

# Determining Factors that Cause Seminarians Not To Pursue Life in the Seminary

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## ABSTRACT

The study focuses on factors that cause seminarians of not pursuing life in the seminary. The research objectives are to identify the following: (1) The Challenges faced by former seminarians during seminary years, (2) the reasons why former seminarians go out of the seminary, and (3) the values that the seminary has instilled in them, even in their journey outside the seminary.

The study utilized the descriptive method as a qualitative research design, which utilizes a method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied. This type of research provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a population or subject, which allowed the researchers to better determine the approaches used by the former seminarians to overcome the challenges faced while in formation in the seminary.

The researchers interviewed five (5) respondents, all former students and graduates from St. Pius X Seminary, Roxas, Capiz, and Sto. Niño Seminary, Numancia, Aklan.

The results of the study uncovered that the former seminarians faced spiritual, academic, and personal challenges. The result of the study discovered that seminarians desired to receive higher education outside the seminary and realized they needed other paths for personal growth and fulfillment. The study showed that despite not pursuing the seminary life, former seminarians recognize the vital role of prayer and values instilled by the seminary in their lives outside.

**Keywords:** Seminarians, Seminary, Vocation, Spiritual

## INTRODUCTION

Seminary life is a distinctive and meaningful experience that offers rigorous study, contemplation, and spiritual development for individuals pursuing a vocation in ministry or theological scholarship. The collective of researchers, mentors, and peers fosters a nurturing atmosphere for enhancing comprehension of faith, theology, and ministerial practice. Seminary life requires religious dedication, academic diligence, and personal discipline, yet also provides a feeling of purpose, fulfillment, and service, influencing one's worldview and directing one's vocation (Aligan, 2015).

The seminary setting, which integrates study, prayer, and community, is optimal for further discerning God's will. The development process for incoming seminary students encompasses four dimensions: human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and pastoral formation (Carroll, 2022). The archetypal student life is characterized by the standard experiences of any student enrolled in academic courses throughout a designated semester (Basi, 1991).

Pope Francis described vocation as "like a divine seed that springs up in the soil of our existence; it opens our hearts to God and to others so that we can share with them the treasure we ourselves have found." In order for

young men to build up what is necessary to partake in spreading God's beloved word, they must first undergo studies within a seminary, a life with challenges that are vastly different, yet similar, compared with that of regular schooling. Vocation is of immense importance as it represents one's calling in life, encompassing more than just a career or job (Vatican.va, 2023).

Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XVI, in his correspondence to seminarians, stated, "You, dear friends, have chosen to enter the seminary and to prepare for priestly ministry within the Catholic Church, despite prevailing opinions and objections." Your actions are commendable. Individuals will perpetually require the divine, even in an era characterized by technological prowess.

In the context of the world and globalization, individuals will perpetually require the God who has manifested Himself in Jesus Christ—the God who unites us within the universal Church—to discover, with Him, the authentic significance of life and to uphold and implement the principles of genuine humanity. God exists, and he requires individuals to serve him and convey his presence to others. Becoming a priest is logical: the world perpetually requires priests and pastors, today, tomorrow, and indefinitely, until the end of time" (Benedict XVI, 2010, p. 13). Pope Benedict composed this letter in response to inquiries posed by contemporary culture concerning the relevance of the clergy in the modern world. Pope Benedict unequivocally asserted that priests are essential and indispensable. He asserted that it is not the priesthood that is diminishing, but rather the secular culture. The priest is the individual of the future.

Annually, young men commence their preparatory programs at the priestly and religious formation houses of the Roman Catholic Church to pursue the priesthood. Annually, the Catholic Church observes the ordination of priests. Annually, the Catholic Church dispatches and receives priests and missionaries to disseminate the word of God and serve His congregation. Nonetheless, each year, the Catholic Church experiences a diminishing number of seminarians who are unable to persist in their vocational journey within the seminary. The reasons for this decline are diverse and frequently inconsistent (Hankle, 2010). Some individuals may voluntarily resign from their pursuit of the priesthood due to a perceived inability to fulfill the vocation, while others may be compelled to withdraw by the community or diocese due to unforeseen behaviors and acts.

The vast knowledge of the church is taught within the seminary, and every seminarian is expected to be knowledgeable on a multitude of topics, such as church history, philosophy, doctrine, liturgy, morality, or Sacred Scripture. This massive amount of information can stump those who are unprepared (Monson, 2019).

