

REVIEW ARTICLE

Priest Yesterday Lay Today: Facing the Challenge

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the way of life of a former Catholic priest and his underlying views on priesthood and the church in general. This research utilized the qualitative design of research employing the case study approach as it tried to delve into the life experience of the participant involved. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the participant. The research focused on the reasons of the participant's exit, his joys and difficulties after leaving the priesthood, how he faced the challenges of daily life along with the shadow of his past, his definition of priesthood, and how he sees his future. The primary reason for him leaving the priesthood is the experience of burnout. In trying to fit into the world, the participant experiences both joys and difficulties. Facing the challenges of daily life, the participant maintained independent attitude and optimism. He changes his perspective in life, learned to become humble, realized the need to retool his skills, and maintained an active prayer life. His view of priesthood and the future were also discussed. This study recommended priests to avail regular breaks, the Church to develop an intensive pastoral counseling for priests, priests to seek advice upon exit, to retool their skills, for the community to avoid judging former priests and for the Church to restructure the priestly formation.

Keywords: Former Priest, Priestly Formation, Transition, Secular.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

These stages are expected to prepare the candidates to be fully ready for the priesthood. The first step is aspirancy. Both religious and diocesan aspirancy often go through a similar process. The state of aspirancy includes the period after contact until one is admitted into the formation program. During this time, the person aspiring to join a society may keep in touch with the vocation director and be invited to special programs like retreats organized for the group of aspirants. Some congregations though, already formally begin their formation programs with this stage with a residential duration (Angmor,2008). The second stage is called the postulancy. The duration of this period depends again on the specific requirements of a congregation. In the case of candidates studying for the priesthood for example, this may also more or less coincide with about three or four years of philosophical studies in college or the major seminary.

The candidates are led through various programs to learn more about the life of the community that they would want to be committed to in the future (Angmor,2008).

The next step is the novitiate. The formation personnel in charge of the program, which lasts for at least one year, and may be up to two years (or still even further possibly extended), is the novice master or mistress, with or without the assistance of other personnel. Furthermore, for clerical candidates to the diocesan priesthood, the novitiate may be repacked by what may be described as the "Spiritual Year" (Angmor, 2008). This is followed by the candidates taking their vows. The First Vows, which are also referred to as the temporary vows, last for a year. These are renewed every year for between about three to six years or so, depending whether the candidate is training for the priesthood, or the other states as a nun or a brother. Candidates in temporary vows who have become convinced of their desire and capability to continue

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their lives perpetually as professed religious priests, sisters, or brothers may apply and be admitted to make their final commitments through the Perpetual or Final Vows. This is preceded by another period of preparation of about three months or more leading to this final profession.

In the case of priesthood, the intensive formation which takes many years prior to the ordination makes a big impact on the life of the priest. An aspirant to the priesthood usually has to go through an average of twelve to thirteen years of rigorous seminary training to qualify for ordination (Fernandez, 2001). The spiritual and intellectual aspects of his life are enriched and developed and should make a candidate fitting and worthy of the priestly vocation. The priesthood involves a specific lifestyle and the language of a valued spiritual leader (Pietkiewicz and Backryj as cited by Pietkiewicz, 2016).

Many people look up to the priestly vocation because of its nature and role. This is why a man aspiring to join the priesthood must undergo formation to prepare himself. It is usual for most Catholics to expect that once a candidate finishes this formation, he has now been transformed into someone worthy of the priestly holiness. Priests are usually revered because they are viewed and treated as leaders with moral ascendancy giving them authority to advice people on matters of moral life. In addition, the lengthy formation for the priestly ministry begets admiration in the community's collective mind because it requires determination, discipline, perseverance, and genuine response to God's call. This view on priesthood, however, depends on cultural orientation and the place. Some Catholics take it for granted that this long preparation towards priesthood readies the aspirant in a holistic manner, molding the intellect through extensive learning, preparing the physical body through multiple facets of discipline, and forming the emotional and spiritual aspects through an ordered life of prayer and various spiritual activities. From this perspective, ordination necessarily becomes a momentous event for the priest and the entire community because of the rigors involved in the formation. Attaining this state of life is viewed as God's will. Such forms the reason for admiration and reverence from the community.

Some insights into the priestly vocation can be surmised by a brief look at priesthood in the Old Testament. The priest in the Old Testament is described as "one who is duly authorized to minister in sacred things, particularly to offer sacrifices on the altar, and who acts as mediator between men and God" (Schulz,

2003). The word "priest" is translated from the word "kohen" in the original Hebrew manuscripts. In the Hebrew Scriptures the word "kohen" appears 741 times. More than one-third of the references to the "priests" are found in the Pentateuch. Leviticus, which has about 185 references, is called the manual of the priests. The office of priest in Israel was one of supreme importance and of high rank. The development of the concept and role of priesthood from its older forms up to what we know today was a product of revisions and changes introduced by the Church authorities in the past. Through those years of revision, the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) concept of priesthood had always influenced the understanding and practice of the priestly ministry. "The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The New Testament clearly speaks of elders (presbuteros) and overseers (episkopos). But these ministers are nowhere represented as priests in any other sense than Christians generally are priests with the privilege of a direct access to the throne of grace in the name of their one and eternal high priest in heaven" (Schaff, 2002).

The nature of priesthood in the New Testament centers on the priestly role of Christ pointed out by the Letter to the Hebrews; the perpetual nature of Christ as the everlasting high priest and the once for all perfect sacrifice. The enigmatic Melchizedek ('king of righteousness') is the first person in the Bible to be given the title 'priest'. He was king of Salem ('king of peace', king of Jerusalem) and 'priest of God Most High'. He came out to meet Abraham as he was about to meet the king of Sodom after the defeat of the kings of Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela. He brought bread and wine and blessed Abraham, who in turn gave him a tithe (tenth) of the battle spoils (Hall, 1998).

These exalted ideas about the priesthood both in the OT and NT are at the roof of today's reverence towards the priesthood. Parishioners look up to priests because they are considered, as in the Bible, the embodiment of the divine living with piety and holiness, steadfast in their faith in God, strong against temptations, and living according to the Scriptures. Priests often strive to embody religious and moral values in order to be perceived as credible spiritual guides (Baniak as cited by Pietkiewicz, 2016). Such an exalted view of the priesthood can have a negative

effect on the perception about the priest who leaves the ministry. The community may disown a priest for being unfaithful to God's will.

Leaving the priesthood is not usual in the history of the church. In the Old Testament, there is no record of priests becoming non-priests. This is understandably the case because being a priest was a great privilege (Gozzens, 2000). On the contrary, rejection of the priesthood is like a form of disobedience to the divine and he who refuses gets punished. A case in point concerns the two sons of Aaron. They performed a ritual where they offered "strange fire" to the Lord. This disobedience or error led to their instantaneous death. Leaving the priesthood usually implies that the priest has committed something very wrong. Although this may not always be the case, ordinary people who are not aware of the reasons for leaving usually think this way. For instance, Fernandez (2001) stated that three priests resigned because they were not being supported by their bishop. The lack of support of what Fernandez called the "crucial other" in the person of their bishop disappointed them so much. "Crucial other" is a concept developed by Fernandez pertaining to the bishop as the primary reason of priests' resignation. Others left the ministry because of their desire to discover their identity. The suspicion of wrongdoing as a reason for priests to leave the ministry, however, remains strong especially for many Filipinos. That is why many priests choose to leave quietly and Church officials avoid talking about the matter. Yet even with this general silence, many individuals in the community discuss and speculate among themselves about the reason for the unfortunate event (Pietkiewicz, 2016).

Many resigned Catholic priests in the country chose to live a quiet life after leaving the priesthood opting to hide from the media and from the prying eyes of people to avoid generating controversies involving him and the Church. But there are also resigned priests who do not mind mingling publicly with people especially when they feel that they have made the right decision to leave the ministry. In the interview conducted by Fernandez (2001) mentioned in his book, one resigned priest continued, without apprehension, his teaching career in a university after leaving the priesthood. One of the priests interviewed also expressed that leaving the seminary is like conquering oneself. Because of this view of leaving the ministry, he became very open to the public. He conducted talks whenever he was asked to. On the contrary, the other priest interviewed had to leave their province because the wife's family could not accept their marriage. He remarked, "Tess

and I decided to leave the province and come to Manila to start a new life here. We realized that staying in the province would make life very difficult for us (what with her family and relatives' reaction and the stigma we were surely going to experience on account of our choice" (Fernandez, 2001). Usually, resigned priests would depart from their community to live somewhere where people do not know them. This is not only to avoid sensationalizing the sensitive issue but also to avoid confrontations between the priest and his own community.

Because priests have dignified status (Gozzens, 2000), the community is usually shocked and does not know how to react to the situation. This shows the difficulty of leaving the priesthood because the condition can be very problematic for the priest and the community. How the community relates to the priest will have to change, and the priest will have to make a lot of adjustment to be able to function normally in society that is usually not very kind to priests who leave the ministry.

This study offers the Church a more holistic picture of what happens to a priest after he leaves the priesthood. Though it may not be apparent, former priests distance themselves from the Church organization because of some feeling of awkwardness and sometimes animosity caused by the withdrawal so this study attempted to bridge the gap that developed after their separation from the Church organization. Former priests can become assets to the society especially in spiritual matters even if they do not wear their priestly habits.

Most of the abovementioned things said above are common perceptions of the faithful about the priesthood and the priestly life. They are the usual things we hear from Christian communities. As regards more scholarly discussions about the priesthood and the priestly ministry, a lot of books have been written about them. However, understanding the priestly life from the perspective of those who left is uncommon. More uncommon, however, are a former priest's descriptions of his life after priesthood. This study aims to understand this way of life of a former Catholic priest and his underlying views on the priesthood and the church in general now that he is out of the priestly ministry and is living as lay person. This study also focuses on how this former priest looks at his life after leaving the priesthood.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Priests are respected in the community because of their distinctive role in the spiritual and moral life of

the people. Being a priest meant being a real Christian, it meant being called to serve Christ and his church, it meant being respected and revered almost as Christ himself (Gozzens, 2000). Old Church thinking saw the priest as dealing with sacred matters in a sacred language. He was versed in the mysteries of the faith. He was holy by the mere fact of being a priest. He was highly educated and wise, and had questioned authority in every facet of the parish. It did not matter much if he could not preach very well (Angmor, 2008). Sociologically, a man who becomes a priest is now placed in a different relationship to other Catholics and therefore is now something more than “another Catholic” and has symbolic significance to the people he associates with (Hankle, 2009)

Leaving the ministry can either be in the form of removal or resignation which may result to laicization. Termination means a priest is removed by the Church authority from practicing the functions of a priest. Resignation is a voluntary withdrawal of the priest from the ministry. Laicization is the process when a priest is totally removed from the priesthood by the approval of the Pope. There are various factors causing the resignation of a priest. Fernandez (2001) coined models that describe the reasons for priests to abandon priesthood. There is the concept of the ‘crucial other’ where priests leave the ministry because of their problem with their bishop. Bishops play a big role in the priestly ministry. They are the direct superiors of the priests serving as their administrators. The bishops are either not supportive or have perspectives different from those of their priests.

