

The Study on Sense of Calling And its Challenges among Priests and Nuns through Qualitative Lens

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Abstract

Introduction: A study to explore the thought patterns and perceptions of priests and nuns that help them to sustain in religious life. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the sense of calling and the challenges that priests and nuns may encounter in their daily lives. **Methods and measures:** Data was collected from seven priests and seven nuns until saturation was reached. The data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) techniques of thematic analysis. **Results:** The findings revealed that the following themes- Divine Calling and Service, Simplicity and Relinquishment, Spiritual Fulfillment, Integration and identity, Self-Growth and Support, Inspirational Figures and Healing, Faith, Resilience, and Balance, Trust in Providence and Divine Guidance play a significant role in the lives of the respondents. **Conclusion:** The findings of the present study put forth the challenges faced and how these are addressed by the priests and nuns while discharging their duties wholeheartedly.

Keywords: Sense of Calling, Priests and Nuns, Challenges, Thematic Analysis, Purpose in life, Motivation and desire to persevere

Introduction

Each person has their own goal to achieve in this world. The concept of calling is a major aspect of human life related with a sense of inner conviction or sense of "rightness," that this specified path is what the individual is meant to do. The sense of calling nourishes meaning or purpose in one's life. In this contemporary era, most of us are unaware of our unique calling. Calling refers to an individual's sense of purpose or direction in life, often connected with a strong sense of motivation and a desire to pursue a particular path or goal. The call can also be observed as a voice of the supreme and it is very significant from the life of priests and nuns as they devoted their lives to God. As religious leaders, priests and nuns have unique calling experiences and may face specific challenges in fulfilling their vocation. This study investigates the sense of calling among priests and nuns, and the challenges they face in fulfilling their vocation. Traditionally, the term "calling" was used in a

religious context to propose that one was "called" by God or another higher power to work regarding an extraordinary goal (Kline, 1991). However, in more recent times, source conceptions of calling have expanded to include notions such as a sense of destiny or a perfect fit (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Riza & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Weber argued that the concept of the call was a new idea, a product of the Reformation and a Protestant conception. The new concept involves "evaluating the performance of obligations in worldly affairs as the highest form that the individual's moral activity can take" (Weber, 1992). Though the concept of calling was first developed by Luther, he was not all that welcoming to capitalism or the capitalist spirit, and a further traditional view of economic activity came to lead Luther's teachings – opposition to capital and profit-making and acceptance of one's occupation and work "as a divine ordinance, to which he must adapt himself" (Weber, 1992). According to the Catechism of the catholic church, a priest is a man called by God to serve Christ and the Church through the reception of the sacrament of Holy Orders. (Church, 2000). A nun is a woman who vows to dedicate her life to religious service, typically living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the enclosure of a monastery or convent.

In recent years, the priests and nuns of the Catholic Church have been met with a series of controversies that remain fresh in the memory of the public. Certain dropouts and adjustment problems became great issues in public that led to debates in the media. This is happening to few but, still, society cannot digest faults or mistakes on the part of priests and nuns. As they are coming through long years of formation and prayer, they are supposed to lead a model life well accepted by others. Here comes the importance and relevance of the call. According to Dik & Duffy (2009) and Duffy et al. (2011), the construct of calling is 'a source or expression of one's broader sense of meaning and purpose in life, and having a calling is in a manner that one feels called by an external, beyond-the-self force to a particular career, and holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation'. This process is supposed to benefit people to find firmness and consistency in life (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Savickas, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

There is a difference between having a calling and living it. Moreover, assessing an individual's skill to live out his or her calling may be equally as significant as, or more important than, assessing the presence of a calling. Almost all the priests and religious have the call, but the question is whether they are aware or not. In the Indian context, they are the model personalities for common people for a long period. Because they are for the poor, homeless, handicapped, leprosy patients and so on. Now society relates religious to very reputed institutions. As they are coming out to the world and getting exposure to modern technologies, are they happy and satisfied in their religious life? Are they facing challenges within them? This study removes the veil of the construct calling and its challenges, especially in the life of priests and nuns.

