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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“YOU CAN TAKE ON AS MUCH AS YOU WANT”:  
WHY U.S. CATHOLIC PRIESTS FIND RETIREMENT SO SATISFYING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

BY  
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY, 1997

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## DEDICATION

To my mother and father for their relentless support

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## ABSTRACT

This study rebuts the popular image of retired Roman Catholic priests as sad, lonely men. The overwhelming majority of the twelve retired priests I interviewed in two Midwestern dioceses reported being very satisfied with their lives as retirees. I found that they have such satisfying retirements because: 1) dioceses have taken steps to make retirement a positive experience for their priests, 2) the shortage of priests has put retired priests into a good position for bargaining for work, enabling them to be very selective about which tasks associated with being a priest they will agree to do, and 3) the constraints of celibacy do not prevent retired priests from finding the social support they need, with some even negotiating and maintaining intimate friendships with unmarried women. I conclude that, in comparison to the average American worker, retired priests have enviable work lives. I then explore the implications of these findings for policies directed toward making retirement a more satisfying experience for the general population.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Father McKenzie,  
writing the words of a sermon  
that no-one will hear,  
No-one comes near.  
Look at him working,  
darning his socks in the night  
when there's nobody there,  
What does he care?

All the lonely people,  
where do they all come from?  
All the lonely people,  
where do they all belong?

-Paul McCartney and John Lennon,  
"Elanor Rigby", 1966  
(Aldridge 1969)

The image of the priest in the Beatles song "Elanor Rigby" is a popular one, with Fr. McKenzie a lonely man working tirelessly for no one and ultimately nothing. Elanor Rigby, one of his unmarried parishioners, lives a lonely and tragic existence as well. Upon her death, the Beatles lament, "No-one was saved". Linking these two pitiable lives seemed natural. Portraying them both as retired might have conjured up an even more powerful image of loneliness and despair. Unneeded and all alone, we can only imagine their misery intensifying with retirement.



While being alone need not result in loneliness, for men especially, one does often accompany the other. Married men and women both consistently report higher levels of satisfaction with their lives than do those who never married or who are separated, divorced or widowed. Among those who never married, men are relatively less satisfied than women (as reported in Collins & Coltrane 1995). One would expect that retired Roman Catholic priests, precluded from marrying by their vows, would report less satisfaction as well. To most, celibacy and loneliness are inextricably linked.

The reports of satisfaction among the retired priests I interviewed contradict these images and expectations. With the exception of only one priest, all of the priests described their retirement as good to ideal. This finding surprised me. I entered this project expecting reports of misery and regret, tempered only by their wishes not to paint an unflattering picture of the Catholic Church. When their reports contradicted my expectations, I set out to explain why they experienced such satisfying retirements.

While all but one reported being satisfied with his retirement, having a good retirement meant different things to each priest. For some it meant escaping the stress of being a pastor. For others, it meant having enough to do to remain occupied. With only one exception, they all negotiated work associated with their pre-retirement assignments. Priests retiring from pastoral and administrative posts found plenty of work in their chosen fields, often having to decline some requests. On the other hand, priests who retired from universities, including the dissatisfied one, did not find as much work as they desired. They also differed in how much and what kind of social support they wanted. They found a variety of living and working arrangements that met their social needs, with two of them

negotiating retirements with women that on the surface clashed with my preconceived notions of what a celibate life should look like.

Based on interviews with twelve retired priests in the Midwest, I contend that three factors account for priests finding retirement satisfying. First, in the case of retired diocesan priests, their dioceses took steps that affected both their attitudes toward and their status in retirement. Second, the shortage of priests has put retired priests into a good bargaining position for negotiating their work lives, enabling them to pick and choose which tasks associated with being a priest they will agree to do. Finally, the constraints of celibacy do not prevent retired priests from finding the social support they desire, negotiating and maintaining ties to their families and intimate friendships with others, including unmarried women.

To support my argument, I first review how retirement became an issue in the church and how dioceses responded to its challenges better than institutions like universities. Next, I discuss what effects the shortage of priests has had on the retired priests' work lives. I then describe how priests negotiate and manage to have the social support aging persons need, describing the living and working arrangements they make, with an emphasis on two priests who have primary relationships with women that circumvent the dictates of celibacy.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

I became interested in the experiences of retired priests when a priest friend began his retirement three years ago. His remarks at the time gave me the impression that the image of Fr. McKenzie working alone tirelessly was an accurate one. He indicated that due to the increased demand for his services caused by the shortage of priests, he expected to get no rest or respite from his duties even when his health began to fail him. After he did retire, I interviewed him and another retired priest in the diocese and began to suspect that both the Fr. McKenzie image and his earlier remarks had misled me. I decided to expand my study to investigate how typical those two priests' experiences were.

A wide variety of retired priests exist and their experiences differ along many dimensions. For example, they differ in the type of work they do and their superiors. Some work in diocesan parishes and are answerable to bishops and cardinals, while others work as professors in universities and are answerable to their deans, department heads, and religious orders' leaders. They differ in where they decide to retire as well. Some retire into parishes, some into private homes, some into communal residences, and others into institutions for the elderly. Even among diocesan priests, differences exist. Archdioceses are much larger and are often located in large urban centers that offer the

priests retiring there different options than those retiring in less urbanized dioceses.

Because of this variety, I drew a stratified purposive sample from two dioceses in the area, the Chicago archdiocese and a smaller Midwestern diocese. The bulk of my interviewees live within the archdiocese, whether they are officially associated with it or not. When I began interviewing, the archdiocese alone had two hundred and seventy-five retired priests, which does not include those many retired priests not associated with the archdiocese but living within its boundaries. The other Midwestern diocese<sup>1</sup> was much smaller and had only twenty-six retired priests from which to sample, all of whom were parish priests.

The sample was stratified as follows. Eight of the twelve retired priests hailed from the archdiocese, two from a small Midwestern diocese, and two from religious orders. Three were retired less than two years, six from two to ten years, and three more than ten years. Seven of the twelve retired from parish pastorates, three from administrative posts, and two from university posts. Ten of the priests retired into the same diocese/locality in which they served and two moved to a different diocese/locality. Finally, eight of the twelve retired into independent residences, two into parishes, and two into institutional residences.

The individual cases are reported in Table 1:

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<sup>1</sup>I kept this diocese's identity clouded because it had only twenty-six retired priests at the time of the interviews. With over two hundred and seventy-five retired priests officially associated with the archdiocese alone, the archdiocesan priests did not face a similar risk of being identified.