There are also other reasons for priests to leave such as fulfillment of a civic duty, doubt, or experience of burnout. In 1974, Herbert Freudenberger introduced the term “burnout” to describe the symptoms and condition in mental health professionals who were becoming increasingly tired, unmotivated, and paralyzed because of the constant and intense demands of working with people’s emotional problems. The syndrome of burnout is a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind that is characterized by exhaustion, sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional work attitudes and behaviors. The burnout experience is a gradual, insidious, and prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors resulting in the loss of idealism and purpose for helping professionals (McDevitt, 2016).

Adjustment as elaborated in the preceding paragraph is the next major stage a former priest has to

experience in his journey to live a common life in harmony with the community. The initial stage is coming up with the decision to withdraw. He tries to think if leaving the ministry is the right decision or not. If it is a termination, the priest had to process the acceptance of this painful decision which is not his own. The reason for leaving the church plays a vital role in the adjustment process of the former priest because it sets the preliminary emotion of the individual. The acceptance if terminated is different from the adjustment in the transition period where the former priest has to adopt to his new environment which means living as a secular. Accepting that he is no longer a priest and considering his efforts and work to get there can take some time for a terminated priest to accept hence this requires processing that needs help from others.

The transition period starts from the time the priest leaves the ministry and begins living as a secular. This stage is similar to the exit experience stage written about by Angmor (2008). This is the moment when the real work of transition and adjustment takes place. In this stage, the ex-priest faces the reality of life outside the convent. After the transition is the post transition period or the community life of the former priest. The adjustment process is over and he now lives as an ordinary resident of the community. He now lives his life as a lay person with the attitude of mindfulness that he is no longer a priest. He has now gained familiarity with the life in the community. It is this post-transition period that the present study has focused on: how the participant former priest lives his life as lay, and how he faces the challenges of a changed life after the transition period.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to understand the life of a former priest living as a lay after his transition or adjustment period. His thoughts and emotions reflected in his daily activities were the bases in attempting to understand the case at hand.

To attain the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the following core questions:

1. Why did the participant leave priesthood?
2. What are the participant’s joys and difficulties in transitioning from the priestly life to the life lay?
3. How does he face the challenges of daily life considering the complications associated in his past?

4. How does he define priesthood based on his experiences after leaving?
5. How does he see the future as a former priest?

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the life experiences of a former Catholic priest. While many aspects of his life find similarity with those of other priests who left the ministry, the conclusions of this study are solely based on his own experiences. This case study deals with only one participant only but the findings may have something in common with the experiences of others who have gone the same path. Former priests have been in different circumstances and their life stories may be unique to them. Studies about other former priests with different background and religious orientations are recommended for future researches.

Finally, it is to be noted that in qualitative study like this, the researcher is an essential part of the study, and so his personal values and attitudes, biases, and interests (reflexivity) affect the nature of the study (Creswell as cited by Angmor, 2008).

2. Research Methodology

In this chapter, the various methods of practically carrying out the study are outlined. There are five main parts: (1) the research design (2) the participant (3) data gathering procedure (4) research instruments, and (5) the analysis of data.

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized the qualitative design of research employing the case study approach as it tried to delve into the life experience of the participant involved (Angmor, 2008). The use of qualitative method as the approach of the research is to come up with a holistic picture and an in-depth understanding of the case rather than a numeric analysis of data. The goal is to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the entity (the “case”) (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2006). In this work, the case studied is the life of a former priest.

This qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study focuses on the analysis of the individual, a former priest who has a unique experience. Leaving the priesthood is both distinctive and defining experience. With the use

of case study as a design, questions regarding why the participant left and how he lives his life with others as a lay person are answered. Yin (2002) defines case as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (Yazan, 2015). The objective of using a case study as a research strategy/approach is to understand complex social phenomenon, as exemplified by the case of a resigned priest in this study. Through this strategy the richness of the unique experiences of the former priest in his endeavor to live normally as a lay person is presented in a logical and comprehensive manner for better understanding. In brief, the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles (Yin, 2002).

2.2 Participant

The participant in this study is a former diocesan priest from the Cordillera Region whose background in the religious life is rooted in the orientation of a diocesan formation. The participant (Father Regidor - not his real name) was ordained in 1983 at the age of 27. He was inspired to enter the priesthood after witnessing a performance of minor seminarians in their school. He was in first year high school at that time. After graduating from high school, he joined the seminary upon the recommendation of his hometown’s parish priest. He spent one year in the minor seminary before becoming a full-fledged seminarian. He was ordained in his hometown with the help of the people in the community. However in 1999, after spending 16 years in the ministry, he decided to leave.

Purposive sampling was employed by the researcher to ensure that the participant qualifies as required. The small number of resigned priests and the sensitivity of their cases made it difficult for the researcher to find a participant. The participant’s ordination as a priest and his separation from the priesthood qualified him as subject of this research.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The primary sources of data were in-depth interviews, observation, and documents that concern the life of the participant. The participant was informed of the study and its direction. Upon obtaining his permission to become the participant of the study, the schedule for the interviews was set. The tape-recorded interviews, which lasted for two months, had an average duration of 2 hours and 30 minutes each. The participant

was asked about details of his religious background such as the reason for his entry into the priestly life, his experiences in the seminary or formation, his experiences as a newly ordained priest, his experiences as a full-fledged priest being assigned in various places, his thoughts on leaving the institution, his adjustment upon his exit, the present status of his life, his views as an individual living a secular life, and finally his views on the priesthood. The data were then transcribed/written down to formulate themes. Necessary documents were given in a soft copy form by the participant. Observation was conducted during the entire duration of the interviews.

2.4 Research Instruments

A pre-made questionnaire based on the objective and research questions of the study was used in eliciting responses from the participant. With the written set of questions, the researcher used a recorder (with the permission of the participant) to record the responses. The interview process was conducted in a semi-structured way to allow an informal communication with the participant. In addition to the tools used, observation was relied upon as source of data to help validate certain ideas or claims of the participant.

2.5 Data Analysis

Gathered data were collected, organized, and categorized or coded so that they can be transcribed and interpreted (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2006). Categorization of data was done through thematization.

2.6 Research Ethics

This study abided with the standard norm of conducting research especially since the case is sensitive and controversial in nature. Permission to be the subject of the study was obtained first from the participant explaining the nature and direction of this research. The participant was not forced to answer questions he did not like such as one that is too personal. The use of pseudonym or “alias” for the participant and the other people involved in the study was resorted to so that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Reasons for Leaving the Priesthood

To get a picture of the life of the former priest, his struggles and joys to fit in the world outside the ministry, it is necessary to comprehend the nature of his departure from priesthood. The reason why he left the priesthood could provide us a certain understanding of his life afterwards.

3.2 Burnout (Hitting Rock-Bottom)

Burnout can be attributed to several reasons. In the case of Father Regidor, the volume of his work/responsibility and his experiences being assigned in the frontiers of the region (far-flung areas) resulted in burnout.

3.3 Heavy Loads

The first assignment of Father Regidor as a full-pledge priest was as assistant priest in a parish situated in the town of Kabugao, Apayao. He described the parish priest serving in the area as an idealistic priest. He was an intellectual priest and he would prefer staying in the convent for administrative work. Father Regidor knew that as a young priest he would do more pastoral works; someone who visits the far-flung areas to administer the sacraments such as celebrating mass and others. Father found this assignment rather enriching. He was full of spirit as a newly ordained priest. He said he was oriented about those tasks when they were doing pastoral and missionary works back in their seminary days. The task was to bring the good news to the remote barrios. For Father Regidor, the experience was a “baptism of fire” in its positive sense.

In his second assignment, he served again as an assistant priest for 3 years. His role as an assistant priest differed though because of the contrasting personalities of the two parish priests he was with. If the first was an idealistic priest who was very vocal in his ideas and visions and systematic in his approach, the parish priest of his second mission assignment was rather passive. In this second assignment, Father Regidor’s work included decision-making, making strategic plan for church projects, and still walking to the far sitios to perform sacramental works.

It was in his third assignment where Father Regidor experienced a more challenging job as a priest. This time he was the parish priest who replaced two priests in the town of Natonin, Mountain Province. The functions of the two priests were delegated to him. Father Regidor still remembered when he shared to the Bishop his apprehension about accepting the assignment. Speaking in humility, he asked his bishop if he could send a priest in Natonin with more experience. Earlier, Father Regidor learned that the relationship of the priests with some residents in the community was not always good. There was an incident of throwing stones at the convent where one glass window pane broke. Also, the assistant parish priest was kicked in the stomach during a basketball

game. As to the reasons why those incidents happened, Father did not know. He only learned that the priests did not have a good relationship with the people.

This news made Father Regidor hesitant to accept the assignment. The bishop then asked Father Regidor to try first before he complained. Father Regidor was laughing when he remembered this conversation between him and the Bishop. He said he could no longer say another word because deep in his heart he knew that the bishop was right. After serving as an assistant priest for three years in Kapangan, Beguet, he moved to Natonin, Mountain Province to be the new parish priest of the town. Fortunately, he developed a good relationship with the community. There was no untoward incident. The only thing he failed to consider was the volume of work he had to perform.

“I was their new parish priest. I was also in charge of administering the school and the hospital since these were under the Vicariate. I had to handle the management of all these institutions, from checking the distribution of the employees’ salaries to seeing that sufficient supplies of both the institutions were taken care of.”

The work did not only require physical strength but also good emotional and psychological balance. One time, he had to replace the principal of the school because of her lack of qualification based on Department of Education’s required hiring policy. He thought there was nothing wrong with the performance of the principal, only she did not meet the position’s qualifications based on documents. Many residents did not take this decision well. The principal was not a stranger to them. People in the area almost know everyone else. This did not go well for others but for him he had to do it. Being the administrator, he knew the Department of Education would question him at some point if he did not make such move.

“I have to make this kind of decisions. First, there’s no one to do it but me. They are kind of heavy but they were part of my duties and there was no one to settle these matters. I was alone. I explained it to them and some understood. It’s part of my job as the parish priest. Coming up with these decisions was difficult but I had to do it.”

