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Seminarians in the person-of-the-therapist (POTT) training : a phenomenological study

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SEMINARIANS IN THE PERSON-OF-THE-THERAPIST (POTT) TRAINING:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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SEMINARIANS IN THE PERSON-OF-THE-THERAPIST (POTT) TRAINING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

SEMINARIANS IN THE PERSON-OF-THE-THERAPIST (POTT) TRAINING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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This dissertation presented a transcendental phenomenological study conducted among eight seminarians in one of the theological schools in Southern Texas, who attended the person-of-the- therapist (POTT) training program during the fall semester of 2019. This study aimed to examine seminarian participants' experiences in POTT training, their influence on their self-awareness, and their impact on their emotional maturity and the ability to make responsible life choices. The study was guided by an existential-humanistic philosophical orientation as an overarching theoretical orientation with the subjective epistemological worldview and social-constructionism paradigm. Findings indicated POTT training positively impacted seminarian participants' human formation, which was foundational to their emotional, spiritual, and psycho-social development. The participants described the essence of their experience in POTT training as self-awareness, by becoming aware of themselves, their family background, and their vulnerabilities. The experience of safety and trust within the group enabled participants to take the risk of sharing personal stories of their vulnerabilities and brokenness despite the initial discomfort. The experience of greater self-awareness facilitated the process of healing and reconciliation, providing the inner sense of freedom to navigate the direction of their life, especially their self-acceptance, growth, and maturity capable of making responsible choices in

life, including the discernment of vocation. The findings of this study suggest that interventions like POTT training effectively provide a safe space for self-exploration as part of human formation to facilitate self-awareness, acceptance, and growth in seminarians' discerning vocation. Based on participants' recommendations, the formation program in seminaries should provide a safe and supportive climate that facilitates self-exploration and awareness of developmental deficiencies and promotes growth as part of human formation. Local ordinaries and boards of administration of seminaries should ensure that seminaries have qualified and skilled formators or identify suitable mental health practitioners to facilitate the group in self-exploration and reflection process in creating self-awareness among seminarians.

Keywords: safe space, self-awareness, inter-generational genogram, self-acceptance, healing, emotional growth, responsible choices, and discernment.

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Chapter 1

Rationale and Justification for the Study

The Second Vatican Council, the latest ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, took place from 1962–1965 and emphasized the Christological foundation for Christian ministry, finding its basis in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Casado, 1997; Osborne, 2003; Pope John Paul II, 1992). The essential characteristic of Jesus's ministry was love—the love of the Father and the love of neighbor—which continues to be the underlying force that directs Christian ministry today (Furnish, 1972; Osborne, 2003; Stovell, 2018). The gospels present Jesus actively engaged in the ministry of service, which is not limited to preaching but also bringing comfort and solace to the sick and the needy, renouncing his needs, and finally laying down his life (Congregation for the Clergy, 1995; McTavish, 2018; Osborne, 2003). Saint Mark presents the "servant-model" of Jesus as the key model of Christian ministry, as explained in his gospel, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Mk 10:45; cf. Mt. 20:27–28). As all four gospels indicated, Jesus was a person of service; it is essential for his followers, his disciples, or anyone who continues his ministry to be a servant of all (Johnson, 2012; Osborne, 2003).

The Second Vatican Council presented the definition of priesthood based on the ministry of Jesus with its threefold functions: teacher, priest, and leader (Mey, 2018; Osborne, 2003; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2005), and the Church is called upon to follow the same ministry of Jesus. According to Flannery (2004a), God sent his only begotten son into the world as the heir of all things (cf. Heb 1:2) was that he might be teacher, king, and priest for all. Pope John Paul II (1992), in his exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, stated:

> By the virtue of this consecration brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the sacrament of holy orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded, and characterized by way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity. (no. 21)

Therefore, a priest is called to be a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, seeking to reflect in himself the human perfection manifested in Jesus and depicted in the Gospels. Pope John Paul II (1992) emphasized that "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation" (no. 43).

Since then, the *Program of Priestly Formation* (USCCB, 2006) and *The Gift of The Priestly Vocation* by Pope Francis in Congregation for the Clergy (2017) has reiterated the importance of human formation of priests and clergy. The USCCB (2006) recommended incorporating human formation strategies such as pastoral counseling courses, conferences, and seminars on various aspects of human growth and maturity, especially celibacy. However, those strategies could be further developed by providing more in-depth opportunities for the development of human growth and maturity through programs that focus on the self of the priest. Therefore, an experimental study of the seminarian's experience in the human formation program in seminary directly addresses the self of the seminarians, like the person-of-the-therapist (POTT) training (Aponte & Kissil, 2016). POTT training was introduced to students in marriage and family therapy as an intervention program in facilitating the development of their self, emotional maturity, and effective use of their self (Aponte & Kissil, 2016; Aponte & Winter, 2000).

Significance of the Study

Priests play a significant role in the life of people, especially among Catholic Christians. They serve as mediators between God and human beings, performing sacred rites, public worship, and offering sacrifices (Knight, 2017; Pies, 2019). Priests are called to be living instruments of Jesus Christ (Flannery, 2004c). As a participant in the priesthood of Christ (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; Flannery, 2004b) and as a shepherd to the people, a priest seeks to reflect in himself, insofar as possible, the model of human perfection, Jesus Christ, by expressing attitudes toward others in imitation of Jesus as narrated in the gospels (USCCB, 1994). The role of a priest is spiritual fatherhood, a role that goes beyond the official functions of teaching, sanctification, and leadership for his spiritual children (Mayerhofer, 2020). So, the formation of a priest aims to facilitate a transformation of a man into a spiritual father capable of manifesting God's fatherly love, warmth, and beauty toward his children (Mayerhofer, 2020). The transformation to be acquired during formation is not a simple process. According to Saint Paul, transformation is an internal process of sanctification of the person as they cooperate with the grace of God: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; . . . so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (*NRSV Bible*, 1 Cor 1:27–29). Therefore, for a priest to be a faithful minister of Christ, he must be aware of his weaknesses, and, in humility, seek to do what is pleasing to God (Flannery, 2004c).

According to White (2015), despite being limited and vulnerable, priests, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, are "conformed to Christ the High Priest" (p. 323) as an instrument and, thereby, Christ is "sacramentally made present to the world" (p. 323) through the ecclesial and sacramental actions of the priest. Nevertheless, Christ's promise of personal sanctification is

conditional, depending on how a priest cooperates with the providence of God. Therefore, the life of each priest is a continual process of sanctification and growth into perfection by being faithful to his vocation, sharing in the ministry of Christ, and exhibiting pastoral prudence (White, 2015). According to Mayerhofer (2020), although the functions of the priest are based on the grace received through the ordination to act *in persona Christi*, the priestly character must be supported by an appropriate formation that fosters human and spiritual perfection in the image of Christ. Mayerhofer (2020) depicted the priest as a spiritual father based on the interpretation of Saint Paul's writings and stated the priest is a proclaimer and giver of faith in Jesus, a loving spiritual leader, and a motherly helper who nurtures Christ in the hearts of people.

The expectations placed on priests by the church and society are very high, so much so that clergy often experience an internal conflict between their frail humanity and the transcendent requirements (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Though physically grown adults, many priests are emotionally stuck in the early stages of human development, having difficulties in interpersonal and intimate relationships (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). During the past few decades, numerous priests and deacons have been charged with criminal acts for sexual misconduct with minors and have misused their privileged positions, thus betraying the trust of the faithful. This has raised questions and concerns regarding the role of priests in the Church and the process of their formation (Bacon & James, 2018; Doyle, 2003; Gartner, 2004; John Jay College of Criminal Justice [JJCCJ], 2004; Marcotte, 2008). According to Mayerhofer (2020), such misbehavior is evidence of their lack of personal transformation into the identity and integration of spiritual fatherhood. In Mayerhofer's opinion, these priests were mere dispensers of sacraments and religious orators to the faithful, but they did not attain the necessary transformation.

Problems of the Clergy: A Developmental and Formational Issue

A study by the JJCCJ (2004) revealed that about one-third of the 1,400 priests against whom allegations of sexual abuse of minors were made showed a history of substance abuse or lacked the suitability and fitness for ministry. Although Church records show very few priests accused of sexual abuse had been victims of abuse themselves, the JJCCJ (2004) study revealed, of the 4,392 male U.S. clergy (priests and deacons), 279 or 6.8% of them were reported to have suffered one or more forms of abuse (i.e., sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional) from significant others, parents, or other family members. Though there is no specific record available on the prevalence of victims of abuse victimizing others among the public, Clark et al. (1999) indicated that, among 439 intravenous drug users, the prevalence of childhood physical or sexual abuse was 51% among women and 31% for men, and about 28% of them victimized others. Though the percentage of childhood abuse victims turning out to be victimizers is only a little over a quarter, it is a significant number to consider the long-term impact of childhood abuse on their adult life and behavior. Lothstein (2004) found about 20%–25% of priests and religious were sexually, emotionally, or physically abused as children.

Terry et al. (2011) found that some abusive priests exhibited serious pathological behaviors and developmental issues. Some abusive priests exhibited intimacy and social skill deficits, distorted sexual scripts, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive distortions (Ward & Siegert, 2002). According to Doyle (2003), abuser priests often came from families that failed to provide adequate emotional and spiritual nourishment, and they usually had problems with persons in authority. Research among the Catholic clergy in the United States by Kennedy and Heckler (1972) revealed emotionally underdeveloped priests who lacked social bonds often functioned at a preadolescent or adolescent level of psychosexual growth. Although these priests

may have a few close friends among their peer group, they appeared more comfortable in the company of teenagers and often handled their deficiencies through intellectualization (JJCCJ, 2004; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Most priests who had allegations of abuse against minors had been trained in national, mainstream seminaries before the 1970s (Terry et al., 2011).

Marcotte (2008) recognized the influence of the contemporaneous shift in U.S. culture. This shift in U.S. culture compels one to look at the statistics among the general population regarding the sexual abuse of minors. Finkelhor et al. (2014) indicated 26.6% of girls and 5.1% of boys are abused by the time they reach 17 years of age. The JJCCJ (2004) study, Terry et al. (2011), and Marcotte (2008) all emphasized the number of Catholic clergy who had sexually abused minors is significantly less than the number of reported cases by the nonclerical population who abused minors. Terry (2015) asserted sexual abuse against minors is not a problem specific to priests or the Catholic Church, but a major social problem affecting many young people. Marcotte (2008) suggested sexual misconduct allegations against mental health professionals are even higher at 2%–17%. The scholars at John Jay College collected data from all known allegations between 1950–2002 from 97% of dioceses in the United States and estimated 4% of the priests in ministry were alleged to have sexually abused minors (JJCJ, 2004; Terry, 2015).

Recommendations for Human Formation in Seminary

Doyle (2003) recommended to the USCCB that authorities like bishops, religious superiors, rectors of seminaries, and other significant formators should have adequate knowledge of neurotic psychopathology. Terry et al. (2011) also recommended the need to integrate human formation in seminary education to identify the potential risks of abuse and assist priests in working through their issues as they discern their vocation.

The JJCCJ (2004) study also revealed, prior to the 1980s, the Catholic seminary program in the United States focused mostly on spiritual and academic formation with minimum attention to pastoral formation. Since the mid-1980s, the Church emphasised the need of affective maturity and moral development in addition to spiritual and academic formation. Pope John Paul II (1992), in his apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, emphasized formation through the integration of four dimensions: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. In 2017, Pope Francis, in his document on *The Gift of The Priestly Vocation* (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017), explained human formation represents the "necessary and dynamic foundation" (no. 89) of all priestly life and should include (a) a spiritual dimension that shapes the quality of priestly ministry, (b) an intellectual dimension that provides the rational roots to understand the values required of a pastor, and (c) a pastoral dimension that facilitates a responsible and fruitful ecclesial service. Pope John Paul II (1992) explained how the basis of all priestly formation is human formation, stating, "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation" (no. 43). The person of the priest has a significant impact on the receivers of the mission; the ministry must be a bridge, not an obstacle, for people to encounter Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Therefore, developing an effective human formation program to facilitate the growth of the person of the priest and his transformation into his vocation into a spiritual father is a critical component of the priestly formation program. Person-of-the-therapist training is an evidence-based program that facilitates the process of identifying developmental issues or the core human woundedness of a mental health professional and provides the individual with the necessary tools to address and correct the issues so the person can appropriately engage with others (Aponte & Kissil, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The Catholic Church believes the formation of the priest, unlike the secular understanding of training for a particular job, is a collaboration with God's grace (USCCB, 2006). *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests* explained Saint Paul's description of formation as the work of the Holy Spirit transforming believers into the very image of Jesus Christ, who himself is the image of God (USCCB, 2001, 2006). The grace of baptism unites believers to the mystical body of Christ in faith and enables them to be available to God's work of formation and transformation, making a place ready for the Lord to dwell in them and transform them (USCCB, 2001, 2006). Therefore, priestly formation takes place within the context of the body of Christ and in relation to the mission of the church, so the candidates understand their role as priests to be representatives and servants of the church (USCCB, 2006). The seminary is an ecclesial educational community that aims to provide vocational accompaniment to future priests, helping them in their discerning and preparing them to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders with its grace and responsibilities (Pope John Paul II, 1992). Through the sacrament of ordination, the priest is configured to Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd, sharing the mission of salvation in the Church. According to the document, *Program of Priestly Formation* (USCCB, 2006), a seminary should have a program that aims to develop not only a well-rounded, prayerful, and experienced pastoral practitioner but also a well-integrated human person. More importantly, the document envisioned the human formation of candidates to the priesthood should focus on supporting and guiding aspiring young men to discern their call to be apt instruments of God's grace through the process of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-sacrifice, capable of giving oneself as a gift to others with total faith in God (USCCB, 2006).

It is through human formation that the priest integrates the qualities of a spiritual father (Mayerhofer, 2020). Since the 1990s, the USCCB has recognized the need to complement the human formation of priests apart from spiritual directors who focus specifically on the spiritual and personal growth of candidates to the priesthood (JJCCJ, 2004). In the early 2000s (JJCCJ, 2004), striking changes were initiated regarding human formation in seminaries. According to the *Program for Priestly Formation* (USCCB, 2006), current practices include the assistance of external psychologists and licensed mental health professionals. These professionals work with seminarians referred to them by the seminary faculty. However, often the seminary faculty are not trained to identify developmental issues. This situation can lead to issues going unnoticed and tends to mask, rather than reveal, the lack of development in many candidates for the priesthood (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Therefore, it is imperative that these individuals receive a broader, deeper, and genuinely freer experience of life to overcome such deeper developmental issues (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972).

Making a Difference in Human Formation of the Clergy

POTT training has been found to be an effective training model that facilitates the development and integration of therapists and counselors (Aponte & Kissil, 2016). The training helps aspiring therapists recognize and accept the reality of their flawed humanity as normal and then learn to use it to relate, understand, and intervene more effectively with their clients (Aponte & Kissil, 2016). Similarly, introducing POTT training for aspiring priest candidates can make a difference in human formation, providing opportunities for priests to work through their own neurosis by repairing and resolving the issues from their family of origin that could affect their ministry in a pastoral setting (Aponte & Kissil, 2016; Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). This training can help priest candidates make active and purposeful use of who they are, personally

and professionally in all aspects of their ministry as pastors—such as maintaining appropriate boundaries in their relationships and interactions and, at the same time, being genuinely present to the people they minister to with an attitude of empathic understanding and positive regard (Rogers, 1961).

Rationale

Research was essential to identify the best practices for assisting in the human formation of clergy and to improve their emotional and psychological well-being in all stages of their priestly ministry. The sexual abuse scandals caused by a small percentage of priests have effectuated severe harm to the victims, their families, the church community, and the morale of most of the priests who devoutly live their vocation in service to the community (JJCCJ, 2004; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Even though human formation had been made a primary and foundational focus of formation (Pope John Paul II, 1992; USCCB, 2006), minimal research considered current human formation practices and how these practices help priests in their developmental and emotional growth. Furthermore, there are no effective intervention programs currently integrated into seminary formation curricula.

Theoretical Orientation

Existential-humanistic theorists recognize every person as having the potential to become a fully functioning person (Corey, 2017; Rogers, 1961). Although existentialism and humanism have a significant philosophical difference, they share the respect for the individual's subjective experiences, the uniqueness and the individuality of each person, and reliance on the capacity of the person to make positive and constructive conscious choices in life (Corey, 2017). Both theories emphasize the significance of an individual's freedom, choices, values, personal responsibility, autonomy, purpose, and meaning, giving little emphasis on technique but great

significance to the therapeutic process and a genuine encounter (Corey, 2017). In line with humanistic psychology, Rogers (1961) believed people are essentially trustworthy, resourceful, capable of self-understanding and self-direction, and able to make constructive changes and live effective and productive lives as fully functioning or self-actualized persons (Corey, 2017; Rogers, 1987a). That ability is the central source of energy in the human organism that drives the person toward self-fulfillment (Fernald, 2000), which Rogers (1961) perceived as the nature of the human person. Therefore, the existential-humanistic approach helped the researcher be fully and genuinely present and communicate the same to the participants, with a higher degree of congruence, an attitude of warm and positive acceptance, and empathic understanding of the subjective world of the participants, sensing the feelings and personal meanings of the participants' experiences (Rogers, 1961).

Relevance of the Current Study

The qualitative phenomenological research approach helped to examine the experiences of seminarians who underwent modified POTT training and assessed how it helped the priest candidates work through the family of origin and early childhood experiences they identify as adverse or dysfunctional. The training was assumed to be an effective process in facilitating the human development and emotional maturity of candidates to the priesthood by increasing their identity integration and religious commitment and making use of their full potential. The training could help participants identify their true selves and their strengths, reminding them they can be at their best even as they give their service to the community as ministers. The training could also help priests in their ongoing formation by helping them become aware of the areas in which they need to grow and making a regular assessment in collaboration with their spiritual director or mentor.

In this research, I focused on describing the experiences of the seminarian participants in the POTT-informed training. I also aimed to describe how the training has helped participants identify the emotional and developmental issues that continue to affect their current life and how it has helped them work through some of these issues to be effective ministers as priests. The results of the study have helped expose many problems of clergy to be like those of any other ordinary person who grew up in a dysfunctional family, rather than labeling it as a problem of the celibate clergy. This study also has paved the path for a new collaboration between mental health and counseling professionals and theological schools for the training and formation of the future clergy.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the participants' experiences in POTT training and evaluate the degree to which those experiences helped them in their human formation by facilitating a greater awareness of the emotional and developmental issues that affect their lives while fostering growth and maturity as effective priests. In exploring and describing the essence of the experience, I used the following as the primary research question: What is the essence of seminarians' experience in POTT-informed training? The following are the subquestions:

1. What were seminarians' experiences in the POTT training?
2. How do seminarians describe the influence of their POTT experience on their awareness of self?
3. How do seminarians describe the impact of POTT experience on their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and discernment of their vocation to priesthood?

To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the experiences of seminarians who completed POTT training. A qualitative research design, using a transcendental phenomenological approach, was best suited to understand the participants' subjective experience of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations

The study had four notable limitations. First, there are no comparable objective data to verify the impact of POTT training on the participant seminarians. I did not have data that described the participants' level of self-awareness, personal development, and the status of their emotional maturity before attending the POTT training. Pretest data would have been valuable for comparing and assessing the impact of the training. The passage of time since the research began was a second limitation. Given the passage of time and the crisis of the pandemic, some participants found it difficult to recall some of the details of their learnings or nuances of their emotions when reflecting on their experiences.

Third, participants' overidentification with me as a past formator was a potential limitation (Sheperis et al., 2017). Participants had the tendency to overidentify with me due to their familiarity with me as a formator and the long-term contact. As a result, participants might have felt the pressure to please or give an amplified impact of the training. Fourth, although I am a priest and formator and my peer debriefer was a priest and formator, there were no priests on my dissertation committee who had the understanding and experience of formation, which was also a potential limitation.

Definitions of Terms

Archbishop. The title of archbishop is given automatically to bishops who govern archdioceses (USCCB, 2021). It is also given to certain other high-ranking church officials,

notably Vatican ambassadors (apostolic nuncios), the secretaries of Vatican congregations, and the presidents of pontifical councils (USCCB, 2021).

Auxiliary Bishop. An auxiliary bishop is assigned to a Catholic diocese or archdiocese to assist its residential bishop (USCCB, 2021). Whether in a diocese or archdiocese, his title is bishop.

Bishop. The person of the bishop is the highest order of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church. Most bishops are of the diocesan clergy, the chief priests in their respective dioceses (USCCB, 2021). But some (auxiliary bishops) are the top assistants to their diocesan bishops, and some priests are made bishops because of the special posts they hold in the church associated with the offices of the Vatican (USCCB, 2021). Diocesan bishops and their auxiliaries are responsible for the pastoral care of their dioceses (USCCB, 2021). In some cases, diocesan bishops are assigned a coadjutor bishop, who is like an auxiliary except he automatically becomes the diocesan bishop when his predecessor resigns or dies (USCCB, 2021).

Bracketing. Bracketing is a research strategy used by the researcher to set aside all knowledge not due to the actual instances of the phenomenon being explored or investigated to mitigate the potential bias that might have a deleterious effect on the research process (Giorgi, 2007).

Brother. A man who has taken a religious vow in a religious order but is not ordained, who could be studying toward the priesthood, or one who chooses to remain a brother in a religious order that has clerics and brothers or in a religious order of brothers (USCCB, 2021).

Catholic Church. The word *catholic* means universal, in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole" (USCCB, 1994, no. 830). The church is catholic because Christ is present in her, and she has been sent on a mission to preach Christ to the whole of the

human race (USCCB, 1994). Although all are called to this catholic unity of the People of God, it is manifested in different ways—some as Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all humankind—because, ultimately, all are called by God's grace to salvation (USCCB, 1994). A fully incorporated person into the Catholic Church is someone who possesses the Spirit of Christ and accepts all the means of salvation given to the church together with the entire organization. The profession of faith manifests their bond of unity, the sacraments, ecclesial governance, and communion joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, rules through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops (USCCB, 1994).

Church. The word *church* (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-kalein*, to "call out of") means a convocation or an assembly (USCCB, 1994). It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for religious purposes. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the chosen people of God (USCCB, 1994). The first community of Christian believers, by calling itself the church collectively, recognized each individual to be an heir to that assembly (USCCB, 1994). In the church, God is "calling together" his people from all the ends of the earth (USCCB, 1994). In Christian usage, the word church designates not only the liturgical assembly but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers (USCCB, 1994). In this research study the word "Church" is used to refer specifically the "Catholic Church" and exclude other churches and church denominations.