**Table 1: Individual Cases of Retired Priests**

| DIFFERENCES   | PRIESTS |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
|---|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
|   | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| clergy living in the <u>large</u> Chicago archdiocese (L) vs. in the <u>small</u> Midwestern diocese (S) vs. in religious <u>orders</u> (O)                 | O       | O | S | S | L | L | L | L | L | L  | L  | L  |
| retired <u>recently</u> , less than 2 years (R) vs. retired <u>moderate</u> -length, 2 to 10 years (M) vs. retired <u>long</u> time, more than 10 years (L) | M       | R | R | R | R | M | M | M | M | L  | L  | L  |
| clergy retiring from <u>parish</u> work (P) vs. retiring from <u>universities</u> (U) vs. retiring from <u>administrative</u> posts (A)                     | U       | A | P | P | U | P | A | P | P | A  | P  | P  |
| clergy retiring in <u>same</u> diocese/locality in which they served (S) vs. retiring in <u>different</u> diocese/locality (D)                              | S       | S | S | S | S | D | S | D | S | S  | S  | S  |
| clergy retiring into private <u>residences</u> (R) vs. retiring into <u>parishes</u> (P) vs. retiring into <u>institutional</u> setting (I)                 | I       | I | R | R | I | R | R | R | R | P  | P  | R  |

Before interviewing retired priests in the archdiocese, I asked for permission to conduct my study from the archdiocesan vicar of retired priests, Bishop Timothy J. Lyne. During my meeting with him, I also interviewed him about the general situation of retired priests in the archdiocese at that time (Lyne 1995). I compiled my sampling frame from the Official Directory of the Archdiocese of Chicago (1994). This publication lists the status and address of every priest in the archdiocese of Chicago, including those associated with orders. I did not need to further sample from the smaller diocese as I had already obtained an adequate number of interviewees in my two initial interviews.

I conducted twelve open-ended interviews, addressing certain questions and

covering a set of common topics with all the interviewees. Each was asked to explain what he had found to be most salient and surprising about retirement and why. I also asked each about their income, work, family, friends, activities of daily living, leisure, spirituality, preparation for death, and overall feelings about their retirement experience. I gave each an opportunity to include anything that they found important about retirement which I had neglected in my questioning as well.

I contacted each potential interviewee by phone, with three turning me down for reasons ranging from “I’m too busy” to “I just don’t want to be interviewed, thank you”. Each of the final twelve interviewees chose the place of the interview, with only one wishing to drop by my residence. Three other interviews were conducted in public places, one took place over the phone, and the rest took place in the priests’ residences or offices. I also observed three priests engaging in everyday activities on many occasions. Two involved being invited to spend some time at the residence of a friend of the priest, one of which culminated in participating in the mass the two reported they celebrated every day. Three others were hospital visits to one of the interviewees. Another activity was a public mass in the smaller diocese celebrated by one of the interviewees. I also saw two of the priests and two women they introduced me to frequently. At all of the occasions, I both participated in and observed the activity.

I undertook this project to explore the lives of retired priests. While my interviewees all reside in the Midwest, my findings would likely resonate with the experiences of retired priests across the United States. As a study by psychologist George A. Aranha (1991) demonstrated though, priests who retire in countries where the clergy

typically have less resources have different experiences. Aranha interviewed forty retired priests from two dioceses, one in India and one in the western United States. Due mostly to their income, he found that the priests in India, as compared to those in the United States, more often retired later in life, in poorer health, and into common-living retirement institutions. In the next section, the effects diocesan institutions have on priests' retirements are explored.

## CHAPTER 3

### RETIREMENT IN THE UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CHURCH

Though retirement became an option available to many workers in the United States in the 1950s, the Catholic Church did not begin to address the issue until the mid 1960s, during the Second Vatican Council. Prior to that time, the common practice for diocesan priests was to remain in the rectory of the parish in which they served as pastor until they died or were seriously impaired. Other priests took the bulk of the responsibilities of the parish while the pastor retained his full power and authority. Priests in orders, such as those who taught in high schools and universities, remained in their positions as long as they were able as well. Pope Paul VI altered this tradition in the 1966 document *Ecclesiae Sanctae*:

...all pastors are asked to offer spontaneously to their Bishop their resignation from office, not later than the completion of their seventy-fifth year of age. The Bishop will decide whether to accept or defer the resignation in view of all the personal and local circumstances. (as quoted in Bishops's Committee 1979)

Mandatory retirement at age seventy-five was codified into canon law in 1983, with the option to allow retirement before that age left open to each diocese (Lyne 1995).

This push to allow priests to retire occurred, ironically, at the same time that the number of ordinations to the priesthood fell dramatically. Using the annual official guide



to priests in the United States, the Official Catholic Directory, two studies have demonstrated both how retirement had become more of an option for priests and how the total number of priests declined since Vatican II. Kaiser (1979) reported that while 26 of 146 dioceses in the United States listed no retired priests in the above directory in 1967, only 6 of 158 listed none in 1977. Aranha (1991) reported that while the priest population declined from 36,410 in 1966 to 34,390 in 1990, the percentage of retired priests grew from 2% in 1966 to 17.3% in 1990. Even with the dwindling number of active priests available though, the dioceses continued to retire priests.

Why the Catholic Church continued to retire priests as their numbers dwindled is best explained by the church's desire to modernize its institutions and practices. In part, modernizing included making the church more like a corporation, as is evident in the report Bishop Raymond J. Gallagher wrote to the Institute on Planning for Pre-Retirement and Retirement of Priests:

You are conscious as I am of the very business-like steps being taken to modernize the Church in its administrative systems and in its system of communication between all levels. Looking at the reports that are produced by various management study organizations we could readily say that no area has been left untouched in the efforts of those presently administering the Church in the United States to modernize its operations. (1969)

To simply think of the Catholic Church as a corporation and its clergy as corporate employees would be a mistake though. These are employees who, after all, at an early age vow to devote their entire lives to the institution. Very few workers for IBM would report, as this priest from my sample did, "I can honestly say I never disobeyed a superior,

never, never once". This same priest boasted of never having taken a day off. The other model operating here is that of the religious vocation. Trying to merge two models so different has resulted in some strain on the institutions and persons who work for them, especially during the initial period. I have found that diocesan institutions have succeeded in merging the two models better than universities, the other institution that employed the priests I interviewed. I explore the policies of both kinds of institutions in regard to clergy retirement in the following subsection.