Father Regidor also narrated the difficulties in running the mission hospital. There was no electricity in Natonin at that time so they relied on a power generator

to supply electricity to the convent, the hospital, and the school. There was only one time in a year when the road to Isabela where they get supplies opened. The roads were not cemented. They were not passable by vehicles. There was a path where they can walk but due to many landslides in the area, automobiles could not pass through the roads. Once a year, the road opened to give way to acquiring supplies such as oxygen for the hospitals and crude oil for the generator. They would buy nine oxygen tanks for the patients of the hospital and eight drums or 200 liters of crude oil. If they missed this opportunity, they would not have anything to use for the whole year. As the head of the parish and the hospital, Father Regidor must ensure that they will not miss this one time.

Running a hospital as well as doing his multiple functions in Natonin was new to Father Regidor and he had to learn them. In managing things, Father Regidor asked advice from other priests in the other mission stations. He said he would consult other priests, asking them the how’s and what’s of managing an institution. The diocese used to have a walkie-talkie called Single Side Band (SSB) for their communication with other priests –from Apayao to Cebu.

“I needed to be resourceful and creative. I needed to think fast and be discerning.”

“I performed my duties in Natonin handling and managing various institutions with my best.”

It was in Flora, Apayao, where Father Regidor stayed for his longest tenure as a priest. He was assigned as a parish priest in 1991 and was only transferred to a different area upon his request in 1997. I asked Father if there were significant incidents that happened in the seven long years that he acted as a Parish Priest. “A lot,” he answered.

The work was again heavy. It was too much to bear but Father Regidor exclaimed he was still in good spirit at the time.

“My spirit was always high.”

The parish covered three municipalities at that time: Luna, Sta. Marcela, and Flora – Lower Apayao. In celebrating mass, he had to go to remote barrios. It was this time when Father Regidor encountered a new aspect of being a priest. It was more challenging and draining. According to Father, when he was assigned at Apayao, there was a proliferation of illegal activities such as illegal logging, illegal gambling, and dirty politicizing. It was also there where he had his unforgettable encounter with the members of Iglesia ni Cristo who were active in politics.

“As a priest, and representative of the church, you have to make a stand. You have to say something.”

Parishioners would talk to him about the illegal logging and gambling happening in the area. Father became a vocal critic of these illegal acts. He would initiate a campaign against these activities. He would lambast the people behind it in his homilies. He said people seemed to have found a voice in him. Because of his stance, he made many enemies. Traders were not the only ones who were involved in the illegal activities. Even police officers, soldiers and politicians were part of the scheme. Father Regidor was being confronted in all fronts and the biggest opposition came from the governor of the province. Father admitted that a price was set for his head.

“For being very vocal in denouncing the illegal and immoral practices in the community, I was given One Hundred Twenty Thousand Pesos (Php 120,000.00) on my head just to keep me silent (forever).”

Once the governor told Father Regidor to keep quiet and to remember that a priest from another province should never get involved with things happening in Apayao. In return, Fr. Regidor asked the messenger to go back and tell the governor to stop womanizing especially involving women from Benguet. There was a rumor circulating at that time that the governor was having a mistress from Benguet. Because of his effort to combat illegal gambling and logging, he also got the ire of the Mayor who thought that he and the Vice-Mayor who was also against illegal logging and gambling were forming an alliance against him. The Mayor and the Vice-Mayor were part of opposing political parties.

Father also joined the group of election watchers as part of his campaign for fair and clean elections. He was provided with a camera to document the entire election process. Father narrated that cheating was very rampant and the ones instigating this act were members of the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC). The group favored a candidate so they wanted the person to win. When Father was taking photos of the election process, a member of INC tried to confiscate the film of his camera. When Father refused he was shoved by other members of INC and there they forcefully seized the film.

Aside from these problems, he had his multiple duties in the ministry.

“When the Vicariate of Tabuk was created in 1992, majority of the priests were missionaries and we were only two diocesan priests. As per policy of the Bishop, certain offices in the new Vicariate cannot be given to the religious missionaries coupled with the fact that the new Vicariate was groping on its ways to survive financially.”

“Beyond Flora Mission, I was given other added responsibilities in the Vicariate level: as Vocation Promoter in Apayao; member of the Vicariate Mission Council; Board of Trustees of the Vicariate Schools of Tabuk, and in 1997, as Acting Superintendent of the Vicariate Schools of Tabuk, a position which I eventually relinquished to a nun, when I left the Vicariate in 1999”.

Father had also problem dealing with missionaries coming from a different cultural background and with another minister who had a different pastoral view.

“In 1997, two African CICM Missionaries stayed with me as part of their mission exposure. Although, their presence helped me a lot in the Mission, their presence became, at times, stressful in the sense that we had to adjust to one another due to our differences in socio-cultural background and pastoral views and approaches.”

“While assigned in Naneng, western Tabuk Mission, for a year in 1998, I was given an assistant pastor who was just ordained and full of idealism. After some months, our working relationship went to the rocks.”

His fourth and last assignment before his eventual resignation was at Naneng, Kalinga. It only took him a year there before taking his leave. When asked about his performance as a priest in his several assignments he responded with certainty that he gave the best he could.

“I did my best. I gave my all. The people knew it. They could see it in my performance.”

This part of the picture of Father Regidor’s life in the ministry would show the overwhelming work he performed. As a new priest, he was excited to perform his duties. He would not complain of the many activities he had to do because for him it was all he expected. The only problem was that Father did not consider the impact of these tasks on him. Father would later admit that he was drained.

“As Rector of Flora Mission, I got involved in multiple responsibilities that eventually drained me of my staying power in the ministry.”

Unconsciously, the fatigue he finally felt in Flora was the result of the accumulated exhaustion performing the duties and responsibilities from the beginning in his previous assignments. Looking at his functions as assistant parish priest in his previous assignments, it is clear that he was the priest who did most of the pastoral works. When Father Regidor was in Natonin and Flora, he had to perform multiple priestly responsibilities. Father Regidor manifested a feeling of exhaustion and fatigue which many priests also experience in the duration of their ministries. The experience of Father Regidor reflects the concept of clergy burnout as understood by Olsen and Grosch (1991). Olsen and Grosch theorized that burnout among the clergy due to demands of visitation, pastoral counseling, administration, preaching teaching, facilitating church growth, as well as being expected to be an expert in crisis intervention leaves any clergy feeling inadequate, exhausted, frustrated, and frequently questioning their call to ministry (Ofordille, 2010). Father Regidor performed his duties and responsibilities the best he could. This additional pressure of maintaining a high-performance standard further drained his psychological and mental power. The amount of work is becoming a problem in the priesthood. The priesthood is confronted with an aging population, a declining number of active priests, fewer men entering the priesthood, a growing Catholic population, and increasing workloads (Ofordille, 2016). The multiple responsibilities of Father Regidor were not finally relinquished after his leave. The priest had to be a good pastor, a fervent confessor, an admirable preacher, a teacher of the law, and, frequently, a controller, especially in presiding over the sacrament of penance. Moreover, he had to teach catechetics, administer parish properties and finances, and God only knows what else (Häring, 1996).

The priest, despite his education and training, can only do so much. He may do a lot of things but he cannot do everything. Trying to perform numerous tasks is exhausting. Priests who are always exhausted because of too much work will eventually suffer burnout. The state of burnout is very risky to the priesthood because of its consequences. Burnout is the experience of crisis which implies confusion with the true meaning of vocation. Priests who experience burnout may ask if they are truly being called to the

priesthood because of feeling confused. Burnout may lead a priest to look for something or someone as a source of happiness and comfort.

The nature of work must done by priests be given due consideration by the Church hierarchy. Different assignment areas provide different nature of work. There are parishes where people are easy to work and relate with. There are parishes where the priest must work doubly hard because parishioners are not cooperative. The work load of priests then must undergo a review to serve as guide in future assignments. A priest who is assigned in a parish where multiple responsibilities are given must be next assigned to an area that requires lesser work. Better yet, since priests cannot avoid stress because of multiple responsibilities and expectation from parishioners, it is encouraged that they avail themselves of their allowed break every seventh year. The Church allows priests to take Sabbatical leave after seven years of active ministry. Taking advantage of a break or rest period refreshes both the mind and body and it gives a priest the energy necessary to handle the tasks expected of him.

3.4 Ministry in the Frontiers

Being assigned in the frontiers contributed to Father Regidor's fatigue. Fatigue and stress as two main components of burnout can be acquired because of physical or psychological exhaustion.

3.5 Physical Fatigue

One thing is obvious upon a careful study of the assignment areas of Father Regidor. With his request, I took note of the locations of his previous assignments from the time he became a priest. These were Kabugao (Apayao), Kapangan (Benguet), Natonin (Mountain Province), Flora (Apayao) and Naneng (Tabuk). These are located in or near the borders of the region. In his first assignment in Kabugao, Apayao, there was no means of transportation in the area other than walking.

“It was not only an hour of walking; it is walking miles and miles of rocky and uphill roads. And it was a daily routine, not weekly.”

He said he did not feel tired. His spirit was as high as ever. In one way, he was thankful that he was assigned in far areas because at that time being assigned in mission areas meant that you were trusted by the bishop. It basically meant you are capable as a priest. On the contrary, to be assigned in nearby areas implied that there was something wrong with the priest and

that he needed to be monitored by the bishop. When Father Regidor was assigned in Kapangan, a dead-end municipality of the province of Benguet, he was entrusted with a vehicle for transportation because the roads were passable by car. However, when he was transferred to Natonin, Mountain Province, the road condition was bad and so he had to walk. A review on the location of Natonin on the Cordilleran map shows that it is located next to Paracelis, near the province of Isabela. He would narrate how much walking he did for the entire duration of his stay. Although walking or hiking was expected in the frontier areas such as the places of assignment of Father Regidor, its impact on his physical strength became detrimental in the long run. Pastoral works are an integral part of being a priest and it was expected that Father, being a newly ordained priest that time, would fulfill them with vigor as it speaks also about his performance as a minister.

Thus, congregational transference and idealization collude with the grandiose self the pastor is invested in. This begins a vicious feedback loop. The more the pastor attempts to be all that the congregation expects him or her to be (thereby using the congregation as a self-object), the more the congregation expects. One late night emergency visit sets up patterns of more and more late-night visits until the congregation begins to expect this type of pastoral service. As a result the pastor must work even harder to keep up with their expectations so as to preserve the grandiose self (Olsen, 1991). Father Regidor was not only conducting simple visitations, he was walking miles to perform his tasks as a priest. Accumulated physical fatigue contributes greatly to exhaustion and burnout. Another aspect of priests' life is pastoral ministry, which is the ministry of care provided by pastors and church ministers to Christians. Basically, this domain covers two ends of one continuum. It includes home visits, communal prayer, spiritual counseling and advice, by the priest to his lay people, amongst other duties. But it is also covers the self-care of the agent himself, to prevent against such risks as burnout, loneliness, and other psycho-spiritual difficulties (Galea, 2011).