Clergy. In Catholic usage, *clergy* is a collective term referring to all those ordained—bishops (Episcopate), priests (Presbyter), and deacons—who administer the rites of the church (USCCB, 2021).

Deacon/Diaconate. In the Catholic Church, *diaconate* is the first of the three ranks in ordained ministry. The deacons who are preparing for the priesthood are transitional deacons and

those not planning to be ordained priests are called permanent deacons. Married men may be ordained permanent deacons, but only unmarried men committed to lifelong celibacy can be ordained deacons if they are planning to become priests (USCCB 2021).

Diocese. An ordinary territorial division of the church headed by a bishop; the chief diocese of a group of dioceses is called an archdiocese, which is headed by an archbishop (USCCB, 2021).

External forum. In the context of seminary formation, the external forum refers to the domain of knowledge that may be used and referred to in reference to the seminarian at the level of evaluations (including reports to the seminarian's ordinary), discussions and deliberations about the seminarian's progress in formation by the team of advisors, and votes on recommending advancement to higher stages of formation and to orders (St. Joseph's Seminary Handbook, 2019–2010).

Formation. Formation is the education and training offered in a seminary as part of preparing men for priesthood (USCCB, 2021).

Formators. Formators are a team of people who might include clergy, religious, and lay people trained to accompany seminarians in their education and training by way of promoting, assessing, and developing their priestly vocation (USCCB, 2006).

Human formation. Human formation is aimed to promote the integral growth of the person and allows the integration of all his dimensions, which includes the physical, psychological, and moral growth of the person (USCCB, 2006).

Internal forum. The internal forum in the formation context refers to the domain of knowledge that is privately maintained, at least initially, between a seminarian and his spiritual director. Seminarians are expected to give their spiritual directors access to deeply personal

knowledge about themselves with a maximum degree of self-disclosure (St. Joseph's Seminary Handbook, 2019–2010). Both are to keep in mind that "issues of human formation that properly belong to the external forum are not limited to the spiritual direction relationship for their resolution" (USCCB, 2006, p. 131).

Member checking. Member checking is a process for validation in which the researcher takes the transcriptions of the interview and the initial descriptions of the significant statements or themes back to participants to verify their accuracy and credibility (Creswell (2013).

Ordination. The word *order* in Roman antiquity designated an established civil body, especially a governing body (USCCB, 1994). *Ordinatio* means incorporation into an *ordo* or order—an integration into one of these bodies of the church, like the *ordo episcoporum*, the *ordo presbyterorum*, and the *ordo diaconorum* by a rite called ordination (USCCB, 1994). The word *ordination* is reserved for a sacramental act that integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons that goes beyond a simple election, designation, or institution by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a sacred power that comes from Christ himself through his church. Ordination is also called *consecratio* or consecration, for it is a setting apart and an investiture of the person by Christ himself for his church (USCCB, 1994). The laying on of hands by the bishop, with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination (USCCB, 1994).

Parish. A specific community of the Christian faithful within a diocese, having its church building and under the authority of a pastor responsible for providing ministerial service, is called a parish (USCCB, 2021). Most parishes are formed on a geographic basis, but they may be formed along national or ethnic lines (USCCB, 2021).

Pastor. A pastor is a priest in charge of a Catholic parish or congregation (USCCB, 2021). He is responsible for administering the sacraments, instructing the congregation in the doctrine of the Church, and providing other services to the people of the parish (USCCB, 2021). *The pastor* is not ordinarily used as a title before the name of a Catholic priest (USCCB, 2021).

Peer debriefing. A peer debriefer is an external check of the research process to increase the trustworthiness of findings. The peer debriefer plays the devil's advocate, helping the researcher to be honest and examine the data collection and analysis process from multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology. The term phenomenology refers to the study of phenomena, where a phenomenon is anything that appears to someone in their consciousness (Moran, 2000).

Presbyterate. Presbyterate is a synonym for the priesthood or may refer to the collective body of priests of a diocese or similar ecclesiastical jurisdiction (USCCB, 2021).

Priest/priesthood. Priests, or members of the priesthood, are men ordained and appointed to act on behalf of people in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (USCCB, 2021).

Religious priest/diocesan priest. Religious priests are professed members of a religious order or institute. Religious clergy live according to the rule of their respective orders (USCCB, 2021). They are under the jurisdiction of their local bishop as well as of the superiors of their order if they engage in pastoral ministry (USCCB, 2021). Diocesan, or secular, priests are under the direction of their local bishop (USCCB, 2021). Most serve in the parishes of the diocese, but they may also be assigned to other diocesan posts and ministries or be released for service outside the diocese (USCCB, 2021).

Seminary. A seminary is an educational institution for men preparing for the priesthood (USCCB, 2021).

Transcendental phenomenology. A transcendental phenomenology is a methodological approach to gaining knowledge through insight into the phenomena explored through intentional awareness of the actual instance of the phenomena to describe the essence of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review centers around two conceptual lenses that support the understanding of the quality of the person of priest in the Catholic Church: (a) the ideal of the person of the priest, and (b) the actual developmental issues of the person of the priest. I divided the literature review into eight major sections beginning with the history of priesthood in the church. A short demographic of Catholic clergy, clergy sexual abuses, and the problems of sexual abuse of the clergy are presented in the first section of the chapter. The Old Testament and the New Testament understanding of priesthood and the development of their functions in the church to the present day are included in the second section of the chapter.

The third section of this literature review focuses on the problems in the life and ministry of priests in the church, especially the criminal and scandalous behaviors of clergy in the United States. The section includes a special focus on the abuse of minors among the clergy in the United States in the context of diverse sociocultural backgrounds and the gradual development of legal sanctions. In this section, I also explore various studies on the cause of misbehavior among the clergy.

The focal point of the fourth section is the church's responses in general to the problem of sexual abuse of priests. This section includes the responses of the USCCB in addressing the problem of abuse and the development of formation practices in the church that fosters growth and development in the person of the priest. I also review the recommendations of the Church for improving the quality of priest formation, emphasizing the need for human formation practices in seminaries and limitations in current practice.

In the fifth section, I present the dogmatic and developmental perspectives of an effective priest and the relevant research on current formation practices. In the sixth section, I summarize the literature review and discuss the literature gap and the recommended intervention program for improving the development of self and emotional maturity. In the seventh section, I present the plan for the current study on the experience of seminarians in the person-of-the-therapist (POTT) training and the theoretical orientation. Finally, in the eighth section, I present a brief reflection on myself as a researcher, recognizing my biases that might affect this study and my strengths that positively contribute to this study.

Demographic Data on Catholic Clergy and Clergy Sexual Abuse

The church's *Book of Statistics*, updated in 2016, reported there are 414,969 priests in the world, serving 1,299,059,000 Catholics, 18% of the total world population (Agenzia Fides, 2018). There are 70,412,021 Catholics in United States, which is 22% of the total population according to the Catholic Directory (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2016). As of 2018, there are 37,302 diocesan and religious priests in the United States, of which 25,706 are diocesan, and 11,396 are religious-order priests (USCCB, 2021). In 2018, 523 priests were ordained in United States, and 4,856 seminarians were enrolled in Catholic seminaries, 3,596 in diocesan seminaries, and 1,260 in religious-order seminaries (USCCB, 2021). According to the USCCB (2021) report, 7,002 clergymen (i.e., priests and permanent deacons) were found guilty of sexually abusing minors between 1950 and 2018, which is 5.9% of the total number of 118,184 priests serving during the same period. The report showed there were 20,052 identified victims of sexual abuse by clergy in the same period (USCCB, 2021).

These demographic data present the severity of the problem of abuse among the clergy and the extent of the damage in their lives and ministries as well as to the entire Christian

community. In the Christian tradition in general and the Catholic tradition in particular, priests are chosen from among men as described in the letter to the Hebrews (5:1), in the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (1989) and appointed to act on behalf of people in relation to God. These priest offenders who have been chosen and appointed failed to integrate adequate personal growth, maturity, and sanctification in their vocation and identity as priests. Therefore, the problem I seek to address in this research is the inadequate formation of priests that promotes the integration of the personal and spiritual maturity required for bringing Christ sacramentally to the people of God. This is particularly a concern for those responsible for formation programs.

Problem

The Old Testament history of Israel significantly recognized priest and priestly ministry as the mediator between God and man (Knight, 2017; Morales, 2019; VanGemeren, 1997), offering sacrifices to God on behalf of people (Biggerstaff, 2009; Morales, 2019; VanGemeren, 1997; Xavier, 2010). In the New Testament of the Christian Bible, Jesus Christ fulfilled the role of the priest, offering his own life for the salvation of his people (Haring, 1996; Healy, 2011; Merrill, 1993). Jesus is the model, the foundation for the apostolic ministry and the ministry of the priests who have presided over the Lord's Supper in the subsequent centuries (Harun, 2017; Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003). The life and ministry of a priest is a total commitment to follow the example of Jesus Christ and represent Christ to his church (Burghardt, 1973; Osborne, 2003), requiring continued growth in personal sanctification and faithfulness to vocation and in bringing Christ to be sacramentally present to the world (Flannery, 2004a; White, 2015). However, some priests have failed to live up to the ideal and have abused their privileged positions (Bacon & James, 2018; Doyle, 2003; John Jay College of Criminal Justice [JJCCJ], 2004; Lothstein, 2004; Terry et al., 2011), inflicting irreparable damage to faithful Christians and to the church.

History of Priesthood in the Catholic Church

The history of priesthood in the Catholic Church has its foundation in Jewish traditions. Therefore, in understanding the priesthood and the significance of its role in the Church, it is essential to understand it from the perspective of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and its gradual growth in the history of Christianity to its status as we see it today.

Old Testament Priesthood

The word *priest* is derived from the Greek word *presbyteros* meaning "the elder," a male person, who was chosen to be at the service of the Deity and authorized to hold public worship, especially to offer sacrifice (Knight, 2017; Korsah & Oku, 2019). The priest assumed the role as a mediator between God and humans, offering sacrifices for atonement on behalf of the people and functioning as a teacher of religious truths (Knight, 2017; Leithart, 1999; Morales, 2019; VanGemeren, 1997). In the Old Testament, the idea of personal priesthood begins from Adam, who was instructed to till and keep the land. This mandate was later transferred to Noah after the flood, being the father of the new humanity (Bergsma, 2021). In the course of history, the role of high priest was identified with the head of the clan (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses), though the whole of Israel was chosen to be a priestly nation and every first born to be consecrated to serve as a priest (Bergsma, 2021; Bramwell, 2020; Korsah & Oku, 2019; Lane, 2016). With the Mosaic covenant, priesthood was not identified with the head of the clan or the firstborn, as the men of the tribe of Levi were anointed to be priests for Israel (Bergsma, 2021; Bramwell, 2020).

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in the Bible refer to priests as having significant roles in the life of the Israelites and anointed to offer sacrifices (Korsah & Oku, 2019; Lane, 2016; Rehm, 1992; Soggin, 1989; Wellhausen, 1871). Israel was in dire need of Yahweh's

gift of the priesthood, as they could not have access to God's house without an ordained priest to offer sacrifices, obtain blessings, and, above all, ensure the nation's survival from the judgments of God (Bergsma, 2021; Leithart, 1999; Morales, 2019; Xavier, 2010). Biggerstaff (2009) identified the three primary duties of the priests, described in the book of Deuteronomy (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Deut. 33:10) as (a) teaching the law, (b) offering incense, and (c) performing sacrifices on behalf of the people.

In performing their responsibilities as religious functionaries, priests had to be pure and holy (Korsah & Oku, 2019; Lane, 2016; Xavier, 2010). Therefore, every step of the priestly initiation ceremony and ordination was for their purification and sanctification above the rest of the congregation, as described in Leviticus 8 and Exodus 29 (Biggerstaff, 2009).

New Testament Priesthood

The presentation of Jesus as firstborn in the temple by his parents, Mary and Joseph, unlike other first-born Jewish boys, was because he was going to serve God in a priestly role (Bergsma, 2021). The baptism of Jesus was not only to demonstrate his solidarity with sinners but to consecrate him by the power of the Spirit. The voice announcing, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (*New Revised Standard Version Bible,* 1989, Mt. 3:17), is a testimony to this consecration, pointing out his identity as a savior and as the high priest (Haring, 1996. According to Merrill (1993) and Lane (2016), the author of Hebrews in the Bible identified Jesus, the high priest, as the priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Heb. 5:6, 10, 6:20), the king of Salem, the priest of the Most High God who came out to meet Abraham after defeating the kings (Heb. 7:1).

However, a clear distinction is evident between a Jewish high priest who offered animal blood in the inner room of the temple and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The offering of Jesus is

perfect in every respect, for he entered not only the most holy place of the temple made by human hands but also entered into heaven on our behalf and is seated at the right hand of God to intercede for all of humanity (Harun, 2017; Lane, 2016). Therefore, Christ and his apostles do not fit the characteristics of either the Jewish Levitical priests of the Old Testament or the pagan priests of the Gentiles but comprise a new priestly leadership for a new Israel (Healy, 2011). There are several essential characteristics of Jesus' ministry: (a) Jesus was sent by God as a divine initiative and not self-initiated or initiated by community; (b) it was a ministry of love, a loving response to God his Father and love for the people of God; and (c) it was a ministry of service, a self-renunciation and sacrifice for the sake of the redemption of humanity (Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003).

The Apostolic Ministry and the Priesthood in the Early Church

The apostolic ministry in the New Testament began with the appointment of the 12 by Jesus and their being sent out on mission (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Mt. 10:5–15; Lk. 9:1–5; Mk. 6:6–12). According to the synoptic gospels, the Twelve Apostles—because of their intimacy with Jesus and familiarity with the teaching on the Kingdom of God—were given the power to act on behalf of the kingdom and commissioned to (a) teach, (b) baptize, (c) celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of Jesus, and (d) govern the community (Bergsma, 2021; Lane, 2016; Nicolas, 1990).

The word *apostle* is derived from the Greek word *apostolos*, meaning someone who is sent or commissioned to complete an assignment (Lane, 2016). The New Testament does not mention any ordained priest as we understand them today in the church, and Jesus never called himself a priest (Harun, 2017). However, the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is recognized as his role as the high priest offering his own life for the salvation of his people (Harun, 2017).

After the Pentecost experience, the apostles continued the ministry of Jesus and, as the number of believers increased, many overseers, presbyters, and deacons were appointed to assist them (Lane, 2016). The ministers presiding over the Lord's Supper in the subsequent centuries were called presbyteroi, episkopoi, and diakonoi; however, the difference between presbyteroi and episkopoi is not very clear, particularly in the pre-Nicene church (Harun, 2017; Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003; Stewart, 2014).

The Encyclical of Pope Pius XI (1935) stated that a priest as a minister of Christ is an instrument in the hands of God, another Christ to work for the redemption of the world by continuing the work begun by Jesus. Burghardt (1973) identified four basic facets of a Christian minister or priest: (a) called as a companion, giving a lifetime commitment to Christ Jesus as his master; (b) called as an apostle, to be sent to bring the message of Jesus and the presence of Jesus; (c) called as a presbyter, to be responsible for the churches and to represent the Church's teachings and institution; and (d) called as the presider at the Liturgy of the Eucharist, a central function of the priesthood. Around this liturgy, the church has built human access to the life that is Christ.

The Ministry of Priest and the Priesthood—Third Century to Second Vatican Council

In the third century and onwards, the episkopos began to gain prominence and, in some cases, became the sole leader in many Christian communities. The liturgy and the leadership of the community were centered around the episkopos (Osborne, 2003). The episkopos was also the primary unifier of the local church and successor apostles (Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003). The episkopos ordained a presbyter as a minister within the local church, sharing the same succession and the ministerial office of the priesthood (Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003). The Council of Nicaea in AD 325 recognized the collegiality of episkopos and apostolic succession (Osborne,

2003) in the post-Nicene Church. The episkopos (i.e., the bishops) as apostolic delegates became more concerned with matters of the regional and universal church than with the responsibilities of local churches. The presbyters were entrusted with the administration of local congregations and became parish priests (Nicolas, 1990).

In the early medieval and scholastic periods, the celebration of the Eucharist became the central ministry of the priest, making him different from all others in the church because of his sacred power in celebrating the Eucharist (Osborne, 2003). The development of the theology of priesthood also happened in this period. The sacramental order of priesthood came to be identified with three exemplifying qualities initiated by the church by a liturgical action, conveying a spiritual power and bringing the grace of Christ (Nicolas, 1990). The Council of Trent began in 1545 and emphasized in its 23rd session that sacrifice and priesthood are conjoined and that the church received the visible sacrifice of the Eucharist—as well as the visible and external priesthood—from Christ, who has entrusted to the apostles and their successors in the priesthood the responsibility to offer and administer the Eucharist and forgive sins (Waterworth, 1848).

Post-Vatican Council Understanding of Priesthood

The Second Vatican Council modified the Eucharistic-centered understanding of the priesthood from the scholastic period by presenting a broader definition of the priesthood based on the ministry of Jesus, reemphasizing the threefold functions of teacher, priest, and pastor (Osborne, 2003). Pope Paul VI in *Lumen Gentium* (Flannery, 2004b) stated God sent his son and appointed him as the heir of all things (cf. Heb. 1:2) that he might be the teacher, king, and priest of all people. The threefold mission and ministry of Jesus became the basis for the Second

Vatican Council to reaffirm the Church's theology and ministry (Osborne, 2003), especially regarding the ministerial role of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ministers.

According to Pope Paul VI in *Lumen Gentium* (Flannery, 2004b), the fullness of sacramental orders (i.e., sanctifying, teaching, and governing) is conferred upon a bishop by his episcopal consecration. However, the bishop's office is exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the college of bishops. Priests do not possess the highest degree of religious authority over the laity and depend on the bishop in the exercise of power; however, priests share in the church's threefold mission and represent Christ in collaboration with the order of bishops, thereby making the universal Church visible to the local church (Flannery, 2004b).

The Second Vatican Council, according to Flannery (2004b), taught that priests, as fathers in Christ, should (a) take care of the faithful whom they have begotten by baptism and their teaching (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pt. 1:23), (b) serve from the heart as a pattern to the flock (cf. 1 Pt. 5:3), (c) lead and serve their local community as the people of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), and (d) bear witness to Christ as the good shepherd to all (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), even those who, though baptized, have fallen away from the use of the sacraments or from the Catholic faith. However, White (2015) reiterated that Christ's promise of personal sanctification is conditioned upon the faithfulness of a priest to cooperate with God's providence and to build up the body of Christ in a life of faith, hope, and charity. Therefore, each priest's life is a process of growing into perfection by being faithful to his vocation, sharing in the ministry of Christ, and pastoral prudence (White, 2015). Despite their significant role as mediator, some priests have abused their privileged positions by misappropriating church funds and, even worse, by sexual

misconduct that betrays the faithful's trust and raises many questions and concerns regarding the roles of priests in the Church.

Criminal and Scandalous Behavior of Catholic Priests and Clergy

The criminal and scandalous behavior among church leaders was not an entirely new issue that developed in the 19th or 20th centuries; it has been around since the beginning of the history of the Church. Anderson (2005) described widespread sexual abuse of children and adults by 11th-century priests and bishops who were unaccountable to the secular law. Anderson also referred to the efforts of Cardinal Peter Damian (1007–1072) in addressing the problem of abuse and the legitimization of laity to punish offending clergy. Although today's sexual abuse crisis in the Church is considered the gravest since the Reformation, 16th-century Dutch scholar Erasmus expressed his concern over innocents who fell prey to priests sexually abusing them under the pretense of confession (Boer, 2019). Bohm et al. (2014), in their literature review of child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, presented an extensive prevalence of abuse in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United States between 1981–2013. In the following sections, I briefly describe the areas of abuse in the Church by clergy, particularly the sexual abuse of children, and the social-cultural and legal contexts of abuse that brought the problem of sexual abuse into the limelight.

Misappropriation of Church Funds

There have been numerous bishops, priests, and church leaders who have misappropriated church funds for personal and deviant purposes (Bacon & James, 2018; Doyle, 2003; JJCCJ, 2004; Lothstein, 2004; Marcotte, 2008). I describe a few of the most egregious cases to highlight the extent of the problem. In one case, reported in January 1981, a federal grand jury in Chicago investigated the late John Cardinal Cody of the Catholic Archdiocese of

Chicago for diverting one million dollars in tax-exempt church funds to enrich a life-long friend (Taylor, 1982).

The *Washington Post* reported on June 5, 2019, that Michael J. Bransfield, bishop of the diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, gave cash gifts totaling $350,000 to fellow clergymen (Boorstein et al., 2019). Ryan (2005) reported about Walter Benz, a priest from the diocese of Pittsburgh, Rev. David Piroli in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and Monsignor Joseph McLoone, a priest of the diocese of Philadelphia, who all misused church money for their promiscuous lifestyles. There has been an alarming increase in church fund embezzlement cases and squandering by Catholic bishops, priests, and laymen serving in parishes as office staff or volunteers.

Sexual Misconduct With Adults

Sexual misconduct with adults is not always considered illegal. A dismissive, ambivalent, or even clergy-compassionate approach has often been taken toward clergy accused of sexual misconduct with adults (De Weger & Death, 2017). Notably, most misappropriation of church funds has also involved sexual misconduct with adult men or women. For example, John Cardinal Cody of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago spent the misappropriated money on his lifelong friend (Taylor, 1982). Michael J. Bransfield, bishop of the diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, spent the stolen money on gifts to his fellow clergymen and young priests with whom he had sexual relationships (Boorstein et al., 2019). Walter Benz, a priest from the diocese of Pittsburgh, admitted to spending part of the money on gambling trips to Atlantic City and on his secretary, with whom he cohabitated for several years (Ryan, 2005). Monsignor Joseph McLoone, a priest of the diocese of Philadelphia, was paying for a beach house in Ocean City, New Jersey, and for traveling, dining, and entertaining adult men with

whom he had sexual relationships (Argos, 2019). Fr. Peter Migueli of the Archdiocese of New York was found guilty of looting more than $1 million from a pair of city parishes in the diocese and spending the cash to maintain a sexual relationship with a man named Keith Crist (Ross & McShane, 2015). Cases are numerous of priests misappropriating church funds to support an opulent and impulsive lifestyle, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and sexual misconduct with adult men and women.