#### "Organizational Men": Priests' Relationships to their Employers

Marvin Kaiser investigated the relationship between priests and their dioceses in his dissertation, "A Study of Retired Roman Catholic Diocesan Priests: A Sociological Analysis" (1979). Kaiser, a University of Kansas faculty member and a Roman Catholic priest, studied clergy retirement at the time when it had just become an issue for three neighboring dioceses in Nebraska. Two of the three dioceses had recently implemented retirement programs for priests based upon age requirements, while the other still only allowed retirement in the case of incapacitation. Interviewing twenty-seven of the forty-one retired priests in the three dioceses and an equal number of active priests similar in age to those retired, Kaiser reported the effect each dioceses' retirement policies had on both their attitudes toward their own retirement and their satisfaction with their lives as retirees.

While Kaiser did not find that *diocesan retirement policy* was a significant indicator of whether the priests reported being satisfied in retirement, he did find a significant relationship between the policy and priests' attitudes toward retirement. Those

priests in the two dioceses with set retirement ages looked forward to retiring while those in the one without such a policy did not. Even in the two dioceses that defined retirement as a worthwhile stage, Kaiser found differences. The one with the most positive definition of retirement had the priests most enthusiastic about it both for themselves and their diocesan brothers. Combined with other findings, this suggested to Kaiser that the priests were true “organizational men”, that is they strongly identified with both their jobs and their employers, their dioceses.

My findings support Kaiser’s characterization of diocesan priests as organizational men. A priest from the smaller diocese reported to me:

Like this retirement question, you know? When a priest is ordained, the primary consideration always must be in his life the good of the church. So you’re told that from the very outset. And consequently, the whole thing of your staying in office or retiring has to be evaluated on the basis of how much value you are to the parish or the church or the organization you’re working for at the time, see? And again, then you’ve got to look into the past, present, and future of these organizations that you’re involved with. And what your staying or leaving is going to entail.

The retired diocesan priests I interviewed echoed Kaiser’s findings in other ways as well. With diocesan policies about clergy retirement in place in each diocese for over a decade, they, with one exception, viewed retirement as a legitimate stage of their priesthood and reported having looked forward to it. A priest in the smaller diocese, a member of the diocesan retirement committee, even pushed to have his diocese set seventy-two as the age where priests could opt to retire. After the approval of the new policy, he became the first priest in his diocese to exercise that option. But it was an

archdiocesan priest whose words best demonstrated the powerful relationship between most priests and their diocesan policies:

You know formerly pastors fifty or sixty years ago did not wish to retire. Until Cardinal Cody came, it was considered a disgrace. So they usually stayed on until they were carried out. There was some resistance when he started to retire people, 1965 I suppose. But eventually priests began to look forward to the time when they wouldn't have to worry so much. It's probably the difficult influences we have today which didn't exist fifty years ago. Pastor made up his mind and that was it. But now, not so. Most priests are quite ready for the move, some anticipate it by getting out a little early.

The Chicago archdiocese eventually set seventy as its mandatory retirement age. One archdiocesan priest I interviewed asked his cardinal to allow him to retire at age sixty-six, requesting time to take care of his soul. The cardinal granted his request.

The one priest who disagreed with priests retiring for any reason except incapacitation did not think retirement a fit stage for non-priests to enter either. He was an exceptional man. Despite his heart attack in 1962 and his three heart operations since, he seemed to thrive on work. He was the one who earlier boasted of having never taken a day off. An archdiocesan priest, he had held administrative posts both within and outside the archdiocese. Despite the archdiocesan retirement policies in place, he viewed his work as vocation from which he should not retire:

I retired from my job in the \_\_\_\_\_ office at the \_\_\_\_\_ because I'm seventy years of age, but then I moved down to \_\_\_\_\_ a few days after that and kept on working at about the same things I've been working at for the last thirty years. So that I don't look upon myself as retired. I'll be seventy-nine in October and I feel that as long as there's strength in me and the opportunity to serve, I want to continue to serve. So I'm frankly opposed to retirement. I

know that it's becoming more and more common, even amongst the clergy, but I feel that as long as God gives me the strength, I want to continue to work as a parish priest and also my job at \_\_\_\_\_. I'm generally opposed to retirement for anybody if they're able to work. However, I realize that in certain jobs they demand a person be in physical good health, like a policeman and other jobs where a person can serve too long. And they should retire, give an opportunity for younger persons to take their job. That's one reason I left the \_\_\_\_\_ office, I felt that the job there could be done better by younger people. But I think that's something I've always felt, that you shouldn't stay in any job too long.

He seemed to practice what he preached. The only accommodation to retirement he admitted was that while his present assignment was similar to those of his past, there was less work now and the pace there was significantly less stressful.

In regard to the satisfaction of priests with their retirements, Kaiser found that the *status replacements* available for the priests had the greatest effect. He defined status replacement as the amount of worth in both word and deed that the bishop, priests, and diocesan institutions bestowed upon the role of being a retired priest. Indications of high status included having the bishop show concern for them, having write-ups in their diocesan newspaper about each retired priest, and having their status in the diocese well-defined. Kaiser concluded that "retirement can best be understood in terms of the social determinants of that role within the context of the Church, both universally and within the diocese" (1979:103).

Both the archdiocese and the smaller diocese had taken steps to ensure that the priests knew that they regarded their retired status as a legitimate one. The Chicago archdiocese had appointed a special vicar of retired priests, whose job description was specifically to address the needs of retired priests. The bishop filling this position when I

began the study was Bishop Lyne, of whom a retired priest remarked to me: "He looks after the old priests quite well". The retired priests in the archdiocese also have an association of retired priests which gets together periodically and a newsletter, called *Sursum Corda!* (Lift up your hearts!), published specifically for the archdiocese's retired priests. The smaller diocese did not have these services or posts. With only twenty-six retired priests in the diocese, less than ten percent the number in the archdiocese, this was understandable. The diocesan newspaper did keep track of the priests, however, running stories on individual retired priests occasionally. The retired priests remained on many diocesan committees and were invited to participate in many diocesan functions, including laying their hands on newly ordained priests. In addition, their ordination anniversaries were well-attended by their diocesan brothers.

Priests who worked for universities did not fare as well as the priests who worked for diocesan institutions. They had to contend with two different sets of retirement policies, those of the order or diocese with which they were affiliated and those of the university. For both of the retired professors I interviewed, the university policies were more restrictive than those of the order or diocese. The universities, which had many lay employees, simply had not attended to the work and status replacement needs of their retired priests as well as the dioceses had.