3.6 Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Father Regidor's cultural immersion in various subcultures in the Cordilleras was a huge concern. In Kabugao Apayao, he had to deal with Itnegs. Kapangan, his second assignment was home to Kankanaeys. Natonin presented a different cultural orientation. It was the same case with Flora, Apayao whose population were more of Ilocos and

Cagayan origin. Cross-cultural adaptation requires psychological adjustment from the person. In his entire ministry, Father had to adjust with the variation of cultural setting. In order for a person, like Father, to adjust properly, he has to adapt himself to the culture and traditions of the people. It is a task for the visiting priest to cope with the community's different cultural point of view to be an effective bringer of good news. Adjustment and adaptation are two skills a visitor must know to fit in the new community. Adaptation is the process of altering one's behaviors or cognitions in relation to a different environment, in order to better interact with the environment to achieve desired goals. Contrastingly, adjustment is the psychological outcomes that are associated with adaptation. It is important for positive adjustment because controlling one's negative emotions evoked during conflict and stress, which are inevitable in intercultural (and intra-cultural) life, allows one to not be overly influenced by negative emotions and instead think clearly and rationally, which then paves the way for using the other psychological skills important for intercultural adjustment, such as openness, flexibility and critical thinking (Yoo, Matsumoto, & LeRoux, 2006).

Although Father Regidor was describing this cultural immersion as an enriching experience because of the acquisition of new knowledge, it appears that he was not conscious of the other side of the coin that is the stress associated with adapting and adjusting to a new sub-culture. Crossing cultures can be a stimulating and rewarding adventure. It can also be a stressful and bewildering experience. The stress and coping perspective on the acculturation process conceptualizes cross-cultural transitions as entailing a series of stress-provoking life changes which tax adjustive resources and necessitate coping responses (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

3.7 "Burnout"

This narration was given by Father Regidor as part of the documents he submitted in his annulment case. He gave a full account on the incident that led to his marriage. The narration clearly describes the burnout state of Father Regidor.

"As Rector of Flora Mission, I got involved in multiple responsibilities that eventually drained me of my staying power in the ministry.

When the Vicariate of Tabuk was created in 1992, majority of the priests were missionaries and we were only two diocesan priests. As per policy of the Bishop, certain offices in the

newly Vicariate cannot be given to the religious missionaries coupled with the fact that the new Vicariate was groping on its ways to survive financially.

In other words, I was so much engrossed in the ministry that I seemed to have spent my energy in trying to do my tasks as expected of me as Rector of the Missions, of the School, and as acting superintendent and what not. But, after all the enthusiasm perhaps full of adrenalin in the ministry, I started getting stressed with the tension in the Mission, with the conflict with the powers that be. I gradually felt frustrated with myself and feeling empty inside. With the rough sailing ministry, I sensed that I can no longer go on.”

A careful analysis of Father Regidor’s ministerial experiences shows a picture of a priest who suffered burnout. Stress and the lack of motivation in priests and other helping professionals are associated with the syndrome of burnout. The syndrome of burnout is also referred to as compassion fatigue (McDevitt, 2016). Burnout is a term that was originally used to refer to a sense of fatigue and an inability to function normally in workplace as a result of excessive demands on the individual (Ofordile, 2010). Father Regidor was so immersed in numerous concerns that drained him of his energy in the end. He lost focus in his work as a priest. His prayer life according to him had greatly weakened. Recent Popes have been conscious of the difficulties faced by priests in meeting their prayer obligations. Before he became Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger was conscious of how the interior life of the priest can suffer when he is faced with many tasks, being in charge of a number of parishes, so that he becomes exteriorly stretched and interiorly drained (Daly, 2016). He was no longer seeing the meaning of his pastoral ministry. Ofordile explains that burnout is used to refer to the situation in which what was formerly a “calling” becomes merely a job. One no longer lives to work but works only to live. In other words, the term refers to the loss of enthusiasm, excitement and a sense of mission in one’s work. Still others have used the term as synonymous with “alienation”. For example, Berkeley Panning Associates (1977) defined burnout as the extent to which a worker has become separated or withdrawn from the original meaning or purpose of his work.

The burnout phenomenon of priests is not new. In the introduction of his study, McDevitt (2016) echoes a finding that Roman Catholic priests are at high risk

for stressors, burnout, and other emotional problems due to aging, role confusion, lack of support, changes in occupational focus, and ideological questioning (McDevitt, 2016). Also he cited that professionals who choose to work in high need arenas are most at risk for burnout because they are highly committed and driven people.

Unfortunately, burnout results in cynicism for once held values and ideals about life, hope, faith, love, and mission (McDevitt, 2016). Father Regidor experienced confusion when he was in this state. Everything seemed meaningless and he started to seek comfort and happiness whatever that means. The problems of ministerial burnout and its ensuing lack of motivation becomes more than an individual issue. It generates a broader cultural dynamic as well as an organizational problem in the Church (Miner, 2007; Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003). What organizational factors attribute to ministerial burnout and the lack of motivation? (McDevitt, 2016). Due to the human condition of self-transcendence which implies decisions and renunciations with their intrinsic tensions, such union and interrelation is not taken for granted, but rather an object of illusions about the dynamic meanings of joy and fatigue: joy may show truly or only apparently what is good and true, and fatigue may show truly or only apparently that one is on the wrong track (Büssing, Frick, Günther, & Jacobs, 2013).

3.8 Someone who Cares: Woman

In this case when Father was feeling empty, bored, lonely, when he couldn’t find the meaning of his ministry, he looked into himself and in doing so he realized how lonely he was and that he needed to be comforted and happy. It was the time when he felt attracted to the woman working as catechist in the parish, who later became a teacher in the parochial school. He met the woman three years earlier but he said he did not feel anything towards her that time. In his findings, Fernandez (2001) narrated that when the respondent priests were “let down” by their bishop, they met someone who, they felt, understood them well, someone who cared about them and appeared capable and willing to heal their wounds. In the case of Father Regidor, when he was having an ‘emotional crisis’ because of burnout, he found the woman as a source of comfort and happiness. He thought that this woman could ease his pains and struggles in the ministry.

“I was so much engrossed in the ministry that I seemed to have spent my energy in trying

to do my tasks as expected of me as Rector of the Missions, of the School, and as acting superintendent and what not. But, after all the enthusiasm perhaps full of adrenalin in the ministry, I started getting stressed with the tension in the Mission, with the conflict with the powers that be. I gradually felt frustrated with myself and feeling empty inside. With the rough sailing ministry, I sensed that I can no longer go on. Then, turning in to myself, I thought of giving myself a perk, some kind of comfort. Since I had no penchant for drinks, I turned to this lady in the Parish Office instead, Tess (not real name). I began to give her special treatment beyond the employee-employer relationship.”

Father Regidor admitted there was an intimate relationship between him and Tess when he was still in Flora, Apayao. This fact gives the impression that Father left the priesthood because of a woman. However, further review would reveal that his primary reason in leaving the ministry was not because of her. His relationship with Tess was only the immediate consequence of the crisis he had been going through at that time.

In the interview, Father Regidor explained that the initial meeting between him and Tess was just the usual introduction. She was introduced to him only because she was from Flora which was his next assignment area. He did not feel anything special for her. There was no attraction in the beginning. This shows that Father Regidor did not have any sexual feeling toward Tess in the beginning. The attraction and desire only developed when he was suffering burnout.

“Entering into an intimate relationship with Tess that led to our civil marriage was just a palliative cover up to fill up the deep emptiness of being burnt out in the ministry due to my neglect to nourish my close relationship with my God in prayer in my last years in the ministry. Entering into civil marriage was rather a hasty decision I had ever made at the height of my crisis, and time has proven that.”

Father Regidor described the relationship as a palliative cover-up. He mentioned that at that time he was having a spiritual crisis. His relationship with God became distant.

“I was beginning to ask God at that time what I could get with all my effort as a priest. I was trying to be happy and because of it I looked more of what I can give myself rather on what I can give God.”

Women are always associated with the resignation of priests. While in many cases, this is true (Pietkiewicz, 2016), it may not be so for others such as Father Regidor’s case. It is a long held belief that it is women who always pull the trigger, but the case of Father Regidor is different even if he eventually married the woman. In another study, Loudon & Francis (2003) stated that the biggest reason for leaving the ministry was the desire to marry, which was partly a result of loneliness. While there was indeed a feeling of loneliness, Father did not desire to marry in the first place. The relationship began not because of Father’s intention to marry but to fulfill his emotional and sexual desires. The marriage which took place after he left the ministry was the result not of desire but of confusion caused by burnout.

3.9 Fitting in: the Joys and Difficulties upon Exit

Leaving the ministry happened so fast according to Father Regidor. Father requested for a sabbatical leave which was granted immediately. But months after the sabbatical leave, he applied for an indefinite leave. After a couple of months, the wedding took place. It was a simple wedding attended only by a few people mostly from the relatives of Tess. No family member of Father Regidor was present because primarily they were not informed and consulted. They did not know that there was a wedding at all. Father admitted it was a very hasty decision.

Father acknowledged that though he realized that his exit would generate controversy especially from his family, community, and the Church, his positive attitude always kept him confident. With this positive attitude, his exit presented a feeling of joy and excitement.

3.10 The Desire to Explore

Something that excited Father Regidor after his indefinite leave was the idea of exploring. For Father the world outside the ministry was definitely a different world. He thought of learning things that were difficult to understand when he was in the ministry. Part of this desire in discovering the lay world was learning new skills by applying for other jobs.

“I went to school. I went into sales and insurance type of jobs and I went abroad to work as a company driver.”

Father Regidor tried a lot of things. He knew that there were many things to learn outside the priesthood and this idea provided him with a positive outlook after his resignation. For Father, life in the ministry presents a

one-dimensional kind of life. There was no problem about it since this single dimension is considered a holistic life. Something that comforted Father in the complicated manner of his exit was the thought of discovering things that were impossible to experience when one wears the habit. It made him happy and excited to think that he would learn other things. This idea is similar to the confession of a former priest in his own article that since his exit, he had the time to step back from the church and focus on discovering the world (Murtaf, 2017). The desire to explore and do something new is a sentiment usually felt by people who get tired of doing their work. They want to see life on the other side of the fence. This is not a permanent feeling because it is raised only when people experience problems or confusion. The idea to explore can also be led by the idea of escaping a current problematic situation. Going to a different place, doing a different job, or being with different people could temporarily remove the person with problems out of the situation. People suffering from burnout have themselves searched for some form of release and creativity and have experienced it in connection with permissive human relationships. A way out has been possible when in tolerance and rest the research persons have managed to stay and rest in a condition of 'pure being'. The healing potential of 'just being' has also been discovered in connection with situations of self-chosen creativity such as reading books and being outdoors in nature (Arman, Hammarqvist, & Rehnsfeldt, 2010).