Sexual Misconduct With Minors

Sexual misconduct with a minor is one of the worst crimes anyone can commit, given the devastating impact on the victim's life. The recent discoveries of clergy's sexual misconduct with a vulnerable population are even more heinous than misuse of church funds or misconduct with other adults. Consequently, such sexual crimes have come to the forefront of public and media attention and have become a priority among law enforcement to protect children and the vulnerable. The sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy has been more visible in the United States, although it is by no means confined to this country (Doyle & Rubino, 2004). It has also become one of the most significant challenges the church has faced since the Reformation (Doyle, 2006). Therefore, there have been numerous studies done on clergy sexual abuse of minors, its context, the consequences, and the ways to address the problems.

Stoltenborgh et al. (2011, as cited in Bohm et al., 2014), stated the sexual abuse of children has been increasingly recognized as a serious international problem affecting around 11.8% of all children. The case of Fr. Gilbert Gauthe in 1984 was the first complex and highly embarrassing example of clergy sexual misconduct against minors in the United States. Gauthe pled guilty to 39 counts of sexual battery and was sentenced to 20 years in prison (Doyle & Rubino, 2004; Terry, 2015). Terry et al. (2011) indicated the diocesan authorities had received

complaints about Gauthe 7 years prior to the indictment, and he was repeatedly warned about his behavior. Gauthe was not removed from ministry until a parent of one victim demanded the removal.

The Catholic Church has since received increased scrutiny, especially following the publication of a series of investigative articles by the *Boston Globe* regarding the abuse of priests and other professionals in the archdiocese of Boston (Terry, 2015). According to Doyle and Rubino (2004), since 1984 there have been several hundred criminal prosecutions of Catholic clerics throughout the United States; it is estimated some 250–300 Catholic clergymen have received a sentence through the criminal justice system. However, between 1950 and 2018, there have been more than 7,000 clerics accused of sexual abuse involving a minor among a total of more than 118,000 clerics, or approximately 6% of the clergy serving in active ministry during this period (USCCB, 2018).

According to Doyle and Rubino (2004), these abusers' patterns were varied, though initially identified as pedophilia. Sipe (1995) estimated the actual number of pedophile cases was 10%–20% of all reported cases. Doyle and Rubino (2004) stated most cases of priest abuse involved adolescent boys, although a smaller number of cases involved girls. More recent reports have revealed numerous cases of women who were abused by clergy while they were minors (Dillon, 2002; Lundstrom, 2002; McNamara, 2002; Pfeiffer, 2002). Although most of those accused of sexual abuse were male clerics or religious men, there have been isolated cases of religious women who abused children in orphanage settings (Doyle & Rubino, 2004). Even though priests were the majority of those accused among the clergy, there have also been a few bishops and cardinals. Since 1990, 14 U.S. bishops have been accused of some form of sexual abuse and have resigned from office (Sipe, 2003). One of the most serious cases involved the

long history of sexual abuse of minors, seminarians, and young priests by Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, illustrating the seriousness of the problem of sexual misconduct among the clergy, which still continue to reveal new sex assault allegations (Graham, 2023).

The revelations of such extensive sexual abuse of minors by clergy have had a significant impact on the church in the United States. Sociologists, political scientists, theologians, religious scholars, and lawyers have made many attempts to better understand the problem and recommend solutions to rectify the situation (Doyle & Rubino, 2004). Prior to 1984, people were largely unaware of extensive clergy sexual abuse, as it was rarely reported. Even when it was reported, the victims and their families were often silenced with the assurance the church would take appropriate measures to resolve the issue (Doyle & Rubino, 2004). Unfortunately, the resolutions often were limited to admonitions or a transfer of the offending clergy to another assignment (Goodstein & Stanley, 2002). Rarely were the accused clergy clinically assessed or treated until the 1970s and 1980s (Barry, 2002). According to Barry (2002), even the justice system rarely pursued criminal proceedings against accused priests to avoid embarrassment and allow church authorities an opportunity to deal with the situation.

Today, with the exposure of so many clergy sexual abuse cases, the church, the general public, and the legal system all recognize the seriousness of the problem. Several studies have tried to make sense of the abusive behavior of the clergy (Terry, 2015). One longitudinal study of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy revealed the rise in sexual abuse instances in the 1960s and 1970s was consistent with the rise in other types of deviant behaviors (e.g., drug use and crime) and changes in social behaviors (e.g., premarital sex and divorce) during the same period in the United States (Terry et al., 2011). Factors unique to the Catholic Church, such as an exclusively male priesthood and their commitment to celibacy did not seem to be a reason for

their abusive behavior (Terry, 2015). In the following section, I provide a brief highlight of some of these studies from sociocultural, legal, and other developmental perspectives.

Abuse of Minors in the United States

Abuse of minors in the United States is not an isolated incident limited to the clergy or their status as celibate but has been found among the general population and was prevalent early on. However, abuse of minors came into the limelight in recent years. Many sociocultural factors have contributed to the prevalence of licentious lifestyle and sexual abuse, including abuses against minors (Terry et al., 2011). A gradual and subsequent development of legal sanctions against abusers has also brought greater awareness among society leading to increased legal protection for children. In the following section, I describe the socio-cultural and legal sanctions against the abuse of children, particularly factors that led to the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy.

Sociocultural Context of Child Abuse

In seeking to understand the problem of abusive and deviant behavior of clergy in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, it is essential to consider cultural and societal changes—especially the sexual revolution—during the last half of the 20th century (Terry et al., 2011). The 1920s sparked a radical change in perception in nearly every aspect of U.S. life (Clark, 2016; Ostrander, 1968). Sexuality thrived with the growing advancement of entertainment and communication, which strongly influenced the behavior of young people, especially affecting their interest in sexual behavior. Sex had previously been valued as something acceptable only within the bond of marriage (Clark, 2016; Mosher, 1980; Ostrander, 1968). The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s received much media attention and had a lasting impact on U.S. culture to the extent that sexual encounters, premarital sexual

relationships, gay and lesbian lifestyles, and the publication of erotic material gained acceptance among young adults (Escoffier, 2015; Meyerowitz, 2014). The 1970s were considered, according to gay novelist Brad Gooch, the Golden Age of Promiscuity, leading to a culture of "easy sex"—sex without commitment, obligation, or a long-term relationship (Escoffier, 2015). Sexual abuse became a serious social problem that affected many teens and early adults (Finkelhor et al., 2014; Terry, 215). According to Terry (2015), sexual abuse is often perpetrated by people closely known to the victims, especially within organizations serving young people (e.g., sports organizations, the Boy Scouts of America, and institutions such as schools, colleges, and churches).

Pope Benedict XVI (2019) wrote about the social context of sexual abuse by the clergy, in relation to the 1960s through 1980s, as an egregious event that occurred in Europe and the United States on a scale unprecedented in history, distorting the normative standards of sexuality. According to Pope Benedict XVI, this extensive collapse of culture influenced the new generation of priests in those years, resulting in a high degree of laicization among the priests.

The social and cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s reveal the increase in the level of deviant behavior in general society and among priests of the Catholic Church in the United States (Terry et al., 2011). According to Marcotte (2008), based on the JJCCJ report, the "sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy involved a discrete cohort of mostly diocesan priests who entered seminaries and were ordained between 1950 and 1980" (p. 32). Marcotte further identified, as did May (1999), that most of the offenses were committed by newly ordained priests who were in their late 20s or early 30s, many of whom were themselves victims of sexual and other abuses and who grew up during the affluent period following depression and war.

The perception of "normal" sexual behavior and the laws governing sexual behavior considered to be "wrong" or abusive have been changing dramatically over the past 50 years (Terry et al., 2011). Similarly, the JJCCJ (2004) study also identified the changes in court rulings associated with rape and the sexual abuse of children and the reporting requirements regarding child abuse and neglect (Terry et al., 2011) as a major factor affecting the increased rate of reporting of sexual abuse during the late 1980s. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the social and legal sanctions against sexual abuse and neglect of children in the United States.

Social and Legal Sanctions

The history of child protection in the United States, according to Myers (2008), can be seen from the perspective of three eras: (a) the period from colonial time to 1875, also described as the era before organized child protection; (b) the period from 1875 to 1962, which witnessed the beginning of organized child protection through nongovernmental child protection societies; and (c) the period since 1962, which marked the beginning of the modern era with government-sponsored child protection services.

Child Protection Before 1875

Before 1875, children were largely without protection, although they were not totally without assistance (Myers, 2008). During the colonial period, English common law gave the father absolute custody of his children as a matter of legal right, including a duty to provide support, an obligation to discipline, and the right to the child's services (Thomas, 1972). The parental discipline of children could be both severe and arbitrary, as parents, teachers, and ministers often believed in stern corporal correction, which many felt was supported by the teachings of the Bible (Thomas, 1972).

Child Protection From 1875–1962

According to Myers (2008), organized child protection emerged from the rescue of a 9-year-old girl named Mary Ellen Wilson in 1874, who lived with her guardian and was routinely beaten and neglected in one of New York City's worst tenements, Hell's Kitchen. A religious missionary named Etta Wheeler, through the help of Henry Bergh, an influential founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, initiated the rescue efforts of Mary Ellen and the creation of a nongovernmental charitable society devoted to child protection. This new organization came to be known as the New York Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC). By 1922, there were some 300 nongovernmental child protection societies across the United States (Antler, 1979; Myers, 2008; Schene, 1998).

The Modern Era of Child Protection

The 1960s saw an explosion of studies on child abuse, and medical professionals played a significant role in this awakening (Myers, 2008; Schene, 1998). Prior to the mid-20th century, medical schools provided little or no training on child abuse. John Caffey, a pediatric radiologist, published an article in 1946 in which he described the condition of "six children with subdural hematoma and fractures of the legs or arms" (Myers, 2008, p. 454). This article brought attention to the prevalence of child injuries (Myers, 2008).

In 1962, Dr. C. Henry Kempe and colleagues published a ground-breaking article, "The Battered Child Syndrome," which played a leading role in bringing child abuse to national attention (Kempe et al., 1962/1985). The article included evidence of X-rays and relevant documentation of injuries (Kempe et al., 1962/1985). Congress placed new emphasis on child protection with amendments to the Social Security Act in 1962, which recognized Child Protective Services as part of all public welfare (Myers, 2008). By 1967, all states had passed

some form of mandatory reporting laws (Brown & Gallagher, 2014; Myers, 2008;). In 1974, the federal government enacted the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974), and many states began to make reporting child abuse mandatory for nurses, teachers, social workers, and police officers (Brown & Gallagher, 2014), bringing the prevalence of child abuse and neglect into focus. In 1974, about 60,000 cases of child abuse were reported, and this number continued to increase year after year until the early 21st century, when the numbers declined but remained high (Myers, 2008).

The increased awareness of the sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of children and mandated reporting of abuse cases against children also brought to light sexual abuse by clergy in the Catholic Church. Many victims or their parents began coming forward to report their experience of abuse. The result was an alarming increase in the number of sexual abuse cases by Catholic clergy and other religious denominations and the general public between 1984–2002. According to the JJCCJ (2004) study, most of the reported abuse incidents occurred between 1960 and 1980 (Terry et al., 2011). Since 1985, there has been a significant drop in the number of reported sexual abuse cases involving children, especially among the clergy (Terry et al., 2011).

Factors Associated With Clergy Misconduct Against Minors

Plante (2015a) confirmed, based on his evaluation and treatment of 50 sex-offending priests in the Catholic Church that sex offenders are not all the same; they differ in their "offending behavior, interpersonal dynamics, preferred victim targets, and taking risks" (p. 413). Plante recommended that offenders should be treated with respect due to their unique conditions, as some have varied forms of comorbidity that contribute to their conditions. Although Plante advocated sensitivity to offenders' potential vulnerabilities, acknowledging offenders' infirmities

in no way negates the devastation and long-term negative mental health, spiritual, and relational impacts of being sexually violated or betrayed by a person of trust.

Celibacy and Clericalism

The studies conducted by the JJCCJ (2004), Terry (2015), and Terry et al. (2011) found evidence to support the idea that the celibate status of Catholic priests contributes to the sexual abuse of minors. In contrast, Doyle (2006) found "mandatory celibacy alone does not cause sexual dysfunction" (p. 195); however, Doyle acknowledged a possible relationship between celibacy and the emotional health of priests. Doyle argued the privation of sexual contact does not necessarily cause dysfunction and affirmed healthy celibacy is possible; however, Doyle felt it is detrimental to the priest and those around him when celibacy creates a sense of an ontological superiority.

According to multiple researchers, the sense of clerical superiority and the specialness of priests may contribute to a feeling they are immune to ordinary problems; when faced with common human problems such as loneliness, problematic alcohol or drug abuse, overeating, mood or behavioral disorders, and dysfunction, they feel confused and unable to seek the help they need (Doyle, 2003; Manuel, 2012; Plante, 1999b, 2004, 2015a, 2020a). Clericalism and accompanying elevated expectations of priests give priests a feeling they are not ordinary persons but have reached a level of perfection or an elevated state (Frawley-O'Dea, 2007). This elevated status severely hampers the reality of the human person, encouraging him to repress and deny sexual urges and desires without developing a healthy and productive path toward integration (Cozzens, 2000; Manuel, 2012).

Confronted with the reality of common human experiences, priests might begin to question their identity (Manuel, 2012). When it comes to problems of sexual impulses and

behavior—which are contrary to the expectations of the church—the clergy may find it difficult to admit their struggles and to seek the necessary help to embrace their humanity (Manuel, 2012; Plante, 2015a; Plante & McChesney, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Clericalism frequently results in an unwillingness to seek professional help and a continuation of denial and repressive defenses to maintain the more perfect and idealized clerical persona (Plante, 2020a; Plante & Aldridge, 2005; Plante et al., 1996).

When clerics encounter problems with sexuality, clericalism can lead to the adoption of coping mechanisms like chronic and compulsive use of pornography, masturbation, and sexual acting out, most typically with either consenting adults or paid sex workers (Manuel, 2012; McGlone & Len, 2012; Plante, 1999a, 2004). Another downside of clericalism is that priests struggle with moral and interpersonal challenges, leading to self-doubt and acting out behaviors (Cozzens, 2000; Manuel, 2012; Plante & McChesney, 2011). Psychological consultations are required to identify the root cause of a cleric's behavior and receive a diagnosis whether of comorbid psychological issues or other problems (e.g., alcohol and substance abuse, chronic depression, anxiety, or personality dysfunction) and to develop adequate wellness and safety plans in responses (Plante, 1999a; Plante & McChesney, 2011; Thoburn & Baker, 2011).

Childhood Experience of Abuse and Neglect

Greathouse et al. (2015), in their review of the literature, identified factors that contribute to the perpetration of sexual abuse, including "experience of child abuse, previous sexual behavior, interpersonal-skill deficits, gender-related attitudes, perceptions of peer behavior, and substance abuse" (p. 9). Tyler (2002) identified the impact of childhood abuse and neglect upon adulthood, especially the problem of internalizing and externalizing behaviors of children who have been sexually abused in their interpersonal relationships; these behaviors include substance

abuse, depression, suicide, and various forms of violent behavior. Hanson and Slater (1998) advocated a victim-to-victimizer theory to explain abusive behavior, suggesting exposure to sexual abuse in childhood could lead the victim to reenact that childhood trauma as an adult by abusing children. Hanson and Slaterfound 28.2% of 1,717 offenders reported they had been sexually abused as children. Lothstein (2004) supported the victim-to-victimizer theory after finding about 20%–25% of the priests and religious who had undergone treatment in her institute following accusations of sexual abuse had been sexually, emotionally, or physically abused as children. Bryant (1999) reported about 66% of the sex-offending priests he treated were abused as children.

Other studies resulted in mixed results. Knight and Sims-Knight (2003) found support for the victim-to-victimizer theory, but McCormack et al. (2002) failed to find such a connection. Simons et al. (2002) found childhood abuse did not predict the perpetration of assault on others; however, they did find offenders who had a history of childhood sexual abuse and childhood exposure to pornography were less empathic to child victims and reported perpetrating sexual abuse toward children. Collectively, these studies suggest a possible association between physical abuse during childhood and later involvement in violent and aggressive behavior in adulthood (Lee et al., 2002; Muller & Diamond, 1999; Widom & Ames, 1994; Widom & Shepard, 1996). Exposure to childhood emotional abuse appears to have deleterious effects, including negative emotions like anger, irritability (Teicher et al., 2006), and difficulties in adult relationships (Davis et al., 2001; Perry et al., 2007). Exposure to family violence and witnessing domestic violence has also been found to be predictive of adult violence (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987; Widom, 2001) and intimate partner violence (White et al., 2008).

Many researchers have found a correlation between having multiple sexual partners, early initiation of sex, and perpetration of sexual violence (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Hall et al., 2005; Merrill et al., 2001; Parkhill & Abbey, 2008; Senn et al., 2000). According to the research, men with impersonal attitudes toward sex prefer casual sexual encounters to committed relationships and are more motivated to have sex for gratification than for intimacy or emotional closeness (Malamuth et al., 1991). Those endorsing sex without love as acceptable are more likely to perpetrate a sexual assault (Abbey et al., 2006, 2007; White et al., 2008; Zawacki et al., 2003). Thus, childhood sexual abuse, neglect, and similar traumatic experiences have serious consequences in adulthood, especially in interpersonal relationships and behaviors.

Attachment Style

Based on psychological attachment theory during the developmental years, individuals develop bonds that become the foundation for prosocial and intimate relationships in adulthood (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). The absence of secure attachments in early childhood might lead some individuals to begin to seek intimacy inappropriately as adults (Greathouse et al., 2015). The love and trustworthiness individuals experience from caregivers in their early life help them develop healthy human relationships later and are essential to human existence (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). The literature on attachment theory emphasizes how love and trustworthiness in relationships can significantly influence an individual's functioning, styles, and personality (Bowlby, 1988; Johnson, 2004). The support of family therapy emphasizes the importance of relationships and trustworthiness for children in forming healthy individuality, a strong sense of self, and the desire for socialization (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Boszormenyi-Ngy & Kesner, 1986; Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2003; Pipp et al., 1992). In contrast, a person who is unattached or

insecurely attached may reject human relationships and attention or become emotionally insecure and isolated when left alone (Liberman et al., 1991).

Antisocial Personality Disorders and Behavioral Issues

Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is a "pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 748). This behavior pattern is also referred to as "psychopathy, sociopathy, or dissocial personality disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 748) and is "more common among first-degree biological relatives than the general population" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 750).

However, environmental factors such as "child abuse or neglect, unstable or erratic parenting or inconsistent parental discipline may increase the likelihood that conduct disorder will evolve into anti-social personality disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 750). Studies give convincing evidence that genetic factors contribute significantly to individual differences in ASPDs, alcohol use disorders (Tarter et al., 1999; Waldman & Slutske, 2000), and/or drug use disorders (Cadoret et al., 1995; Grove et al., 1990). However, studies have also shown several environmental factors increase the risk of ASPD and ADDs, especially problematic family functioning such as poor parental monitoring and inconsistent disciplinary practices (Clark et al., 1999).

Parents' use of drugs and other psychopathology also affect the development of their children (Clark et al., 2002). Holzer and Vaughn (2017) reported the results of a longitudinal study done among children by Robins (1966) who found the symptoms of the disorder could be traced back to childhood; maladaptive behaviors in childhood can be a risk factor for ASPD. Robins (1966), in their study of 524 individuals who were referred to a child guidance clinic for

30 years, found "a majority of the patients diagnosed with ASPD were male with a history of symptoms including theft, incorrigibility, running away, truancy, bad companions, sexual activity and excessive interest, staying out late, and problems with school discipline" (Holzer & Vaughn, 2017, p. 292). According to Holzer and Vaughn (2017), the majority of the ASPD patients came from broken or impoverished homes and had fathers who were either sociopathic or alcoholic and were "antisocial toward their parents, teachers, and other authority figures [and were] involved in at least one juvenile court case, with 51% sent to correctional institutions" (p. 292).

The psychological investigation conducted by Kennedy and Heckler in the late 1960s among Catholic priests revealed priests in the United States were not very different from most ordinary Americans, even though high expectations were placed on them (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Therefore, according to Kennedy and Heckler, there were many underdeveloped and emotionally immature priests in the United States at that time; just as many ordinary U.S. men were also underdeveloped.

Clergy struggled most because of the insurmountable contrast between their experience of human limitation and the transcendent requirement and expectations placed on them to present themselves as the image of Christ (Doyle, 2003; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Manuel, 2012; Plante, 1999b, 2004, 2015a, 2020a). High expectations tend to shape the education, living, and interpersonal relationships of priests, though they continue to be ordinary men who can only react to situations with their ordinary human powers (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972).

Kennedy and Heckler (1972), making use of Erikson's multistage schema for describing human psychosocial development, evaluated the representative sample of U.S. priests in their study into four categories: (a) 7% were rated as developed, (b) 18% as developing, (c) 66% as

underdeveloped, and (d) 8% as maldeveloped. The lack of personal development affects their life as priests, in that they (a) remain distant, (b) experience relationships as unrewarding, (c) are uneasy about intimacy, (d) have few close friends, (e) have difficulties with their personal identity, and (f) lack self-confidence (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). According to Barrs (1972), 20%–25% of the priests in western Europe and North America "have serious psychiatric difficulties, especially in the form of neuroses and chorionic alcoholism or a combination of both" (p. 50). Barrs found about 60%–70% of the priests in the study suffered from emotional immaturity to some degree. This does not necessarily prevent them from exercising their priestly function, but it does prevent them from being happy and effective priests—despite being called to bring people the joy of Christ's love.

Spiritual Dryness

Bussing et al. (2017) examined the prevalence and predictors of spiritual dryness in a cross-sectional study of 3,824 Catholic priests and found spiritual dryness was experienced occasionally by 46% of the priests and often or regularly by 12% of the priests. The strongest predictors of spiritual dryness were (a) lack of perception of the transcendent, (b) low sense of coherence, (c) depressive symptoms, and (d) emotional exhaustion. These four variables explained 46% of variance; loneliness, anxiety, and the personal accomplishment component of burnout only added 1.3% to the explanation of the variance (Bussing et al., 2017).

By recognizing the complexity of these genetic and environmental factors that affect the clergy's life and functioning, the Church has made attempts to address priest misconduct and abuse individually through therapy and proactively through (a) psychological testing and screening for admission into formation programs, (b) new formation policies and guidelines for candidates, and (c) continuing formation programs for clergymen.