One university professor, an order priest who reported being dissatisfied with his life in retirement, was automatically retired from his university post at age seventy-one. The university offered him the option of continuing teaching part time. He faced a lesser status as a part-time professor and did not feel that it would give him enough to do. He

opted instead to move to another diocese and become a pastor.

A semi-retired archdiocesan university professor, who had taught at a university for forty years, spoke of not having as much access to his former work as he would have liked. University policy required that he cut back from teaching three courses a quarter (full-time) to two, which was fine with him. He regretted though that according to university policy he could only teach electives. He only taught ten to fifteen students in retirement, and so he did not get to teach and get to know all of the students who passed through the program as he did before retiring. In short, the universities, in regard to their priest employees, employed the corporate model in lieu of the vocational one. They did not offer their priests work or status in retirement that adequately replaced that they had before retiring. In this the priests were treated just like their lay counterparts at the university.

In summary, the interplay between the religious vocation and corporate models helped account for why retirement was instituted and how it was experienced both in the short and long run. The dioceses of the priests interviewed, which sought to synthesize the two models, created policies that better addressed the needs of the priests than did the universities. The dioceses took an active role in seeing that their retired priests had satisfying work options and agreeable statuses. Priests employed by universities, on the other hand, faced restrictions on their work lives by their employers and a decline in their statuses. As a result, priests who retired from diocesan institutions reported being more satisfied in their retirements. In the section that follows, I discuss what work the priests chose to do in the retirements their dioceses and universities mandated they take.

## CHAPTER 4

### “I’M NOT YOUR KELLY GIRL”:

#### HOW THE PRIEST SHORTAGE HAS AFFECTED

#### RETIRED PRIESTS’ WORK LIVES

Roman Catholic priests’ work lives are qualitatively different from those of virtually any other profession. Their vows at their ordinations, as summarized by Kaiser, exemplify these differences: “1) that they are set apart from the rest of men because of a ‘call from God’ articulated through the person of the bishop; 2) the priesthood they receive is forever, i.e., ‘Thou art a priest forever accordingly to the order of Melchizedeck’” (1979:23). As theologian Patrick J. Dunn made clear in his book Priesthood: A Re-examination of the Roman Catholic Theology of the Presbyterate (1990), these particular distinctions have not diminished even with the challenges to them in the tumultuous period following the Second Vatican Council.

But this tumultuous period has not left the priesthood unaffected. Richard Schoenherr and Lawrence Young document the decline in the number of active priests in their book Full Pews and Empty Altars (1993). They make optimistic, moderate, and pessimistic future projections for the priest population in the United States. By 2005, the optimistic projection predicts a 34% reduction in the number of priests from 1966, while



the pessimistic projection predicts a 53% reduction. At the same time, the authors predict that the lay population will continue to grow.

In the Catholic tradition, certain vital tasks, such as the consecration of the Eucharist, must be performed by priests. As Ruth Wallace's book They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women (1992) documented, the shortage of priests to pastor parishes has reached a point of crisis in many dioceses, including those two from which I drew my sample. The dioceses' misfortune benefits retired priests who want to continue working though. The dwindling number of priests has put the services of retired priests in demand, enabling them to negotiate work arrangements from a position of power.

The demand does not extend to all of the tasks various priests perform across the United States though. While the majority of priests work as pastors or associate pastors, other priests perform tasks related to administration, teaching, training future priests, missionary work, and social services, to name but a few. Even so, the tasks priests are uniquely qualified to perform revolve around the sacraments, with the celebration of the mass by far the most common. Peripheral to that task are the duties that surround being the pastor of a parish. The other tasks can be, and routinely are, performed by qualified lay persons. Thus, retired priests find that there is much work to be bargained for, but it greatly revolves around duties associated with parishes.

As long as the priests sought work in this area, they found that there was more work to be done than priests, both active and retired, to do it. Ironically, most of the duties surrounding being a pastor are precisely those from which the priests I interviewed wished to retire. A priest from the smaller diocese described what a typical day as a

pastor was like for him:

Well, at the office, I could put a piece of paper in the typewriter in the morning and it still was there at five in the afternoon. Doorbells, and telephones, and going over to the school. You just didn't get it done. I don't know how I could operate without a secretary. The work she did. But when she'd be gone, I'd just be tied down to the telephone. How do you get anything else done around here? I'd always marvel at all the work she did do, on books and everything else besides the telephone. When she was gone, I really did have a day like that. In the other times though, I used to try to maintain the morning in the office or in the school. And the afternoons were my calling time. Hospital and whatever else, business. And of course, you'd be surprised how tied up with meetings; there's always one after another. You've got parish organizations and converts and somebody wants to see you and wedding arrangements. Your time is filled up before you know it. You just really had to keep going, find some time for yourself. And get your prayers in too.

As the above quotation makes clear, being a pastor entails a variety of tasks. Pastors must juggle daily masses, baptisms, weddings, funerals, conversions, hospital visitations, bookkeeping, parish meetings, and diocesan duties. If the parish had a school associated with it as well, the hassles of juggling all those duties multiplied according to one retired pastor.

Fortunately for the retired priests, these tasks do not come as just one package or not at all. The priests I interviewed were very selective in the tasks they chose to accept and knew precisely those tasks they wished to avoid. Having the power to make those choices resulted in a less stressful work life as a retiree. One archdiocesan retiree, after telling me he never enjoyed the administrative work that pastors must do, remarked humorously: "If I'd known it was this good, I'd have quit long ago". The stressed-out priest quoted in the previous paragraph described his life without those administrative

duties below:

Being retired gets rid of a lot of headaches. Office work, calls, worries, dealing with people, and you can start enjoying your priesthood. Enjoy your priesthood. Say your prayers, say your mass. All the pressures are gone. Your schedules are your own. You can take on as much as you want or you can take as little as you want. But if you get your own place, you relieve yourself of that. As much as you want.

For this priest, one meaning of his phrase “enjoying your priesthood” seems to be getting to what he considered the core of his duties: praying and celebrating the mass. All of the duties he viewed as nonessential fell off his back. In essence, he gained the power to negotiate his ideal working day when he retired. He described a typical day in his retired life in the following:

Well, I usually have the 12:01 mass. I don't get up any earlier than I have to, I don't even use an alarm clock half of the time. I'm a night person. Always have been. The only thing that put me to bed was that I knew I had to get up early, like maybe six, you know? And now that's gone, I can stay up later at night and I do. And then I can sleep later.