"One of the great challenges of seminary life is that we combine rigorous academic study with discipleship for personal spiritual growth and practical preparation." (Duncan, 2016).

Seminarians usually have a very busy academic schedule. They take classes in theology, philosophy, church history, and pastoral work.

Seminarians may also have to go to prayer services and programs for growth, as well as do spiritual work like helping out at parishes or in the community. Also, as seminarians work to become priests or ministers, they often become close with other students (Oakley, 2017). But it can be hard to leave a close-knit group. It may be difficult for seminary graduates to establish themselves in the community while maintaining their values and habits. Additionally, leaving the seminary can be challenging for former students, posing challenges in adapting to life beyond the seminary and managing their finances (Wärnberg, 2021).

There are lots of reasons why seminarians might stop being seminarians. The candidate may leave the clergy or religious life because their personal views have changed or they no longer feel called to it. It's possible that some applicants can't study because of a mental, physical, or financial problem. Sometimes, the school may ask the candidate to leave because they broke the rules or behaved badly, which is considered inappropriate behavior. But if a seminarian decides to leave, they usually have to go through a process of telling their school and diocese what they want to do. Meeting with a spiritual director, vocation director, or bishop to talk about their choice and figure out the best way to move forward may be part of this process (McDaniel, 2019; Fisher, 2020).

People who used to go to the school often find themselves in tough situations after they graduate. Most of the time, these problems are personal, like family problems, health problems, or not having enough people to lean on. Also, extra costs like rent, food, and utilities can quickly add up and put pressure on a former seminary student's budget. These factors may explain why they have money saved or ask their family for help paying for school. Moreover, a significant number of seminaries provide room and board to their students, thereby requiring former seminarians to secure their own housing and cover the associated costs. These factors can make it challenging for former seminarians to meet their financial needs while pursuing their degrees (Daud, Norwani, & Yusof, 2018).

This study aimed to explore the former seminarians' perception in choosing not to pursue life within the seminary. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are the challenges faced by former seminarians during seminary years? (2) Why do former seminarians leave the seminary? (3) What are the values that the seminary has instilled in them, even in their journey outside the seminary?

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the descriptive method to determine the factors that cause seminarians of not pursuing life in the seminary. Descriptive research utilizes a method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied. To learn more about how former seminarians dealt with the problems they faced while they were being formed in the seminary (Sirisilla, 2023), this kind of research gives a clear and accurate picture of the traits and behaviors of a group or subject.

The participants of the study are former seminarians of St. Pius X Seminary in the Archdiocese of Capiz and Sto. Niño Seminary in the Diocese of Kalibo. The researchers interviewed five (5) former seminarians who graduated from ten up to thirty years past. The researcher chooses five participants with different years to uncover the factors affect the decision of former seminarians who spent more or less time in seminary formation. Therefore, participants are with rich experiences and knowledge.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Former Seminarians in the Study

Name	Seminary	Years spent
Respondent 1	Sto. Niño Seminary	4 years
Respondent 2	St. Pius X Seminary	10 years
Respondent 3	St. Pius X Seminary	1 year
Respondent 4	Sto. Niño Seminary	4 years
Respondent 5	Sto. Niño Seminary	6 years

The researchers employed the interview method as a qualitative research instrument to collect data, which involves asking participants questions to gather rich and detailed information to determine the factors as to why seminarians do not continue their stay in the seminary.

The researchers first asked the respondents for permission to interview. Upon agreement, the researchers asked a series of questions through online video calls to better know the challenges faced by the former seminarians while in the formation of their seminary and to explore seminarians' perceptions not to continue their stay in the seminary.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges faced by former seminarians during seminary years

The qualitative themes of the challenges faced by the former seminarian students during seminary years are displayed in Table 2. In addition, the themes and sub-themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges faced by former seminarians during seminary years

Themes	Sub-themes	Statements
Spirituality	Prayer habits	“The first was to create a habit of prayer.”
Camaraderie	Problem getting along with others due to dialect differences	“I had a problem getting along with others because we spoke different dialects, me Aklanon, and they Ilonggo.”
Cuisine	Adjustments with food Struggle to appreciate the food	“I had trouble appreciating the food they cooked.”
Personal emotions	Homesickness	“I always missed home.”
Academics	Adjustments to studies	“I struggled to keep up with the academics due to the schedule that is to be followed.”