The Catholic Church Response to the Issues of Clergy Misconduct

The Catholic Church has recognized the criminality and seriousness of the sexual abuses committed by her clergy—and its long-term impact on the victims, their families, and the future of the Church (JJCCJ, 2004; Terry et al., 2011)—and has taken necessary measures to address the problem. Pope Francis (2018), in his open letter to the people of God, stated no effort would be sufficient to repair the harm done; however, the pope firmly asserted that we should spare no effort to prevent such situations. In the following sections, I describe recent responses of the American Catholic Church, namely the USCCB and the recommendations of John Jay College of Criminal Justice after their study on the sexual abuse cases of the clergy.

Diocesan Responses

Although sexual abuse is a major problem that has affected many young people in many countries, the Catholic Church has received extensive media attention as a U.S. problem (Terry, 2015), generating a deep sense of outrage against priest-abusers and those protecting them (Terry et al., 2011). A Philadelphia grand jury report and subsequent investigations revealed not only allegations of sexual misconduct against the perpetrators but also allegations against the religious superiors and bishops who failed to make mandatory reports of the abuse, thus further endangering the welfare of minors and obstructing justice (O'Brien, 2020). Until the mid-20th century, any violation of celibate priestly chastity was considered a moral failure that required appropriate spiritual help, and the troubled priests were typically sent to particular retreat centers; however, beginning in the 1950s, the discipline of psychology and psychological testing became the accepted norm for screening and implementing a treatment process for such disorders and behavioral problems (Terry et al., 2011).

Although the USCCB began discussions on the issue of sexual abuse in 1985 (Terry et al., 2011), only in 1990 did the bishops develop principles that demanded prompt response to allegations: (a) removal of the offender from ministry, (b) compliance with civil law, (c) assistance to the victim, and (d) greater transparency in dealing with the case (Terry, 2015). In 2002, the USCCB, in their annual general meeting held in Dallas, Texas, promulgated the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, known as the Dallas Charter, which included necessary revisions based on recommendations from the Vatican (Miller, 2020; Robertson, 2005; Terry, 2015; Terry et al., 2011; USCCB, 2002a, 2002b).

Evaluating the implementation of the Dallas Charter after 10 years, Plante and McChesney (2011) noted most U.S. bishops had taken the issue of sexual abuse seriously and notable progress has been made, especially in the development of policies and practices recommended in the charter: (a) safe-environment programs, (b) zero-tolerance policies, (c) establishing local and national review boards, (d) regular auditing, and (e) better screening of clergy applicants; however, Plante and McChesney also noted some bishops had made little or no effort to implement the charter guidelines. The USCCB also charged the National Review Board to commission a study on the prevalence and reasons for clergy sexual abuse in the church within the United States. The study was led by the JJCCJ at the City University of New York (Miller, 2020).

In 2014, Pope Francis appointed a pontifical commission for the protection of minors and appointed U.S. Cardinal O'Malley of the archdiocese of Boston as president of the commission; the pope also approved the creation of a tribunal to investigate and judge bishops accused of protecting abusive priests (Miller, 2020). The 2018 plenary assembly of the USCCB revised and approved the *Charter for the Protection of the Children and Young People: Essential Norms for*

Diocesan/Episcopal Policies Dealing with the Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons and *A Statement of Episcopal Commitment* (USCCB, 2018b). With these actions, the bishops established processes for greater accountability in dealing with sexual abuse cases, which were made more stringent with a new document of Pope Francis titled *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (O'Brien, 2020).

Recommendations for Prevention Policies

The JJCCJ (2004) study noted identifying potential abusers may not always be possible with traditional psychological assessments, and abusers are not always driven by diagnosable psychological disorders (Terry et al., 2011). The authors of the JJCCJ study recognized the importance of prevention policies that focus on three major factors: (a) education emphasizing the human formation of the seminarian, (b) appropriate intervention strategies used to prevent chances of abuse, and (c) greater transparency and accountability on the part of church leaders (Terry et al., 2011).

Since the beginning of this century—with numerous sexual misconduct cases and other behavioral and personality disorders of the clergy exposed—the church has recognized more than ever the significance of appropriate human formation practices for seminarians (Doyle, 2003; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004). From a systemic point of view of the family and society, a seminarian aspiring to become a priest—just like nonreligious individuals—inevitably carries unresolved issues from the experiences in family and early childhood (Richardson, 2011). Unless these unresolved issues are worked through and integrated appropriately, a seminarian may continue to have emotional and relationship struggles. The church has begun to recognize the importance of appropriate psychological development and emotional maturity of priests to promote a level of self-awareness and self-acceptance that

prepares priests to give themselves freely and appropriately in the service of others (John Paul II, 1992).

The human formation components in seminary education programs are regarded as the most critical prevention practice (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; John Paul II, 1992; USCCB, 2006). Clergy need "in-depth training in maintaining professional and personal boundaries as well as issues related to sexuality and sexual expressions" (Plante & Daniels, 2004, p. 391). According to Terry et al. (2011), priests who have taken some form of human formation programs recognize it as a valuable intervention in reducing priests' vulnerability to abuse, consistent with the decline in sexual abuse (Terry et al., 2011). In response to recommendations made by Pope John Paul II (1992) in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the USCCB prepared the fifth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* in 2006, which emphasizes the significance of and specific programs for human formation. The emphasis on the human formation program does not state there was no formation program for the priests in the history of the Church. However, the gradual growth and educational structures in the formation program for priests in the Catholic Church is evident. In the following section, I briefly describe the gradual growth of the formation program of priests from the time of Jesus.

History of Formation Practices

The selection, formation, and formal designation or ordination of a priest is an ancient tradition found in the Old Testament. It has its origin in the Jewish tradition, as described in the history of priesthood presented earlier in this chapter. In the Mosaic period, a priest was formally appointed, and they belonged to a priestly clan; though, previously, the priesthood was identified with the head of any clan (Bergmsa, 2021; Bramwell, 2020). However, in the New Testament, Jesus, the high priest, personally chose, formed, and commissioned the apostles to continue the

mission, following the footsteps of Jesus (Bergsma, 2021; Lane, 2016; Nicolas, 1990). In the following section, I describe priestly formation practices that began with Jesus and their gradual development over the years to the present form. I also describe the limitations of these practices.

Scriptural Background

The Christian priesthood and the formation of priests have their foundation in Jesus Christ, who formed his disciples through a personal and nonformal education in ministry. As written in the gospel, "And he appointed 12, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Mark 3:14–15). The formation for disciples was "to be with Jesus," and so being with Jesus was the set pattern for formation in the early church. Paul referred to Timothy as "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, 1 Corinthians 4:17; cf.1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2) and as a "fellow worker" (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Romans 16:21; cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:2). Timothy became one of Paul's most reliable traveling companions on his second missionary journey (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Acts 16:1-3). After that, it appears Timothy left Paul's side only when Paul gave him special orders to work with individual congregations (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Acts 17:14; 19:22; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Apprenticeship During the Patristic Period

In the early church, the priests' training occurred on a personal and practical level, similar to an apprenticeship in which aspiring candidates assisted bishops or priests in discharging their duties, thereby gradually acquiring abilities to explain the scriptures and administer the sacraments (Ellis, 1967; Viéban, 1912). However, St. Augustine of Hippo established a

monasterium clericorum (monastery of clergy or clergy house) in North Africa toward the end of the 4th century; it was attached to the cathedral, and everyone lived together in Augustine's house (Ellis, 1967; Smither, 2008; Viéban, 1912). Augustine believed this arrangement was essential for ministry, and he ordained only those willing to live in a community (Viéban, 1912). According to Smither (2008), Augustine insisted on several essential values: (a) community as key for intellectual and spiritual growth, (b) renunciation of private property and commitment to sharing everything in common, (c) the importance of training clergy for ministry in Hippo and Africa, and (d) the importance of celibacy and personal holiness.

The Council of Trent

Following the Reformation, there was such a felt need for well-trained clergy that Pope Paul III appointed a commission to undertake the cause of ecclesial education and clerical reform in the Church. This became a major topic for the Council of Trent from 1545–1563 (Viéban, 1912). The recommendations on the formation of clergy promulgated by the Council of Trent continue to be the foundation for formation to the present day: (a) every diocese is bound to choose and train a certain number of youth in ecclesial discipline; (b) the candidates must be at least 12 years of age, skilled in reading and writing, and interested persevering in the service of the church; (c) besides general education, they were to be professionally trained to preach, conduct divine worship, and administer sacraments; and (d) seminary is to be governed by the bishop with the assistance of two commissions of priests, one for spiritual and the other for temporal matters (Ellis, 1967; Smith, 1899; Viéban, 1912; White, 1989). The result of these council reforms was the establishment of seminaries with bishops as the central figures in priests' formation and their ordination. This was the case for the next 350 years (Viéban, 1912; White, 1989). The Sulpicians and the Vincentians further strengthened the spirit of Trent's

reforms by integrating intellectual training with opportunities for meditation and spiritual conferences to support the moral and religious formation of priests (Viéban, 1912; White & Wister, 1995).

The Sulpicians at Baltimore established St. Mary's Seminary in 1792 as the mother seminary of the United States (Ellis, 1967; Viéban, 1912). As new dioceses were created in the United States, with additional bishops and many religious congregations, by 1900 there were 76 seminaries in the United States with about 3,395 seminarians, including diocesan and religious enrollees (White, 1989). From the early 20th century, there seems to have been annual meetings of the seminary department of the Catholic Educational Association to help maintain the standards of education and seminary formation. These meetings included discussions on recruitment, spiritual formation, discipline, and the method of teaching the various branches of seminary curriculum (Viéban, 1912).

Although Pope Leo XIII emphasized the quality of intellectual life in the church, Pope Pius X came down sharply against these developments, labeling them as "modernism" and limiting such intellectualism through his 1910 decree Sacrorum Antistitum (Talar, 210; White, 1989; White & Wister, 1995). Pope Pius X also promulgated the universal church law known as the Code of Canon Law, which came to effect in 1917. These laws included the general legislation of the Council of Trent and defined the nature and purpose of priestly formation, the needs of spiritual directors, and the subjects studied in seminaries as requirements for holy orders (Peters, 2001; White, 1989; White & Wister, 1995). Local bishops and major superiors of the religious congregations were no longer the authorities over the seminaries but were agents of Roman authorities executing the Pope's decrees. Pope Pius XI and Pius XII continued this trend

by issuing more encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, and letters on the priesthood with unprecedented regularity (White, 1989; White & Wister, 1995).

Vatican Council II

The Second Vatican Council's decree on the training of priests, Optatam Totius, is one of the most important documents that emphasizes the need for renewal of seminary training; it laid down the basic principles for priestly formation, especially considering the pastoral needs of the local church (Flannery, 2004c; Walsh, 2012). The council also proposed the episcopal conference of each nation develop a seminary program of priestly formation aligning with the national education system and the ministerial needs of the country (USCCB, 2006; White & Wister, 1995). The decree emphasized that seminary training be oriented to the formation of the whole person—spiritual, intellectual, and disciplinary—so they become true shepherds of souls after the model of Christ—teacher, priest, and shepherd (Flannery, 2004c). In alignment with the council's recommendations, the USCCB promulgated the first Program for Priestly Formation (PPF) in 1971. The fifth and latest edition of the PPF was published in 2006 and aligns with recommendations of the Ratio Fundamentalis or the Basic Plan for Priestly Formation, published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1969 (USCCB, 2006; White & Wister, 1995). One of the unique features of the post-Vatican Council focus on priestly formation was its recognition of an integrated approach and its emphasis on human formation as foundational (USCCB, 2006). This emphasis is the specific area of focus in this study. Therefore, in the next section, I highlight the significant aspects of human formation and current practices of human formation in the seminary according to the pontifical documents as well as the PPF from USCCB.

Current Formation of Priests and Seminary Practices

Pope Saint John Paul II, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores* Debo Vobis (John Paul II, 1992), described seminary formation as far more than schooling or job training. Seminary formation is "a cooperation with the grace of God [and] moved by that grace, we make ourselves available to God's work of transformation" (USCCB, 2006, no. 68). Pope Saint John Paul II emphasized programs for formation should attend to human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral areas as the four pillars of formation, as each mutually informs the other three (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; John Paul II, 1992; USCCB, 2006).

The Congregation for the Clergy, under the guidance of Pope Francis, more recently published Ratio Fundamenalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis [The Gift of Priestly Vocation]. According to the document, "Each dimension of formation aims to form the seminarians in the image of Christ who was sent by the Father to fulfill his plan" (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017, no. 89). However, human formation is recognized as the "necessary foundation" for priestly formation (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; USCCB, 2006), as the human personality of the priest is to be a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ (John Paul II, 1992; USCCB, 2006). The document further stated, "A correct and harmonious spirituality demands a well-structured humanity. . . . [It is a] journey towards perfecting our humanity by cultivating humility, courage, common sense, right judgement and discretion, tolerance and transparency, love of truth and honesty" (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017, no. 93).

The focus on human formation aims to prepare these aspiring candidates for the priesthood to be apt instruments of Christ's grace (USCCB, 2006, no 76). This focus includes various dimensions of being a human person—the physical, the psychological, and the

spiritual—that brings about affective maturity, including human sexuality—particularly for celibate priests (USCCB, 2006). According to the PPF, "Human formation happens in a three-fold process of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-gift, and all of this in faith. [As the process unfolds], the person becomes more perfectly conformed to the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, the word made flesh" (USCCB, 2006, no. 80).

For human formation training to be effective, every seminarian must become more aware of his own life history and share especially with the formator (a) his experiences of early life, (b) the influence of his family and relatives, (c) his ability—or lack of ability—to establish mature and well-balanced interpersonal relationships, and (d) his ability to positively handle moments of solitude (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017). Family history and information about early life experiences help the candidate and the formator make collaborative, safe, and appropriate assessments and choose suitable formation approaches during the years of formation (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017).

The resources recommended for fostering this human formation process in seminary, according to the PPF, include (a) instruction in human formation through conferences, courses, and other educational means; (b) personal reflection to self-examine behavior, motivations, inclinations, and appropriateness of life experiences; (c) community life and feedback to provide greater self-knowledge opportunities, self-control, and opportunities to cultivate a spirit of generosity; (d) engagement in various tasks to help learn to accept authority, act responsibly, and work harmoniously; (e) the inclusion of external advisors or mentors to observe and assist in growing humanly with feedback about general demeanor, relational capacities and styles, maturity, capacity to assume the role of a public person and leader of the community, and the appropriation of Christian virtues; (f) the presence of spiritual directors to function in an internal

forum to dialogue with seminarians to cultivate those virtues of self-reflection and self-discipline; and (g) the engagement of mental health professionals to support human formation (USCCB, 2006). The PPF includes recommendations and a vision of formation that enables seminarians to be formed as well-integrated and mature persons, who can give themselves totally to the service of the church and the Christian community. The practical implementation of the program, however, has its limitations, and the envisioned human maturity and emotional growth do not occur in many seminarians.

Limitations in the Current Formation Program

The Congregation for the Clergy (2017) has emphasized the importance for a seminarian to become aware of his life history and to be ready to share it with his formators. Childhood and adolescent experiences in the immediate and extended family have influenced their lives, including their current life. The experiences in infancy and the early formative years with parents, caregivers, and other family members, especially their relationships with women, will contribute significantly to the person's integral growth and, ultimately, to their life and ministry (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017).

However, there were no specific programs or courses offered to seminarians in the academic curriculum or any other formative courses to create an awareness of their life history. There were no programs to address childhood experiences and the dynamics in the family of origin or their experiences with their caregivers and extended family members. Neither the current academic curriculum nor formational conferences and workshops provided an opportunity for the seminarians—as individuals or as a group—to become aware of their family of origin and early childhood experiences and how those experiences affect their present life.

Even the courses on pastoral counseling and clinical pastoral education focus more on learning pastoral skills than on working through their personal issues.

Barrs (1972) and Doyle and Rubino (2004) described the need for formators and vocation directors to be instructed in human psychology and to have an adequate working knowledge of neurotic psychopathology. Most of the formators and spiritual directors who mentor the students were not trained or professionally skilled to help seminarians identify the developmental issues coming from their family of origin or early childhood and adolescent experiences. Therefore, very often, developmental issues were undetected or overlooked by either or both the seminarian or the formators. According to Kennedy and Heckler (1972), the recruitment and training process of seminarians has often tended to disguise rather than expose the lack of development of many seminarians due to passivity to regulations and authority and by staying away from many normal developmental experiences such as dating and other normal challenges non-seminarians experience in their social life.

Seminarians had very few opportunities to become aware of their developmental issues or other family-of-origin issues that continue to affect their current life and potentially their life as a priest. In their exceptional role as a priest, they are shielded from the challenges of growth. Instead, they adopt compensative behaviors to disguise this lack of growth or personality weakness, which only perpetuates clergy problems (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Seminarians lacked adequate opportunities to receive necessary assistance from skilled professionals in a safe environment to discuss the personal issues that continue to affect their present life. There was little literature or information available about the experiences of priests involved in human formation practices in the seminary and how such involvement is helping them become aware of the personal and developmental issues that affect their lives. It was essential to identify suitable

training programs that facilitate development with greater self-awareness and self-acceptance so seminarians can learn to give themselves freely in service to others in their vocations as priests.

An Effective Priest

In identifying a suitable program for an effective formation of priests, it is important to recognize the expectations of an effective priest. In the following section, I briefly describe the expectations of an effective priest from the perspective of the Church's teaching and the developmental perspective, particularly the development of self and emotional maturity. The section also includes recent research on seminary formation.

Dogmatic Perspective

An effective priest, according to the teachings of the Church, is trained to undertake the ministry of Christ, the good shepherd, teacher, and priest, representing Christ to everyone by giving himself in the service of others, just as Christ gave his life as a ransom for humanity (Flannery, 2004b; John Paul II, 1992). Therefore, the fundamental character of priestly formation is an integration of four dimensions—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—that aims to transform the aspiring priest in the image of the heart of Christ by entering into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017). John Paul II (1992), USCCB, (2006), and Congregation for the Clergy (2017) all emphasized the significance of human formation and emotional maturity of the priest as the foundation for all other aspects of formation.

According to Baars (2015), the affective maturity of the priest has special relevance for the priest and the priesthood. Barr emphasized how St. Thomas Aquinas recognized the necessity of psychic integration for the mature development of the human person and the importance of achieving personal happiness for anyone with a passion to live a virtuous life, particularly for a

priest who aspires to be a spiritual father to his flock. Flannery (2004a) wrote of the spiritual fatherhood of bishops and priests as the fathers of the church, who have been called to look after the faithful whom they have spiritually brought to birth by baptism.

Developmental Perspectives

Maslow (1943, 1970) emphasized different levels of needs necessary to achieve self-actualization in his hierarchy of needs, such as basic physiological and safety needs and the psychological needs of belongingness, love, and esteem (Smith, 2017). In self-actualization, a person can recognize their full potential and pursue becoming the best they can be (Smith, 2017). Neto (2015) highlighted that Maslow emphasized the importance of early experiences on individual development and personality stability, as the scaffolding of autonomy and personal growth entirely depends on the reciprocity of love and respect received in early childhood. Consequently, the lack of appropriate and timely nourishment in the lower tiers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs could negatively affect the developmental process and the possibility of reaching self-actualization (Gold, 2013; Huss & Magos, 2014; Petty, 2014). Based on Maslow's perspective, a priest needs to reach the stage of self-actualization to function effectively in his ministry; however, a lack of appropriate growth in any of the early stages can negatively affect the development of the person as a priest.

According to Kennedy and Heckler (1972), from their study of U.S. Catholic priests, the developmental framework of Erikson (1968) provides a perspective on the development of priests. Kenny and Heckler concluded a developed priest is not a priest who is in the state of absolute perfection but a person at the healthy end of the continuum of development. According to Erikson, a human person goes through eight developmental phases, and a successful handling of crisis in each stage leads to further development through integration and internalization

(Scheck, 2005). Erikson recognized human development as a process of working through sequential life crises, the successful resolution of each leading to higher levels of maturity (Scheck, 2005).

The first of Erikson's (1968) psychological developmental stages is infancy, where the quality of relationship and secure attachment with a caregiver becomes the foundation for a child's sense of trust, self-confidence, and the quality of relationship; mistrust developed due to inconsistent and insecure parenting greatly affects a child's ability to express themselves in a healthy manner in their later relationships (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005; Syed & McLean, 2018). Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), Greathouse et al. (2015), Hanson and Slater (1998), Hargrave and Pfitzer (2011), and others have, like Erikson, identified the serious impact on adult life and relationships from the lack of secure emotional bonds in early childhood, including the effect of abuse and neglect. According to Kennedy and Heckler (1972), maldeveloped priests in their study demonstrated the impact of unresolved traumatic experiences and experiences of mistrust during the formative years on their current lives and relationships. Poor family functioning, lack of parenting, and inconsistent discipline can increase the risk of ASPD, ADD, and maladaptive behaviors (Clark et al., 1999; Holzer & Vaughn, 2017).

The second of Erikson's (1968) stages is in early childhood, where children develop a greater sense of personal control and autonomy, depending on the caregiver's support and the freedom they are given in making choices. If a child is over-protected and not given optimal freedom to make choices, they develop a sense of shame and doubt (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). According to Erikson, success in this stage is the development of a healthy sense of autonomy; failure is seen in a sense of shame and self-doubt, which can lead to maldevelopment and, consequently, to disorders like compulsive and manipulative behaviors

(Erikson, 1963, 1968; Scheck, 2005). Erikson (1968) wrote that failure at this stage could lead to severe psychotic tendencies, a precocious conscience, overcompensation, and defiant behaviors. Kennedy and Heckler (1972) described how some of the maldeveloped priests had experienced painful separation from their parents due to divorce, desertion, or other psychological distance from one or both parents, causing emotional turmoil during their formative years and over-identification with their mothers who were over-protective; the father figures in their lives were often absent, weak, or passive. Lothstein (2004) and Kennedy and Heckler (1972) also pointed out how psychological immaturity among most of the priests in their studies was manifested in personality disorders, such as dependency, avoidance, chronic anxiety, depression, withdrawal symptoms, and other obsessive-compulsive and sexually deviant behaviors that reflect a need for desirability and acceptance. Kennedy and Heckler (1972) also found many underdeveloped priests grew up in troubled homes and could rarely express feelings or emotions.