Theoretical framework

The sense of calling is a complex concept that has been explored by several psychological theories. The various theories highlight the role of factors such as basic psychological needs, purpose in life, positive aspects, personal identity, existential concerns, and vocational identity in the development of a sense of calling. These theories highlight the importance of meaning and purpose in one's life and suggest that a sense of calling can contribute to well-being and personal fulfillment. Calling is "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation." (Berg et al., 2010; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Elangovan et al., 2010; Praskova et al., 2015; Wrzesniewski, 2011). As per this definition, three essential features of calling are external summons, profound meaning, and prosocial motivation. Self Determination Theory suggests that all human beings have three basic psychological needs – the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness – the fulfillment of which are essential nutrients for effective functioning and wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Identity theory explains that an individual's sense of calling is closely connected to their sense of self and personal identity. According to identity theory, a sense of calling is an aspect of one's own identity that refers to an individual's sense of purpose and direction in life. An identity is a set of meanings attached to roles individuals engage in the social structure (**Stryker, 1980**) (role identities), groups they recognize with and belong to (group identities), and unique ways in which they see themselves (person identities) (**Burke & Stets, 2009**). Identity theory reveals that individuals who have a clear and constant sense of who they are and what they stand for are more likely to experience a sense of calling. Individuals who view their work as an important aspect of concept centrality (**Rosenberg, 1979**) of identity are more likely to feel a strong sense of motivation and direction in their lives. **Kuhn (1964)**, kept the concept of a core self as a set of stable self-meanings, which provide stability to personality, anticipating behavior, and continuity of interaction. This research can provide insight into the factors that contribute to a sense of disconnection or dissatisfaction with one's chosen path, as well as the coping mechanisms and strategies that individuals may use to overcome these challenges. Additionally, this research can offer valuable information for religious organizations and institutions, as it can help them to better support and understand the needs of their members, and help them develop programs and support systems to address the challenges that priests and nuns may face.

Literature Review

Lee et al. (2022) investigated the various aspects of calling and made significant suggestions for improving the hospitality workforce. The results showed that transcendent summons, passion, and a life with a purpose are important aspects of the hospitality calling that boost professional identity and reduce intentions to leave the industry. However, the intention to leave the industry was not significantly influenced by professional identity. **Vianello et al. (2022)** proposed the Work as a Calling Theory (WCT) with the moderating role of job demand predicting that career calling fosters job performance. The study found that the positive relationship between calling and self-reported performance is suppressed in highly demanding work environments with high workloads, unachievable deadlines and pressure to perform. Performance is directly impacted by job demand, which reduces the positive impact of career calling. Again, **Reed et al. (2022)** revealed Work as a calling theory in providing a helpful deductive structure to the consistent evidence that people who view their work as a calling and can actively live that calling typically experience both career-related and general well-being. They propose a particularly promising cognitive framework for constructing a sense of calling by bringing work identity into sharper focus. According to **Quan et al. (2022)** the sense of calling influences pilot safety behavior from the perspective of occupational psychology. When the safety climate was lower, the sense of calling had a stronger effect on harmonious safety passion and a stronger indirect effect on safety behavior. **Shin et al. (2022)** focused on the positive aspects of living a calling (LC), hence more attention needs to be given to its potentially negative aspects. From a person-centered perspective, the current study was defined by individuals' scores on LC, burnout Hi, exploitation, and work-life balance. This contributes to the prediction of profile membership's psychological capital, organizational support, and adequate compensation.

Jones et al. (2022) also researched that work as a calling is gaining momentum, and work as a calling theory provides a helpful deductive structure to the consistent evidence that people who view their work as a calling can actively live out that calling usually experiences both career-related and general well-being. By bringing work identity into sharper focus, we propose an especially promising framework for constructing a sense of calling, one that uses a cognitive approach. **Yuliawati and Ardyan (2022)** say planning has an effect on one's career calling and purpose, and the findings show that planning positively anticipates the presence of purpose and living one's career calling. While the search for purpose negatively predicted the presence of purpose, planning was not a significant predictor of the search for purpose. **Uzunbacak et al. (2022)** looked into the

possible causes of changes in nurses' sense of purpose during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the findings, nurses sometimes experienced both positive and negative shifts in their sense of purpose. Positive changes were most frequently cited as a result of nurses' perceptions of the significance of their work, their desire to help others, and a sense of meaningful work. **Wu et al. (2019)** explained career calling can positively moderate the effect of role conflict on job burnout. By appropriately introducing career calling and controlling role stress, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge. Additionally, the research offers some recommendations for construction project management.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, **Terry and Cigularov (2021)** looked at the role of living a calling as a potentially powerful resource that helped employees become work-ready and, in turn, led to greater well-being in the form of lower job stress. Through increased COVID-19 work readiness, they provide preliminary evidence that living a calling may be associated with lower levels of job strain. Living a calling in a time of high potential or actual resource loss is important, as this study demonstrates.