The idea of exploring or discovering is always associated with the feeling of joy and excitement. For Father, leaving the ministry is not all sad stories, and discovering the other world is one reason to stay positive. "The decision I made to leave the priesthood was the hardest decision I've ever had to make. However, it means that I have the life I have now" (Murtaf, 2017).

3.9 A Sense of Freedom

After being exhausted with the immensity of work/load on his shoulders before his resignation, Father remembered that resigning gave him a sense of relief and freedom.

Priests are always in the limelight because of their significant role in the community. They are looked up to as models and people who have a higher moral ascendancy. McDevitt (2016) elaborated this view of priests in his article. Priests are expected to be selfless and to consider the needs of the community before their own needs and interests. The priesthood

is a fraternal brotherhood with expectations of life-long commitments of service, loyalty, and trust. The wider church membership expects priests to lead, build, and develop the community of the Church. Priests are expected to possess an attitude of altruism, holiness, and a Christ-like way-of-being. Moreover, it is expected that priests follow all the teachings and regulations of the Church. Both spoken and unspoken rules and expectations regulate priests' norms of behavior. The heavy burdens of having to be Christ-like and all-around good citizens of the world are a "two-edged sword" for priests; these generate a "set-up" for inevitable failure and a disincentive to further personal and, possibly, professional growth (McDevitt, 2016). A person who is being watched has the tendency to feel being trapped hence the desire to look for a wider space where he can be himself. This kind of attention is being enjoyed by people in the beginning. This is because this attention somehow asserts the importance of the person. People in the entertainment industry/show business enjoy this treatment but there are also a lot of people who ended up getting tired of the attention they receive. When everybody knows you, you have to be watchful of your words and actions. You cannot roam freely because people will always stick around. You feel like you are in a prison where you cannot move freely. Typically, the burned-out person's emotional resources are exhausted and he or she feels empty, trapped and at the end of the rope (Schaufeli & Bisunk, 1996).

The feeling of Father Regidor when he resigned was similar to this. According to him, he would not be afraid anymore to talk or sit with anyone because he is no longer a priest. A study about the idea of feeling imprisoned and the sense to be free explains this thought. An interpretation of the self-image seen in the data could be that one feels imprisoned by doing things and has less of an ability of 'being' in harmony with life; a being that may be a bridge to an authentic existence or 'becoming'. The innermost longing, meaning of life, will to live and life goals characterize this becoming but are for the time being hidden and forgotten by the person. A metaphor to describe the feeling of being shut in showed in the narratives of the research persons – that of a prison – is relevant. The person experiences him/herself as being caught up in his/her outer situation, which has also become a kind of mirror of his/her inner condition. One's own aims in life and will to live seem on the point of disappearing (Arman, Hammarqvist, & Rehnsfeldt, 2010). Father Regidor was initially happy because at last he felt free. He was freed from the multiple

responsibilities, freed from being put in a box, and freed from the problems associated with his role as a priest.

3.10 Hopeful of a Better Situation

Father Regidor was hopeful that everything will be alright after his resignation. Since he could no longer feel the meaning of what he was doing, he was hoping it would be different outside the ministry. This gave him hope and happiness.

“The grass is greener on the other side of the fence.”

Father’s hope of a better situation is based on his self-concept. This hopeful attitude implies the optimistic attitude of Father Regidor. He was certain of what would happen outside the ministry; in his mind he had created a picture that portrays a better life after priesthood. When people confront adversity or difficulty in their lives, they experience a variety of emotions, ranging from excitement and eagerness, to anger, anxiety, and depression. The balance among these feelings appears to relate to people’s degree of optimism or pessimism. Optimists are people who expect to have positive outcomes, even when things are difficult. This confidence should yield a mix of feelings that is relatively positive. Optimists seem intent on facing problems head-on, taking active and constructive steps to solve their problems (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001). His rich background on spirituality helped him to maintain a hopeful attitude despite the situation.

3.11 Financial Problem

The primary difficulty Father had to face was financial in nature. He thought his education background in Theology would make it easy for him to source out money for his daily needs. He admitted he was wrong.

After his resignation, his immediate concern was a place to stay. He could not go back to his hometown because they still did not know that he resigned at that time. His family was not aware of it until he sent a letter to her sister informing her about his resignation. In short his family was taken out of the picture when he decided to leave the ministry and so he could not ask help from them. He contacted a priest, a friend, and asked if he could stay in his convent. His friend-priest willingly agreed. But it did not take long for the news that an ex-priest was staying in a convent to spread. Father Regidor felt uneasy so he moved to another place. It was a clergy house where priests used

to stay when they travel to the city. Father Regidor was already married by that time so there was a point when his wife was with him in the clergy house. A priest saw them together there and commented about the fact. That moment, Father Regidor knew he had to look for a place for them to stay (not in any convent anymore).

“It was very different. When you are a priest everything is provided but it was no longer the case.”

Father Regidor and his wife moved to a boarding house in Holy Ghost Extension, a Barangay in Baguio City. They moved to that boarding house for its affordability. He realized his need for a solid source of income and his wife was feeling it too. Father Regidor understood he had to work for his family and that he could not rely on anybody for financial assistance.

After struggling to find a job, Father Regidor was accepted as a sales agent. When the pay was deemed insufficient, they moved to his wife’s province to manage the small piggery of her family. After one year in the province, Father decided to go back to the city to continue selling. His wife stayed in the province but followed him afterwards to work as a waitress in a canteen.

Though the income was not much, Father Regidor was contented but he later realized it was never enough to finance the family’s needs especially when they would have children. When everything was not working for them financially, they talked about the possibility of one of them going abroad to work. Since Tess had more chance of landing a job considering her educational background, they agreed that she would be the one to go. The plan was for Tess to work and comeback after four years. His struggle with financial matter continued when his wife got into a problem and their relationship started to break. His wife was still abroad when the relationship started to get shaky until his wife stopped sending him money. From sales, Father Regidor transferred to an insurance company.

“Sales was not my cup of tea but I had to do it because I needed to survive.”

After his work stint in the insurance company, he applied abroad as a company driver. It was all because of financial consideration. Except for those who belong to well-to-do families, priests who have left the ministry experience financial problems. Priests who left struggled to establish themselves in new areas, including life-style, career, residence, financial

security, family, and friends (Graham, 1986). From the start Father Regidor struggled for financial independence. Apparently, like many priests who have left the ministry, he had to start from nothing. Pianta (2016) wrote in his article that in Italy, between 5,000 and 7,000 priests have given up their robes. Some ex-priests re-enter lay society with a female companion, others struggle to build a new life from scratch. Father Regidor did not receive help from anyone other than his wife except on the latter part of his life where he was able to source out financial help from his siblings. This is mostly observed in the mainstream society where priests who left had to struggle for their financial freedom.

Welcome to the (complicated) world of ex-priests, those who abandoned the cassock and returned to everyday society, in some cases accompanied by a wife. It isn't easy to begin a new life and take on a new identity, to start over without ever having prepared a résumé or hunted for an apartment, especially without the support of the Church or the prospect of a generous pension from the Italian Episcopal Conference (Pianta, 2016).

3.12 Problem with Finding Work/Job (Career Problem)

The difficulty in finding the right job was related to Father Regidor's problem with financial independence. He was having problem with money partly because he struggled to find the right job or the job that pays enough. Although it came out during the series of interviews that Father Regidor learned so much from his jobs, it also appeared that he was only convinced to take these low-paying jobs because he was rejected in his other job applications.

Father Regidor is now a senior citizen at the age of sixty-two. He said many rejected him in his job application because of his age. In addition, employers do not hire him, although he is qualified because he was a former priest. Father said there is a negative image associated with being a former priest. There was one teaching job he almost landed but only to be rejected in the end because one of his resource persons was a priest who refused to recommend him when he was asked about Father Regidor's qualification. This is similar with the experience of a former priest confessed in one study: "Finding a job wasn't easy either. I tried to apply for a teaching job in several Catholic institutions, but most of them immediately turned me down. Those who did not turn me down right away did so at the last minute. It was only later on that I learned that there was actually an implicit church policy that prohibited

Catholic educational institutions from employing former priests as teachers" (Fernandez, 2001).

The biggest problem Father Regidor experienced in finding a job was the lack of qualification. This is a usual problem Pianta (2016) is describing in the following: "Today, I'm looking for a job, I'm taking English classes, and I'd like to get involved in social work with young people," he says. "I've sent out dozens of résumés, but no one has answered."

"I have my qualifications and the world/outside has its own qualifications. The problem was my qualifications as a former priest, although I excelled with it, were not congruent to the qualifications of the world. I don't have teaching documents. In paper, I am just a college-degree holder."

Father worked in sales and insurance companies. He managed his parent-in-laws' small-scale piggery business for a whole year and worked abroad as a company driver after securing an NC II in driving. Next, he had a part-time job in teaching English language proficiency. This problem of finding a teaching-career which is Father Regidor's career preference after priesthood led him to take Professional Education in one of the universities in the region and to enroll in Master's Degree in Religious Studies. Father knew he had to adjust to reality.

This employment experience of Father Regidor fits the report of Time (1969). "As if the emotional wrench of leaving the priesthood were not enough, most former Roman Catholic priests face the harrowing task of finding a new job. Even so, a survey conducted by The Gallagher Presidents' Report shows that most of the 231 former priests interviewed had found work within two months. Half of the priests, reported the weekly newsletter for executives, went to work in the business world. They became salesmen, management trainees, office managers, systems engineers, journalists, admen, economists and personnel directors." When Father Regidor could not land a job in the teaching profession, he became a salesman.

Some have "converted" to being social workers, some have jobs in factories and others have reinvented themselves as entrepreneurs or salesmen or high school teachers. Many others are desperately seeking work (Pianta, 2016).

Father was optimistic of the future upon his exit because he thought that his education and training in the seminary and priesthood would land him immediately on jobs such as teaching. In the country,

former seminarians and priests ended up pursuing teaching as their career. Father was not expecting that it would be difficult for him to get a teaching job. He realized later that he did not have documents or certificates to prove his qualifications for the job. He may be qualified intellectually but his training and education do not fit the desired job. Often trained mostly in theology, ex-priests hardly have the ideal background for civilian careers (Time, 1969).

