.41
Involvement in community affairs	2.10	1.50	1.00	2.29
Some other task	0.97	0.00	0.00	3.26
Total hours worked per week	46.34	44.00	47.00	15.93

As was expected, there is some minor discrepancy between the totals from Table 32 and those from Table 33. Respondents were not asked to make the number of hours match exactly and many of them said that this was a very difficult section of the survey to complete since they were not accustomed to keeping track of their time in such specific designations. In all, the difference between the two mean scores is only 5.4 percent.

Table 34 clearly shows that these “greener pastures shepherds” follow a work schedule much like that of mainline Protestant ministers. The only activity for which the amount of time they dedicate was closer to their Catholic confreres than it was to the Protestants was the amount of time they spent preparing and delivering their sermons.

As an interesting side note, perhaps the additional four hours that Protestant ministers spend preparing their homilies each week is part of the reason why in a 2002 National Opinion Research Study 36 percent of Protestants rated the sermons they heard as “excellent,” compared to just 18 percent of Catholics (Greeley 2004b).

Table 34. Mean hours spent in pastoral tasks per week by denominational affiliation

	Selected participants from Carroll study (N=883)		Greener Pastures Shepherds (N=77)
	Roman Catholics	Mainline Protestants	
Preaching (including preparation)	6.00	10.00	6.00
Worship leadership (including preparation)	9.00	4.00	4.00
Teaching (including preparation)	2.00	4.00	3.00
Training people for ministry	1.00	1.00	1.00
Working to convert others	1.00	1.00	0.50
Pastoral counseling	4.00	3.00	3.00
Visiting members, sick, and shut-ins	3.00	4.00	4.00
Visiting prospective members	0.00	1.00	0.50
Administering congregation’s work	10.00	5.00	6.00
Attending congregation meetings	3.00	2.00	2.00
Promoting goals for congregation’s future	2.00	2.00	2.00
Involvement in denominational affairs	2.00	2.00	1.00
Involvement in community affairs	2.00	2.00	1.50
Some other task	2.00	2.00	0.00
Total hours worked per week	56.00	48.00	44.00

It is important to take into account the explanation given by Carroll (2006) in his footnote that explains the apparent miscalculation concerning the total numbers of hours worked per week, an “error” that is noticeable even when one just scans Table 34:

The amount shown for each individual task is the median hours worked at that task. The amount shown for the total hours worked per week was derived by summing the actual hours per week for each task and then computing the median for the total hours worked; thus, the latter figure, for each tradition, is larger than the sum of the median for each individual task. (P. 107)

In any case, it is clear that the participants in this study do not work as many hours as celibate Catholic priests do today, in spite of the fact that they say that they are just as devoted to their current Protestant parishioners. It would be interesting to compare the actual amount of hours they used to work when they were Catholic priests to the amount they spend now, but that data is (and probably always will be) unavailable.

As a concluding note for this section, data from Table 35 (which did not reach statistical significance) show how similar the Episcopalians and Methodists appear to be on the one hand in terms of workload, and the Lutherans and Congregationalists on the other. Both measures of the workweek (the general and the specific) are included.

Table 35. Average amount of hours spent in ministry by denomination, SGP, 2008

	General measure of work hours	Standard deviation	Detailed measure of work hours	Standard deviation
Episcopalians ( <i>N</i> =58)	47.65	11.05	43.92	14.55
Lutherans ( <i>N</i> =13)	53.23	9.89	52.94	17.07
Methodists ( <i>N</i> =1)	48.00	-----	43.50	-----
Congregationalists ( <i>N</i> =5)	53.70	13.41	57.34	23.31

### *5.6 Summary and conclusions drawn from inferential analyses*

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, the two pairs of research questions divided neatly into causes and consequences. The answer to the first question about what motivated these men to renounce their high status position was, quite simply and not surprisingly, their desire to marry. For most, becoming Protestant was a secondary step. The distinction between those who followed their “heart” as opposed to those who followed their “head,” highlighted the fact that both emotion and intellect had a role to play. Although one could get the impression (by listening to their retrospective narratives only) that both head and heart had equal “pull,” analyzing their concrete actions revealed that most followed their hearts first by marrying before switching affiliation.

The second research question revealed a definite period effect (from the 1970s to the 1980s) that can be traced back to the conclusion of Vatican II. Unless a second wave of priests begins to embark upon this path soon, within 30 years the number of “greener pastures shepherds” will decline substantially. Given the more conservative stance of the new generation of priests (Hoge and Wenger 2003), this seems highly unlikely.

The hypothesized link between parental support and current levels of satisfaction was verified in the third research question with the added nuance of how such a correlation is stronger among the former diocesan priests than it is among the religious priests, due most probably to dissimilar levels of differentiation from their family of origin.

Finally, the fourth question highlighted the fact that these ministers follow a work schedule that is more in line with their current denomination than with the Catholic priest model. This finding supports the hypothesis that the obligations of marriage limit the amount of time a minister can dedicate to his flock.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### *6.1 Introductory outline*

The main thrust of the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation focused on achieving the first goal presented at the beginning, i.e., to fill the informational void that existed concerning these unique transitional clerics through the creation and description of this first-ever database. While the secondary goal of shedding light on other analogous multiple-role-transitions applicable to a general audience may have been too ambitious for a study limited to such a specific population, nevertheless, thanks to the examination of two possible causes and two specific consequences (covered in the preceding chapter), a few rays of “generalizeable” sociological light seem to have been generated.

In an attempt to explicate further the theoretical insights that can be derived from the experiences of these “greener pastures shepherds,” this final chapter will 1) succinctly summarize the principle findings, 2) analyze this unique boundary transition through a cognitive sociology lens, and 3) derive theoretical implications at both the individualistic and the institutional level. At the end, there will also be a discussion of the limitations of this study, and a presentation of suggested avenues for future research.

#### *6.2 Succinct summary of the principal findings*

The findings of this report contribute supportive evidence to previous research on resigned priests that highlighted celibacy/marriage as the main “push/pull” factor. The specific nuance that this study revealed is that that most participants “followed their

hearts” first into marriage before switching their affiliation. Somehow, during their years of priestly ministry, their motivation for celibacy waned. For some this disillusionment happened quickly but for others it came after many years of service. Once they decided to resign, most chose not to go through the formal process of dispensation, which would have allowed them to marry with the blessing of (and within) the Catholic Church.

Once married, they had to find employment outside of the priesthood to support their wives and the arrival of children. As stated earlier, some ventured into the business world of sales and management but most stayed within ex-priest friendly careers such as teaching and counseling for which they were well qualified. After a few years of this kind of non-ministerial labor, their longing for pastoral work surfaced again but, knowing that they could not engage in the Catholic variety, they looked elsewhere. Switching “close to home” (Sullins 1993), most gravitated towards the Episcopal Church.

Given their devout Catholic background, the kind of repositioning that these men undertook must have seemed daunting, even unthinkable during the earlier stages of their life journey. Especially for the pioneers among them (i.e., the two men who began their ministry in the Episcopal Church in 1967 and 1968<sup>9</sup>), without role models to emulate, it took courage to start down the “less traveled” path of this dual transition. They were not only abandoning the religion of their youth and of their family network but must have felt that they were jettisoning much of their cultural heritage with it. For example, during the 1960s or 1970s to be of Irish or Italian extraction (as many of these men were) was practically synonymous with being Catholic, and a third-generation immigrant.

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<sup>9</sup> One interesting side note, due most likely to mere coincidence, is that the first two former Catholic priests to begin ministering in the Episcopal Church were both of 100 percent German descent and were both diocesan priests. One was from western Pennsylvania and the other hailed from the neighboring state of Ohio. Both began the process of dispensation but did not complete it, and both married former Catholics who also became Episcopalians. They each fathered three children.