The third of Erikson's (1968) stages generally occurs around the 4th and 5th years of life. After having learned to be an independent individual, children begin to recognize the difference between themselves and others, including gender differentiation, in an attempt to understand oneself and the world. Lack of growth in the previous stage in gaining a sense of identity hinders the child's ability to successfully move through this stage (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). The outcome of the challenge in this stage is the development of a healthy sense of initiative, nurturing a sense of direction and purpose in life, showing signs of ambition, active and curious exploration of life, a drive to accomplish, and a tendency to solve problems directly and enjoy it (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). Excessive guilt and shame can drain enjoyment out of their initiatives and could lead to self-restriction, hysterical denial, over-

conscientiousness, and paralysis of action (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005).

The fourth stage in Erikson's (1968) model occurs between the 6th year of life and puberty. During this stage, the child is more open to the world and has a growing need to be productive, learn something new, contribute to the world of adults, and be recognized by the world (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). Erickson called this stage a sense of industry. As a child develops a sense of industry, they feel they can make things and participate with others competitively and cooperatively; failing can make the child feel a sense of inferiority (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Erickson emphasized the significance of play and participation in activities with friends in school, the neighborhood, or at home, which introduces them to a new level of coping with reality; inferiority results in a child losing faith in one's tools and skills, feeling unable to be like others, and feeling disabled and isolated (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). Success in taking initiative at the previous stage leads to success in managing the challenges of the stage of industry. Fostering positive attitudes is significant at this stage as children develop a sense of division of labor and multiple opportunities (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005).

The fifth of Erikson's (1968) stages lasts from puberty to about 18 years of age. Erickson called this the stage of identity versus role confusion, a stage of life between childhood and adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). A sustainable and stable self-identity can be achieved at this stage only if they have been successful in dealing with the challenges of earlier stages constructively and positively (Scheck, 2005). Self-identity allows the person to have a sense of their unique personhood; otherwise, the person experiences confusion because of the diffused quality of self-understanding (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). Identity refers to a

sense of stability, wholeness, and harmony with oneself so that the person feels at home with their body and appearance and can move forward toward a greater purpose in life (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). This internal sense of identity integration flows into their social situations, especially into work, sex, and relationships with fellow human beings (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972). On the other hand, identity diffusion refers to a "feeling that one's appearance and one's being do not fit together" (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972, p. 25). Individuals might also experience doubt about their sexual identity and their ability to choose a career due to their conflicting interests, doubts, and struggles in relating well with others (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005).

Kennedy and Heckler (1972) found underdeveloped priests have failed to reach psychological adulthood and identity integration. Such priests consequently tend to assume the identity conferred by their role as clergy, which is not in tune with their internal disposition, but they find it difficult to relate to themselves and others authentically and intimately and are often uncomfortable with strong emotions and deep commitments. Davis et al. (2001) and Perry et al. (2007) confirmed that exposure to childhood emotional abuse and neglect has deleterious effects on adult relationships. According to Kennedy and Heckler, the priesthood offers security, and priests are rewarded with respect for their status as a priest; they are rarely challenged to change and grow and may use emotional isolation or other psychologically projective or reactive coping mechanisms to deal with uncomfortable or challenging situations. Therefore, identity diffusion and lack of integration is a major developmental block experienced by many priests and religious personnel.

The sixth stage, according to Erikson (1968), is intimacy and dissolution from self-centeredness that takes place in early adulthood; with adequate growth and integration in

previous stages, personality formation reaches its highest level (Scheck, 2005). In this stage, persons develop their capacity to move toward greater intimacy and sustainable relationships, not only sexually, but in developing true and mutual psychosocial relationships with a sense of duty toward the other (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). When identity and capacity for intimacy are not developed sufficiently, the person experiences isolation leading to psychotic disorder, depressive self-absorption, or vulnerability with the fear of ego-loss (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). This isolation can lead to regression, reflected in an obsessive need for pseudointimacy, and is often accompanied by a sense of stagnation, boredom, and interpersonal deterioration (Erikson, 1968).

Kennedy and Heckler (1972) observed this phenomenon among underdeveloped priests who experienced (a) periodic efforts to resolve their need for sexual expression and emotional closeness with women; (b) excessive use of alcohol to expedite close interpersonal relationships; or (c) compensatory behaviors like excessive vacations, sports activities, expensive hobbies, and expensive tastes in housing and automobiles. Similarly, many other priests have been accused of misappropriating church money for lavish and promiscuous living with adult men and women or in other forms of pseudointimacy with adults or minors (Argos, 2019; Boorstein et al., 2019; Doyle & Rubino, 2004; Ryan, 2005; Taylor, 1982; Terry, 2015).

According to Erikson (1963), the seventh stage of development is called generativity versus stagnation. The person experiences this in middle adulthood, as generativity encompasses two partners' desire to procreate and become responsible parents (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). Having achieved a positive and intact sense of identity and intimacy in middle adulthood, the person can now be devoted to caring for others; they turn away from self-absorption to altruism and creativity (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Scheck, 2005). This stage is

similar to Maslow's (1970) idea of self-actualization. Some might remain unmarried or have no children, but they still try to do their part in society's advancement, which enriches their lives (Scheck, 2005). Stagnation is the absence of such rich generative involvement and results in regression, an obsessive need for pseudointimacy, and self-indulgence. It appears in a personal sense of impoverishment and lack of real purpose (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972).

The eighth stage of development in Erikson's psychological development schema is integrity versus despair and disgust (Erikson, 1968). Only a person who has gone through the previous seven stages can now, as an older adult, accept their life cycle the way it presented itself, including the people they encountered and the nature of those encounters (Scheck, 2005). Ego integrity is the synthesis of all parts (Scheck, 2005), where the person can review their past life experiences with a sense of integrity. However, it can also be overwhelming and incredibly disheartening for the person who has failed or missed those opportunities and has no chance to do anything about it, thus leading to a sense of despair (Kennedy & Heckler, 1972).

As Syed and McLean (2018) pointed out, Erikson (1968) viewed all eight crisis stages as present at all points in human development; although certain tensions are salient at specific developmental periods in the lifespan, they will continue to be relevant to the rest of life. According to Syed and McLean (2018), the length and the intensity of the tension at each stage varies for individuals based on their personal situation and cultural context, but a reasonable resolution of tension is necessary for successfully resolve subsequent tensions. Erikson's developmental stages serve as a framework to understand the developmental blocks each individual may have experienced that affect their current life. Even though Erikson's model includes objective and predetermined developmental schema, an individual's experience of these

crises and how they are or are not resolved at different life stages is subjective, as pointed out by Syed and McLean (2018).

Appropriate psychological development and emotional maturity of a priest is necessary for him to function in his role as a priest and for living his priesthood effectively, carrying out his responsibilities as a spiritual father—just as it is important for any person to be an effective parent to their children.

Development of Self

In the early childhood years, experiences with parents or significant caregivers enable children to develop self-recognition and enhance their self-understanding (Santrock, 2013). According to Erikson's developmental model, the development of self is a process of growth that begins from infancy with successful handling of crises in each stage of growth with the support and encouragement of parents or significant others (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Santrock, 2013; Scheck, 2005). Infants gradually gain a sense of trust, self-confidence, and independence leading to a greater sense of identity or identity integration, which flows into social situations such as work, sex, and relationships with other human beings (Erikson, 1968; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Santrock, 2013; Scheck, 2005). Children also become socially sensitive as they develop their understanding of other people and their emotions (Santrock, 2013).

Emotional Maturity

The growing awareness of self is associated with children's ability to feel an expanding range of emotions; they begin to make sense of other people's emotional reactions and are better able to control their emotions (Santrock, 2013). Parents play a significant role in training children to regulate their emotions, especially negative emotions, either by their emotion-

coaching or by emotion-dismissing approach (Gottman et al., 1996). In coaching, parents monitor their children's emotions for opportunities to assist them in labeling the emotions and to coach them about how to deal with emotions effectively; in dismissing emotions, parents deny, ignore, or change negative emotions (Santrock, 2013). Emotion-coaching is recognized as an effective approach that is more nurturing and more effective in regulating negative effects; the children of emotion-coaching parents have fewer behavioral problems (Gottman et al., 1996; Hooven et al., 1995). The ability to regulate emotions plays an important role in determining the success of a child's peer relationships, as emotionally negative children are more likely to experience rejection by their peers (Santrock, 2013).

Therefore, seminary formation should make human development a priority and create appropriate programs that provide apt opportunities for seminarians to work through their emotional baggage and early experiences that continue to affect their lives negatively.

Research on Seminary Formation

Hankle (2010) conducted a study using a structural functional approach on vocation to priesthood and identified a psychological process of discerning one's vocation that includes (a) identifying oneself in the role of a priest and acquiring the idea of self as a priest, (b) investigating other lifestyle options, and (c) maintaining certain dispositions in tune with the priestly character. Hankle also revealed that perseverance in the discerner's disposition for discernment depends on sociological and environmental factors that play a significant role in identifying values and roles assimilated by the discerner (Hankle, 2010). According to canon law, a person who suffers from any form of amentia or other psychic illness is judged unqualified and lacks suitability for pursuing seminary formation, as they are not able to fulfill the ministry properly (Canon Law Society of America, 1998, Canon 1041.1). McGlone et al.

(2010) conducted a study using a structural-functional approach among psychologists engaged in psychological evaluation of seminarians and vocation directors from various U.S. dioceses on current psychological assessment practices in seminaries. The research revealed that assessment results are used mostly as a screening tool in the admission process and as a resource for formation processes with those admitted to seminary (McGlone et al., 2010). A study on the motivation for entering and leaving religious life by Rulla et al. (1978) revealed the vocation to priesthood is a gratuitous gift of God; however, the apostolic effectiveness of this vocation to priesthood depends on human growth and vocational maturity of the person to internalize the spiritual values that confirm this grace and minister as an effective instrument in the hands of God. Hankle (2010) also proposed it is important for seminarians or aspiring candidates for priesthood to integrate their priestly identity with their sense of self and a psychological evaluation that assesses their integration for their promotion to priesthood.

Summary of the Research

In summary, priests are assumed to represent a sacred and mediatory role between God and humanity, especially in the life and history of Israel (Knight, 2017; Leithart, 1999; Morales, 2019; VanGemeren, 1997). The sacred scripture presents a priest as an anointed one (cf. Lev. 4:3–16; Lev. 8:12; Lev. 21:10; Ex. 28:41; 29:7). Based on the books of Exodus (Ex. 30:7–8), Leviticus (Lev. 1:5; 21:16–24; 24:5–9, 16; 27), and Numbers (Num. 3:8, 38; 28:1–8), Israel was in dire need of the gift of priesthood and would have no access to God apart from an ordained priest to offer sacrifices or to serve God (Morales, 2019; Schiffman, 1985; Xavier, 2010). The duties of priests in the Old Testament were to teach the law and offer sacrifices and incense on behalf of the people (Biggerstaff, 2009; Leithart, 1999). Holiness was required of a priest (cf. Ex.

24:1, 9; 28:1–3; 29:1–37; 32:1–6; Lev.19:2) in performing their religious duties to God on behalf of people (Biggerstaff, 2009; Xavier, 2010).

The New Testament presents Jesus as the new high priest. The essential characteristics of Jesus' ministry were love, love of God, and love for the people of God, which continues to be the essence of Christian ministry today (Nicolas, 1990; Osborne, 2003). A priest, like Christ, offers the sacrifice of the Eucharist on behalf of the community and makes self-offering of oneself, bringing people closer to God (Healy, 2011). Therefore, the life of a priest is a process of growing into that perfection by faithfulness to his priestly vocation and sharing in the ministry of Christ (White, 2015) as a good shepherd to the Christian community (cf. I. Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). However, some priests have fallen from grace and have abused their privileged positions by misappropriating church funds (Bacon & James, 2018; Boorstein et al., 2019; Doyle, 2003; JJCCJ, 2004; Lothstein, 2004; Ryan, 2005; Taylor, 1982) and engaging in sexual misconduct with adults and minors (Argos, 2019; Boorstein et al., 2019; De Weger & Death, 2017; Doyle & Rubino, 2004; JJCCJ, 2004; Ross & McShane, 2015; Terry et al., 2011). Such actions have betrayed the trust of the faithful and created a severe crisis in the church.

Various factors have been identified as possible causes for sexually abusive tendencies among the clergy. The sociocultural context of the United States, especially the sexual revolution and radical changes in the perception of sexuality, advancements in entertainment and communication, and the women's liberation movements have significantly contributed to redefining norms to evolve into an age of promiscuity (Clark, 2016; Escoffier, 2015; Marcotte, 2008; Pope Benedict XVI, 2019; Terry et al., 2011). In addition to sociocultural influences, other influences have contributed to this crisis: (a) clericalism (Cozzens, 2000; Manuel, 2012; Plante, 1999a, 2004; Plante & Aldridge, 2005; Plante et al., 1996; Plante & McChesney, 2011; Wilson,

2008), (b) childhood experiences of abuse (Greathouse et al., 2015; Hanson & Slater, 1998; Lee et al., 2002; Muller & Diamond, 1999; Teicher et al., 2006; Tyler, 2002; Widom, 2001; Widom & Ames, 1994; Widom & Shepard, 1996), (c) insecure attachment experiences from significant caregivers (Bowlby, 1988; Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2003, 2011; Johnson, 2004; Liberman et al., 1991; Pipp et al., 1992), and (d) other developmental disorders (Cadoret et al., 1995; Clark et al., 1999; 2002; Grove et al., 1990; Holzer & Vaughn, 2017; Kennedy & Heckler, 1972; Lothstein, 2004; Plante et al., 1996; Tarter et al., 1999; Waldman & Slutske, 2000). I use Erikson's (1968) understanding of developmental stages as the framework for recognizing and understanding the developmental distress and the consequent behavioral issues of accused priests as well as to identify appropriate programs that might help future aspiring candidates to priesthood work through these developmental issues.

The church's response to the sexual abuse crisis in the United States began in 1985 with the USCCB seeking professional guidance from recognized experts in the treatment of sexual abusers and considering the questions of reassignment and other related issues (Terry et al., 2011). In 1992, a policy on priests and sexual abuse of children was released by the USCCB requiring an investigation and reporting of cases and extending pastoral care to the victims and their families. However, not until 2002 did the USCCB adopt the Dallas Charter and the specific procedures to deal with abuse cases (Terry et al., 2011; USCCB, 2002a, 2002b).

The JJCCJ (2004) study recommended appropriate education of clergy as a primary factor in preventing future clerical abuse, emphasizing human formation components in seminary formation as the most critical and valuable intervention in reducing the vulnerability of priests to become abusers (Terry et al., 2011). Although organized seminary formation began with the Council of Trent, only the Second Vatican Council emphasized the need for greater pastoral

participation with the laity in the church's mission and recommended that spiritual, intellectual, and disciplinary training must be altered to orient priests toward this pastoral end (Flannery, 2004, OP. no. 2,4; Walsh, 2012).

Pope John Paul II (1992), considering all sexual abuse and misconduct of the clergy, emphasized the significance of human formation—along with spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation—in his apostolic exhortation Pastores Debo Vobis (USCCB, 2006). The PPF, published by the USCCB (2006), emphasized human formation as the necessary foundation for priestly formation to prepare seminarians to be apt instruments of Christ's grace for people (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; John Paul II, 1992; USCCB, 2006). The dimensions of human formation emphasized in this document include the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the person geared toward affective maturity (Congregation for the Clergy, 2017; USCCB, 2006).

Therefore, as per the new recommendations of the USCCB and Congregation for the Clergy, priestly formation must provide ample opportunities to explore childhood and adolescent life experiences or the lack of positive experiences from a family of origin to help future priests become self-aware, self-accepting, and self-giving. However, current seminary training programs do not provide an opportunity for such exploration unless an individual, on his own or at the recommendation of the formators, seeks personal counseling or therapy. Research on seminary training and formation for priests and clergy is limited.

Gap in Literature on Seminary Formation

Rulla et al. (1978) emphasized the importance of human maturity and integration of spiritual values for the aspiring candidate to priesthood to be an effective priest. Rulla et al. (1978) recommended the use of a "pedagogical, preventive, and integrative" (p. 24)

psychological intervention program in seminary formation to develop the seminarians' capacity to internalize vocational values and attitudes though vocation to priesthood is a gracious gift of God. Even though there has been a greater focus on human formation and integration of spiritual values by the USCCB (2006), there is no research on current formation programs, especially human formation in seminary training and how it is helping the seminarians in their human development. Hankle (2010) recommended the need to integrate the priestly identity into the self of the seminarian as a primary focus and proposed further research on this process of identity integration and psychological evaluations on identity integration. There exists, therefore, a gap in literature due to the dearth of information on current human formation practices in Catholic seminaries and how such practices help seminarians in their personal growth and development of identity, sense of self, and emotional maturity for their apostolic effectiveness. The current practices in seminary formation warrant:

- A suitable human formation process that provides aspiring candidates with opportunities for self-exploration, self-awareness, and self-acceptance;
- An examination of the experiences of seminarians in human formation practices and its effectiveness in helping their emotional maturity, and the integration of self in tune with their priestly vocation;
- An assessment of the effectiveness of programs designed to help seminarians become effective ministers; and
- Recommendations and strategies to improve human formation practices in seminary training.

A seminarian is like every other human person in need of developing a greater sense of self-awareness, acceptance, and comfort with oneself, especially personal and emotional

vulnerabilities, but, at the same time, is capable of being grounded and differentiated when engaging with people in ministry (Aponte & Kissil, 2017). Person-of-the-therapist (POTT) training has been found to be an effective training program for helping marriage and family therapists work through emotional issues and become effective therapists. POTT training facilitates a greater awareness of the self and the use of self in therapy (Aponte & Kissil, 2017).

The idea of working on the "emotional life of the self of the individual who is conducting therapy" began with the expectation that aspiring analysts need to undertake their own psychoanalysis as part of their training (Aponte & Kissil, 2017, p. 2). Later, Bowen (1972) and Satir (2000) emphasized the significance of "working on the nascent family therapist's resolving personal issues and differentiating themselves as a basic part of training" (Aponte & Kissil, 2017, p. 2). Despite proficiency in the profession, the personal issues of therapists can color their thinking and shape their behavior toward their clients, which is potentially detrimental to clients despite the therapist's best intentions (Aponte & Kissil, 2016). The POTT model focuses primarily on self-improvement (Aponte et al., 2009). For Satir (2000), working through the self helps therapists not only avoid doing harm to the client as Freud emphasized, but it helps them become more integrated and capable of relating effectively with clients using self (Satir, 2000).

Bowen (1972) focused on helping trainees work on their emotional functioning, specifically with their families. Those successful in their emotional functioning with their families were found to have developed exceptional skill and flexibility as therapists. A positive change in the therapist's understanding of self significantly contributes to the effectiveness of the therapist (Aponte & Kissil, 2017). Therefore, the focus of POTT is to assist therapists by freeing them from the dysfunctional ties to their families and promoting a healthier self (Aponte, 1994b; Aponte & Winter, 2000). POTT training can help the therapist—as well as aspiring candidates to

priesthood—normalize their human struggles and enable them to use their humanity as a bridge, instead of an obstacle or an impairment, to relate to and assist those they serve (Aponte & Kissil, 2017; Claudio & Watson, 2018; Lutz & Irizarry, 2009). According to Aponte et al. (2009), the aim of the training is to help the therapist recognize the clients' life struggles and their personal journey through their conscious connection with their own personal journeys—without losing the emotional distance necessary to see and assist their clients in the reality of their experiences (Aponte et al., 2009).

POTT is typically a 12-month or multiyear, insight-oriented cohorted, group process conducted by systemically-trained therapists that helps trainee therapists understand themselves and to use self-knowledge positively to influence therapy, thus improving clinical effectiveness (Aponte, 1994a; Aponte & Carlsen, 2009; Aponte & Kissil, 2012, 2016; Aponte et al., 2009; Aponte & Winter, 2000; Baldwin, 2000; Bowen, 1978; Claudio & Watson, 2018; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008; Timm & Blow, 1999; Watson, 1993). Former trainees and students in the couples and family therapy department at Drexel University have stated POTT is not a theory of therapy but a way of conducting oneself as a therapist, being aware of one's experiences and how they intersect with one's work with clients so that personal experience becomes a resource for effective therapy (Aponte & Kissil, 2017; Lutz & Irizarry, 2009).

Although the POTT model has been expanding in academic settings nationally and internationally, Drexel University continues to be the hub for its training under Aponte in the master's degree program in couples and family therapy or marriage and family therapy (MFT; Kissil & Niño, 2018). POTT training has been used in various settings, and there have been many studies published on POTT (Kissil & Niño, 2018). Niño et al. (2015) explored students' professional gain from POTT training and found (a) increased self-awareness and the ability to

acknowledge their own emotions, (b) improved clinical work gaining more self-confidence, (c) greater acceptance of one's flaws and vulnerabilities as an integral part of being human, and (d) improved perceptions of their vulnerabilities as assets that help them connect with their clients and resonate with their struggles.

Niño et al. (2016), in their second study, explored participants' abilities to create positive therapeutic relationships and found improvement in therapists' ability (a) for empathic presence, (b) to track and manage their emotional reactivity, (c) to track their alliances and balance their connections with each client, and (d) to develop a positive regard for their clients. The purpose of the third study (Kissil & Niño, 2017) was to identify and describe personal gains, especially self-care. Kissil and Niño (2017) found participants gained a better understanding of the self by connecting better with their personal history, struggles, and emotional pain (Kissil & Niño, 2017). Participants also reported the training helped them develop better self-caring practices by being more "self-accepting," "self-compassionate," and "less self-judgmental," with a more "positive attitude to life and the world in general" and a feeling of being "optimistic, liberated," and happy to be able to "live in the present moment" (Kissil & Niño, 2017, p. 531).

In the fourth study, Kissil et al. (2018) reflected on the personal changes students experienced in POTT training and reported (a) increased self-awareness about their feelings, triggers, and internal dynamics while making appropriate changes in being authentic and expressive about their needs; (b) better management of their emotional reactions feeling more freed to respond rather than being reactive; and (c) self-acceptance of their struggles and flaws, giving increased ability to be vulnerable with others.

The fifth study was conducted to explore the relationship between the personal self of the therapist and the professional self of the therapist within the POTT training among graduates of

the master's program. The study included interviews with therapists and the written materials of trainees used in previous studies (Kissil & Niño, 2017). The researchers examined the perceived influence of the training on postgraduates' clinical work using a grounded theory methodology, generating a theory about the impact of POTT on clinical work (Kissil & Niño, 2017). The study included 20 clinicians from the MFT program whose student papers were analyzed for four previous POTT studies (Kissil & Niño, 2017). The findings showed the participants became more self-accepting, self-reflecting, compassionate, grounded, and connected to self (Kissil & Niño, 2017).

