

Closing Report for IUSB Faculty Research Grant
Improving Retirement for Roman Catholic Diocesan Priests: Scale Development

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Project Objectives:

The proposed project was one portion of an ongoing research program. The objective of the entire program of research is to help Roman Catholic Diocesan priests (priests serving public churches) with the transition into retirement. The primary goal of this project was to use a sample of priests, Catholic brothers, Catholic sisters, and Catholic laypersons to empirically evaluate a theoretically developed set of scales (Johnson, 1999). The completion of this task makes it possible to use the new scale in future research to identify ways in which the retirement of a diocesan priest differs from other types of retirement in the Catholic community (e.g., in terms of social support, finances, housing choices, etc.).

The significance of this facet of the programmatic research, therefore, is threefold. First, it expands on previous theoretically grounded work conducted by my colleagues and myself that has been supported by and of use to national level Roman Catholic policymakers. Second, it helps to empirically clarify influential characteristics of retirement in the unique population of Roman Catholic diocesan priests. Third, it provides a survey of practical use for both researchers and individuals counseling priests with regard to the retirement transition.

Data Analysis:

Four separate samples (priests, brothers, sisters, laypersons) were investigated. The first step was to randomly divide each of these independent samples in half. Next, for each independent sample, one of those halves underwent a specific form of exploratory factor analysis according to a recently developed and published technique (Ladd & Spilka, 2002; *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*).

After the conclusion of this procedure, again for each independent sample, the remaining half of cases was subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis (or “structural equation modeling”) to provide a verification of the accuracy of the initial exploratory analysis and test for the viability of alternative ways of organizing the data. In short, this means I conducted a total of eight extended, independent factor analyses (four exploratory and four confirmatory).

Outcomes:

These analyses provided a basis for the construction of a survey style instrument for use among the Roman Catholic diocesan priest community. Only 6 – 7 of the initial 15 dimensions (e.g., health, social support, job identification) remained viable following analyses. These new dimensions were relatively consistent within samples (e.g., between the two halves of the priest data). They also demonstrated between sample (e.g., comparing priests and laypersons) differences that support the notion that the retirement experience is influenced by the context in which one undergoes the transition. As one part of a more comprehensive project, this new survey instrument will help priests identify and creatively prepare for retirement from the active priesthood.

I have prepared a paper with the goal of its presentation at a future joint meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion / Religious Research Association. A peer review process, completed by mid-March, 2005, will determine whether or not this paper is accepted for presentation in October 2005. Whether or not accepted for presentation, I will solicit feedback from other experts in the field concerning the manuscript. Then I will submit the appropriately revised paper for journal review and eventual publication (e.g., Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion or Review of Religious Research).

Following these steps, I will follow-up on conversations with a publisher of materials targeted toward Catholic diocesan priests concerning the development of a workbook type document. I will use the above analyses, presentation, and publication as one segment of the groundwork for additional grant proposals to conduct a multi-year study of retirement issues pertaining to Roman Catholic diocesan priests. This process will include application to both internal and external sources (e.g., Retirement Research Foundation; Templeton Foundation) likely to fund work in this area.