Speaking of ethnic heritage, these former priests form a homogeneous group in terms of their cultural backgrounds, reflecting the predominant European nationalities of American Catholics of their generation. Concerning other basic demographic information, there is an understandable lack of variation by gender since the Catholic Church does not ordain women. As regards age, even though there is a range of 40 years between the oldest (82 years old) and youngest participants (42 years old), two-thirds are between 54 and 72 years of age. After nearly two decades of married ministry (on average), these former priests are convinced that marriage does not negatively affect ministry and, in fact, many of them think they are better clergymen thanks to their wives' (or partners') collaboration. Although they acknowledge having logged fewer hours than their celibate counterparts, they feel that they never shortchanged their parishioners. Their high scores on the various satisfaction scales reflect how deeply happy they are with their decision.

Here it should be noted that there could be a selection bias affecting these results with those who are better adjusted being more likely to participate in the survey. Even with this caveat in mind, however, their very high levels of satisfaction are noteworthy. It seems that they found that the grass was truly greener on the other side of the fence.

### *6.3 Synthesis from a cognitive sociology perspective*

These dual-transition clerics, who at one stage of their lives accepted the strict boundaries set by celibacy and Roman Catholicism, have made a fascinating journey into marriage and Protestantism. For some this liminal experience was tortuous (like crawling through the snares of the Berlin Wall during the Cold War, to use a previous metaphor), while for others it was smooth. By carefully listening to them and attentively reading their completed surveys, it became clear that they did not share Paul VI's appreciation of

celibacy as a “brilliant jewel.” Many of them described it as a burden, a price they had to pay if they wanted to experience the joys of ministry, a bullet they had to bite.

Caught between the proverbial “rock and a hard place,” between their love for the priesthood and their desire to marry, many of them began to look for a place where they could embrace both marriage and ministry simultaneously. They did not want to face an “either/or” decision but rather to find a “both/and” solution to their dilemma. However, this would require that they renounce their deeply engrained Catholic identity. In essence, it became a tripartite decision since embracing concurrently all three identities (married, Catholic, and priest) was unattainable according to Canon Law. They could have married and remained Catholic but would have been obliged to give up their priesthood or they could have continued to serve as Catholic priests but at the cost of forfeiting marriage. Alternatively, as these men in fact chose, they could marry and remain in ministry but would have to disaffiliate from the Catholic Church before doing so. Figures 16 and 17 depict the two sets of ecclesiastical boundary markers between which they had to choose.

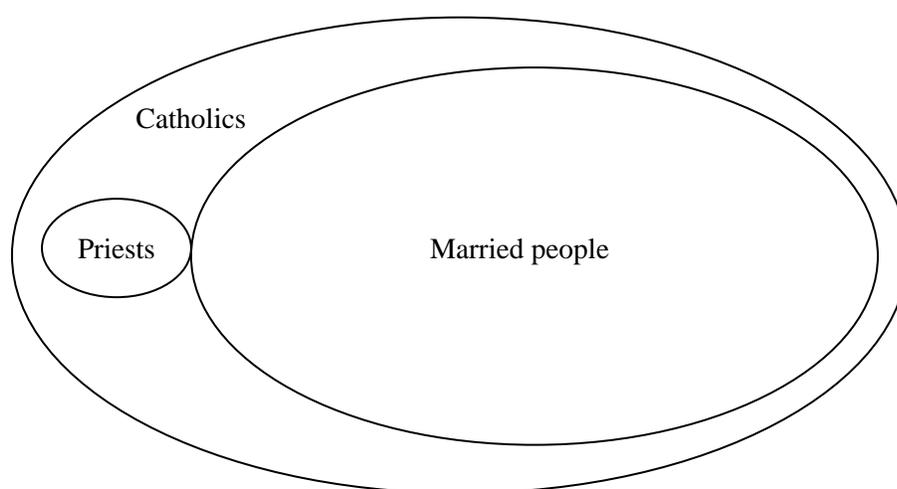


Figure 16. Catholic boundaries concerning priesthood and marriage, SGP, 2008

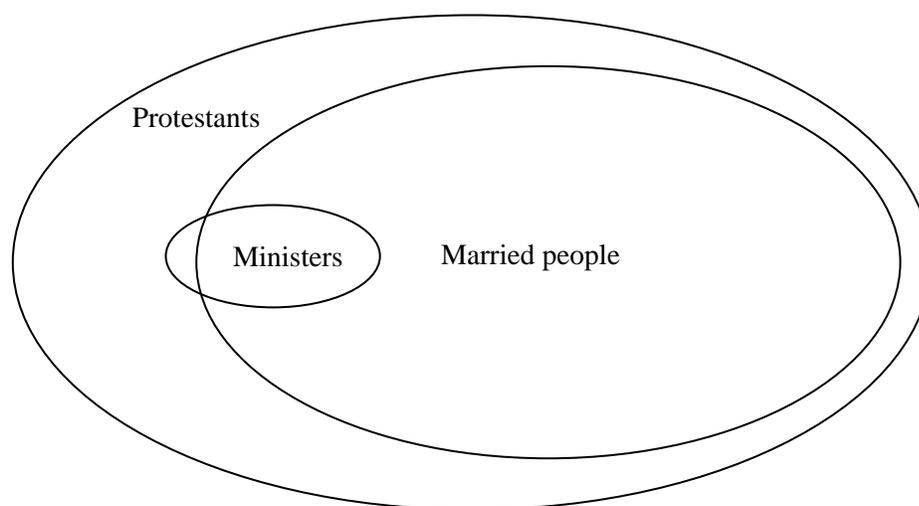


Figure 17. Protestant boundaries concerning ministry and marriage, SGP 2008

To allow themselves to accept such a seemingly simple but truly radical shift, which was contrary to their training, they would need to view Protestants as members of the “one true church,” as Figures 18 and 19 show. In other words, they had to repaint the boundary lines that had previously demarcated their lives. According to Zerubavel’s terminology (1996), they needed to “lump” what they had previously “split.” They had to think differently, to create a new mind map of the social division of the world (Zerubavel 1999). They needed to view as acceptable what they were told was forbidden. The solid double yellow lines separating the churches had to become white and intermittent for them. They had to convince themselves that they were merely “changing lanes” or simply “changing collars” as Hayden (2007) entitled his autobiography. They had to redefine the terms of their previous commitments and enter into their own role exit paradigm, maintaining throughout a heart-wrenching decision-making process their ministerial persona. In an exchange analysis (Stark and Bainbridge 1987), they concluded that—for them—the “benefits” of married ministry outweighed the “costs” of being a celibate Catholic priest.