3.13 Problem with Social Relationship

When he left ministry, Father noticed he was losing friends and he could not exactly point out the reasons. He had some explanations in his mind but chose to be silent about it. Studies would confirm that associations of cross out the names of those who leave the ministry. This is related to the study about the social relationship of former priests. A small number of sociologists who have conducted qualitative studies with former members of charismatic groups conclude that the psychological symptoms experienced by some former members reflect a predictable response of grief or distress resulting from the loss of a social bond (Coates, 2009). Father also became selective with his contacts after he left the ministry. There was a feeling of shame on his part. This confirms the findings of Coates (2009) whose participants in his study described difficulties fitting into society and explained how they felt 'out of place' in the period immediately after leaving the group.

Aside from the unusual treatment he received from his former fellow priests, Father Regidor was also having problems with people who knew his background. He said there are people who have judgmental of priests who left. This observation corroborates the experience of many priests who abandoned their priesthood.

“Some people look at me with condemnation. They were looking down on me. They don't tell me about it but I can feel it the way they look at me.”

With this, Father admitted, he preferred being with people who do not know him. In one study many participants said that leaving the priesthood was associated with social stigma, and added that members of a religious order usually associated those who left with an evil act, backslide, or betrayal (Pietkiewicz, 2016). The negative view of the people is difficult to deal with. The vast majority felt, singly or as a group that they had been and continue to be the objects of a number of injustices (Weber & Wheaton, 1988). People always have an understanding that the former priest did something unworthy of holiness. A study

says that a kind of social stigma comes with the socially undesirable role change, with the implication that the individual has somehow failed at the previous “good” role. Under those circumstances people may feel that such role changes as divorce for example, “connotes failure, irresponsibility, and a threat to the basic social system.” She acknowledges that the combination of an exiter's presentation of self after a role exit and society's reaction to that exit makes the adaptation process either more difficult or easier for the individual. It adds that “to lose that son means an acute humiliation, friends' looking away, neighbors and wagging their heads” (Angmor, 2008). This was the initial struggle of Father Regidor after his exit in the priesthood. The adjustment period was tough because he was confused. The kind of feelings and coping mechanisms that exiters experience in the weeks and months after making the exit are highly dependent on how significant others react to the exit (Pietkiewicz, 2016).

Father Regidor's family was apprehensive in his decision to become a priest at the time he was planning to enter the seminary. He was the son who was expected to carry the family's name but after he explained himself, his parents agreed. When the family learned of his withdrawal from the priesthood, his family, particularly his sisters, did not take it well. He narrated that one of his sisters was infuriated upon learning of his withdrawal and especially the immediate marriage. It was through letter that he informed his sister. When the response letter came, he could clearly imagine how furious his sister was to the point that she disowned him as a brother. A younger sister was also condemning his wife so that one time when this sister visited, his wife got severe scolding from her. His wife would later on comment that his sister said words about her that dogs could not even swallow. It was a very difficult transition to the lay world for Father Regidor. The effects of transitions on the lives of individuals go beyond their own lives and roles, as those transitions can also trigger other transitions of significant people connected to the person in transition. Those people would include their families, friends, colleagues, helpers, and such similar people in their lives (Angmor, 2008).

Father Regidor's town folks were not also aware of his resignation and marriage. According to Father, it was only publicly announced when, during an ordination of another priest in the same town, his absence was noticed. It was a dramatic coincidence because when Father Regidor was ordained, this newly ordained priest who was still a boy at the time of Father

Regidor's ordination, was sitting in front of the church where he witnessed the entire ordination celebration and where he got his inspiration to pursue priesthood. And now during his own ordination, it was publicly announced that Father Regidor has already left the ministry and gotten married. These turns of events limited the association of Father with his family and his community. It made him realize that he has only himself to lean on.

"I need to be independent."

The problem with social relationship did not concern him that much compared to financial stability and career. Father Regidor expected this treatment from others and it helped him process his response to it. It is difficult to change the perspective of people towards former priests. Social relationship is a vital aspect in the adjustment of the former priests in fitting in the world and in developing a productive lay life. A positive relationship with others would increase the confidence of priests and prevent further confusion or loneliness.

3.14 Facing the Challenges of Daily Life along with the Shadow of the Past

3.14.1 Independent Attitude and Optimism

Father Regidor faced many challenges in fitting into the secular world but with his strong determination to survive, he welcomed every challenge that came his way. In sales, he joined personality-development seminars, leadership trainings, and got to listen to inspirational tapes provided by the company. His training and experiences in sales gave his morale a boost.

"Little by little I was coming out from my confinement. Before I always thought the reaction of people with by background. I felt ashamed. I did not mingle that often. I did not want to go out with people I know. It took a year. Sales helped me to overcome my fears. I took it as the hand of God helping me."

Father Regidor attributed this independence both to his experience at home and to his training as a seminarian and a priest. He said that being alone as a parish priest he decided for himself, for the parish, and for the community. There was no one else to rely on.

"I got my independent attitude from home. I got it from priesthood –as parish priest, as administrator."

When he was a child, Father said, he was tasked to take care his younger siblings when his parents went

to the farm/work. He said he cooked for his siblings, fed them, and acted as their guardian in the house in the absence of their parents.

"If everything was provided when I was a kid, if everything was given in a silver-platter, perhaps I could not survive my life after my exit from priesthood. I might have turned into a drunkard."

Dealing with the challenges of daily life requires strength especially for someone who is undergoing a major life transition. From the time of the exit, a former priest faces needs to overcome the bigger difficulties in adjusting to the transition period. In this case, it was the optimism and independent attitude of Father Regidor that kept him moving. These findings provided the first indication that optimists do not use just problem-centered coping. They also use a variety of emotion-focused coping techniques, including striving to accept the reality of difficult situations and putting the situations in the best possible light (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 2001).

Independence can be understood as self-reliance. The positive aspect of this attitude is the resilience to accomplish a goal without relying so much on outside help. In this manner, the person will try to improve or develop himself to accomplish a certain goal. The goal of Father Regidor at the time he was building a new life was to secure a job to support his family. When he was rejected in his earlier teaching job applications, he did not give up or ask assistance from others. He believed that, sooner or later, he could land one. This reflects optimism and independence. There is a problem though in being self-reliant. Aside from the tendency to be self-centered it can lead one to become unrealistic. The task of developing independence is seeing oneself as competent and capable of taking care of everyday goals and activities. It has special significance and importance as one makes the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but it is a process that has significance during all periods of transition or change. The goals and tasks of each transition represent new or different activities that need managing, and developing independence requires learning how to manage them and maintain important aspects of the self in a changing environment (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001).

3.15 Change of Perspective

To adjust and survive, Father had to change his perspective in life. He realized this during the later part of his transition period up to the present. After

he joined a group called Alcoholic Anonymous (AA), this concept of perspective change became even made clearer for Father Regidor.

“I accepted that I’m no longer a priest. Do not expect any special treatment. You’re only one of them.”

This orientation was a product of his determination to survive. He was no longer relying on the ministry or on any friend. His relationship with his family had also gone sour. Father instilled in his mind that he had to do whatever it takes to survive. The first thing to fix was the way he saw himself. He had to remember that he was no longer a priest whom people ask for guidance or consult. He was no longer in the ministry where he is given special attention. Adjusting during the transition and eventually surviving as a lay requires a changed mental orientation. This means that a former priest must not be ashamed to take jobs that are seemingly not priestly. Teaching can be readily seen as a former priest’s new career, but being in sales may not be. In his first years in sales, Father had to endure some negative reactions from people who know him.

“I felt that many people were talking about me (being in sales) but I didn’t mind them anymore.”

During his work in the insurance company, they had to go at SM Mall in Baguio to pitch sales to people. He said he no longer had the fear of being seen by people who know him. In fact, he said, he realized it was better to talk to people he knows in order to have a higher sales percentage.

“In the ministry you’re being looked up to but outside you have to understand you’re only one of them.”

This orientation which was also reiterated in his trainings in the sales industry carried Father from the many difficulties he encountered as an ex-priest trying to survive in the world. There are many ways a former priest is not different from the others. People who think they are special may expect a higher regard or treatment from others and failure to receive it produces disappointment and stress. This can cause stress. For Father Regidor, considering himself as not different made him confident to take any job as long as it was decent and legal. Such an attitude took away the shame or fear of being recognized. Changing one’s perspective is similar to the attitude of acceptance of the real situation and

mindfulness of the reality. Mindfulness thus involves the capacity to be aware of internal and external events and occurrences as phenomena, “rather than as the objects of a conceptually constructed world.” Because mindfulness permits an immediacy of direct contact with events as they occur, without the overlay of discriminative, categorical, and habitual thought, consciousness takes on a clarity and freshness that permits more flexible, more objectively informed psychological and behavioral responses (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). It is to be grounded with reality where one acknowledges that he is in a difficult situation and that he must do something to surpass the situation. Acceptance implies a restructuring of one’s experience so as to come to grips with the reality of the situation that one confronts. Acceptance thus may involve a deeper set of processes, in which the person actively works through the experience, attempting to integrate it into an evolving worldview (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001). Mindfulness can be seen as part of a long-standing tradition in the field that recognizes the adaptive value in bringing consciousness to bear on subjective experience, behavior, and the immediate environment (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Former priests must learn to separate their previous life, their past from the present situation. Failure to do so will disappoint because of unmet expectations.

3.16 The Challenges of Marital Life

It is also imperative to understand how Father Regidor handled his marital life. From the time of the wedding, he and his wife had to transfer from one boarding house to another due to financial considerations. It was the same reason why they decided that Tess, his wife, would work overseas. There was a constant communication between him and his wife since she left, but after three years abroad, Tess stopped sending financial assistance to Father because of a misunderstanding. Father said, it started when his wife was convinced to be a guarantor to a loan by co-worker. That co-worker, a fellow OFW, according to Tess moved to another place without telling anything leaving Tess to settle the loan. Father Regidor relates:

“After over two and a half years of work abroad, according to her, she was caught in an unfortunate situation wherein, as a guarantor of a loan of an acquaintance from Laguna but also working in the same country, she had to pay the loan plus the interests, as her friend managed to escape to Spain leaving my wife to shoulder her

obligation. As the years went by, her attitude progressively changed. She became demanding and made her own decisions without consulting or even informing me, especially regarding money matters. By the time she started paying her obligation as guarantor of that loan, she stopped sending me money. With the thought of helping her out and myself in that situation, I also decided to go to Saudi Arabia as a company driver for two years. While in Saudi, we had no clear communication, only text but seldom, as there is no communication network system between Arab nations and Israel”.