The study is therefore planned to examine the sense of calling and its challenges among priests and nuns. This study aims to understand the motivations and experiences of individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving as religious leaders and to identify any difficulties or obstacles they may face in fulfilling their calling. The research will seek to shed light on the personal and spiritual experiences of priests and nuns and the factors that contribute to their sense of fulfillment and purpose.

Research Questions

- What are the factors that contribute to the development of a sense of calling among priests and nuns?
- What are the unique challenges faced by priests and nuns with a sense of calling, and how do they overcome them?
- How do priests and nuns balance their sense of calling with the demands of their roles and responsibilities?
- How do religious teachings and practices relate to the sense of calling?

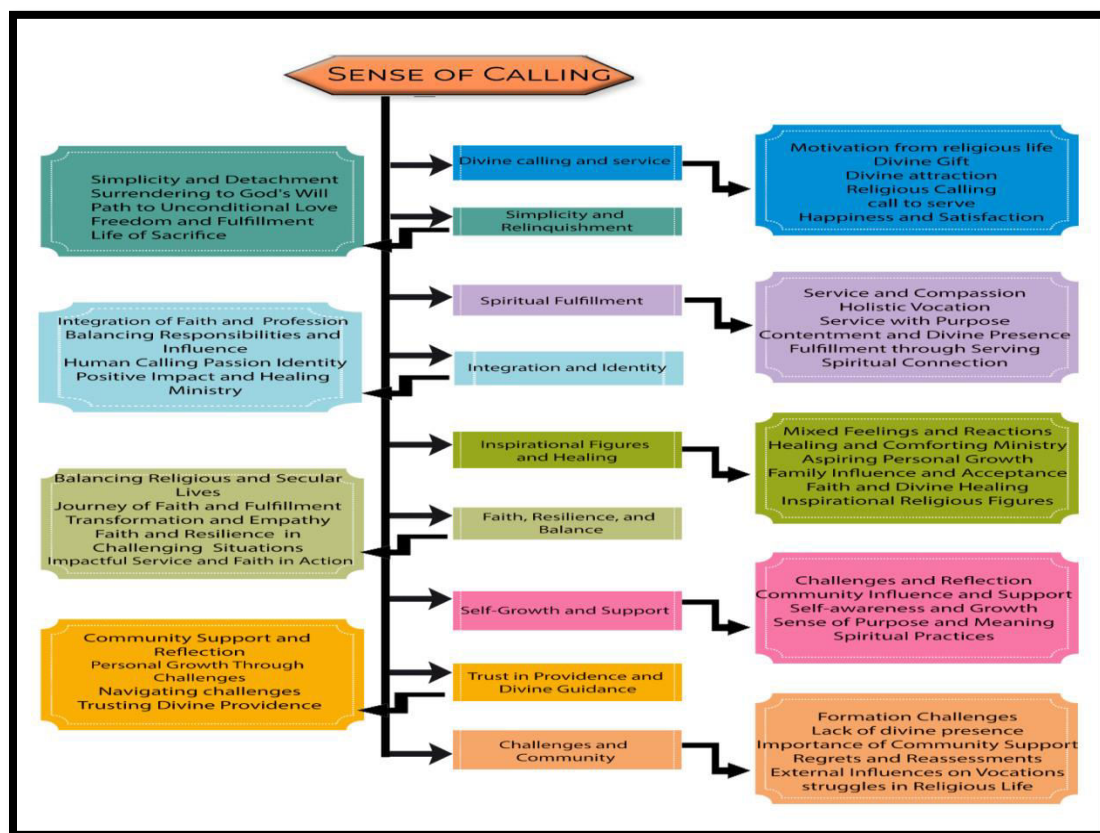
Materials and Methods

The study aims to understand the concept of a "sense of calling" among priests and nuns and to identify any challenges they may face in fulfilling their calling. The objectives are understanding the factors that contribute to the development of a sense of calling among priests and nuns, identifying the unique challenges faced by priests and nuns with a sense of calling, and how they overcome them, to study how the sense of calling changes and evolves among priests and nuns and to study how priests and nuns balance their sense of calling with the demands of their roles and responsibilities. A qualitative research design is appropriate for studying the sense of calling and its challenges among priests and nuns. This type of research design allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences. A constructivist approach delves into the detailed construction of their realities, informed by their experiences, perceptions, and social contexts and recognizes the importance of subjective understanding and meaning-making in comprehending the sense of calling. Purposive sampling is the method used in this study. A sample of 7 priests and 7 nuns of the catholic church, who completed at least 5 years of religious life and were falling in the age range of between 35-45 years were selected for the study. An in-depth, semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to conduct interviews with the respondents. The interview schedule was prepared and shared with the three experts to check for the clarity and suitability of the questions, presence of social desirability, repetition, and uniqueness of the questions. The questions which were fit by the three experts. The schedule gathered detailed information about their experiences of calling, the challenges they have faced, and

their strategies for coping with those challenges. The interviews were conducted in person. The present study was cleared by the Institutional Review Board and then obtained informed consent from participants. Once the participants agreed to be a respondent, data collection was started. The participants were comfortable sharing their views on the particular question and were free to quit at any point in time if they found any difficulty. Data was collected and audio recording was done after obtaining prior permission from the participants. The participants were assured that their data would be confidential and used only for research purposes. After the data collection was complete, participants were usually debriefed about the purpose of the study and any other relevant information. After conducting interviews with 7 priests and 7 nuns, data saturation was achieved and analyzed. After the analysis of the data, the researcher engaged in the process of member checking to ensure the credibility of the current study. The collected interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis was done using **Braun and Clarke's (2006)** method.