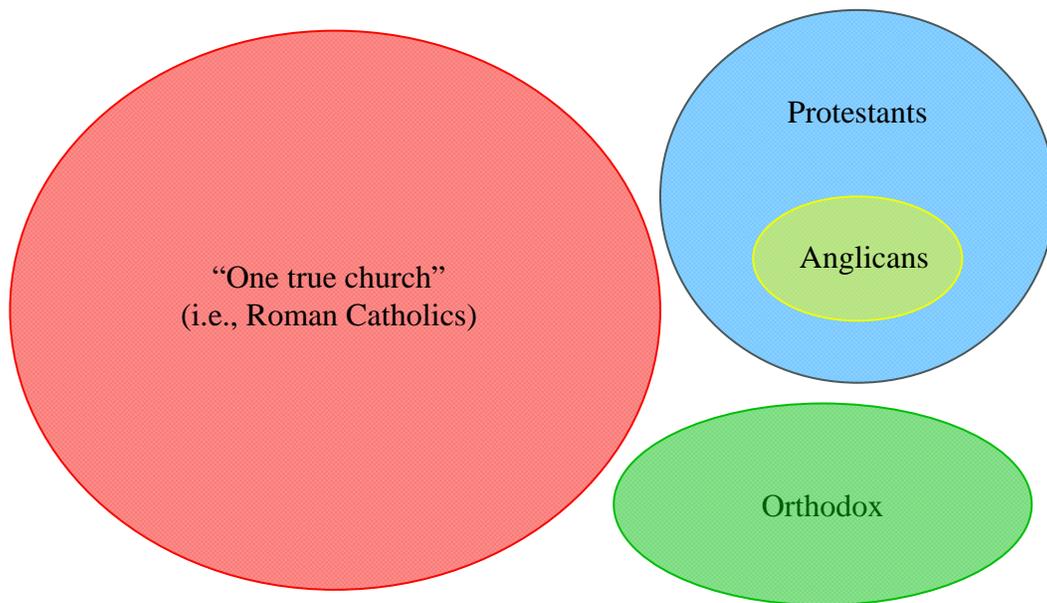


Figure 18. View of the various churches before making their transition, SGP 2008

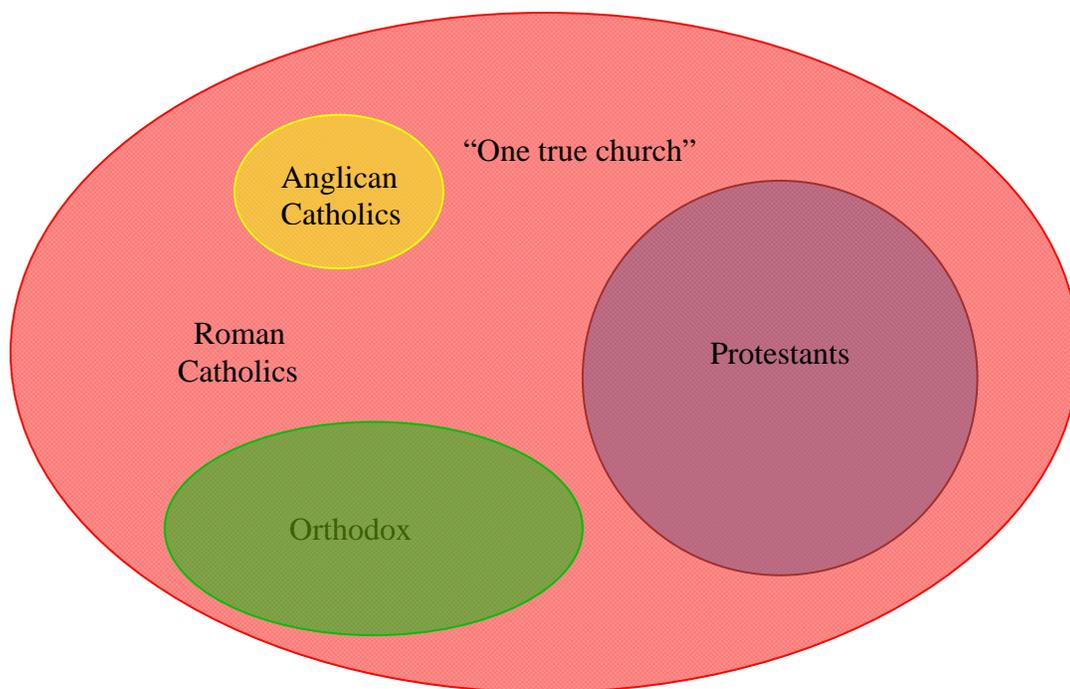


Figure 19. View of the various churches after making their transition, SGP 2008

One small but significant indication of this cognitive restructuring surfaced when several participants (all of them Episcopalian) edited some of the wording of the survey. While I had been careful in the formulation of the questionnaire to employ neutral terms such as “relocation” or “transition,” the word “conversion” appeared twice, in questions C6 and F1. It was surprising to see how strongly these few respondents objected to this terminology. They crossed it out and wrote “transition” or some other synonym in its place. One man wrote, “one does not convert – poor word choice.” Some of the phone interviewees also voiced disapproval of that particular term and stated that “conversion” implies a 180-degree turn-around, which they roundly rejected as an apt description of their previous actions. They said that they understood what the question meant but would have preferred slightly different vocabulary, for they never turned their back on God.

Among the same people who objected to the word “conversion,” some resolutely rejected the descriptor “Protestant” as both adjective and noun. One participant crossed it out every time he found it and replaced it with the word “Episcopal.” He did not accept the word “minister” either but wrote the word “priest” instead, every time it appeared in the survey.<sup>10</sup> Along these same lines, it was interesting to find that several Episcopalians described themselves as Anglican Catholics, in opposition to the label “Roman Catholic.” For them, being Catholic was of paramount importance. From their perspective, they simply shifted their allegiance from Rome to Canterbury. While this may seem a matter of mere semantics (or a “rationalization” in the eyes of a harsh critic), to some participants it was a matter of vital importance in their autobiographical narratives.

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<sup>10</sup> Had I known that this vocabulary would have caused even the slightest upset among the participants, I would have developed a separate survey for the Episcopalians using a more sensitive phraseology and leaving the “Protestant” survey for only the Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Methodists (none of whom expressed any concern about word choice). Pre-testing did not detect this problem and, I must report, the vast majority of the priests from the Episcopal Church did not raise the issue. To those who were offended, however, I offer my sincerest apologies.

#### *6.4 Theoretical implications for individuals*

Following in the footsteps of Fichter (1973) who stated that “I have always wanted my research to be ultimately applicable and useful” (p. 19), I too have striven to produce knowledge that will be helpful to the people who participated in this project. While this report has allowed the participants to see themselves as part of an aggregate, thus giving them the opportunity to see how much their own personal experience was similar to that of others in their cohort, perhaps the greater value comes from the questions that they may now be asking themselves. After reading this dissertation, perhaps they are wondering whether they followed more their “head” or their “heart” (or both) when they first made their decision to resign from celibate Catholic ministry. Perhaps they will now analyze how much their parents’ approval (or disapproval) has affected their long-term satisfaction. They may also be led to reflect about how deeply the Post-Vatican II era influenced their lives or how marriage has limited (or not!) their ability to fulfill their pastoral duties. Sometimes it is not so much the answers that matter as much as the insightful questions that provoke deeper thought about one’s own life journey.

Although it may seem like a relatively minor contribution, just the fact that an entire study has been dedicated to learning about their unique life experiences may give them a sense of official recognition they did not have before. Prior to the launching of this study, no one (even among the most renowned sociologists of religion) knew how many such individuals there were in the United States. Estimates I heard ranged from 50 to 5000 with most people saying that they had no idea how many there were. Now it is known that there are 414 “greener pastures shepherds” from the five mainline Protestant Churches, and that more than 80 percent of them have joined the Episcopal Church.

As they look back on their life course, they will see that the majority of them entered their “mid-life crisis” right on time, perhaps even a little earlier than most. As stated earlier, this kind of identity crisis usually occurs between the ages of 30 and 55 (Peplau 1975). Most of the participants in this study began to doubt their call to celibate priesthood during the first few years of their third decade of life. In this way, they are similar to the resigned priests whom Schoenherr and Young (1993) describe as being in their early thirties to mid-forties when they made the decision to change course.