Since that time, their communication was few and far between. The climax of this misunderstanding was concluded 10 years after when, through a text message, Tess somehow gave a hint of ending their marital relationship.

“Since my wife left for Israel last 2003, she never came home, except, for the first time, in December of 2010, for a scheduled wedding of her younger brother. But, I was in Saudi Arabia by that time. The second time she came home for vacation was last December 2012, for the wedding of another younger brother of hers. Upon arrival, she went straight from Manila to their home in Flora, Apayao. At the end of that day, I then concluded that she was just being consistent – that she had always been deciding as if she had no husband at all. I texted her back regarding my realization - that she was just being consistent - and that her decision to let me go was not at all surprising to me. As she said at the end of her text, “Good Luck”, so did I. With that, she returned back to Israel, I do believe towards the end of January. That was the end of our communication ever.”

One year later Father Regidor filed for annulment. His wife did not want to sign the court letter the first time it was sent to her through her family but when the court made another summons, she finally signed. In Father Regidor’s words, the marriage failed. Today, he is still waiting for the court decision. Father Regidor gave his reflection on his marriage.

“I do not blame her for her decision to release me. From the very start, I married her not so much because I loved her and to raise a family with her, but because I was just thinking more of myself, my emotional needs at that time. It was rather a selfish motive on my part to have rashly

decided to marry her. I was not financially ready for a family life, much more psychologically. For all the years of our marriage, we never really had quality bonding time together as husband and wife..”

The series of interviews conducted with Father Regidor revealed that this attitude shown in his reflection was not the attitude he had when their marriage was on the rock. Father admitted that one big reason for the marriage to fail was his unpreparedness for marital life. When he married Tess, his mind was not clear. He needed only companionship to satisfy his emotional and sexual desires fueled by the burnout feeling he had at that time. Also, he mentioned that he and his wife did not have any quality time together. When they were staying at the boarding house, his brother-in-law was with them. Afterwards, her wife flew abroad for work.

Being self-centered may have something to do with the failure of the marriage. Self-centeredness is being too focused on oneself without much regard for others. Father Regidor may have developed this attitude by serving as administrator in different institutions and also by being a parish priest. As an administrator and priest, people consulted his views and his opinions were highly regarded by the parishioners. There are many people who, when they are used to being the decision-makers, tend to feel they are always right. When something goes wrong, they blame others for the mistake. In the case of their misunderstanding, it was his wife who was to be blamed or who was wrong. There was less effort from Father Regidor’s side to fix their marital problem because he was expecting his wife to make the move. Long before the annulment case was filed, the marriage has died for Father.

The marital experience of Father Regidor finds similarity with the experience of one of the priests interviewed by Fernandez. “Being married isn’t easy. I found that out immediately, that is, as soon as I started living with my wife. Our process of adjustment was difficult” (Fernandez, 2001). Father Regidor said that as a priest he was “not trained” for marriage which means he was not prepared for it. While many former priests found success in their married life, some, like Father Regidor, are left with failure. Father Regidor had no immediate response to save the marriage other than followed his pride and waited for what was going to happen. Noticeable also was the lack or absence of social support that could have given the marriage a second chance.

3.17 Living with Humility

Father Regidor acknowledged that at one point in his life he was full of pride. This could be understood in relation to his background as a priest. He graduated high school with flying colors. When he was in the seminary he would be recognized as one of the bright students. His experience as a priest who was obeyed and consulted by parishioners strengthened his belief that he is able to deal with everything. This made him think that he was somehow better than the others in many aspects.

His attitude when he left the priesthood and got married showed this pride. He decided to exit from the ministry and got married without consulting his family or other people. His failure to consult others may indicate an attitude of belittling the capacity of others and focusing too much on himself. “Why would I consult someone that is less intellectual? My decision is right because this is what I believe is right.” This proud attitude can also be noticed in how father initially saw his future as a lay.

“Everything will be solved. I could land a job easily with my background”

When he was invited to a group that aims to help people with problems to cope, he had a second thought and asked why he would listen to a lay when he knows the bible and spirituality better. However, when Father Regidor was finally convinced to join, he said it was the group that made him become open-minded and humble. Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) did a lot of things to him as he confessed. Humility was the best lesson he learned. He informed the writer that if the request to make him respondent was prior to his membership in the group, he would have rejected it. Before, he believed that it would make him less if people will know of his life experiences. After his involvement in AA, everything opened up. Everything became clear to Father which means he had to accept that he is one of the many.

Father Regidor joined AA one year after he came back from working abroad. He was taking a part-time job as a teacher in one school when he was invited by a member. First, he was apprehensive because he doubted the capability of the group. But once he joined out of curiosity, he immediately felt the positive impact.

From that time on he was regularly joining the group. AA is composed of 12 steps of spiritual recovery. Father described it as a sharing of experiences of people who

have had trouble in the past. His experience in AA made him become more open to others. Before he was adamant to share his life experiences but after AA, he would gladly share it to those who are willing to listen.

“The devil wants you to keep secret. If you won’t open up-it will explode.”

His membership in AA made him more grounded in reality. One of the ways that people make sense of potentially devastating experiences is by telling the story of the experience. Human beings are storytellers. We use stories to make sense of experience, to bring order to perceptions and to attach ourselves to various sources of meaning (King, Scollon, Ramsey & Williams, 2000). Humility is a virtue commonly preached by priests on homilies/sermons but it is not always practiced by those who preach them. The high regard for priests by ordinary people can be taken for granted. Because of the long experience of priests with being given special treatments, it is possible that they develop a sense of pride. The image of priests among many parishioners is comparable to that of Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk self-understanding when he was fourteen and aspiring to be a priest. At that time he thought that a priest dealt with sacred matters in a sacred language. He was versed in the mysteries of the faith. He was holy by the mere fact of being a priest. He was highly educated and wise, and had unquestioned authority in every facet of the parish.

In discovering the virtue of humility, Father learned to become more open and in doing so, he would share his stories to other people who were willing to listen. He learned to laugh at his past experience, made it as a source of his strength and wisdom, and would see himself as an ordinary person like others. Telling a story that conveys one’s struggle with a life problem—in which the person portrays him or herself as seriously challenged by life and struggling to make sense of it all—is associated with the subjective sense that one has grown, as well as with enhanced ED (ego development) (King, Scollon, Ramsey & Williams, 2000). Humility is a source of contentment and happiness. These feelings radiate on Father Regidor’s face as observed in the entire conduct of interview.

3.18 Retooling the Skills

Father Regidor still sees financial stability as his biggest concern today. He has a limited source of income and for him this problem can only be solved when he acquires the right skills to land a job. Currently, he

does not have appropriate documents and certificates that speak of his qualification. Also, his old age makes it harder for him to get hired especially in those jobs that require physical strength/fitness.

“I have to retool my skills. I have to acquire skills. Retool myself with other skills for me to be qualified in the real world”

In doing this, Father went back to school. He took up Professional Education to qualify him in teaching. He is currently enrolled in a Master’s Degree study. He took up also NC II in driving.

“I have to retool my skills like finishing my master’s degree. I have to learn and unlearn so that I can fit into the world.”

Father Regidor is currently living with his nieces and acting as guardian to them. When he had a regular job he would take care of the bills and part of his nieces’ allowance. When he lost his part-time job, it was the parents of his nieces who had to pay the bills for the boarding house and other payables. Although he has problems financially, the optimism of Father Regidor was very much evident.

Retooling skills means Father had to continue his study and/or to undergo training to acquire the knowledge necessary for the teaching job. He needed to have additional knowledge and skills to land a job that could greatly help him become established. His long years of study in the seminary was not enough even with his experience as a parish priest handling multiple jobs. There were no certificates that could speak of these achievements.

Returning to school as an example of retooling is necessary for people who take another job for a career. It is advisable for people who want to change career to consider the required skill and knowledge necessary for the desired job. Physical fitness must also be given consideration. Father Regidor would explain that age was a big factor for many institutions in hiring job applicants. Priests who leave the ministry cannot expect to land a job easily. The skills required in the priesthood differ from those required in the secular world. The researcher calls this ‘wrong expectation.’ One creates a high expectation of himself only to be rejected in the process because of the mismatch between the applicant’s training and the job requirement. Former priests who want to establish a new career must either go back to school or undergo training and development that fit the job description.

3.19 Keeping Connected with God

Father Regidor kept his prayer life intact after he left

the ministry. In fact, according to him, prayer has more meaning to him now than before. Aside from prayer, Father continues to go to the church. He said he only left the ministry not his faith. His connection with God keeps him strong with life’s daily challenges. Prayer has become more meaningful because he now understands better why he is praying and what he is praying for. Prayer is not only an obligation but a venue to talk to God about all his experiences as a former priest.

“I pray but it was no longer the same thorough schedule. I go to the mass. I maintain the Christian obligation. I was invited to become a pastor for other faith practices but I cannot give up my faith.”

A person who experiences difficulties in life, like Father, turns to prayer as a source of strength. The conversation with God, as prayer is defined as a communication, becomes more intimate and personal. Prayer could be considered the “core of faith” and is seen by many as a helpful coping strategy. People have reported that praying and having faith in God are the strategies that they use most frequently to cope with personal problems (Bade & Cook, 2008). Engaging in prayer and holding positive attitudes toward religion are empirically associated with personal wellbeing, health, and the relief of distress (Murray, 2008).

Father Regidor explained that his relationship with God became distant because his prayer life deteriorated. Prayer keeps the connection of a person with God. People who do not communicate with others become distant to one another and it signals the start of breaking up. Baesler (2003) considered prayer as a type of spiritual communication between the believer and God. Prayer can involve several types of communication processes, such as talking, listening, and dialoguing. Some of these processes are amenable to empirical investigation (e.g., listening to a sacred scripture, speaking aloud to God). Baesler refers to active forms of prayer, characterized by talking, listening, and dialogue (Dein & Littlewood, 2008). Prayer, which is often considered the vehicle to talk with God and nourish one’s relationship with God, has been identified as important to integrate in mental health services with priests. Health practitioners can explore with priests how prayer and their relationship with God can serve as a coping mechanism during times of stress and to buffer against more severe psychopathology (Isacco, 2015.) A priest without a prayer life becomes more vulnerable to the problems of the ministry. Without prayer and communication with God, the priest turns to his own strength. For

their own people and for the whole people of God priests have a duty to pray and offer sacrifice, realizing what they are doing and imitating what they are handling; and far from being held back by their apostolic cares, dangers and tribulations, by these very means they should rise to greater heights of sanctity (Daly, 2016). The Christian way of life, the Christian path to glory, is not conventional. Our glory is gained the same way Jesus gained His. We serve. In fact, we serve sacrificially. We acknowledge our dependence on God and live with an appreciation for being dependent. When we say, "Give God the glory," we say it because that is where it belongs. If we are humble enough to acknowledge this dependence, we will find our worth in God (Priest, 2010).