Two priests were notable exceptions to the general trend of retiring to get away from the parish. They chose to retire into the parishes at which they served. One of these two cited having “some sort of claim on housing and an economical right to stick around” as his two reasons for remaining in the parish. Age eighty-nine at the time of the interview, he added, “I find it's better than being off by myself or going into some kind of an institution”. The other priest, also in his eighties, cited feeling safe and cared for as his major reasons for remaining.

They are exceptions that prove the rule, however. Both disengaged from the pastoral duties as fully as any of the other retired pastors, as this quote from one of them about what he most enjoys about retirement makes plain:

The most gratifying thing is to be free of the worries of the pastor. The financial duties and the other duties. I did eighteen years as pastor and before that I was teaching part of the time. But that makes life more easy, not to be responsible for paying the bills and making big decisions. Some places it's possible to be involved, but I've never been much involved. Once I was relieved of the responsibility, I wasn't inclined very much to participate.

Both of the priests chose to restrict their involvement in their parishes to celebrating daily mass and visiting the sick.

Celebrating the mass was the one task that all of the retired priests chose to continue. Seven of the priests took jobs as chaplains at various institutions, including hospitals and women's religious communities. One archdiocesan priest described the masses he opted to celebrate in the following:

I do say mass for the school for retarded kids on South \_\_\_\_\_. I can do that because I don't have any other obligations. And I like it, I like the faculty there. (Umm hmm. And you pretty much do masses just on weekends?) No, I say mass every day at the school for retarded kids. Every day. And of course, on the weekends I help out in the different parishes. I overschedule on weekends. It's hectic, but it's nice. It's a lot busier now, in a way, than when I was a pastor. But I like it. It's a nice, easy existence. Of course I don't have to, but I'm physically able, so...[Voice trailed off].

Being able to choose from among a variety of tasks those the retired priests enjoyed was only one aspect of their new power though. They also gained in their power to say "No". When they made their ordination vows, they promised obedience to

superiors. While they still had to remain obedient in a variety of areas, an important area where this was relaxed was in their work lives. Free to negotiate their own work for the most part, they suddenly had the power to decline assignments. And decline they did, as the following quote by an archdiocesan priest demonstrated:

And again, it depends on how much the retired person is able to do and wants to do. One parish I assist at occasionally began calling me, right at the last minute, to fill in for someone. I refused. I finally told them, "I'm not your Kelly girl". [When I asked him to explain the term, he replied] I will not drop everything at the drop of a hat just because someone calls me. I only fill in if I'm asked far enough in advance to schedule it in.

Most of the other priests reported declining requests for any reason they saw fit as well.

The reasons ranged from not wanting to have to drive during the winter to just preferring not to do so.

As I stated earlier though, one priest did not report being satisfied in his retirement, and his sole complaint was his work life. He retired from the university at age seventy-one, an event he described in these terms, "Now I retired from teaching when I got to the statutory age. I could have gone on teaching part time, but frankly teaching had got a little off-center. I mean I didn't have the kind of students I used to have; they don't exist". Not wishing to fully retire, he sought work as a pastor, a role he had not worked at previously. He described the experience as follows:

I wasn't going to retire from everything. So I spent an awful lot of time and trouble and what not contacting bishops all around the country. And I finally got a job as pastor of a rural parish down in Indiana. It was a mistake. It was a disaster. I was, oh, I was conned into it by the bishop who used me to get the money out of the parish. Well, the parish didn't like that.

He subsequently left that position and returned to Chicago, where he became engaged as a chaplain both at a convent and a retirement home.

His experiences illustrated a problem that priests not used to being a pastor may face. Upon his retirement from the university, he chose to try a job he had never tried before, being a pastor at a rural, struggling parish. Getting money out of a struggling parish was hard work. No other priest I interviewed took a job as a pastor upon his retirement, in fact all the priests who had been pastors indicated that they were happy to retire from the job. Because he had no experience in the area of work where the jobs were, being a pastor, this priest was “conned” into taking a responsibility that no one else wanted. Apparently, he was not as savvy about the pitfalls of pastoral assignments as he needed to be. Choosing that assignment was a mistake that the priests who retired from pastorates would likely not have made. One retired pastor said this about becoming a pastor somewhere else after retirement: “In fact, you know, you could probably even go to other dioceses where they don’t have any priests and go on back to work [as a full-time pastor] if you wanted to. But why do that when you just retired to get out of it, running a parish, to start with, see?”

While his experiences do put some qualifications on my contention that priests gain much power in negotiating their work lives when they retire, they simultaneously affirm one core part of my argument. Unlike the priests who are active in a diocese, he was able to quit the job. Active priests similarly dissatisfied with their assignment would have had to put in for a transfer and then hoped the bishop granted it. The power to quit and retain his full authority as a priest demonstrated a shift in the power relations.

His experiences demonstrated that retired priests' power in negotiating their work lives had some limits as well though. Being taken advantage of did not explain why, in regard to finding work in the Chicago archdiocese, he exclaimed, "Now I have contacted, I cannot tell you how many bishops, pastors, offering my services. And frankly, my services are as good as they ever were. I'm not feeble. I'm not senile. I have, in fact, as much energy and ability as I've ever had. It's don't call us, we'll call you". I attributed his inability to find work to his health problems, which he never acknowledged even when I asked specifically about his health in the interview. In regard to celebrating the mass, his primary health problem was the involuntary movement of his hands. They shook whenever he held anything, moving about three inches to either side. When I witnessed him saying a mass with a friend in her apartment, his hands shook so that several times I had to resist the temptation to steady the chalice he held, lest it should spill all over him. He reported not being asked back to some parishes he had assisted at once or twice. Likely, the parishioners who watched him celebrate mass had reactions similar to mine. Thus, health problems, which often are beyond the priests' control, restrict their power to negotiate their work lives.

In summary, the shortage of priests put the retired priests into an enviable position from which to bargain for certain kinds of work. As long as they opted to work at those tasks central and peripheral to the parish, they found they were in high demand. The majority exercised their power thoughtfully, with even those who retired into parishes being very selective about what tasks they agreed to perform. The sole priest who reported being dissatisfied with his retired work life demonstrated that with so much need

for priests, some persons may take advantage of retired priests. His experiences also illustrated a qualification to the power priests gain over their work lives: health problems restrict the work options of even priests actively seeking work. This same priest is featured prominently in the next section about the social support the priests received.



CHAPTER 5  
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF CELIBACY  
IN THE LIVES OF RETIRED PRIESTS

A final area essential to understanding why the priests overwhelmingly found retirement satisfying was the social support they reported receiving. In this section I deal both with the topic of social support generally and with a particular type of social support, how two priests managed to have rewarding friendships with unmarried women that superficially appeared to violate their vows of celibacy.