Results And Discussion

The results are the main themes which arose out of the interview process and subsequent data analysis. The key themes that emerged following data analysis as a result of the sense of calling and its challenges on the priests and nuns were Divine Calling and Service, Simplicity and Relinquishment, Spiritual Fulfillment, Integration and identity, Self-Growth and Support, Inspirational Figures and Healing, Faith, Resilience, and Balance, Trust in Providence and Divine Guidance, and the Challenges and Community. All of the themes are interconnected, from analyzing the data it emerged that the sense of calling impacts all areas of the lives of priests and nuns.



Divine calling and service

Divine Calling and Service refers to the profound conviction that individuals experience, often attributed to a higher spiritual source, leading them to engage in a life devoted to selfless actions that benefit others and contribute to the greater good. This alignment between calling and identity can lead to increased commitment, satisfaction, and resilience in the face of challenges which is mentioned in identity theory (**Rosenberg, 1979**). In the context of self-determination theory, people are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation in their service work when they feel that their actions are in line with their values and beliefs (autonomy) when they are confident in their ability to serve effectively (competence), and when they develop meaningful relationships in the context of service (relatedness). Having conducted interviews with 14 participants, all of whom express contentment and happiness with their religious lives, they collectively view it as a divine calling and a gift from God. They said: *"I'm very happy. I'm so satisfied in my life"* (Participant 1). A study on nurses also explains how a sense of calling improves one's job significance, their desire to serve humanity, and a sense of meaningful work (**Uzunbacak et al., 2022**). With unanimous agreement, they all voice that their experiences are a divine call and a bestowed gift from God. Hence, their collective gratitude towards God is evident, coupled with a deep awareness that their calling is dedicated to serving others.

Simplicity and Relinquishment

Simplicity and Relinquishment are characterized by the intentional embrace of a minimalistic and organized lifestyle, detached from material possessions and worldly attachments. A person's surroundings or way of life either encourages or discourages their inherent drive and autonomy. Autonomy and intrinsic motivation in self-determination may be increased through simplifying one's life or letting go of pointless distractions. Simplifying one's identity or relinquishing aspects of it may occur as part of an identity change or adaptation process especially in the life of priests and nuns as they are leading a temporary pattern of life, moving from one place to another or one duty to another. Similarly, participant 9 describes: *"Vow of poverty can help me to remain focused on my mission gives me to remain humble and open to the guidance of my superiors and teaching of the church"*. In their way of life, they endeavor to emulate Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master. This involves living simply, akin to how He did during His earthly existence. And the Holy Bible says "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' **Bunderson and Thompson (2009)** showed that a calling orientation fosters a self-reported willingness to make sacrifices for one's work.