Once doubt set in, most often because they fell in love or were simply dissatisfied with celibate loneliness, they began to seek alternatives. As mentioned before, given the predicament in which they found themselves, they had three choices. They could have remained as celibate priests but would have had to sacrifice their desire to marry or they could have entered a Catholic marriage but at the cost of giving up their beloved ministry. The third option, which is the one these participants chose, required that they renounce their Roman Catholic allegiance. There was a fourth option (i.e., having a hidden “wife” or mistress) that some of their confreres in the priesthood (or maybe even themselves for a time) may have tried but such precarious relationships seem doomed to failure.

As they started to weigh their options, whether they realized it or not, they were engaged in the “role commitment process” that Schoenherr and Greeley described as the “continuance in a role’s socially organized pattern of action” as long as there is “a desirable net balance of rewards over costs” (1974:409). Part of this decision-making process usually included getting feedback from significant others as Ebaugh (1988) explained so clearly in her “role exit” theory. The particular contribution this research project makes to Ebaugh’s theory is the study of long-term effects of such feedback.

### *6.5 Practical implications for institutions*

Moving beyond the micro level of personal applications, I posit that the very institutions under study (the Catholic Church and the five mainline Protestant Churches) could also learn some important lessons from this research. In this particular exchange of human capital, it is obvious that the Catholic Church lost the most while the various Protestant Churches, especially the Episcopal Church, gained the most.<sup>11</sup>

For the Catholic Church as an institution, not only was there a loss of personnel in whom they had invested much time and money, but also confusion and hurt feelings among the former superiors, colleagues, and parishioners of these participants. From the spontaneous comments added to their reports concerning the level of support from various significant others, it is clear that the farewells between diocesan priests and their bishops were often unpleasant experiences for both parties. Many former priests reported cold or harsh treatment by callous and uncaring bishops. While most participants have made peace with their past, for some the resentment continues to linger.

From the Protestant Church perspective, the relocation of these former priests was an unexpected boon. Without investing time and personnel, the various denominations received scores of well-qualified clergymen. It seems to have been a “win-win” situation for them and for the individual transferees, and their doors remain open. If indeed more transitions take place, the mainline denominations would be well advised to listen to the two most frequently mentioned suggestions made by these men on how to improve the dual-transition process: 1) to set up an individual mentoring system for each newly transitioned cleric, and 2) to create a support network specifically for them.

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<sup>11</sup> The exact opposite occurred when the Pastoral Provision priests, previously mentioned, resigned from Episcopal Church ministry and joined the ranks of the Catholic clergy. A handful of Lutherans and ministers from other denominations have also joined their ranks but in much lesser numbers.

For the Catholic Church, there are also many valuable lessons. It became apparent to me, especially during the telephone interviews, that most of these men really enjoyed being priests, especially in the exuberant months immediately following Vatican II. They did not resign because they did not like ministry or had failed at it. Had the pope allowed them to marry while remaining in ministry, it seems many of them would have stayed, especially those who “followed their heart.” Three of the respondents even stated that they would return now, many years later, if only they could maintain their marital status.

Given the fact that there is no hint of a change in the Catholic policy of celibacy for Latin rite clergy, diocesan bishops and religious superiors would be wise to teach their seminarians how to live celibacy faithfully and joyfully. In fact, many of them have been doing this and are currently seeking new ways to foster commitment to the practice of lifelong chastity. They may also want to pay attention to levels of satisfaction especially among priests in their early 30s to mid-40s, and make sure that the priests’ living quarters and work environments serve as positive support systems.

Bishop John Crowley of Middlesbrough, England, who has been a Catholic priest since 1965 and a bishop since 1986, has made an interesting proposal that he feels would help diocesan priests live celibacy more fruitfully: he believes that instead of living alone they should live in small communities (like religious priests do) to diminish the risk of loneliness. This is not a new idea. The Oratory movement, started by Saint Philip Neri in Rome in the 16th century, and made popular in modern times by Cardinal Newman in England, sought precisely to create such an atmosphere of priestly fraternity but without the vows of a religious community. In the light of the experiences of these participants who often mentioned loneliness as a contributing factor to their resignation, it behooves

bishops to consider seriously this option. This long quote from Bishop Crowley (2005) provides highlights of his progressive yet traditionalist view of clerical celibacy:

Recently... I was interviewed on local radio on a whole range of issues which included a question about my view on married priests. I expressed the personal hope that within my lifetime the Church might more generally allow married priests. Subsequently that remark has produced some lively debate, not least in some parts of the Catholic press... First, I would want to sing my song in favour of celibacy as one blessed route to living priesthood. How could I do otherwise when, having just clocked up 40 years as a celibate priest, I personally have found it such a grace from God? Like any other celibate, I could tell of the times when that call from God has seemed to cost not less than everything. No need to expatiate on the seasons of struggle, the sometimes profound aching within, when the human heart feels all the God-given drive towards the most intimate union with one other. That is how we are gloriously made, and there is no need to labour that side of the celibacy challenge. Rather, let me labour a little the other side of the celibacy opportunity... [Celibacy] has been a great gift to the Church right from the beginning, an invitation by Jesus who, against the general cultural and religious grain of his time, freely chose, this being the tradition and teaching of the Church since earliest times, to remain unmarried for the sake of God's kingdom. The choice, so it seems to me, is between enduring celibacy as a duty, which is required by the present law of the Church, or embracing celibacy for love of the Lord... Let me now touch lightly upon a related issue. More and more I am personally convinced that, for celibacy to flourish to the full within the diocesan clergy, we should look more often towards the possibility of priests living together in small communities... (P. 2)

Although Crowley's suggestion may never be put into practice on a large scale, just the fact that a bishop raises the issue with such frankness is significant. No longer is celibacy the "fearful topic" as Fichter (1968) described it forty years ago. Given the more open approach to the subject today, a committed celibate Catholic priest (such as I am) can investigate this subject without fear of reprisal from church authorities. Perhaps some critics will dismiss the experiences of these resignees by saying that they were either psychologically immature or that they were self-centered men who, lacking generosity, shunned the cross of celibacy. Unfortunately, an approach that ignores the value of their testimony will also miss an opportunity to study a critical issue for the church today.

### *6.6 Limitations of this present study*

While this project has provided a point of reference for future research in this specific field and has offered some interesting insights into the multiple-role-transition process, at least five major limitations that deserve mention. The first (and perhaps the most glaring) limitation of this study stems from the fact that I failed to include a question that specifically asked them whether their decision to resign from the priesthood was sparked by a particular romantic relationship or whether they were simply lonely but not involved with another person. Any follow-up study should include this particular item, as such information would be valuable for a deeper causal analysis.

The second limitation stems from the cross-sectional nature of the survey. It would have been ideal to have longitudinal data, which would have reduced the amount of distortion of facts due to memory recall or to the reinterpretation of the past in light of the present. For example, it would have been much more insightful to ask them about the level of support they received from their parents and other significant people at the very time that they were making their decision. It also would have been helpful to know how satisfied they were in their ministry at that time, another question that I failed to ask.

While reflecting on this cross-sectional limitation, it also became clear that this approach at this particular time in history was actually one of the strengths of the study design. If this survey had been conducted 30 years ago, one might have made projections into the future that would have been exaggerated. If conducted 30 years from now, there may not be enough subjects alive. It may be that this survey has captured the beginning, the middle, and the end of a significant historical event. It should also be noted that the retrospective approach allowed the participants to view their entire life course.

Thirdly, it is important to remember that only ministers from the five mainline Protestant Churches were contacted for this survey. While it is highly unlikely that Catholic priests would have become rabbis or imams, it is understandable that perhaps some of them joined other denominations within Protestantism. Future research could attempt to locate such ministers, although it will probably be just as hard to do so in the future as it was in the recent past due to their lack of a centralized government. Given the many differences that exist between mainline and non-denominational ministers, it would be illogical to try to generalize the results from one group to the other.