Where Priests Find Social Support in Retirement

As indicated in the introduction, the constraint of celibacy results in priests not having spouses and/or children upon whom they can rely for social support in their retirement years. The priests I interviewed regarded finding support from other sources important enough that they arranged their living and working lives around it. While only one priest moved in with a relative, his sister, the rest also weighed their proximity to family and friends heavily in their decisions about where to live and work.

This impetus to find social support resulted in a variety of living and working arrangements. For order priests, deciding where to live involved choosing one of the

orders' community residences. Both order priests I interviewed remained in the residences they lived in before they retired. Only two diocesan priests I interviewed moved out of the diocese in which they had worked. A desire to be near family and friends motivated their decisions. One archdiocesan priest moved to a nearby state where much of his family and several of his classmates from the seminary lived. In general, the retired priests sought a balance between having access to their family, to their friends, and to work they enjoyed.

A priest from the smaller diocese exemplified this search for that balance:

So I retired in the summer. And at the same time I wondered, well, what am I going to do? Should I go back to Dubuque [his hometown has been cloaked]. I could go back to Dubuque with my brother and all of them. He thought I'd go back to Dubuque. I thought no, sure I have all my cousins and people back in Dubuque, but I don't know anybody in Dubuque anymore. I don't know the priests, I don't know the people. I know the names, but I don't really know them anymore. I didn't really visit them. Everyone I know is up here, parishioners and priests and so forth.

He chose to retire in a city near the one at which he had last been a pastor.<sup>2</sup> The house he retired into was two hours away from his brother, whom he frequently visited for a week at a time. The house was a block away from the parish where he said mass daily. Saying the noon mass there entitled him to share their midday meal, often with the pastor of the parish. He, like many others interviewed, did much of his socializing at meals, accepting breakfast, lunch, and dinner invitations frequently.

Some priests retired into residences where other priests, both retired and active,

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<sup>2</sup>The priests in the smaller diocese both considered retiring too near to their last parish problematic, as it could interfere with the new pastor's leadership of the parish. Archdiocesan and order priests reported no similar concerns.

resided. One priest lived in a residence where other priests worked and where many other priests came to conduct business. He celebrated mass at a nearby church. The two priests who retired into parishes befriended the priests who became the new pastors and their replacements. Both of these priests were in their eighties and reported that most of their other friends had died. The priests who retired from orders kept in touch with their families, but found much of their social support from other priests in their orders. The two retired professors both reported that they had frequent contact with former students as well as with their university colleagues.

A former archdiocesan priest, who became bishop of another diocese, returned to Chicago upon retirement because it was where most of his family and friends lived. Typical of all of the retired archdiocesan priests, many of those friends were other retired priests who were his classmates at the seminary. One priest's classmates got together once a week to, weather permitting, play golf, cards, and have dinner. He spoke of it as if it were the highlight of his week. He and his fifteen other classmates vacationed together once a year as well, usually for two weeks. Unfortunately, the retired priests in the smaller diocese did not have this asset. When I asked a seventy-two year old if he got together with his ordination classmates, he replied, "I'm the only surviving member of my class". He did get together with other priests, both retired and active, at diocesan meetings and other events though. For him in particular, his female housekeeper was his main source of social support. He and another priest are featured next.

### Celibacy and the Retired Priest

Two priests had unmarried women as their primary source of social support. The circumstances of these relationships transcended popular images of what celibate friendships look like. To evaluate how well these relationships compared to the relationships priests are directed to have, I reviewed church literature on celibacy. The literature did not have any one unitary direction in its advice to priests about what their relationships with women should be. The advice ranged from being fully engaged with women to being very cautious in their dealings with any persons to whom they could become attracted.<sup>3</sup> I present three examples representative of this range below.

Andrew Greeley, in his book Uncertain Trumpet: the Priest in Modern America (1968), took the least cautious approach. Greeley began with an admission that he suspected that priests are often afraid of women. He argued that this was unfortunate since priests are directed to love all persons, including women. Further he contended that the love must be a sexual one, since priests are human beings and all human beings are sexual creatures. Having a sexual relationship did not imply that they should have a genital one though. Mature sexual persons can have deep relationships with other sexual persons without them developing into genital relationships. In the end, Greeley emphasized that fear must not prevent priests from having deep relationships with women. Not only may priests have loving relationships with women, mature priests must love others regardless of their gender.

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<sup>3</sup>Because I have no reason from my interviews to assume otherwise, I assume that the two priests profiled are heterosexual.

Keith Clark took a different approach in his book An Experience of Celibacy (1982). Clark described how he transformed the loneliness that he experienced as a chaste celibate<sup>4</sup> man into a spiritual journey. He encouraged priests to only become involved in relationships that would not preclude their experiencing loneliness. Just as married persons should give themselves completely and vulnerably to the riches that accompany intimacy, he argued that so too should celibate persons give themselves over to the riches that loneliness holds for those who seek it. Some of the riches of loneliness he expressly listed included acceptance of yourself as you are alone, acceptance of one's limitations, acceptance of the simple pleasures of life, and acceptance of one's inevitable death. Overall, Clark emphasized that celibacy and loneliness are gifts that should be explored and cherished.

Benedict J. Groeschel's The Courage to be Chaste (1985) typified another approach to celibacy. Groeschel, a priest of the Capuchin order, defined chaste celibacy as "the avoidance of all voluntary genital and pregenital sexual behavior" (12). This included all forms of sexual behavior deemed deviant by the church, including masturbation. Contrary to Greeley's admonition that priests must have deep relationships with women, Groeschel argued that chaste celibacy implied "a decision to avoid personal relationships of human affection which are likely to be genitally expressed" (12). The

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<sup>4</sup>I use the term "chaste celibate" to avoid the confusion associated with the word celibacy. Strictly, a vow of celibacy is a vow to abstain from marriage. A vow of chastity is a vow to abstain from sexual intercourse. While the members of some religious orders do make vows of chastity, diocesan priests only make vows of celibacy. For Catholics, a vow of celibacy would preclude sexual intercourse because intercourse should only take place between married persons. It is in this sense that I say that engaging in genital activity would be a violation of a priest's vow of celibacy.

watch word for Groeschel was caution and he recommended exercising it lest one should end up violating one's vow.

The two priests in my sample who did not on the surface appear to adhere to Groeschel's call for caution were the two to whose lives I had the most access. In the following pages, I chronicle their relationships with women whose social support was important enough to them that they retired with or near them. My data for the relationships came both from the interviews with the priests and my participant observation of all four persons chronicled after the initial interviews.