According to Kissil and Niño (2018), one of the limitations of their research was the lack of evaluation of POTT training outside the MFT setting. Additional research beyond the MFT setting would strengthen the understanding and support of the model. The proposed study is not assuming that POTT is an effective intervention for human formation, but it provides an opportunity to understand seminarians' experience through POTT and its suitability in their human formation, especially their psychological development and emotional maturity to make responsible choices as priests.

Theoretical Orientation

For the design of this study, I used a philosophical stance that is humanistic, recognizing the self-actualizing capacity of every person based on the philosophy of Rogers, which stresses a person's ability for self-direction and self-responsibility (Corey, 2017; Rogers, 1961, 1980). DeCarvalho (1991) and Rowan (2004) stated that humanistic psychology has its beginning at the Old Saybrook Conference in 1964. The key persons involved in the development of humanistic psychology were Maslow, Rogers, May, Allport, and Bugental, with a view to developing psychology as an alternative to the psychoanalytic and behavioral approaches (Rowan, 2004).

Freud (1948), the founding father of psychoanalysis, believed humans are deprived of their freedom of choice as the libidinal impulses control them and become unsocialized and irrational in behavior. According to Freud, human behavior is determined by the warring parties of the psyche, namely the id, ego, and superego. But Freud overlooked the significant impact of the environment, peer groups, and society on personality development (Razak et al., 2018). According to Freud, there exist two types of instincts in humans: (a) the life instinct (eros), which is essential for survival on earth (e.g., hunger, thirst, sex); and (b) the death instinct, which is related to aggression and destruction (Razak et al., 2018). Behavioral approaches, like that of Adler, consider social relatedness, individual and distinct childhood experiences, and struggles as important factors in understanding human nature (Schultz & Schultz, 2013).

Many of Rogers's ideas—especially the positive aspects of being human, the characteristics of a fully functioning person, and people's self-actualizing tendencies—were central themes of Maslow's (1968, 1970, 1971) work. The core characteristics of self-actualized people, according to Maslow, are "self-awareness, freedom, basic honesty and caring, and trust and autonomy" (Corey, 2017, p. 169). The other characteristics of self-actualized people include (a) more effective perceptions of reality and more comfortable relations with it; (b) a capacity to welcome uncertainty in their lives without fear or feeling of threat; (c) acceptance of themselves, others, nature, spontaneity, simplicity and naturalness; (d) a need for privacy and solitude; (e) autonomy; (f) a capacity for deep and intense interpersonal relationships; (g) a genuine caring for others; (h) an inner-directedness (rather than tending to live based upon others' expectations); (i) the absence of artificial dichotomies within themselves; and (j) a sense of humor (Corey, 2017; Maslow, 1970). However, the Rogerian person-centered standpoint recognizes the need for a suitable psychological climate for self-actualization, growth, and maturity, though humans have

the capacity for self-direction (Rogers, 1961). Rogers developed his person-centered and nondirective concepts in the context of the research and investigations done by many of his colleagues, such as Raskin, Seeman, Cartwright, Thetford, Bergman, and others (Rogers, 1961). Artley (1964) and Aanstoos et al. (2000) stated Rogers's idea of a humanistic orientation and the self-actualizing tendency was influenced by Maslow, May, and Allport.

Person-centered theory was developed with the intent of providing an alternative to the prevailing psychodynamic and behavioral approaches to psychotherapy. The theory was initially called nondirective therapy, though later the term client-centered therapy became preferred (Wilkins, 2016). After the 1960s, Rogers applied the principles to other realms of human relationships so the term person-centered gained prominence, emphasizing the significance of the relationship to therapeutic success, focusing on the client rather than on theory or technique (Wilkins, 2016). The Rogerian person-centered lens facilitates the strength-based approach by recognizing every person has within themselves the resources and capacity for self-understanding and self-direction (Rogers, 1959). However, Rogers stated individuals can make use of these self-directive resources only when a conducive climate is provided that facilitates the psychological attitudes for change and self-direction (Rogers, 1980).

Rogers (1980) proposed three necessary conditions required to create such a growth-promoting climate that recognizes the personal strength of every individual. The first is called the "geniuses, realness and congruence" (Rogers, 1980, p. 115). When a therapist is genuine or transparent by being "himself or herself in the relationship, with no professional or personal façade, the greater is the likelihood for the client to change and grow [constructively]" (Rogers, 1980, p. 115). The second significant attitude that promotes a climate for change is "acceptance or caring," what Rogers called "unconditional positive regard" (Rogers, 1980, p. 116). If the

therapist is experiencing a positive accepting attitude toward whatever the client is experiencing at that moment, the therapeutic movement or change is more likely to happen (Rogers, 1961, 1980). The third condition is the attitudinal element that strengthens the relationship and facilitates the process of change, which is "empathic understanding" (Rogers, 1980, p. 116). The therapist is capable of accurately sensing the feelings and personal meanings the client is experiencing in each moment and successfully communicates this understanding to the client (Rogers, 1961, 1980).

Recognizing this Rogerian approach, I believe individuals have the strength within themselves and the capacity and innate tendency to move forward toward maturity and full potential, provided they are given a growth-promoting psychological climate (Rogers, 1961). In tune with this Rogerian line of thought, I recognized this tendency as evident in every organic and human life to express and activate the innate capacities of the organism, to develop and to become autonomous to the extent such activation enhances the organism or the self (Rogers, 1961). However, Rogers (1961) stated the tendency can be "deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defenses" and remain "hidden behind elaborate facades that deny its existence" (p. 35) or cause developmental blocks in individuals until they receive a suitable condition to express themselves.

Erikson's (1968) developmental stages served as a framework to understand the developmental blocks individuals may have experienced that affect their life. Even though this understanding of Erikson uses an objective and predetermined developmental schema, the individual's experience of these crises and how they are resolved or not at different life stages is subjective. Similarly, the impact of these experiences on individuals can also be very subjective. Therefore, I assumed POTT training would provide a safe and supportive environment for

seminarian participants to explore and work through their personal and subjective experiences in their family of origin or early life that may have caused developmental blocks due to the lack of a supportive environment. As Rogers (1961) recognized, the more one experiences a supportive environment, the more likely they are to achieve their full potential.

The person-centered approach helped me to be fully and genuinely present with the participants (Rogers, 1961). It allowed me to communicate with the participants with a higher degree of congruence, an attitude of warm and positive acceptance, and empathic understanding of the participant's subjective world, thereby helping me better understand the participants' feelings and personal experiences in POTT training (Rogers, 1961). A qualitative research design using phenomenological theory best suited and helped me to understand the participants' subjective experience of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). The Husserlian transcendental phenomenological methodology aligned with the constructivist epistemological position (Creswell, 2013). The social constructivist paradigm assumed understanding, significance, and meaning are developed in coordination and interaction with other human beings (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Vygotsky (1978) stated cognitive growth occurs first on a social level through interaction, and then it can occur within the individual.

The Study

This study was proposed to address this gap in the literature on seminarians' experiences of human formation practices and how those practices aided in facilitating the personal growth and emotional and affective maturity needed to empower the seminarians to become effective priests. The study focused on seminarians' personal experiences in a modified POTT training program that focuses on development of the self with greater awareness, identity integration, and emotional maturity and enables them to be effective in their ministry as priests. The central

research question guided this research was: What is the essence of seminarians' experiences in POTT training? The following subquestions guided the study:

1. What were seminarians' experiences in the POTT training?
2. How do seminarians describe the influence of their POTT experience on their awareness of self?
3. How do seminarians describe the impact of POTT experience on their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and discernment of their vocation to priesthood?

A qualitative phenomenological study was most suitable in exploring these questions by providing insight into the subjective experience (Creswell, 2013) of seminarians in the POTT training. Qualitative data were gathered through multiple individual semistructured interviews of all consenting participants describing their experience with the POTT training intervention for human formation.

Self of the Researcher: My Experience as a Seminarian, Priest, and a Member of the Formation Team

I am passionate about the formation and training of future Catholic priests. I have been studying and discerning ways in which my experience and skill in counseling and the counseling profession can contribute to the formation and training of future priests. Therefore, my research focused on the human formation of Catholic priests—especially their personal growth and emotional maturity—by promoting greater self-awareness and self-acceptance that nurtures their ability to give themselves selflessly in service to the community. This research is relevant and significant today, particularly for the Catholic Church in the context of abuse scandals that have caused so much pain to the entire church community and its leadership. My goal is to investigate

and seek to understand the essence of the seminarians' experience in the person-of-the-therapist training.

The Catholic Church identifies human formation and emotional integration as fundamental to the formation of priests. It facilitates the appropriate discernment of their vocation to the priesthood and addresses the ongoing crisis of abuse and misconduct. The current crisis of sexual misconduct in the church is a matter of concern for me, as I am part of the priestly fraternity, and anything that affects the authenticity and integrity of priests challenges my authenticity and integrity as a priest.

I grew up in a strong and active Catholic family, and I was privileged to have good parents who were committed, caring, and have been great examples for their children. However, I experienced emotional struggles during the years of my formation to the priesthood and later in my priestly ministry. I had feelings of low self-esteem, which made me feel I was not good enough or capable enough. I compared myself with others and considered myself inadequate, which affected my learning ability, self-confidence, social relationship skill, and general performance. I longed for acceptance, approval, recognition, and appreciation from people around me, and I allowed those significant figures in my life to control my behavior. Lack of approval and recognition caused me to feel uncomfortable and question my self-worth. My studies and experiences in counseling have helped me understand myself better. My struggles have their roots in my early experiences in my family. I know my parents and siblings were loving and caring and thought the best of me. However, the comparisons my parents or older siblings made of me with others and their discontentment over my performance inadvertently discouraged me. I felt I was not good enough because, in my mind, I did not match up to others. I

felt I was not loved and could never live up to my family's expectations of me, leaving me feeling very inadequate.

My studies in counseling and my training as a therapist have helped me become aware of my emotional struggles. I am gradually overcoming this subconscious feeling of inadequacy and getting in touch with my authentic self. I feel I could have handled my struggles better and more effectively in my ministry if I had had the opportunity to work on my "self" during my seminary formation years. Although I was aware of my struggles, I did not fully understand then the roots of my problems or how I could deal with them. I did not approach anyone to seek help, nor did anyone offer to help me work through my emotional baggage. Looking back at the years I spent in formation, I feel the focus of formation was on intellectual and spiritual growth while neglecting many of the foundational principles of human formation. This lack of human formation inhibited me from successfully integrating my spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formational experiences. Often the intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual formational experiences became a mere gathering of information and skills development. As a priest, I am now much more aware of my limitations and my need to continue to grow into that integrated person. In my ardent desire to grow and integrate my identity as a priest, I chose to continue my studies in counseling—both for my own continuing personal growth and to fulfill my desire to help future priests. Today, my studies in counseling have helped me become much more aware of my childhood experiences in my family of origin and how those experiences continue to influence my current behavior. This awareness and acceptance of my flawed humanity has helped me gain greater maturity and integration in my identity as a priest. I recognize growth toward maturity is an ongoing process, and I still have much room for growth.

I come from a very conservative Eastern Catholic tradition and collectivistic culture and social lifestyle. However, the focus of my study is on the experiences of seminarians pursuing the priesthood for the dioceses or archdioceses in the United States. These seminarians are influenced by an individualistic culture and are generally liberal and modern in their thinking and perspective. Therefore, biased by my personal experience, I might be tempted to assume these seminarians' experiences are like mine. Culturally, I grew up in a society and family where parents, especially the father as the head of the family, decided everything. As a child, I had no freedom to choose anything in my life and blindly obeyed my parents until I joined the seminary. As a child, I had no voice to express my feelings, so I learned to adapt to the situation and fulfill my parents' expectations. I did this for survival rather than recognizing my individual self and forming my own personal identity.

In the United States, however, seminarians who grew up in an American or Hispanic culture seem to have had much more personal freedom to express their feelings and make their choices in life even as children, and their parents respect the concerns of their children. Even though I had my schooling in a coeducational school, there was no interaction between the boys and girls. It was like a taboo or unwritten rule in the school, and even in society, that boys and girls do not interact. Immediately after graduating from the 10th grade, I joined the seminary, so I had few opportunities for social interaction with girls until I was a seminarian doing my internship or regency. Because of these experiences, I could be biased in my assumptions about the systemic impact of childhood and family-of-origin experiences on one's emotional maturity and integration of identity as a priest. I could be biased in my understanding and descriptions of the experiences seminarians bring with them into the formation process.

My entire seminary formation took place in India from 1987 to 1998 in the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. There were no psychological assessments or evaluations done during the selection process or during the process of ordination in the seminary formation system in India. Even though certain orientation programs were given for our emotional integration, there was no specific focus on human formation or emotional integration as part of seminary formation. Even though there were courses in psychology and mental health in our undergraduate program, the focus was on gathering information intellectually rather than developing the kind of self-understanding that can lead to personal growth.

The church began to emphasize human formation in seminaries in the early 1990s, but this new emphasis was not a major focus during the years of my formation. The recruitment process of candidates to the seminary and formation policies and programs have been updated since then. There are now more integrated policies and programs with greater emphasis on human formation in addition to the other three dimensions of formation. Especially relevant in the United States, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released a revised edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* (PPF; USCCB, 2006) with new guidelines for formation.

I am well aware of the emphasis on psychological assessment that is now part of the process for screening and selecting candidates for the priesthood. The seminary provides regular assessment and counseling to those deserving candidates to help them in their studies in the United States and other Western countries. There are great differences in the formation I received 25 years ago and what seminarians receive today under the new guidelines for forming seminarians toward priesthood, especially in the United States. However, I could be biased in assuming these seminarians still do not have adequate opportunities to address their personal issues and emotional integration. Therefore, the awareness of my biases and sensitivity to

understanding the participants' perspectives by using appropriate bracketing procedures may help me stay focused on the research process and recognize the emerging data.

My knowledge and experience in counseling psychology, especially my background in marriage and family therapy, could be a bias for me in perceiving every individual, including seminarians, from a systemic perspective, leading me to assume all seminarians have unresolved issues from their family of origin and early childhood. I also may be biased in assuming participation in this POTT training is going to address these issues and help seminarians in their human formation and integration of identity as a priest.

I learned about POTT from a Catholic nun—also from Kerala—who was obtaining her doctoral degree in MFT at my university. Her doctoral program required students to complete 2 full years of POTT as part of their training as advanced MFT clinicians and clinical supervisors (master's-level students completed 1 year of POTT). She reported that the level of insight gained in the challenging and intense process of examining oneself and clinical behavior in light of family-of-origin and unresolved relational issues was liberating. Although POTT was not offered in my program nor part of my personal experience, I educated myself enough to know that it could make a significant difference in the training of seminarians and to participate in offering the training. Offering the course involved pre-class planning meetings, reading journals, as well as familiarity with the materials. For me, as a seminary community member, there was the additional work of briefly debriefing POTT discussions and insights between class sessions.

My personal experiences and skills as a priest and a counselor place me in an advantaged position as a researcher. I have a wide range of expertise in priestly life and the ongoing formation of priests. I have gained knowledge and skills as a counselor over the past 9 years to be able to work effectively with people, families, couples, individuals, seminarians, and priests.

My status as a priest, counselor, and adjunct spiritual director of the seminary gave me greater access to priests and seminarians in my research. I had a greater sensitivity to their struggles, and the participants may feel a sense of connection with me as one among them. I also have the support and encouragement from the leadership of Assumption Seminary to conduct this research study, as it will benefit the quality of its formation program.

I recognize the differences in my cultural and social background, my upbringing in my family of origin, the seminary formation I received in India 25 years ago, and my experiences as a priest, formator, and counselor can all be possible biases in my research. I am conducting my research with a group of seminarians who are different from me in culture, social background, upbringing, and, above all, living at a different time with new understanding and approaches to recruitment and formation of seminarians. As a researcher, I am aware of my biases that could affect the entire research process. Therefore, I used bracketing procedures to help me set aside those biases. Bracketing procedures ensured my research remained focused on the goal of understanding the essence of the participants' experience. My study was structured using Husserl's transcendental phenomenological framework, with its intentional awareness and detailed attentiveness to the description of the participants' experiences. In this study, I employed a social-constructionist epistemological position, as I aimed to explore and describe participants' experiences in person-of-the-therapist training, which were held in a group interactive setting; it is the group setting where interaction happens that can facilitate the growth process.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

The purpose of this research study was to explore seminarians' experiences in person-of-the-therapist training (POTT) and to develop a description that provides insight into the essence of their experiences informed by phenomenology. Specific information about the experiences of seminarians with human formation practices was very limited, other than very general information about their overall formation (Joseph, 2019). Therefore, the current study was intended to inform the human formation practices in seminary and expand the scope of qualitative research in the human formation practices in training future seminarians.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of seminarians in a self-awareness training program and examine its impact as an intervention program aimed at helping seminarians in their human formation, especially in the development of emotional maturity and development of self in their identity as priests capable of making responsible choices. The findings provided information about new approaches and interventions to improve human formation programs in seminaries. The findings opened new avenues for collaboration between counselors and seminary formation teams, especially use of family-of-origin work and restoration strategies to improve human formation programs and to prepare future priests to be effective ministers. The central research question was: What is the essence of seminarians' experiences in the POTT training? The following subquestions guided this study:

1. What were seminarians' experiences in the POTT training?
2. How do seminarians describe the influence of their POTT experience on their awareness of self?

3. How do seminarians describe the impact of POTT experience on their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and discernment of their vocation to priesthood?

The study provided insight into the specific experiences of human formation practices and counseling interventions that help facilitate the discernment, emotional maturity, and integration of seminarians' identities as priests, resulting in greater religious commitment.

Methodological Congruence

Methodology helped to maintain the legitimacy of research by "insisting on strict rules of scientific practice, rigor, and ethical code of conduct [while helping] frame the research topics and guid[ing] the researchers in concrete terms as they make decisions in the process of research" (Daly, 2007, p. 84). Methodological congruence provided cohesiveness in the study to ensure the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of the research topics, the questions, the method, the data, and the handling of data (Richard & Morse, 2013).

Epistemology and Philosophical Paradigm

The purpose of the study was to explore the subjective experiences of seminarian participants in POTT training. A subjectivist epistemological worldview and a social constructionism paradigm informed the design and methodological approach. A subjective epistemological worldview also informed the subjective meaning of participants' experiences in training (Creswell, 2013). Subjectivism recognizes that knowledge is subject to differing viewpoints, explanations, interpretations, and revisions according to changing circumstances, giving rise to the idea that the meaning is constructed in the inquirer's mind (Daly, 2007). However, I took the social constructionism philosophical paradigm, recognizing that meaning-making is an interactive process as proposed by Vygotsky, unlike the Piagetian idea of meaning-

making as a cognitive process, which is constructivism (Castello, 2016; Daly, 2007). Social constructionism recognizes the relational, conversational, and social interactive practice as the source of perception, understanding, and obtaining knowledge (Boyland, 2019; Blake & Pope, 2008; Vygotsky, 1986). Because the experiences are varied and are formed through social interaction, it is through the interaction and conversation with the participants that I can gain access to the meaning of their experience and generate or inductively develop a description of their experience in POTT (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, a subjective epistemological standpoint and a social constructionism philosophical paradigm are best suited to explore the subjective experiences of participants in self-awareness training. Semi-structured interviews of the participants provided enough structure to stay focused on the primary research question and the flexibility to capture in-depth participants' subjective experiences in the training program and its influence on their emotional maturity, personal growth, and experience of integration of identity towards priesthood.

Theoretical Orientation

An existential-humanistic philosophical orientation developed by Carl Rogers as an overarching theoretical orientation best suited for this research because it was congruent with the subjective epistemological worldview and social-constructionism paradigm. Rogers (1961) called this philosophical approach a person-centered approach that recognizes the subjective experiences of research participants as co-constructing meaning from their experiences (Corey, 2017). Existential humanism is an approach that recognizes the individual's capacity to make constructive choices (Corey, 2017; Rogers, 1961). An existential-humanistic approach relies on phenomenology to explore the human experience by investigating another person's lived experience (Corey, 2017; Vachon et al., 2016). The existential-humanistic theoretical orientation

helped me as a phenomenological researcher to set aside pre-suppositions in exploring the experience of participants (Corey, 2017; Knight, 2014). I also used the theory of self-actualization developed by Maslow (1970) and the eight stages proposed by Erikson (1968). Both theories formed the framework for understanding the developmental blocks and emotional immaturity that continue to affect the person of the priest. Rogers (1961) recognized the need for and the subjective experience of a suitable and safe psychological climate for growth and development towards self-actualization as Maslow (1970) stated or the identity integration as Erikson (1968) stated.

Methodology

In this section, I describe phenomonology as a research method and discuss the data analysis process used in phenomonological studies. I also describe the types of data to be used in phenomonological research.

Phenomenology

The term phenomenology was first used by Immanuel Kant (Kaufer & Chemero, 2021; Priest, 2002) which has its origin in Greek phainein, "to appear" (Priest, 2002), Phaenesthai, "to flare up" (Sheehan, 2014) or phaino, "bring to light" (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a philosophical movement and, at the same time, a set of qualitative research methodologies (Gill, 2020). The term phenomenology refers to the study of phenomena (Gill, 2020) which appear to someone in their conscious experience (Gill, 2020; Moran, 2000). As a methodology, phenomenology is qualitative, focusing on people's perception of the world or the human experience as they experience in their life (Langdridge, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Therefore, the tasks of data collection, analysis, and the results are in view to describe the meaning and the

essence of individuals' lived experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Qutoshi, 2018; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Phenomenology as a methodology has two major types based on their perspectives. They are descriptive and interpretative phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The phenomenology Edmund Husserl proposed, known as transcendent phenomenology, seeks to describe the essence of experience (Gill, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The interpretative phenomenology, proposed by Heidegger, known as hermeneutic phenomenology, emphasizes the need for interpretation (Gill, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). According to Heidegger (1962), although phenomenology aims the describe the individuals' experience of the phenomenon, the description inevitably involves interpretation (Davidsen, 2013; Gill, 2020).