As stated earlier, the five Protestant denominations involved in this survey represent just less than 20 percent of all Protestant ministers in the United States. Specifically, that is 115,871 ministers out of an estimated total of 600,000 (Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2007). I speculate that, if indeed there are any former Catholic priests in the evangelical and non-denominational American Churches, they probably would have followed their “head” more than their “heart” when compared to these “greener pastures shepherds” who switched very close to home.

The fourth limitation that deserves mention is cohort attrition. Not only were there some participants who may have died before I conducted my survey but perhaps there were some who did not feel comfortable about their dual transition and dropped out of Protestant ministry and hence never made the list of potential participants.

Finally, my own Roman Catholic bias may have blinded me to some important areas of investigation. Perhaps my adherence to the Catholic faith and my commitment to its priestly ministry have prevented me from understanding the mindset of a person who is totally convinced of the truth of Protestantism.

### *6.7 Suggestions for future research*

Besides investigating whether former Catholic priests joined other Protestant denominations, a future research project could examine whether any of them entered Orthodox Christian ministry or tried to transfer to one of the 22 smaller Eastern rites within Catholicism that allow for a married clergy. One of the participants in this study actually followed that route but found that the cultural differences were too much for him and for them. He was much more at peace in the Episcopal Church but perhaps some would have been more comfortable in one of these rites and would have stayed.

Another study could include a sample of resigned Catholic priests who married but remained Catholic. Did they leave for the same reasons? Did those who remain Catholic follow their hearts even more than the “greener pastures shepherds?” Is one group more satisfied than the other? Did they experience differing levels of support from family, friends, and colleagues? These and many other questions could be addressed by adding a few hundred participants from this “comparison” group of almost 16,000 men.

Even more fascinating would be to insert a third group that would include those Catholic priests who found themselves in exactly the same predicament as these relocated clerics but ultimately decided not to renounce their Catholic identity nor to get married but to remain celibate Catholic priests. Did they not “change lanes” because they thought differently or because they were afraid of disappointing their family? Was it their unbending sense of loyalty and commitment that held them back? While it would be nearly impossible to get a sample of this kind, the insights such comparisons could generate would be well worth the effort. It would be similar to studying divorcees and those who seriously considered divorcing but then decided not to.

One last comparison group that was mentioned several times throughout this study would be the Pastoral Provision group of former Protestant ministers (almost all Episcopalians) who have, with Vatican approval, become married Catholic priests. It would be intriguing to compare these subsets who moved in almost identically opposite directions. Since the Pastoral Provision priests did not have to choose between marriage and celibacy, it would seem that their motivations were chiefly theological.

Leaving aside these four types of comparisons just mentioned, and recalling the differences found between diocesan and religious priests, a separate study of Catholic priests could try to explore further the variation that seems to exist between these two main categories of Catholic clergy. As far as I have been able to ascertain, no one has ever conducted a study solely focused on discovering said differences.

Results from the third research question concerning the long-term effects of parental approval on career satisfaction also seem to merit further attention. This kind of study could easily be expanded far beyond the realm of clergy research.

Finally, there is the age-old philosophical question: Do people think their way into new ways of acting or do they act their way into new ways of thinking? In other words, did these former priests first start to get involved with someone and then rethink the boundaries marked by celibacy or did they think about the “absurdity” of celibacy first and then decided to begin dating? While the answer is probably a little of both, my survey did not ask enough specific questions about this aspect of their transition. Perhaps a follow-up study could explore this point in greater depth and contribute some insight into the perennial debate. In the meantime, these 133 shepherds will probably just keep tending to their flocks in the greener pastures of married Protestant ministry.

## APPENDIX A

**SURVEY OF RELOCATED CLERGY IN THE U.S.**  
 FORMER CATHOLIC PRIESTS NOW SERVING AS PROTESTANT MINISTERS  
 A STUDY BY THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

PLEASE DO NOT FILL OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. I intend to complete it with you via a telephone or a face-to-face interview within the next few weeks. I am sending it to you only for your preview. You may want to make notes on it so that you will have your answer ready when I call or when we meet. All information provided will be kept strictly confidential and will be reported only anonymously and/or in aggregate form. If you do not wish to be interviewed by phone or in person, please fill out the questionnaire (*following the instructions in italics*) and return it in the pre-paid and pre-addressed envelope included.

**A. General background**

A1. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

A2.A3. Counting from oldest to youngest, I was born number \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ children in my family of origin.

A4. Which best describes your main ethnic identification? (*Circle all answers that apply.*)

1. White      2. Black      3. Hispanic      4. Asian      5. Other \_\_\_\_\_

A5. How would you describe your family of origin's heritage? (For example: 100% Italian or 50% Irish and 50% German or 50% Polish, 25% Native American and 25% French):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A6. Which of the following options best describes your current marital status?

1. Married
2. Widowed
3. Separated
4. Divorced
5. Committed same-sex relationship
6. Committed opposite-sex relationship
7. Single – never married (*skip to question A17*)
8. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

A7. In what year was your spouse/partner born? \_\_\_\_\_

A8. In what religious denomination was your spouse raised? \_\_\_\_\_

A9. Was your spouse a former Catholic nun? Yes No

A10. In what year were you married? \_\_\_\_\_

A11. What was the denomination of the church in which you were married?

\_\_\_\_\_

A12. What is your partner's current religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

A13. What is your partner's current occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

A14. If retired, what was your spouse's former occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

A15. Have you been married more than once? Yes No

(If yes →) A15a. Please outline very briefly your marital history:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A16. Please list, from oldest to youngest, the gender and the age of each of your children (e.g. "male age 18, female age 13, etc.), if any:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

A17. Which of the following options best describes your current living situation? (*Circle one*)

I live alone. 1  
I live with at least one other minister. 2  
I live with my spouse and/or family. 3  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_ 4

A18. In what type of housing do you currently live? (*Circle one*)

Rectory or equivalent. 1  
Other Church-supplied housing. 2  
I rent an apartment. 3  
I own my own house. 4

A19. What is the highest level of theological training you have obtained?

Bible college degree 1  
Master of Divinity or Bachelor of Divinity 2  
M.A. S.T.M., Th.M. or other Masters 3  
Doctor of Ministry degree 4  
Ph.D. or Th.D. 5  
Other \_\_\_\_\_ 6

**B. Religious background before transition**

B1,B2. With what religion, if any, were your parents affiliated at the time of your birth?

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_

B3,B4. In what year \_\_\_\_\_ and religious tradition \_\_\_\_\_ were you baptized?

B5,B6. In what year \_\_\_\_\_ and religious tradition \_\_\_\_\_ were you confirmed?

B7. When you were 11 or 12 years old, how often did you attend religious services? (*Circle one.*)

- |                        |                         |                        |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Never                | 2 Less than once a year | 3 Once or twice a year |
| 4 Several times a year | 5 About once a month    | 6 2-3 times a month    |
| 7 Nearly every week    | 8 Every week            | 9 Several times a week |

B8. In what year did you enter the seminary? \_\_\_\_\_

B9. In what year \_\_\_\_\_ and for what diocese or religious order B10. \_\_\_\_\_ were you ordained for the priesthood?

B11. Please indicate any Catholic organizations or groups of which you were a member, such as Call to Action, Charismatic Renewal, Knights of Columbus, Opus Dei, Right to Life, etc.