*Fr. Homesharer and Hazel*

Hazel and Fr. Homesharer<sup>5</sup> met just about the time Father was moving to a new parish. Hazel had been both a teacher and a Catholic elementary school principal in the years prior to their introduction. When a principal, she had contracted cancer and had come close to dying. Her doctor strongly recommended that she find a less stressful profession, and so she chose to function as Father's assistant and housekeeper in his new parish. Hazel functioned in the parish in many ways. For example, she kept on top of the finances for the parish's school and served as interim principal when two principals resigned and had to be replaced. She cut the checks and managed the benefits for the teachers and other parish employees. She also kept all of the diocesan paperwork up and in order.

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<sup>5</sup>I use the full title of each priest and the first names of the women because that is how they were introduced to me. Generally, the women themselves called the priests by their titles. I never heard the priests refer to the women by anything but their first names.

In addition, Hazel performed the housekeeping duties at the rectory at which they both lived. She took pride in keeping the large rectory washed down and told me how much work some of the cleaning jobs could be. She also laundered both of their clothes and usually prepared two meals a day. Unless Father was out on business, she prepared lunch for him. They often did not eat this meal together as she took her lunch with her to wherever she was working. They almost always ate together the dinner that she had prepared. They ate out together only once or twice a week.

Because of their compatibility in age, roughly a six year difference, both planned to retire at the same time. Fr. Homesharer was seventy-two, the minimal optional retirement age in the diocese, and Hazel was sixty-five. Father could not afford to pay her in retirement. This was fine since she had a pension from her years as a principal plus social security coming to her. They had a house built for them in a nearby town and split the cost. The design allowed for each to live greatly separate lives, with a kitchen, family room, chapel, and porch in common. The house was completed about a year and a half prior to their planned retirement. In their wills they arranged to have the house go to the person who survived the other.

Tragedy, in the form of a recurrence of the cancer, struck Hazel about six months prior to the retirement date. Keeping to her habit of privacy, she told no friends of the cancer until three months into its treatment. Her family did not learn of it for an additional three months. Father and she carried the burden of her illness alone. He picked up much of her workload in addition to tending to the new tasks associated with her medical treatment. By the time they were able to formally retire, she was greatly incapacitated and

required hospitalization.

Fr. Homesharer attended to her at the hospital dutifully. She had no appetite for the hospital food, so he bought or prepared food for her at every meal. This meant having to come to the hospital three times a day for several months. He ate the hospital food tray she was to eat and generally attended to her needs. Her sister was finally told of her illness and came out to stay and take care of her from the end of her hospital stay to the beginning of her time back at their shared home. Her sister could not stay long though as she also took care of their mother back in their home state, their mother being over one hundred years old. Rather than relying on her family during the illness, she remained at the residence she and Father shared.

At their home, Fr. Homesharer attended to Hazel's needs, cooking her meals, seeing that she got her rest, driving her wherever she needed to go, and helping her get up and take care of herself when it was too painful for her to do so on her own. Such assistance caused the two to be close in ways they may not have planned. Due to her weakened immunity system, Father had kept her greatly secluded from visitors. Her cancer continued to progress, and when I last spoke to her she seemed resigned to her fate. One spot of cancer was in an area too tricky to reach and the others did not seem to be responding to the radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

How closely Fr. Homesharer and Hazel's relationship resembled a chaste friendship depends upon which theorists' criteria you accept. Father showed no signs of being afraid of women, as Greeley claimed most priests were (1968). His friendships with Hazel struck me as a deep one. By Greeley's standards then, Father was likely a mature



sexual person capable of having non-genital loving relationships with persons to whom he could potentially be attracted. Father also appeared to adhere to Clark's (1982) recommendation to appreciate the loneliness that accompanies celibacy. He reported that retirement had given him the time to prepare himself for his eventual death. By Clark's criteria, this indicated that he had learned to appreciate the riches that celibacy and loneliness can bring.

He did not do as well at adhering to Groeschel's (1985) warning to avoid relationships that could potentially become romantic, however. In fact, their relationship fulfilled many of the same functions of marriages as defined by some theorists. One such theorist, Lloyd Saxton, argued in his book The Individual, Marriage and the Family (1986) that ideally marriages fulfilled biological, sexual, and social/psychological needs. Biological needs included food, shelter, safety, money, and health care. Sexual needs would include mutual physical and genital activity and its accompanying pleasures. Adapting his definition of sexual needs to better fit a chaste celibate's relationships, sexual needs could be limited to affectionate touching. Social/psychological needs would include desires for intimacy, friendship, companionship, and acceptance.

Fr. Homesharer and Hazel did fulfill each other's biological needs, that is they did take care of each other. They shared a house, ate food the other had prepared, looked after one another's health, and made it possible for the other to afford the house in which they lived. They met some of the other's sexual needs to a more limited extent. When Hazel was weak, Father supported her when she walked and helped her get in and out of the car. They fulfilled the celibate version of sexual needs as well, the need to be touched

affectionately by someone who cares about you. Finally, the two of them fulfilled many of each other's social/psychological needs. Each provided the other friendship, companionship, and intimacy. This intimacy was best evidenced in Father being the only one who knew of Hazel's health problems those first three months. In sum, Father and Hazel's relationship greatly resembled a marriage. The other couple profited live under very different circumstances than Fr. Homesharer and Hazel.

*Fr. Friend and Amie*

Fr. Friend and Amie have been friends for forty-four years. Father described his relationship with Amie in the following interview excerpt:

But no, I don't have any regular associates. Amie, of course. (And now, you've known her for quite a few years?) Since 1952. (1952? That's quite a few years. How did you meet her?) Her brother was \_\_\_\_\_ [same order as Fr. Friend]. He administered something called the honors program and I went over to teach in it. And while I was there, we became very close friends. And sort of one family. I mean they would come and visit my family in Chicago and I would visit their family in Ohio. Whoever was left was to take care of the others. She's like a very dear sister to me. I'd say I've known her for forty years, close. And we are very close.

Principally, the family in Chicago to which he referred was his mother. Within a year, both Amie's brother and Father's mother died. In the twenty-four years since, Father and Amie have taken care of one another.

Fr. Friend was seventy-eight at the time of the interview and Amie looked to be in her eighties. Amie never married, supporting herself by working for both the religious order and outside office employment. As a result of my interview with Father, I got to

know Amie quite well. I picked up groceries for her, occasionally ate with her, and drove her to see Father several times when he was hospitalized. Amie could not walk very far, so she relied on visits and assistance from friends like Father.