3.20 View on Priesthood

How one looks at the priesthood may differ depending on one's experience. The perspective of Father Regidor on the priesthood was certainly a product of his experiences in the seminary, priesthood, his struggles as a lay, and his experiences after his adjustment in his transition period. Father said that the definition of priesthood in the seminary is theoretical and it changes once a priest begins his active duty or once a priest goes out of the seminary.

"Priesthood is announcing the good news and denouncing what is not. It is witnessing to what you're saying. As a priest, you lead the community into prayer. As a prophet, it's announcing and denouncing. As king you have to serve."

Father Regidor's stated that a priest must live according to what he preaches. His spirituality is grounded in what is understood as his ontological status as a priest of the Church. Because of his power to consecrate, forgive, and anoint, comes the responsibility to lead a holy life worthy of his presbyteral status (Gozzens, 2000).

"I realized that all these three roles of a priest are entwined into one. They are intertwined, rolled into one".

Father Regidor sees the life of Jesus as an embodiment of true priesthood. Jesus announced the good news and denounced the bad. In doing so he made a lot of enemies and friends started to turn away from him or even against him. Only few true friends would remain on a person's side in times of difficulties. When Father Regidor was busy fighting against illegal logging, illegal gambling, and other illegalities taking place

in his parish, many parishioners were taking his side. However when influential people like the governor and the mayor complained, Father noticed he was losing support from the parishioners. For Father, a priest must perform these tasks because it is part of denouncing the bad news. It is part of who he is. Grounded in the mystery of grace, priests are both men of hope and men without illusions. In the words of Gozzens (2000), priesthood is his truth, the truth discovered in responding to the call of the Church and to the call of God's spirit rising from the depths of his soul. It is his vocation. It is what he is and what he does.

"Preaching is easy but witnessing is not. The lifestyle of a priest must be consistent to what he preaches. If you are preaching about poverty make sure it fits your lifestyle"

Father Regidor's view of the priest and priesthood finds resonance in the reflections of famous theologians. The priest must bear witness and make his mission credible by his life, not merely by exercising his powers. He is not only the liturgical functionary, but the prophet. He is the real *apostolos*, who is sent and must give testimony. And however much it refers to the testimony of Christ, this testimony is always that of one's own life. In the Catholic priest- who is not merely liturgical functionary, but apostle, prophet, envoy, recruiter, missionary – there lies necessarily a tendency towards what is institutionally established and –in the religious life – concretely organized (Rahner, 1973). People rely on the priest to live and proclaim the truth. The truth is not only proclaimed in homilies, it is lived in the daily life of a priest. The priest is confronted with different challenges wherever he is. While the urban setting presents a different set of challenges for a priest, the rural areas present another. People in the rural areas are people who want to see a priest that is real like them. They want a priest they can talk to, share their thoughts with and someone who can speak for them. Without a doubt, the priest must thoroughly know he is called to holiness to the point of becoming a source of encouragement and inspiration to all on the road to Christian wholeness (Häring, 1996).

3.21 View of the Future

3.21.1 Hopeful/Optimistic

Despite all the struggles that Father Regidor had to deal with, he remained the optimist that he is. The author observed the jovial personality of Father as the interviews were conducted. He would laugh often in

sharing his experiences without any hint of bitterness. It shows how he had accepted the past and learned to transform it as an experience to ponder on. Sometimes he would ask if his decision to leave was right but in the end, he would consider it as the will of God. His aura displays a life full of spirit. His financial struggle does not prevent him from appreciating life and looking forward to the future with hope. Father Regidor has two things in mind when asked about his views on the future.

“I could fit into the world but I feel I don’t belong. I think I’ll feel happy to go back. I compare myself to the Prodigal Son. I still want to go back. This all depend to the decision of the bishop”

It was surprising to know that he would like to go back to the priesthood. According to him, he was not yet laicized which means he is still a priest as far as Rome is concerned. Father Regidor acknowledged that there is still a calling from within telling him to go back. This is his first priority if the annulment decision favors it.

“If the marriage is annulled, I’ll try to go back. It’s always good to go back home. It’s all up to God.”

This decision to go back affirms the same sentiment shared by a number of former priests who expressed a desire to go back. One study participant of Fernandez (2001) narrated his desire to go back to the priesthood years after he left. This thought was not even a secret to his wife and on her deathbed, she encouraged the former priest to go back. He then applied to the Eastern Church to accept him as a priest.

Considering the number of years priests had to stay in the seminary and convent, it is possible that their mindset or orientation is directed towards convent life. Priests are formed to live a life that is different from other vocations. This implies that even if a priest leaves the seminary, there might still be that longing to go back to this. Like other priests who resigned, Father Regidor admitted he misses priesthood but he is fully aware that this is all up to God.

Father has an alternative plan if his first plan does not push through. This shows his positive attitude that no matter what happens he is always ready to take the challenge.

“If the bishop decides on the contrary, I’ll find my place in the world. I’ll find ways to serve in other ways.”

Father maintained a positive outlook in life. At present he said he stays with two nieces taking up college and acting as their guardian. If the initial plan will not happen he has still another plan and either way, Father thinks, he will do well. Asked what motivates him, he says:

“I still have something to contribute.”

4. Conclusion

This research has studied five significant aspects of the life of a former priest in order to partly understand his life as a lay that includes the challenges he faces. These aspects are the reasons for his exit, the joys and difficulties after leaving the priesthood, how he faced the challenges of daily life along with the shadow of his past, his definition of priesthood, and how he sees his future. The author attempted to describe and present these phases of his life as faithfully as possible to the participant’s views.

The primary reason for Father Regidor’s leaving the priesthood is the experience of burnout. There are many causes of burnout. In the case of Father Regidor it is because of the multiple functions accumulated since the start of his ministry, the various responsibilities has to be fulfilled simultaneously, and the exhaustion he experienced in his ministry in the far flung areas. Burnout resulted in crisis for Father Regidor. His prayer life waned. He was experiencing emotional crisis. To find happiness and comfort for himself, he “turned” to a woman.

The nature of the priest’s departure from the ministry says something about the manner of his transition into lay life. The decision to leave the ministry was Father Regidor’s decision hence it is understood that is choice to leave gave him joy. For Father Regidor it is a joy to explore the world since this cannot be done if he remains in the ministry. Leaving the ministry provided Father Regidor a sense of freedom. Freedom is always associated with the feeling of relief and happiness. Father Regidor, felt trapped inside and the departure offered an experience of freedom. Father is hopeful for a better situation. Along with joys of leaving, Father experienced challenges such as financial difficulties. Most years of Father Regidor’s life after his transition was trying to establish financial independence. He had also difficulty in establishing a career. As a result, he tried other jobs such as being a sales agent, an insurance agent, company driver, and as a part-time English teacher. These are problems shared by other former priests. There was also the problem of Father Regidor’s social relationship. Some people who know

Father Regidor's background (leaving the priesthood) judge him because his decision to leave is viewed by many as a betrayal of something good and holy.

This study also attempted to understand how Father Regidor faced the challenges of his daily life with his background as a former priest. In the midst of all his struggles, Father remained resilient. Father relied on his independence and optimism in facing the challenges. Without sufficient income, he accepted different jobs and his self-reliance and optimism kept him motivated to live his life productively. In facing the challenges, he had to change his perspective by accepting the reality that he was no longer a priest therefore he needed to adjust to the reality of the new situation. Father Regidor shared about his marital life. The marriage failed because of his failure to prepare himself for the responsibility. His mind and heart was not dedicated to marriage and it took him a decade before finally ending it by filing an annulment case.

Humility taught Father to accept his past that led him to becoming open about his background. It was a big help for him because it gave him relief and freedom. He learned to share his experiences to others and by doing so he let go of the fears and worries of being an ex-priest. Retooling himself was another way for Father Regidor to face his life's challenges. He knew that there is only a slim chance of surviving financially without learning new skills and knowledge to fit in the world.

The life of the former priest is not conventional considering his background as a priest. Priesthood is commonly viewed as a special vocation because of the priests' role as representatives of Christ and preachers of the word of God. The country is a predominantly Catholic and this view has a great impact on how the community reacts to priests leaving the ministry. Fitting into the lay community after the exit from priesthood is not easy for former priests. The reason for the exit, the attitude of the community, and the personal character of the former priest will dictate their survival in the lay community. The life of a Father Regidor is full of challenges especially at the time of his leaving. However, he was able to weather the storm and survive because of his resiliency, determination, flexibility, open-mindedness, and his experience.

Father Regidor's adjustment during the transition period was difficult because he was not grounded in reality of the world. He had expectations that did not materialize because he had a different grasp of the

lay's world. Though full of struggles, Father Regidor's life is not a life of regret. He values the learning or wisdom he acquired from these experiences. They were not useless.

4.1 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on the insights drawn from Father Regidor's life experience as a priest who happened to leave the ministry:

1. Priests should take regular breaks. The Church must design interesting and fruitful programs for priests. The Church should encourage active priests to take advantage of their sabbatical leave to take a rest or to be re-energized in their mind and body. Ministerial work is heavy because priests have to take multiple responsibilities.
2. The Church should develop an intensive pastoral counseling program specifically for the priests. Some priests may find it hard to cope with the stress associated with fulfilling their role as priests. It is imperative that seminaries, in preparing future priests, to exert more effort to develop environments that encourage disclosures of painful life experiences that can lead to healing and effective pastoral care. Seminary formation needs to address the realities of their own psychological and spiritual challenges so as to be able to form seminarians by example.
3. Upon exit, it is recommended for former priests to join social or support groups. A social group can provide support for the ex-priest in his adjustment process. Transition-generated surprises are addressed through the sense-making process.
4. Ex-priests should consult a counselor or a trusted mentor. A priest needs to re-orient himself psychologically, emotionally, and mentally to fit the new environment.
5. Former priests must retool their skills. This is part of the reorientation process. If a former priest relies on his previous knowledge and skills, it would be difficult for him to be hired or to excel in his job.
6. Resigned priests must keep their prayer life active. Faith gives strength to a former priest to cope with the challenges of the secular life.
7. It is advisable for the Church to show former priests an attitude of belongingness even after the priest left the ministry. The 'cold treatment' attitude of the church towards abandoning priests

affects how the society views them. Ex-priests can be productive even outside the ministry.

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