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**C. Transition Process from Catholic to Protestant Ministry**

C1. In what year did you first consider resigning from the Catholic priesthood? \_\_\_\_\_

C2. Did you go through the process of seeking a dispensation from celibacy? Yes No  
(*If yes →*) C2a. In what year did you start the process? \_\_\_\_\_

C2b. In what year did you obtain the dispensation? \_\_\_\_\_

C3. In what year did you discontinue active ministry as a Catholic priest? \_\_\_\_\_

C4. In what *paid employment* were you engaged from the time you resigned from ministry as a Catholic priest until the time you were accepted into Protestant ministry? Please list the kinds and dates of employment, starting with the earliest:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

C5. In what religious tradition do you currently minister? \_\_\_\_\_

C6. When did you first inquire about the possibility of conversion? I would like to know when you *first* asked questions about it. Please give the month and year: \_\_\_\_\_

C7. When did you first contact a denominational officer (or equivalent) to begin the process of acceptance into Protestant ministry? Please give the month and year: \_\_\_\_\_

C8,C9. In what year were you accepted into your current denomination \_\_\_\_\_, and in what year did you begin your ministry in this denomination? \_\_\_\_\_

C10. Why did you choose the particular denomination with which you are now affiliated?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C11. As distinct from your denominational affiliation, when it comes to your approach to faith, would you say that you are...

Pentecostal	1
Fundamentalist	2
Evangelical	3
Mainline	4
Liberal	5
Other: _____	6

C12. Would you say you have been "born again" or had a "born again" experience? Yes No  
(If yes →) C12a. In what year did this happen? \_\_\_\_\_

C13. If you could turn the clock back, would you have become a Catholic priest? (*Circle one.*)

Definitely yes.	1
Probably yes.	2
Not sure.	3
Probably no.	4
Definitely no.	5

C14. If you had the opportunity to make the choice again as a Catholic priest, would you have become a Protestant minister again? (*Circle one.*)

Definitely yes.	1
Probably yes.	2
Not sure.	3
Probably no.	4
Definitely no.	5

C15. How has your life as a Protestant minister turned out?

Better than you expected.	1
Worse than you expected.	2
About as you expected.	3
Not sure.	4

C16. Consider a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the absolute worst and 10 is the absolute best. All things considered, where on this scale would you rate (*write in a number from 1 to 10*) the support you received during your transition period Catholic to Protestant ministry from...

. . . . your parents. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your siblings. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your spouse. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your friends. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your former parishioners. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your Catholic priest colleagues. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . your Catholic bishop or religious superior at the time of your resignation. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . the leader of the Protestant Church into which you were accepted. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . the clergy of the Protestant Church into which you were accepted. \_\_\_\_\_

. . . . the lay people of the Protestant Church into which you were accepted. \_\_\_\_\_

C17. As you reflect on your relocation, what were the greatest losses, disappointments or struggles you experienced (if any) in your transition away from the Catholic Church and ministry? Please briefly mention up to three, beginning with the most important.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

C18. As you reflect on your relocation, what were the greatest gains, encouragements or satisfactions you experienced (if any) in your transition into the Protestant Church and ministry? Please briefly mention up to three, beginning with the most important.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

C19. What would be your top three suggestions to your denomination for improving the effectiveness and support of clergy like yourself who have transitioned from the Catholic Church?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Ministerial environment and levels of satisfaction**

D1. Considering all your duties of any type, in a typical week, about how many hours total do you work/minister...

- a. Monday through Friday? \_\_\_\_\_ hours (total for all 5 days)  
 b. on Saturday? \_\_\_\_\_ hours  
 c. on Sunday? \_\_\_\_\_ hours

D2. About what percent of your work week do you currently spend ministering in a parish?

\_\_\_\_\_ (If zero percent, skip the next question.)

D3. Which of the following options best describes your current *parish* position? (Circle one.)

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Senior Pastor or Minister | 1 |
| Assistant Pastor / Curate | 2 |
| Solo Pastor or Minister   | 3 |
| Co-Pastor or Co-Minister  | 4 |
| Other: _____              | 5 |

D4. Which of the following best describes your current *non-parish* position, if any?

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Chaplain                             | 1 |
| Denominational Administrator         | 2 |
| Educator                             | 3 |
| Other ministry _____                 | 4 |
| Other non-Church-related work: _____ | 5 |

D5. Please estimate how many hours in a typical week you devote to each of the pastoral tasks listed below, including preparation where applicable. (You may include fractional numbers.)

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. Preaching (both preparation and delivery time combined)                        | _____ |
| 2. Worship and sacramental leadership, including funerals and weddings            | _____ |
| 3. Teaching people about the faith outside of worship setting                     | _____ |
| 4. Training people for ministry and mission                                       | _____ |
| 5. One-on-one time working to convert others to the faith                         | _____ |
| 6. Pastoral counseling and spiritual direction                                    | _____ |
| 7. Visiting members, sick, and shut-in  | _____ |
| 8. Visiting prospective members   | _____ |
| 9. Administering the work of the congregation, including staff supervision        | _____ |
| 10. Attending congregational board and committee meetings                         | _____ |
| 11. Thinking about and promoting a vision and goals for the congregation's future | _____ |
| 12. Involvement in denominational or interdenominational/faith affairs            | _____ |
| 13. Involvement in organizations and issues beyond the congregation               | _____ |
| 14. Other (please specify) _____  | _____ |

D6. Within the last seven days, how many hours did you spend in the following activities?

1. Prayer, meditation, Bible reading, and other spiritual disciplines \_\_\_\_\_
2. Searching the web, chat groups, e-mail \_\_\_\_\_
3. Family life (time, other than at meals, spent on family activities) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Household chores (laundry, shopping, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Physical exercise for your health \_\_\_\_\_
6. Recreation (other than exercise) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Commuting to work \_\_\_\_\_
8. Eating out with friends \_\_\_\_\_

D7. Most weeks I have (*check only one*). . .

- \_\_\_\_\_ two 24-hour periods that are entirely free from ministerial duties (“two days off”)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ at least one 24-hour period that is entirely free from ministerial duties (“one day off”)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ at least one 24-hour period that is mostly, but not entirely, free from ministerial duties. On this day I spend on average about \_\_\_\_\_ hours working.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ none of the above.

D8. Using the responses below, how often do you do the following? (*Write number on each line*)

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Never or rarely      | 1 |
| About once a year    | 2 |
| Several times a year | 3 |
| About once a month   | 4 |
| About once a week    | 5 |
| Several times a week | 6 |
| Every day            | 7 |

- \_\_\_\_\_ D8a. Make a retreat.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D8b. Pray the Rosary.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D8c. Meet with a spiritual director.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D8d. Pray the Breviary or the Daily Office.

D9. Taken all together, how would you say things are these days – would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Very happy    | 1 |
| Pretty happy  | 2 |
| Not too happy | 3 |

D10. About what percent of your income comes from each of the following?

- |                                    |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| A parish                           | _____ |
| A denominational office            | _____ |
| Another Church-related institution | _____ |
| Secular employment                 | _____ |
| Pension, savings, or investment    | _____ |
| Other                              | _____ |

D11. Please indicate the types of financial support you receive. (*Circle all that apply.*)

Regular stipend	1
Church-supplied housing or housing allowance	2
Utilities Allowance	3
Pension or retirement account such as 403B	4
Retreat allowance	5
Continuing education allowance	6
FICA Reimbursement	7
Tuition assistance for children's religious school	8
Auto allowance or mileage reimbursement	9
Auto insurance reimbursement	10
Medical expenses reimbursement	11
Other _____	12

D12. To what extent do you feel you are utilizing your skills and abilities in your present assignment? (*Circle one number.*)

Not at all	1
Comparatively little	2
To some degree	3
Fairly much	4
A great deal	5

D13. Thinking back to your time as a Catholic priest, to what extent do you feel that you utilized your skills and abilities?