Spiritual Fulfillment

Spiritual Fulfillment refers to a deep sense of inner completeness and satisfaction derived from aligning one's life with a higher spiritual purpose. It includes a holistic vocation that involves service to others with compassion, guided by a deep connection to a divine presence. Spiritual fulfillment can play a significant role in an individual's identity (**Rosenberg, 1979**). It may be a core aspect of their self-identity, contributing to a sense of belonging and purpose. The participants find deep satisfaction in their lives, understanding that their spiritual connection and intimacy empower them to accomplish remarkable deeds, particularly in aiding those in need. They prioritize their prayer life over their tasks, recognizing that without prayer, their existence lacks purpose and significance. As per a recent study Pastors who reported a greater sense of calling or affirmation of calling also reported less burnout and higher life satisfaction (**Chen, 2020**) which is a kind of spiritual fulfillment. Involving in religious activities was positively correlated with having a stable relationship with God and generous giving (**Pettit et al., 2021**). *"Prayer is the source to liveto gain strength from*

Godevaluate our own life”(Participant 2). Participant 12 sees the directive to be with Jesus as the central essence and fundamental interpretation of a religious calling “*a special call..... closely to Jesus*”.

Integration and Identity

Integration and identity refer to the harmonious blending of a person's spiritual beliefs into their work, resulting in a positive impact on both their profession and the lives they touch. This integration requires balancing responsibilities, influence and finding passion within their professional identity while remaining true to their sense of purpose and calling. An individual's spirituality is an essential part of their self-concept, achieving congruence between their spiritual beliefs and experiences can contribute to a sense of self-actualization and authenticity. A recent study demonstrates that even in the context of work that exhibits duty and altruism associated with expressivist accounts of ‘calling,’ the workers’ understanding of the relationships between themselves, their clients and Jesus Christ dominate their work choices (Wightman et al., 2022). In the case of religious life Jesus Christ dominates their work choices. One of the participants acknowledged: “*If my prayer life and spiritual life is good, betterment of my life and the life of others*”(Participant 4). A previous research demonstrated a relationship between religious engagement level and variations in life satisfaction, subjective well-being, and life orientation (Ellison, 1991; Kogan et al., 2005; Lim & Putnam, 2010; Steger & Frazier, 2005) They consistently forged a Christ-like identity, utilizing Him as a role model. Their approach to prayer and way of life were shaped in alignment with this model.

Self-Growth and Support

Self-Growth and Support include the constant self-improvement and development of an individual, sustained by mindfulness, profound practices, and a solid feeling of direction and significance. When individuals feel competent in their religious roles, have autonomy in pursuing their callings, and experience a sense of relatedness within their religious community, they are more likely to be motivated and fulfilled in their service as per the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012). From the participants it is evident that a sense of calling plays a prominent role in self-growth “*having self-awareness..... everything, especially the emotion*” (Participant 1). One of the recent studies explores the concept of spiritual leadership and proposes a conceptual model of spiritual leadership within the context of the sustainability of the workplace which leads to self-growth and support (Samul, 2019).

Inspirational Figures and Healing

Inspirational Figures and Healing encompass the intense impact of revered religious figures and their teachings as sources of inspiration and guidance. A study by Rajagopalreddy and Varghese (2020) found most Roman Catholic priests had created representations of a stable relationship with God. The prevailing consensus among the participants is that their inspiration stems from various priests, nuns, and the prayerful ambience within their families. The participants described “*I'm inspired by my Parish priest.....*” (Participant 10). *And my family,..... prayerful ambience contact with sisters involved in different ministries* (Participant 2). In the same way, most of them shared that their mother too has a role in their religious life.: “*I got inspiration from my mother*” (Participant 7). Ryan and Deci (2003) hold that the acquisition and maintenance of identities is a dynamic process in which identities are developed and adopted to satisfy the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness of the interaction between needs and social context affordances. Within the frameworks of self-determination theory, identity theory, and Rogers' self-theory, inspirational role models can be considered catalysts for individual growth and development. They have an impact on self-worth, congruence, relatedness, social identity, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation.