In this problem statement, the respondents acknowledged a sense of detachment from their spirituality and academic endeavors while attending the seminary. Some individuals indicated a lack of personal involvement in prayer. Others cited difficulties with food and academics while adjusting to their seminarian schedules and the cuisine given during mealtime, which the researchers found to be similar. Some had difficulties getting along with fellow brother seminarians, most notably due to dialect issues, while others experienced personal emotions such as homesickness.

### Reasons why former seminarians go out of the seminary

The qualitative themes on the reasons why former seminarians go out of the seminary are displayed in Table 2. In addition, the themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Reasons why former seminarians go out of the seminary

Themes	Sub-themes	Statements
Academic	Better education outside	“There was better education outside than here.”
Spiritual	Felt a different vocation other than priesthood	“I’m not seeing myself being a priest in the future.”
Formation	Going with the flow of the schedule	“I simply just went with the flow of the schedule, sometimes with no interest whatsoever.”
Community	Felt like an outcast	“I felt as if I didn’t belong because of the differences we had.”

In this problem statement, responses from individuals who did not continue on the seminary path revealed a variety of reasons for their decision. Some cited external influences, such as the desire for a superior college education, as influencing their decision. Some realized that the seminary was not the only way to achieve their goals and felt compelled to pursue other routes for personal growth and fulfillment. They sought reflection and exploration of alternative paths that would align better with their personal aspirations and sense of purpose. Furthermore, some exhibited feelings of separation from the seminary community, while others simply followed for the sake of schedules, demonstrating little motivation or effort.

### Values that the seminary has instilled on them even in their journey outside the seminary

The qualitative themes on the Values that the seminary has instilled on them even in their journey outside the seminary are displayed in Table 4. In addition, the themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Values that the seminary has instilled on them even in their journey outside the seminary

Themes	Sub-themes	Statements
Spiritual	Be faithful to God	“The seminary taught me to fear God.”
Social	Leadership skills and proper manners	“I learned how to deal with diverse personalities of the community and to be a wise leader to them.”
Formation	Value of Prayer	“I learned that you should never forget to pray and how to pray.”

In this statement problem, the lessons learned, and values acquired during the respondents' time in the seminary were of utmost importance. One of the most prominent lessons was the recognition of the indispensable role and value of prayer in their lives. They came to understand that prayer is not merely a routine or obligation but a vital means of connecting with the divine and nurturing their spiritual well-being. Respondents emphasized the value of maintaining a prayerful life beyond the confines of the seminary, recognizing its transformative power and the need for personal engagement. Moreover, the emphasis on being God-fearing fostered a deep reverence for the divine and a commitment to living a life aligned with spiritual principles.

The seminary environment also imparted important values and lessons to the respondents from which they benefited the most. They cited discipline, leadership skills, organization, respect for superiors, and proper manners and etiquette toward others as essential qualities they acquired during their time there. The structured nature of the seminary, coupled with the guidance of formators and interaction with peers, instilled a strong sense of discipline and respect for authority figures.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the former seminarians had problems camaraderie, cuisine, personal emotions, academics during their journey in the seminary. The former seminarians wanted to receive higher education outside the seminary; therefore, they decided to go outside. For former seminarians, they felt they needed other paths for personal growth and fulfillment. In addition, they felt that the priesthood simply was not for them for another reason of not pursuing their study in the seminary. It is shown also that former seminarians also felt disconnected from the seminary community and followed simply for schedules, demonstrating little motivation or effort. Meanwhile, former seminarians experience the lack of support from their families in the vocation of priesthood. Amidst all this, the former seminarians also expressed the important values and lessons they learned whilst in the seminary. Former seminarians expressed the recognition of the vital role of prayer in their lives. Learning social skills that were essential to their journey outside, such as leadership skills and proper behavior toward others, while some expressed that the seminary taught them to be God-fearing.

The researcher recommended that more detailed and current data on the issues faced by former seminarian students is necessary. A more thorough investigation into the lives of seminarian's post-seminary will enhance understanding of their motivations for not continuing in the priesthood vocation.

**Ethical Approval:** This research received approval from the people involved.

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