Not at all	1
Comparatively little	2
To some degree	3
Fairly much	4
A great deal	5

D14. Using the responses below, what is your level of satisfaction with the following...

Very satisfied.	1
Somewhat satisfied.	2
Somewhat dissatisfied.	3
Very dissatisfied.	4

- \_\_\_\_\_ D14a. Your overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader in this particular congregation?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14b. Your current ministry position?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14c. Housing or living arrangements?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14d. Spiritual life?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14e. Opportunities for continuing theological education?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14f. Support from your denominational official?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14g. Relations with fellow clergy?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14h. Relations with lay leaders in your congregation?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14i. Relations with other clergy and staff members in your church  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14j. Your salary and benefits?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D14k. If married or in a committed relationship, your family life?

D15. Over the past year how often have you felt that your work in this congregation did not permit you to devote adequate time to your children?

Very often	1
Fairly often	2
Once in awhile	3
Never	4

D16. Over the past year how often has your partner voiced resentment over the amount of time that you devote to your ministry?

Very often	1
Fairly often	2
Once in awhile	3
Never	4

D17. Over the past year how often has your spouse voiced resentment over the financial situation in which you find yourselves by being in pastoral ministry?

Very often	1
Fairly often	2
Once in awhile	3
Never	4

D18. In general, would you say that your immediate family has been affected by your ministry...

Very positively.	1
Somewhat positively.	2
Somewhat negatively.	3
Very negatively.	4

D19. At what age do you anticipate retiring from active pastoral ministry? \_\_\_\_\_

D20. In general, how would you rate your health?

1. Excellent    2. Very good    3. Good    4. Fair    5. Poor

D21. Using the response below, please select the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling during the past four weeks...

All of the time.	1
Most of the time.	2
Some of the time.	3
A little of the time.	4
None of the time.	5

\_\_\_\_\_ D21a. Have you felt calm and peaceful?

\_\_\_\_\_ D21b. Did you have a lot of energy?

\_\_\_\_\_ D21c. Have you felt downhearted and depressed?

\_\_\_\_\_ D21d. Did you feel worn out?

\_\_\_\_\_ D21e. Have you been happy?

**E. Doctrinal, Moral and Ecclesial Issues** (These questions closely replicate ones which have been asked of national samples of Catholic priests.)

E1. Do you think Roman Catholics must follow all the Church's teachings to be faithful, or do you think they may disagree on some issues and still be considered faithful? (*Circle one.*)

Must follow all teachings	1
May disagree and still be faithful	2

E2. Would you describe your views on most matters having to do with moral doctrines as...

Very liberal	1
Somewhat liberal	2
Middle of the road	3
Somewhat conservative	4
Very conservative	5

E3. In your opinion, are the official views of the Catholic Church on moral issues generally

Too liberal	1
Too conservative	2
About right	3

E4. In your opinion, are the official views of your denomination on moral issues generally . . .

Too liberal	1
Too conservative	2
About right	3

E5. How much confidence do you have in the Catholic Church in America today?

A great deal	1
Some	2
Not much	3
None at all	4

E6. How much confidence do you have in your denomination in America today?

A great deal	1
Some	2
Not much	3
None at all	4

E7. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the bishop who presides in your diocese (or your equivalent denominational leader) is handling his/her duties?

Approve strongly	1
Approve somewhat	2
Disapprove somewhat	3
Disapprove strongly	4



F2. Some have suggested that the Vatican's approval in 1980 of married convert priests from the Protestant Churches serves as a model for the regular ordination of married men in the Latin rite, or for the readmittance to active ministry of priests who have resigned in order to marry. Please briefly share your views, thoughts, or experience on these issues.

F3. Some have suggested that married priests are less likely than celibate ones to engage in sexual misconduct, particularly the abuse of minor children. Please briefly share your views, thoughts or experience on these issues.

F4. Some have suggested that, for practical reasons, married priests are generally less able to be fully devoted to the care of a parish than ones who are unmarried. Please briefly share your views, thoughts or experience on this issue.

F5. What, if anything, has surprised you about the Protestant Church in which you minister?

F6. Finally, we want to give you a chance to express opinions in your own words that may not have been addressed elsewhere in the survey. Please elaborate on any of your answers above or share any other thoughts, experiences, or perspectives you may wish to relate.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME IN READING THIS SURVEY.** Please keep this questionnaire for reference during your interview, which will be scheduled with you soon.

## APPENDIX B

## COVER LETTER FROM THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

June 11, 2007

*Address Block*

Dear Father *Last Name*:

The Church Pension Group has been contacted by the Reverend Stephen Fichter, a sociology Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers University, who is engaged in a multi-denominational study of former Roman Catholic clergy who have entered ordained ministry in Protestant denominations. We have spoken extensively with Fr. Fichter and, while CPG does not formally endorse this study, we believe this is a worthy academic endeavor.

As a former Roman Catholic priest, you are being forwarded Fr. Fichter's invitation to participate in this project. In order to protect and respect your privacy, CPG did not provide your name or your contact information to Fr. Fichter. Instead, if you are interested in contributing to Fr. Fichter's study, we invite you to contact him directly using the information provided in his enclosed letter. Fr. Fichter is also contacting clerics with similar backgrounds in the Presbyterian Church USA, United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Again, we have not provided your name or contact information to Fr. Fichter. In order to participate in the project, you will need to contact him yourself.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of Fr. Fichter's request for participation.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Price, Ph.D.  
Vice President  
Research and Recorder of Ordinations  
Retirement Programs and Services  
Church Pension Fund

## APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT APPROVED BY THE IRB  
(FOR EPISCOPALIAN PARTICIPANTS ONLY)

June 11, 2007

Dear Father,

I hope that the arrival of this letter finds you well in the midst of your many and varied pastoral obligations.

As a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Sociology at Rutgers University, I am working on my dissertation which focuses on clergy who have relocated from one denomination or faith tradition to another.

Through the assistance of the headquarters of the Protestant Churches, I am reaching out to all known clergy who have transitioned from Catholic ministry to Protestant ministry. One of the chief benefits of your participation in this research project is that the information I will glean from this data will allow me to describe who you are as a group since, as far as I have been able to ascertain, no researcher has conducted such a study. No identifying information will be recorded on the surveys and the results will be reported for the group as a whole, and not individually. This is a unique opportunity to make your voice heard, to tell your life story.

Knowing that your time is precious, but also considering that your ministry experience is very valuable, I ask that you contact me at 201-925-3814 (or at [stephen\\_fichter@hotmail.com](mailto:stephen_fichter@hotmail.com)) so that I may send you a copy of the anonymous survey that I have constructed for this project and you may tell me in which of the three ways listed below you would like to participate.

1. By phone: I can call you within two weeks after mailing the survey to you so that we may fill in the survey together over the phone. I estimate we will need about an hour to do so.
2. By mail: If you prefer to fill out the survey yourself, which should take about 45 minutes, please do so as soon as possible, returning it to me in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.
3. In person: We can try to arrange a face-to-face interview, dependent upon our schedules and geographical locations. This style of interviewing will probably require an hour.

The only foreseeable risk is that by thinking about such a major transition in your life, perhaps made decades ago, you may revisit themes that caused you some concern in the past. If you do, you may contact me at the number listed above and I will refer you to a therapist knowledgeable in the area of clergy transitions.

I assure you that your participation is **completely voluntary and anonymous**. You may skip any question that you prefer not to answer and, obviously, there are no penalties should you decide not to participate.