Depending on each person's unique experiences, ideals, and the extent to which they connect with and aspire to be like these role models, the precise influence of inspirational role models will differ.

Faith, Resilience, and Balance

Faith signify unwavering belief in higher powers, guiding principles, or divine forces. Resilience refers to the capacity to endure and overcome adversity, drawing on inner strength and external support. Balance reflects the harmonious integration of religious and secular aspects of life. When individuals are resilient, they are more likely to feel competent in overcoming obstacles and pursuing their goals, which can enhance their intrinsic motivation. According to **Kim and Choi (2022)**, Boosting the sense of calling and resilience can improve overall end-of-life care performances. Achieving a sense of balance among the different roles contributes to a coherent and integrated self-identity. Resilience and affect balance are fully mediated between trait emotional intelligence and life satisfaction (**Ya et al., 2013**).

Trust in Providence and Divine Guidance

A steadfast belief in a higher power's providential care and guidance encompasses trust in Providence and Divine Guidance. It means depending on a heavenly arrangement despite difficulties. Consensus is unanimous among all participants as they collectively acknowledge this truth *“the trust and Providence and love and care of the lord is constant,”* (Participant 8). *“It's something as a gift from God and whoever opts to follow or receive that gift will be more satisfied*” (Participant 10).

Challenges and Community

Challenges and Community emphasizes the intricate relationship between facing difficulties and the role of community support in religious life. While all participants express satisfaction with their religious life, they also acknowledge the numerous challenges they face. Participant 1, for instance, contends that there's a lack of respect for their religious vocation, with a perception that their lives are undervalued. Additionally, the influence of social media poses a significant challenge as it consumes a substantial portion of their time, affecting their prayer life. Some individuals struggle to step out of their comfort zones, hindering personal growth. Internal conflicts within the church community can diminish the perceived value of religious life, and there's also the issue of persecution faced by those proclaiming the word of God. *“they are not giving priority to prayer life world means, media, mobile phone, and everything,.....”* (Participant 1). Priests who effectively upheld their moral principles in their ministry work reported feeling more flourishing and experiencing less burnout (**Rosales et al., 2020**). Adjustment problems arise within the community due to the diverse backgrounds of its members. They may not always have the opportunity to intervene in their own family's problems. Safety concerns, particularly for women religious in remote areas, are another worrisome issue. Challenges associated with the vowed life include loneliness, with a lack of understanding and support at times, as well as difficulties in upholding chastity and obedience. *“misuse of the internet can cause addiction among many religious and clergy and damage their vocation to the priesthood or religious life”* (Putnam & Maheu, 2000). *“it's due to overwork pressure And also lack appreciationleaving the congregation going because of that social support and communities of the world”* (Participant 10). In the lives of priests and nuns, the sense of calling, a divine calling is deeply intertwined with the challenges they face. Their journey is about finding fulfillment, growing personally, and balancing the complexities of community life while holding onto faith and resilience. Ultimately, their commitment to service shines through their unwavering dedication.

Conclusion

'The study on sense of calling and its challenges among priests and nuns through a qualitative lens' explores the powerful sense of calling felt by priests and nuns, as well as the many ways it affects their lives. Together, the themes show the exceptional depth of commitment, resilience, and purpose that religious people derive from their feeling of calling. This study demonstrates the constant relevance of religious vocations and the significant impact of spirituality on the lives of individuals who respond to the call to serve the world marked by increasing complexity and obstacles. Understanding the intricacies and difficulties of this holy calling not only deepens our appreciation of religious life but also offers perspectives that might be helpful in a society that is becoming more diverse and secular.

Further Implications

For priests and nuns to continue in their duties as spiritual leaders, burnout and stress must be addressed. To draw and keep people in these professions, we need to acknowledge and address their particular difficulties while encouraging compassion and support in their local communities. This study adds to the sense of calling by providing information about the lived experience and well-being of both priests and nuns.

Limitation of the study

Sample of the study may not be representative of the larger population of priests and nuns. Here the study relies on self-reported data, which may be biased. Different cultural and religious backgrounds may affect the experiences and understanding of "the sense of calling." Priests and nuns were hesitant to share personal experiences while interviewing them.

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