Fr. Friend retired from his university position about eight years ago. Wanting to remain active, he accepted the pastorate of a parish a couple of states away. Amie moved to a home near the rectory, but had some troubles while there and had to stay in a nursing home for a spell, confined to a wheelchair. Father eventually came to realize that he had been duped by the bishop of the diocese into taking a parish that no one else wanted due to its deep financial troubles (as was discussed more extensively in the previous section). He resigned from the parish and he and Amie returned to the area surrounding the university from which he had retired. Amie was able to live independently again, so they found her an apartment near Father's residence.

Fr. Friend came to visit Amie every day it was practical to do so, barring bad weather and crises such as his recurring hospitalizations. He generally arrived about 3 p.m., they visited, had a mass together at her dining room table, prepared a meal, ate together, and then he returned to his residence. Father remarked, "If I didn't eat with her, she wouldn't eat", a contention Amie echoed on another occasion. Other activities they shared during these visits included her helping take care of his medical needs. Father had swollen feet and legs that required daily care as well as rashes that needed medication. Amie told me several times how she gave much better care than the nurses she observed when visiting Father during his frequent hospital stays. After we visited Father in the hospital once, Amie remarked to me, "It is just so frustrating to know what he needs and

not be able to demand it from the staff because I am not related to him. I have no rights”.

Fr. Friend did not treat Amie’s residence as just a friend’s apartment he happened to visit. Father’s belongings coexisted alongside Amie’s everywhere, upon the walls, in the closets, and in the cabinets. He felt comfortable enough to nap there, as I awoke him one day when I knocked on her door about 2 p.m. Their lives were intertwined. In a nutshell, as Father reported their families understood they would, they took care of each other.

Like Fr. Homesharer, Fr. Friend demonstrated no signs of being, as Greeley (1968) put it, afraid of women. His relationship with Amie was deep and intimate. Father showed some evidence of having adhered to Clark’s (1982) suggestion that celibate persons should explore the riches that can be gained through loneliness. Especially when alone, he reported, “I find that I am increasingly aware of the presence of God in my life. It’s kind of a continual thing. I haven’t done anything special about it, but it’s always there, kind of over my shoulder”. In regard to Groeschel’s (1985) calls for caution, Father had thrown caution to the wind. Taking care of one another’s health problems, treating her apartment as his own, and napping on her couch gave ample evidence of this.

That said, again it is useful to examine how their relationship resembled a marriage. Saxton (1986) argued that marriages meet the partners’ biological, sexual, and social/ psychological needs. Even while living in separate residences, they fulfilled each other’s biological needs. Fr. Friend’s grocery shopping, his daily visits, and their meals together ensured that Amie would eat enough to remain healthy. Further, they tended to each other’s health care needs. That same health care provided many opportunities for

both of them to touch each other affectionately, our chaste celibate version of fulfilling their sexual needs. Further, I observed them touching each other affectionately when saying goodbye at the hospital each time I accompanied Amie there. Father's daily visits also fulfilled both person's social/psychological needs. As Father put it, "And we are very close". In short, I would say that they shared everything their living arrangement allowed them to share.

In summary, in this section I have demonstrated how the social support systems the retired priests negotiated contributed to the satisfying retirements they reported having. For all of my interviewees, this meant that they negotiated living and working arrangements that put them close to family and friends. I have examined in greater detail two retired priests, each of whose main source of social support was an unmarried woman. While I found no evidence of genital activity, I did find that the relationships resembled marriages to the extent that chaste celibate friendships could. In the final section, I summarize the paper and draw some conclusions.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

I have sought to explain why the retirement experiences of celibate priests, men with no spouses or children, contradict expectations that they will have lonely, unsatisfying retirements. Based upon my interviews, I have identified three factors that help account for their satisfaction. First, I found that the retirement policies and status replacement offered by the employers affected both their attitudes toward and their satisfaction with retirement. In this the dioceses were more effective than the universities. Diocesan policies better addressed the retired priests' desires for satisfying work and agreeable statuses. Universities, on the other hand, did not create policies broad and flexible enough to give their retired priests options they found satisfying.

Second, I found that the priest shortage had put retired priests in high demand, resulting in their being able to bargain for certain kinds of work from a position of power. As long as they sought work that required a priest, they found that there were many tasks they could contract to perform. Being in such high demand meant that they could be selective about what tasks they would agree to do. Conversely, they also could decline performing tasks they did not enjoy. Partially, this new power stemmed from their no longer having to obediently accept assignments from superiors. Their new power was

tempered by their familiarity with the work they agreed to do and their health.

Third, despite their celibacy, the priests found the social support they needed: They met many of their social needs through their living and working arrangements. Two priests found social support from two unmarried women. Though these friendships met most of the same needs that a celibate version of an ideal marriage would, they made better stories of unselfish love than of scandal. They are stories about persons who found ways to care for one another in spite of the obstacles and constraints they have had to maneuver around.

I conclude that retired priests, especially diocesan ones, are in an enviable position in regard to their work lives. How many workers have employers who so actively work to ensure that their retired workers are well taken care of and of a status that they find agreeable? How many of us have specialized skills that are in such high demand that we can opt to take on as much or as little work as we choose? Further, who among us can choose which specific tasks of a job we will do, declining to do those we find disagreeable?

### Policy Implications

The findings above have implications for those wishing to create policies that benefit both the employees retiring from any organization and the organization itself. For religious organizations wishing to have policies that facilitate satisfying retirements, the issue of status replacement seems central. One important aspect of status replacement that has been unattended to by virtually any of the denominations in the United States is having

a formal rite for retirement. In his dissertation, John Paul Boucher (1988) reported that none of the United States denominations he surveyed had formal rites for retirement for their clergy or lay persons. Such a rite of passage, formally replacing one status with another, would likely have been meaningful for the Catholic priests I interviewed. Further, it would likely be meaningful for other persons, whether clergy or lay, of whatever denomination as well.

In regard to organizations more generally, if they are to offer more satisfying retirement options to their employees, they must create policies that are flexible enough to allow persons to retire to the extent they wish to and that allow more choices in the work they can choose to do. In the case of the university policies encountered in this paper, this may have just involved allowing retired professors to teach core courses. In any case, for any organization, allowing experienced retired employees to perform work for the organization that they find satisfying would greatly benefit both the organization and the employees.



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## THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Jonathon Lee Wiggins has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

10/30/96

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