Your completion and return of the survey indicates you are giving informed consent to be a part of this research project. If you have any questions about this study, please call me at 201-925-3814. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Finally, if you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this research project, you will be provided with a postage-paid postcard, which can be mailed to me separately so that your total anonymity will remain intact.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Fichter, M.Div., M.S.W.

This informed consent form was approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects on May 7, 2007; approval of this form expires on October 31, 2008.

## APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT APPROVED BY THE IRB  
(FOR NON-EPISCOPALIAN PARTICIPANTS)

June 11, 2007

Dear Rev. N.,

I hope that the arrival of this letter finds you well in the midst of your many and varied pastoral obligations.

As a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Sociology at Rutgers University, I am working on my dissertation which focuses on clergy who have relocated from one denomination or faith tradition to another.

Through the assistance of the headquarters of the Protestant Churches, I am reaching out to all known clergy who have transitioned from Catholic ministry to Protestant ministry. One of the chief benefits of your participation in this research project is that the information I will glean from this data will allow me to describe who you are as a group since, as far as I have been able to ascertain, no researcher has conducted such a study. No identifying information will be recorded on the surveys and the results will be reported for the group as a whole, and not individually. This is a unique opportunity to make your voice heard, to tell your life story.

Knowing that your time is precious, but also considering that your ministry experience is very valuable, I respectfully request that you take the next 15 minutes to read carefully the enclosed survey. Once you have done so, I ask that you seriously consider participating in this research project in one of the following ways:

1. By phone: I will call you within the next two to four weeks at the number provided by your denomination so that we may schedule a time for me to fill in the survey with you over the phone. I estimate that we will need about an hour to do so.
2. By mail: If you prefer to fill out the anonymous questionnaire by yourself, which should take about 45 minutes, please do so before August 17<sup>th</sup>, returning it to me in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.
3. In person: If you desire a face-to-face interview, I ask that you call me as soon as possible at 201-925-3814 so that we may arrange a visit if that be possible given our schedules and geographical locations. This style of interviewing will require about an hour.

The only foreseeable risk is that by thinking about such a major transition in your life, perhaps made decades ago, you may revisit themes that caused you some concern in the past. If you do, you may contact me at the number listed above and I will refer you to a therapist knowledgeable in the area of clergy transitions.

I assure you that your participation is **completely voluntary and anonymous**. You may skip any question that you prefer not to answer and, obviously, there are no penalties should you decide not to participate.

Your completion and return of this survey indicates you are giving informed consent to be a part of this research project. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 201-925-3814 (or at [stephen\\_fichter@hotmail.com](mailto:stephen_fichter@hotmail.com)). If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Finally, if you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this research project, please fill out the enclosed postcard and mail it separately so that your total anonymity will remain intact.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Fichter, M.Div., M.S.W.

This informed consent form was approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects on May 7, 2007; approval of this form expires on October 31, 2008.

## APPENDIX E

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF TWO OUTLIERS

The first case involved a man whose journey was nearly the opposite of the rest of the participants, the vast majority of whom were “cradle Catholics.” Raised Episcopalian, he was baptized in that tradition as a teenager, and as a young adult joined one of their monastic communities. A few years later, he switched to a Catholic monastic order and eventually was ordained as a celibate priest. When he resigned from that lifestyle as a middle-age adult, he rejoined the Episcopal Church where the validity of his Catholic ordination was recognized. For the last three years, he has served as an Episcopal priest and has been involved in a committed same-sex relationship. While his life story was fascinating, it was so different from the others that he really did not fit the general profile. His entry into Episcopal priesthood was more of a “coming home” experience.

The second respondent whose information was recorded into the database but was then screened out had been raised Catholic, was married at 20 years of age, and then was ordained as a permanent deacon in the Catholic Church at 40. Given the fact that he was married before ordination and never ministered as a celibate, his responses would have skewed the results, so different was his trajectory from all the others. Two years after he was ordained to the diaconate in the Catholic Church, he transitioned to the Episcopal Church, which recognized his previous ordination. Eleven years later, he became an Episcopal priest and has been serving in that capacity for almost 20 years. As was the case with the first outlier, this man’s journey was highly interesting but since he never ministered as a celibate priest, he lacked a basic requisite for inclusion in this study.

## APPENDIX F

THE ORIGINS OF “FICHTER ON FICHTER”  
OR LEARNING FROM PRIEST-SOCIOLOGISTS

The act of dedicating my dissertation to my granduncle, the well-known Jesuit priest-sociologist who held the Chaucey Stillman Chair at Harvard in the late 1960s, allows me not only to reflect on his innumerable contributions to the study of American Catholicism but also to ponder my own academic future as a priest-sociologist.

Whether Uncle Joe (as we used to call him in my family) was reporting “good news” or “bad news” for the church, it seemed that some important ecclesiastic was upset with him for even broaching the subject. Just as he was entering full stride in his research career in the late 1950s, the Vatican issued a warning concerning sociological studies of religion. Cardinal Dell’Aqua, who delivered the official statement, was concerned that “the publication of statistics on the religious situation prevailing in some countries has supplied our enemies with material capable of being exploited in every possible manner to the detriment of the Church” (Fichter 1973:161). The cardinal thereby forbade research that did not have the bishops’ seal of approval. While the admonition did not mention my granduncle by name, it was clear that he was one of the targeted recipients.

Andy Greeley, who two years ago playfully christened my project as “Fichter on Fichter,” also ruffled many feathers in Rome during his long and distinguished career. He, like Uncle Joe, would often tackle topics (such as clerical celibacy) that few dared to address, and would report results that some did not want to hear.

It is interesting to note that both Fichter and Greeley, lifelong Catholic priests in good standing, credited celibacy as a positive contributing factor to their own prolific and successful academic careers. While they might have advocated for changing the celibacy requirement for their fellow clergymen, both researcher-priests came to appreciate the freedom such a demanding discipline afforded them. When reminiscing about how he was able to take on so many different research projects with almost no financing, Uncle Joe concluded that in part the reason was that he had more time than other researchers since as a “bachelor priest” he could “work nights and weekends without the domestic distractions and demands that his married colleagues face” (Fichter 1973:8).

In a recent column, entitled *Priests are happy without wives*, Greeley (2007) says that he has “never been able to understand lay folk who are obsessed with the abolition of celibacy.” He thinks that allowing Catholic priests to marry, while it may appear to be an attractive short-term solution to the vocation crisis, might—in the long run—make their lives more difficult than they already are. Andy refers to studies that highlight the many family problems that spouses and children of Protestant ministers experience. He also points to other studies (conducted by the National Opinion Research Center) that indicate that Catholic priests are “on the average the happiest men in America.”

While I must admit that in my own life I have sometimes experienced celibacy more as a burden than as a source of joy, I have come to value its charisma. I pray that I will be able to draw as much benefit from such a costly discipline as a priest-sociologist as did my granduncle and our common friend Andy. Finally, I hope that their work as trailblazers in the Catholic Church will mean that I will not have to argue with too many bishops concerning the value of sociological inquiry, such as this present one.

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- 2003 Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service  
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- 1997 Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (Rome)  
Licentiate in Philosophy, *magna cum laude*
- 1995 Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (Rome)  
Baccalaureate in Philosophy, *magna cum laude*
- 2008 - 2014 Pastor, Sacred Heart Church, Haworth, NJ
- 2001 - 2008 Parochial Vicar and Adult Education Coordinator  
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- 2002 - 2004 Adjunct Professor, Bergen Community College, Paramus, NJ
- 1998 - 2000 General Administrator (CFO) of the Legion of Christ, Rome, Italy
- 1994 - 1998 Vice Rector of the seminaries of the Legion of Christ, Rome, Italy
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