Transcendental Phenomenology

The aim of Husserl's phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, is to produce a description of the phenomenon from the individuals' lived experience, highlighting the phenomenon's universal essence (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019; Priest, 2002). Husserl believed that the world could only appear for a subject, but the condition for appearance lies with the subject; therefore, the role of the experiencing subject cannot be separated from the experienced (Davidsen, 2013; Zahavi, 2003). According to Moustakas (1994), "intentionality refers to consciousness" or "the internal experience of being conscious of something;" therefore, "the act of consciousness and the object of conscience are intentionally related" (p. 28). Therefore, Husserl proposed that the first and the core process through which one can arrive at the description of the phenomenon based on lived experience are epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche

Moustakas (1994) stated that Husserl emphasizes a "freedom from suppositions" through epoche, a Greek word meaning "to refrain from judgment, to abstain from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (p. 33). Instead, Husserl proposed looking at things by deliberately suspending or setting aside our judgments, commonly held beliefs, and presuppositions about things to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh point of view and see them again as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990; Priest, 2002; Sheehan, 2014). Epoche is also called "the process of bracketing," in which one is bracketing off all previous knowledge, understanding, and assumptions about the phenomenon explored (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 93). According to Moustakas (1994), the epoche process encourages unbiased receptiveness to whatever is being presented or appears in consciousness and a readiness to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance. Bracketing of thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, and judgment allows people to set aside all experiences that are not due to actual instances of the phenomena being explored (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Reduction

The phenomenological reduction is a process by which each participant's experiences are considered individually and a complete description of meaning is constructed about the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). According to Husserl, the method of phenomenological reduction is "graded pre-reflection, reflection, and reduction" with an intentional effort to explicate the essential nature of the phenomenon, which includes "perceiving, thinking, remembering, imagining, judging, each of which contains a definite content" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). Therefore, it involves seeing and listening to open oneself deliberately and intentionally to the phenomena with all its textures and meanings (Moustakas,

1994). In this process of reduction, I made an effort to treat every statement about the phenomena with equal value through horizontalization, an attempt to treat all phenomena at the same level (Davidsen, 2013; Langdridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Later, I deleted the irrelevant, repetitive, and overlapping statements about the topic while retaining the horizons to cluster them into themes and organize them into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative Variation

The task of imaginative variation is employed to arrive at the structural description of experience by seeking the possible meaning through the "utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). It is also called eidetic *variation*, an attempt to imagine the object being different from the way it currently is or imagining varying features of the phenomenon (Davidsen, 2013; Zahavi, 2003). The imaginative variation process relies on intuition and requires imagining multiple variations and universal structures that precipitate the idea about the phenomenon to arrive at the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon (Gill, 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019).

Synthesis

The final step of transcendental phenomenological research is the synthesis of meaning and essence, which is an intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). According to Husserl, the phenomenon's essence is that which is common, universal quality, or the condition that remains as its invariant or essential aspect without which

it would be inconceivable (Gill, 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Moustakas (1994) acknowledged that the essence of experience is never totally exhaustible, as the textural and structural synthesis represents the phenomenon's essence at a particular time perspective of the individual researcher following an exhaustive, imaginative, and reflective study of the phenomenon.

Data and Analysis in Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

The transcendental phenomenological investigation typically uses long interviews, which is an informal and interactive process utilizing open-ended questions to collect data on the topic of the study (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), the interview data analysis includes epoche bracketing, phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, imaginative variation, textural description, and structural synthesis. A number of studies have used transcendental phenomenological in finding the essence of human experience, such as (a) a study of reinvestment or the "ripple effect" for nine individuals who have participated in a youth leadership mentoring program from the 1970s to 2004 (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004), (b) a study on the effects of the oral history practices experienced by preservice social studies teachers on the value of education (Sari & Türküresin-Er, 2018), and (c) a study on eight African American women's lived substance use recovery experiences (Blount et al., 2021). All these studies made use of the transcendental phenomenological method of analysis proposed by Moustakas (1994), elucidated by Van Kaam (1969).

Data

Qualitative phenomenological studies make use of in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups to gather information and develop a detailed description of reality. This process may involve repeated interviews with the same participants and with a range of people who have

experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Daly, 2007). In this study, I used semistructured interviews with a set of general questions as a guideline to structure the interview process. A semistructured interview approach allowed me to maintain focus on the primary research question while giving the flexibility to modify the interview questions as each interview proceeds (Daly, 2007; Roy et al., 2004; Tubbs & Burton, 2005).

Research Design

In this study, my aim was to understand and describe the experiences of seminarians in a self-awareness training program modeled on POTT training and its effect on their emotional maturity, identity integration, and religious commitment. Because I explored the subjective experiences of participants using a transcendental phenomenological methodology, a qualitative semistructured interview design was most suitable for gathering data (Creswell, 2013; Daly, 2007). The primary advantage of using this research design was that it helped maintain focus on the primary research question while allowing enough flexibility to follow the conversation as it unfolded in each interview (Daly, 2007).

Original Study

The POTT training program is recognized as an effective program in assisting the marriage and family therapists (MFT) in working through the self of the therapist and their emotional issues so they can be more effective therapists (Aponte, 1994a). In 2019, an MFT professor and my dissertation chair, Dr. Carolyn Tubbs (who has been trained and has offered POTT training to master's- and doctoral-level students), and two doctoral students (one MFT student and myself), discussed the possibility of introducing POTT training to help theology school students work through self and emotional issues as they prepare to become effective priests. The MFT doctoral student was involved in a POTT course—taught by Dr. Tubbs—for

over 2 years and as part of her required doctoral coursework. At this same time, I was working as a priest involved in the formation of theology school students, and I was fascinated with the potential of using POTT, specifically with clergy. Dr. Tubbs and I submitted a request to a theological school in south Texas to offer POTT as an elective course for one semester, and we were granted permission to offer the course.

The POTT training was introduced as a 2-credit elective course in the fall of 2019. Dr. Tubbs and two doctoral teaching assistants offered the course. Using family-of-origin work and restoration therapy, the training was offered with the understanding the course could facilitate and improve the process of human formation, especially in facilitating students' self-awareness, emotional maturity, and integration of their identities as priests. We adapted the training for seminarians to address the self of the priest, providing greater self-awareness through family-of-origin work (Aponte, 1994a) and teaching restoration therapy strategies (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011).

Self of the priest and therapist issues are inherent in pastoral or clinical work. In POTT training, students were given the opportunity to learn self-reflection and interpersonal skills as they identified and worked through issues that arose in the context of pastoral or clinical work. POTT training provided an opportunity for aspiring candidates to the priesthood to recognize and accept as normal the reality of their own flawed humanity and learn to use this insight as a resource to relate, understand, and intervene more effectively with people in ministry. This training made self-exploration and accountability normative and required activity in the ongoing process of formation, helping priests develop their pastoral and professional lives in the service of God and humanity.

Along with the request to teach the course, we submitted a request to the school's institutional review board (IRB) committee to conduct an educational evaluation of the course. Although IRB approval was not needed, the seminary's IRB reviewed and approved the data that Dr. Tubbs, as the faculty of record, collected for the course.

Recruitment and Sampling With Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The POTT training was offered as a 2-credit elective course to students in a theological school in south Texas, specifically limited to seminarians pursuing priesthood or priests who were registered at the school. The theological school offered the course as an elective along with other alternative courses, so students had complete freedom in their choice of courses. Students received the course outline in advance, which included specific objectives on human formation and the focus on providing opportunities for greater self-awareness through family-of-origin work and restoration therapy strategies. Students were informed the course was a pilot to determine its suitability in human formation, especially the integration of identity, the development of a sense of self as priest, and emotional maturity.

I acted as the primary recruiter for the course, which included posting and sharing flyers and bringing up the course offering with the school's faculty and students. To encourage students to take the POTT course elective, I provided students with relevant information about the program. As a formator and one directly involved in this proposed training program, I assured students that confidentiality of all participating students would be maintained. Participants were asked to refrain from all discussions and decisions regarding the evaluation and promotion of students attending the POTT training program. I also facilitated conversations about the POTT training program as an elective at the theological school and mediated the communication between the two schools.

As a priest, I served as a formator with students attending the theological school. To remove this conflict of interest during the course, I obtained permission from the rector of the seminary to abstain from the evaluation and promotion of the students attending the course. At the end of the year, I was relieved of my role as formator and was reassigned to ministry in a parish.

Participants

Ten participants registered for and attended the course during the fall semester of 2019. The participants included nine seminarians (two Anglo Americans, six Hispanic Americans, and one Asian American) and one African priest. Three of the seminarians were fourth-year students, four were third-year students, and two were second-year students, all in theology. The priest participant from Africa was working on his master's degree in pastoral studies. The participants were to attend 15 in-person classes, one class every week during the fall semester. All participant students were to actively engage in preparing themselves for the class with prior reading assigned for each day, weekly submission of journals, and personal presentations as per the syllabus (see Appendix A).

Data Collection Instruments

Three data collection instruments were used to gather the data: (a) weekly journals, (b) the personal presentations of genograms in class, and (c) an online survey. First, we asked participants to submit a weekly reflective journal about their readings, class discussion, and their experiences. We asked students to focus on their self-awareness and the relational dynamics of their family of origin that continue to affect their current life and relationships. Second, each student completed a three-generational genogram to identify various family relationship dynamics, the strengths and weaknesses of those dynamics, and intergenerational issues that

continue to influence their current life. The restorative strategies and discussions about these issues were intended to provide participants with techniques to experience healing from past emotional wounds. We used a qualitative analysis of weekly journals and personal presentations of the three-generational genograms to identify various experiences that explained the influence of the training on participants' emotional maturity, personal growth, and identity integration. Third, we used online surveys to measure participants' status of identity integration using the extended version of the ego identity status (EOM-EIS-2; Bennion & Adams, 1986), religious commitment using the religious commitment inventory (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003), and burnout using the Maslach burnout inventory (Abbreviated; [MBI-9]; Maslach et al., 1996). Although we originally planned a presurvey and postsurvey for the participants, we conducted an online survey only at the end of the course due to administrative delays.

Current Study

The current study goes beyond educational research, as I primarily used the data gathered through interviews with participants. Moreover, I made use of the weekly journals each student turned in during the training to gain insight into the experiences of participants in the program from their perspectives. The study was a follow up with those who participated in the POTT pilot course in the fall of 2019. The goal was to develop a rich and in-depth description of the participant seminarians' experiences in the self-awareness training program.

Recruitment and Sampling

I used criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) to recruit participants who met the predetermined criterion of importance. The study was restricted to seminarians who attended the POTT pilot course in Fall 2019. Although the study was limited to seminarians who attended this program, they did not differ substantially from seminarians in general. This particular group of

seminarians was diverse, comprised of Anglo Americans, Hispanic Americans, and an Asian American. Although we invited all 10 participants who attended the training to participate in the study, only eight of them participated. One of the participants discontinued seminary formation and failed to respond to the invitation to participate in the study. The second was ordained and served as a priest after his graduation but chose not to participate in the study. As the participants were from different dioceses and archdioceses spread around different states in the United States, we held the individual semistructured interviews using Zoom as the preferred platform for a majority of the participants. I had an in-person interview with one of the participants during the first set of interviews. I completed the first interviews by the middle of December 2022 and the second interviews by the third week of January 2023.

All potential participants from the course were sent the study's information letter (see Appendix B) as an email attachment. I made an appointment for an introductory meeting with all eight participants who expressed willingness to participate. I reviewed the study information and consent form at the introductory meeting and answered all of their questions. Then, I reviewed the information letter and consent form with detailed information about the purpose and duration of the study and clarified their questions. I provided a copy of the consent form to those still interested in participating (see Appendix C). The IRB approved this study proposal and determined that it met the criteria for exception under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2), which allowed the use of survey procedures and interviews with deidentified, minimal-risk data. As an exempt research study, I proceeded with the data collection without obtaining a signed consent form. I sent an email to participants with the Qualtrics link for the demographic survey (see Appendix D) and their unique identification number for maintaining confidentiality. After obtaining their

demographic survey, I made interview appointments with participants to meet at their convenience.

Participants

The participants included five priests who have graduated and are now ordained as priests, two graduates ordained as deacons but doing their diaconal ministry in view of being ordained priests, and one who was still studying as a seminarian at the time of the study and who will be ordained after graduation. The participants serve with various dioceses—territorial divisions of the church headed by a bishop or an archbishop in the case of an archdiocese—in the United States. The priest participants included two Anglo Americans and three Mexican Americans. One of the deacons was Mexican American, and the other was an Asian American. The seminarian participant was also Mexican American. The criteria for inclusion in the study was that the participants had to be seminarians who pursued or were still pursuing their vocation toward priesthood and had undergone the modified POTT training program offered during the Fall semester of 2019 at one of the theological colleges in South Texas.

Data Collection

Data collection began after the participants were informed of the purpose and the duration of the study and gave their verbal consent to participate. Data collection included the demographic questionnaire, interviews, and the weekly journals submitted during the course. I corroborated the findings from weekly journals with the interview findings to gain insight into the experiences of participants in the program and to build a coherent justification for the theme. In the following section, I present a brief description of the data sources and its use in the study. I also provide a detailed description of the semistructured interview, interview guide, interview process, confidentiality, and transcription of the interviews.

Demographic Questionnaire

I gathered demographic information prior to the interview using a Qualtrics survey (see Appendix D). I made the demographic survey Qualtrics link available to the participants (see top of Appendix D). The demographic information allowed me to understand the participants and their backgrounds, as I aimed to gain insight into the subjective experience of participants in POTT training. Demographic information includes age, ethnicity, birth order, educational background before joining seminary, diocese/archdiocese, and status of formation or priesthood.

Journals

The journals were a course assignment each participant was required to turn in every week prior to class. Each journal entry was a one-page personal reflection the participants turned in every week based on significant experiences or insights they gained from their readings, interactions, and conversations in the class. I securely maintained the journals in my password-protected computer. My advisor retained a copy of the same. Analysis of weekly journals gave a description of the participant's experience in POTT training, providing insight into their subjective experience. I further corroborated the findings of weekly journals with the findings from interviews in identifying the repeated patterns in developing the themes and building a coherent justification for the theme.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary data collection instrument for gathering information from participants. I conducted semistructured interviews virtually using Zoom with all of the participants except for one. I conducted two sets of interviews with participants about their experiences in POTT training and its effects on their emotional maturity and their self as priest. I did not conduct a third interview with anyone, as I reached the saturation of information, and

participants stated that they had no more new information to share about their experience in the phenomenon of investigation.

The semistructured interview guide consisted of three principal questions (see Appendix E). The first question had five prompts, the second had two prompts, and the third question had no additional prompt. All questions were open-ended and designed to elicit information about participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Richard & Morse, 2013), particularly to gather rich and detailed data about each participant's experiences in POTT in their development of self and emotional maturity. I asked the same questions in the same order to all participants. I also asked supplementing questions with either planned or unplanned probes to obtain an in-depth description of their experiences (Richard & Morse, 2013). There were two repeated interviews with the same participant, which gave each participant ample opportunity to reflect on each question and me the opportunity to gather accurate, rich, and in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Daly, 2007)

Description of the Interview Process. The first interviews took about 55–60 minutes, and the second interviews took about 15–20 minutes each. I used a set of three principal questions and one to five prompts because the first interview was semistructured and included open-ended questions. The second interview included the member checking of their experiences in the first interview, participants' confirmation on the transcription of the first interview, and clarifications about certain expressions seeking more information about their experience in POTT. I also invited participants to share if they had any new information, thoughts, or missed sharing. I did not conduct a third interview, as the second interview allowed for member checking and clarification about the information gained from the first interview. I reached saturation, as there was no more new information for the participants to share about their

experience in POTT. I completed interviews in two and a half months after IRB approval. The second interview focused on information on specific details, clarification, or confirmation to gain an accurate and in-depth description of participants' experience. I conducted the interviews via a HIPAA-compliant video conference platform (i.e., Zoom), except for the first interview with one of the participants from Southern Texas, which I conducted in person. I recorded the video conference interviews using Zoom's built-in recording function and stored them on a password-protected computer. I recorded in-person interviews using an appropriate (USB) microphone and QuickTime player on a MacBook Pro with backup recording on an iPhone using the voice memo application and stored on a password-protected computer. I began each interview by welcoming the person and thanking him for his willingness to spare his time to share his experiences in the POTT training program. As the focus of the study is on the description of participants' experiences and a goal of the study was to ensure the clarity of the interviewee's perspectives, I regularly asked the participants to describe, define, and elaborate on the terms they used to describe their experiences. The second interview helped clarify and obtain elaborate information from participants' expression of the experience in POTT.

Transcribing Interviews. Verbatim transcriptions of the recorded data gathered through interviews was required for data analysis. I stored the interview recordings on a password-protected computer, transcribed them using Otter software (Liang & Fu, 2016), and further reviewed them for accuracy. I personally reviewed all transcribed data for accuracy and then stored them in a password-protected computer.

Analyses

The six steps of the phenomenological analysis proposed by Sheperis et al. (2017) were used during data analysis: (a) preparing and organizing the data by transcribing the interviews,

(b) identifying the significant statements or phrases and developing a list of nonrepetitive statements, (c) grouping them into larger units of information called meaning units or themes, (d) giving a textual description of the participants' experiences in POTT with verbatim examples, (e) giving a structural description of the phenomena reflecting on the context in which the phenomenon was experienced, and (f) giving a composite description of the phenomena that incorporates both the textual and the structural descriptions.

The phenomenologist extricates the participants' experiences in the data analysis by using several steps in which the researcher continuously and repeatedly reviews the emerging data while being vigilant about their presuppositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sheperis et al., 2017). In transcendental phenomenology, in particular, the researcher seeks to interpret participant experiences without presuppositions and to be aware and attentive to participants' descriptions of the phenomena under investigation (Richard & Morse, 2013). This approach is an attempt to pay attention to participants' descriptions of the phenomena, setting aside any prejudices, prior knowledge, judgements, and preconceptions about the phenomena under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

Although many phenomenologists follow their own way of analyzing data, Sheperis et al. (2017) asserted that all phenomenologists agree on the several steps that make up the data analysis. I followed the phenomenological research analysis steps outlined by Sheperis et al. in analyzing interview and journal data. Part of exploring the essence of participant experiences included using descriptive statistics to describe the demographic characteristics of participants (i.e., age, ethnicity, birth order, educational background before joining seminary, diocese/archdiocese, and status of formation or priesthood). I presented demographic characteristics numerically in counts and percentages and displayed the data in a table. In the

following section, I explain each of the phenomenological steps (Sheperis et al., 2017) and how I used those steps to analyze textual data from interviews and journals to gain insight into the meaning of participants' experiences.

Step 1—Bracketing

Bracketing enables the researcher to set aside all knowledge that is not due to the actual instances of the phenomenon being explored or investigated, including past knowledge derived from other sources or personal experiences (Giorgi, 2007). For LeVasseur (2003), prior knowledge should be suspended and set aside to allow the researcher to form fresh impressions about phenomena without interference from these interpretive influences. The bracketing method I used during the process of data collection, transcription, and analysis was writing memos. Memo writing helped me be reflective on my engagement with participants during data collection and analysis and to be aware of my presuppositions and biases that interfered analysis of the data (Ashworth, 1999; Sheperis et al., 2017; Giorgi, 2007). I wrote memos during the transcription of interview data and reviewed the transcriptions for correction throughout the process of analysis in identifying and describing the essence of the experience of seminarians in POTT. I continued to track and monitor how my perceptions changed with my experience with participants, my exposure to the phenomena of investigation, and how my perception influenced my analysis (Sheperis et al., 2017).

Step 2—Data Review

In data review, a phenomenological researcher recursively listens to each interview and reviews interview transcriptions to correct and grasp participants' expressions and meanings in the broader context (Reisetter et al., 2004; Sheperis et al., 2017). I listened several times to each interview to review the Otter software-assisted transcriptions of interviews and make corrections

to transcriptions as needed. The purpose of repeated listening and review of the transcriptions and journals was to gain insight into participants' expressions of their experiences in POTT training and the meaning of those expressions in the broader context of the participants' culture.

Step 3—Phenomenological Reduction

In this step, researchers identify and summarize the significant statements and phrases the participants expressed to capture the meaning of the phenomena explored (Moustakas, 1994; Sheperis et al., 2017). I identified and highlighted the significant statements, phrases, and conceptualizations from each participant's account to arrive at an initial structure and meaning of their experience in POTT. I used MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2019) to carry out this process of recursive reading, which included highlighting significant statements or phrases that capture the fundamental nature of the phenomena experienced by the participants in POTT.

The second interviews took place during this period when all the transcriptions of the first interview were complete. I verified and confirmed the significant statements and phrases that captured the meaning of the phenomenon with the participants through the process of member checking to ensure the accuracy of the descriptions. Although I had a set of semistructured questions for the second interview, I included some of the newly generated questions as a follow-up clarification specific to the individual data collected in the first interview, integrating the recommendations of the debriefer.

Step 4—Extraction of Meaning Units

In this step, my aim was to extract the meaning of each participant's experiences. Here the researcher examines the overlapping and redundant statements and groups them together as meaningful units or meaningful analyzable units (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2013; Miller & Salkind, 2002; Sheperis et al., 2017). I examined key statements and phrases for

overlap and grouped them into meaning units using MAXQDA, the textured descriptions of participants' experiences using verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013; Sheperis et al., 2017).

Step 5—Identification of Themes

The focus of this step was to develop an overarching theme that describes the experience of the overall group. The phenomenologist looks for themes among the meaning units to develop an overall description of the theme and the essence of the experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Sheperis et al., 2017). I examined the meaning units to identify overarching themes that describe the essence of participants' experiences in POTT. At the same time, I continued to remain reflexively vigilant on personal biases.

Step 6—Data Displays

According to Sheperis et al. (2017), in this final stage—drawing conclusions and confirming the essence—the researcher attempts to develop a systemic visual representation of the themes and results of the data analysis. I created a table displaying themes and findings, which provided an opportunity for exploring divergent perspectives. I also compared and examined the interview findings with findings from participants' journals to identify repeated patterns in multiple situations in generating a plausible theme (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), "developing a complete understanding of the context" (p. 1280) was critical for identifying the key categories for the finding to be an accurate representation of the data. As emphasized by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the credibility or trustworthiness of the data depends on how accurately these categories represent the data. I used peer debriefing and member checking to ensure trustworthiness (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997).

Peer Debriefing

According to Creswell (2013)—citing Ely et al. (1991), Erlandson et al. (1993), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Merriam (1988)—peer debriefing provided an external check of the research process to increase the trustworthiness of themes. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited by Creswell, 2013), a peer debriefer plays the role of devil's advocate by (a) helping the researcher to be honest; (b) asking hard questions about methods, meaning, and interpretation; and (c) providing the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by systematically listening to the researcher's feelings. Therefore, to enhance the trustworthiness of my research findings, I sought help from a peer debriefer who listened to my briefings and helped me examine the process of data collection and analysis from multiple perspectives. The peer debriefer was a personal acquaintance and a priest who agreed to serve in this role. He was not directly or knowingly connected to the study participants, though he is currently a professor of pastoral counseling in the same theological school and has a PsyD degree.

I contacted my peer debriefer through an email with the instructions clearly describing his role as a peer reviewer (see Appendix F) and requesting his valued assistance in this research project. He accepted my request, expressing his willingness in a written email response. I had biweekly briefings during data collection, transcription, and analysis to discuss issues and get feedback. I maintained a written account of those debriefing sessions. I remained open to integrating the reviews and recommendations of those debriefing sessions in the analysis process and the presentation of findings. Debriefing helped me to be aware of and to analyze the subjective and intersubjective elements that influenced my inquiry and the integrity of my inquiry (Finlay, 2002a; Maritz & Jooste, 2011). The debriefing after each first interview was about the key points and findings, in view of generating additional and follow-up questions

specific to the data collected (McMahon & Winch, 2018). It prompted me with new ways of looking at the issue and helped me gauge whether follow-up interviews were necessary or if the old questions should be reframed in the second interview (McMahon & Winch, 2018). The conversation regarding the saturation of data and confirmation over specific pieces of information based on the interview was the result of debriefing sessions (McMahon & Winch, 2018).

Member Checking

In member checking, Creswell (2013)—citing Ely et al. (1991), Erlandson et al. (1993), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), and Miles and Huberman (1994)—pointed out the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretation. Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Creswell, 2013), considered member checking as the "most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 252). According to Creswell (2013), member checking is a process for validation in which the researcher takes the analysis and interpretation of the data—such as the preliminary descriptions, themes, or the conclusion—back to participants to verify its accuracy and credibility. I asked participants to review interview transcriptions and confirm the intent of their expressions were accurately captured by transcriptions during the second interview. I also asked the participant during the second interview to consider if the overarching theme/themes and the descriptions of the essence of the participants' experience in POTT were in tune with their expressions.

Potential Risks and Possible Benefits

The study was an attempt to explore how POTT training helped seminarians in their personal growth, especially in self-awareness, emotional maturity, and identity integration as priests. Of particular interest are those aspects of personal growth that enabled them to give their

best selves in ministry in the service of others. Although this study involved potential emotional and psychological risks, I succeeded in minimizing risks in discussions of the positives and the negatives of personal growth. Because participants were asked to share information about their experiences in POTT training and its effects on their current lives, they shared information sensitive to their perceptions of self or their goals as priests. Therefore, participation was voluntary and the refusal to participate or to discontinue participation in the study had no direct or indirect consequences on participants. Also, I was not directly involved in their formation and had no direct or indirect relationship of a personal or professional nature with participants. Although not considered risks, participants had to make two types of sacrifices. First, they had to sacrifice some personal time for the two sets of interviews. Second, the interviews were emotionally draining for some participants, as they reminded them of personal and emotional struggles in their life that still need integration and growth.

Along with potential risks, this study offered several potential benefits: (a) it provided an opportunity for participant seminarians to become aware of their emotional wounds from early life and the developmental issues that continue to affect their current life and choices, including discernment of the vocation to the priesthood; (b) it provided an opportunity for participant seminarians to become aware of areas they need to work through or need help discerning related to their vocation to the priesthood to be effective priests; (c) it provided an opportunity for participants to begin to experience emotional maturity and freedom in making self-responsible choices in their personal lives and in their ministry as priests; (d) it provided a resource for ongoing self-improvement and improvement of the human formation of priests.

Limitations

Despite its benefits and strengths, the study also had four notable limitations. First, the passage of time since the research began was a limitation. Due to the passage of time, some participants found it difficult to recall some details of their learnings or nuances of their emotions when reflecting on their experiences. Second, the participants' relationship with me as a former formator was a limitation (Sheperis et al., 2017). Participants had the tendency to over-identify with me due to their familiarity with me and my long-term contract as a formator. I was part of the formation team in one of the seminaries, and all the potential participants in the study were residents of the same institute during the POTT training. However, I discontinued my service and direct involvement with the seminary formation to protect participants' confidentiality and avoid conflict of interest.

Third, there were no priests on my dissertation committee who were familiar with the priesthood and the formation of a Catholic priest, which was a potential limitation. A committee member with experience of formation in seminary and the ministry as a priest would more likely identify nuanced attitudes or beliefs in the formation process reactive to the POTT but critical to the ministry process. A priest member would have been more familiar with the terminologies and expressions that are typical of the formation and training of the seminarians in a Catholic Church's perspective. The inclusion of a peer debriefer, who was a priest and a long-time formator with a PsyD degree, helped to address this limitation in my experience of data collection and analysis; however, the resources of this voice were absent from the dissertation committee process.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter, I present the qualitative findings of participants' experiences in person-of-the-therapist training (POTT), based on interviews and written journals. I designed the study to examine seminarians' experiences in the person-of-the-therapist training, its influence on their self-awareness, and its impact on their emotional maturity and the ability to make responsible life choices. I used the lens of transcendental phenomenology to examine seminarians' experiences by qualitatively analyzing interview transcripts and the participants' journal in identifying significant meaning units, overarching themes, and the essence of their experience. Furthermore, I employed peer debriefing and member checking to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings by integrating the peer debriefer and the participants' feedback in developing the overarching themes and the essence of experiences.

In this chapter, I present the demographic data and key findings from participants, explaining the subthemes, core themes, and the essence of experience. I answered the three secondary questions, followed by the answers to the primary research question: What is the essence of seminarians' experience in POTT training? The findings related to the secondary research questions comprised their experiences in POTT, the influence of POTT training on self-awareness, and the impact on their emotional maturity and the ability to make responsible choices in life. The secondary questions were:

1. What were seminarians' experiences in POTT training?
2. How do seminarians describe the influence of their POTT experience on their awareness of self?

3. How do seminarians describe the impact of POTT experience on their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and discernment of their vocation to priesthood?

Demographics and Participants' Key Information

To protect their identities, I deidentified all participants with pseudonyms, which I present in the data tables. All participants in this study were seminarians studying toward priesthood, except one who was already a priest during the training program. However, I conducted the interviews and asked about their experiences in training about three years after the POTT training. Four of the seminarians were ordained priests and three were ordained deacons. One of the ordained seminarians left the priesthood and was married as the interview and investigations were carried out. So, four priest participants, three deacon participants, and a person who had left the priesthood participated in the study. I assigned all participants pseudonyms at random to maintain their confidentiality. I present the participants' key information in Table 1, including age, race/ethnicity, birth order, education before their admission to seminary, and seminary formation status.\

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Race/ethnicity	Birth order	Education prior to seminary	Status
Angel (102)	31–40	Latino/Hispanic	2nd	College	Graduated
Daniel (103)	41–50	Other	5th	Noncollege	Graduated
James (104)	31–40	Caucasian	1st	College	Graduated
William (105)	31–40	Other	3rd	College	Graduated
Benjamin (106)	31–40	Latino/Hispanic	1st	Noncollege	Graduated
Henry (107)	31–40	Latino/Hispanic	6th	College	Graduated
Lucas (108)	41–50	Latino/Hispanic	3rd	Noncollege	Graduated
Jack (109)	31–40	Caucasian	3rd	Noncollege	Graduated

Description of the Participants

The study included eight male seminarian participants. Six participants (75%) were between the ages of 31 and 40, while two (25%) were between 41 and 50. Four participants were from Latino/Hispanic ethnic backgrounds. Two participants were from Caucasian ethnic backgrounds. Two were of other ethnic backgrounds. Four participants (50%) had no college background before seminary, while the other four (50%) had college degrees before seminary.

One participant (12.5%) had been a priest for 21 years and was a student in a pastoral ministry graduate program while attending POTT training. Seven participants were studying theology in a graduate program and preparing for their ordination to the priesthood while they attended the POTT training program. One participant was enrolled in a pastoral ministry graduate program and was already a priest. However, when the interviews were conducted 3 years later, seven of the participants had graduated, and one was still studying. One participant, graduated and serving in the ministry as a priest for about a year, chose to leave the priesthood.

Analysis of the Data

The study aimed to understand the participants' lived experience in the POTT training program. The lived experience encompasses the experiencer's perception, memory, judgment, thinking, and feeling regarding the lived phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I used the modified steps of data analysis in phenomenological research outlined by Sheperis et al. (2017) to analyze the interviews. According to the steps outlined by Sheperis et al. in gaining insight into the participants' experience in POTT, the process begins at the start of the interview.

Researcher's Bracketing or Epoche

The first step of the process is epoche or bracketing. Moustakas (1994) maintained that the epoche process encourages unbiased receptiveness to whatever is presented or appears in consciousness and a readiness to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance. In bracketing, as much as possible, I set aside previous knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, and judgments not due to actual instances of the explored phenomena. In Chapter 4, I reveal my background, values, culture, experiences, and relationship with the phenomenon of investigation. I continued to bracket during interviews as well as analyze the data using my previous knowledge, understanding, judgments, and assumptions about the explored phenomenon.

I gave unbiased receptiveness about what the participants shared about their experiences. But I was aware of three biases from my culture, family background, and professional experiences as a counselor that warranted continuous bracketing. As a first bias, I held a systemic perspective about human experiences that many people, including some seminarians, continue to be impacted by unresolved emotional and interpersonal issues stemming from their family of origin, even though many individuals have supportive family environments and are well adjusted. Second, I held a bias about somewhat lacking seminary formation due to my

experience as a seminarian in formation over 25 years ago, when human formation was not emphasized. Finally, I held an assumption that person-of-the-therapist training would positively address family-of-origin issues. I wrote memos about my internal feelings and thoughts about the interview at the beginning and end of each interview as a tool for bracketing and to set aside all knowledge that was not due to the actual instance of the phenomenon explored.

Interview Data Review

After the first interview, I transcribed, reviewed, and edited the interview data using the Otter software. I transcribed the first set of interviews and saved the information to a Microsoft Word document to edit and make necessary corrections in the text by listening to the original audio of the interviews twice to 3 times to ensure accurate transcription of the participants' experience. Certain parts of the interview audio were not very clear and were hard to understand due to the differences in accent and participants' communication limitations. I reviewed some interviews 5–6 times to understand participants' expressions. I made memos at the beginning of each review and during reviews to bracket my bias and the questions to clarify in the second interview with the participants about their expression or lack of clarity in expression. Biweekly meetings with the peer debriefer throughout the process of interview data collection and analysis helped me as a researcher talk about my experiences, internal feelings, and challenges. Peer debriefing helped me be aware of my tendency to speak for participants that might influence their descriptions of experiences. The debriefing process helped me identify the expressions or information I had to clarify and obtain during the second interview. After making all the corrections, I uploaded the data to MAXQDA and arranged it according to the questions and pseudonyms to begin the analysis.

Phenomenological Reduction

Sheperis et al.'s (2017) third step of phenomenological analysis is phenomenological reduction. I coded the interview data uploaded to MAXQDA according to the questions and identified significant statements or phrases to capture the meaning of participants' responses to each question. Figure 1 provides an example of the initial identification of the significant statements, phrases, and conceptualizations from each participant's account to arrive at an initial structure and meaning of their experience in POTT. Figure 2 shows the coded segments as a sample that identifies the initial identification of the significant statements or phrases from the participant's account. During the initial review of the first interview data, I identified expressions of the participants that need more clarification or information and noted them as memos "To be clarified" in the follow-up interview. An example of such a memo is in Figure 3. Figure 4 provides a sample of an enlarged snapshot of the memos labeled as "To be clarified."

Figure 1

Sample of Data Coded by Question

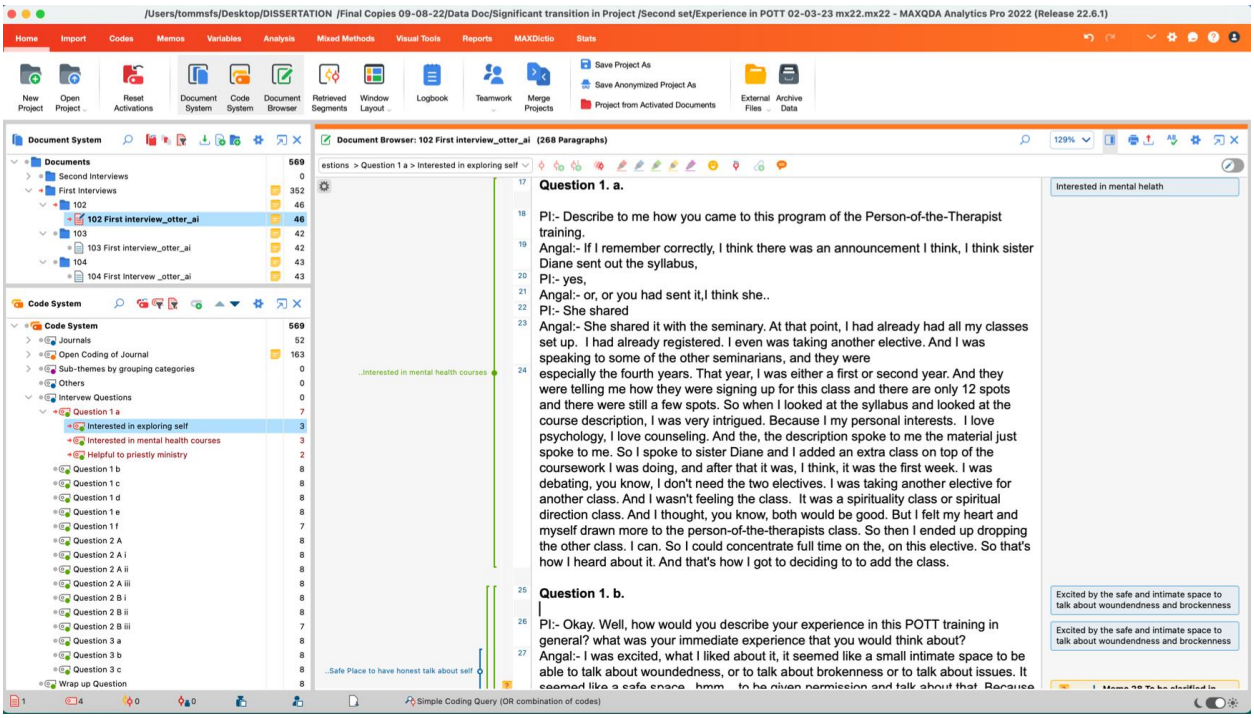


Figure 2

Sample of Coded Segments Used for Initial Identification of Statements

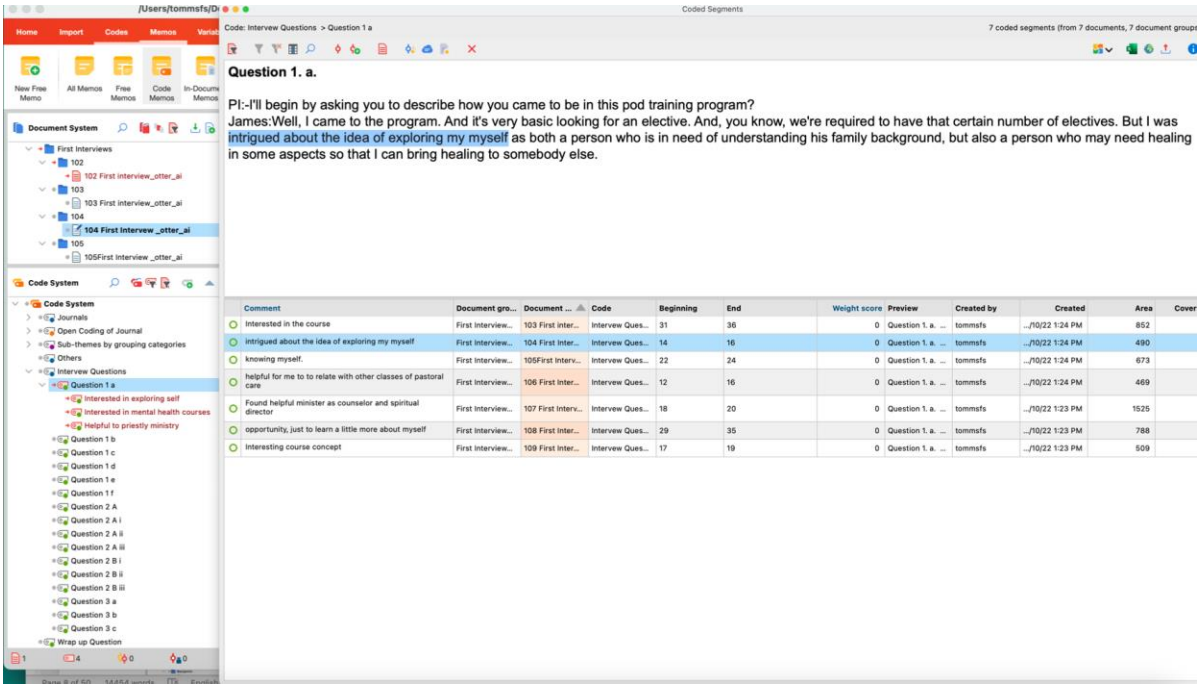


Figure 3

Memos Suggesting the Need for More Clarification or Information

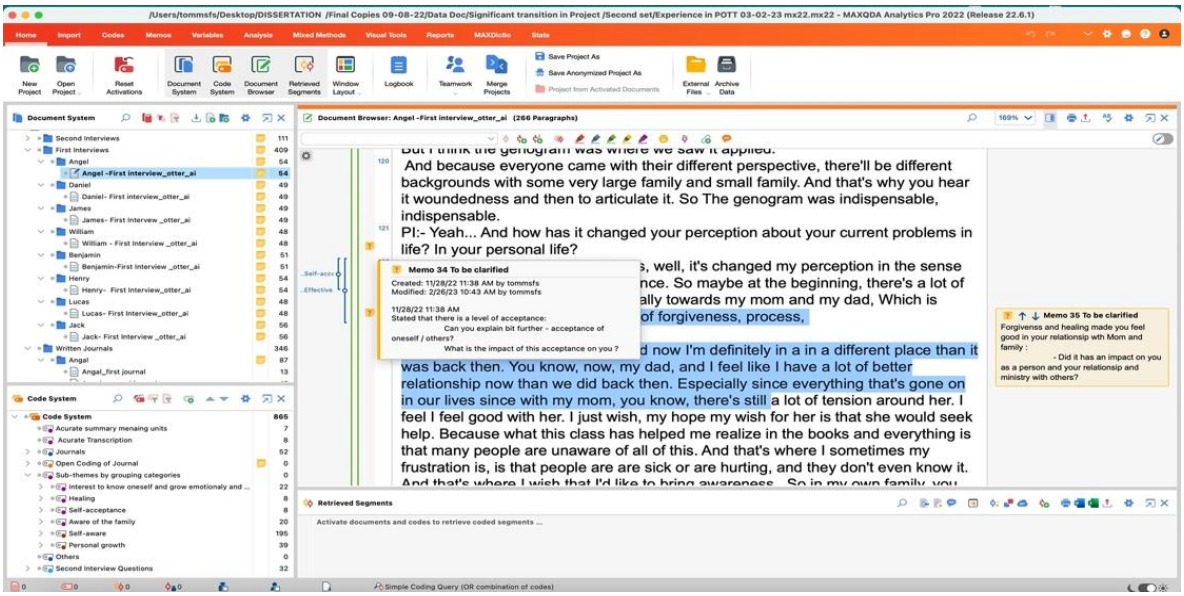
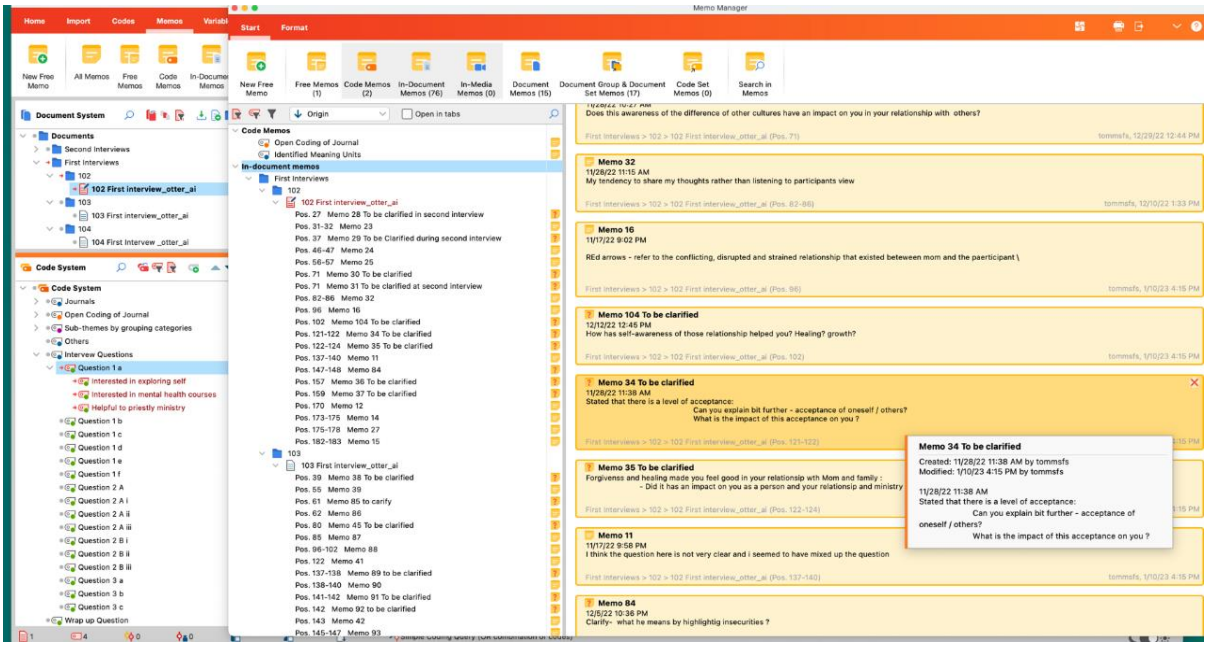


Figure 4

Additional Memos Suggesting the Need for More Clarification



After arriving at this initial structure and meaning of the participant's experience in POTT, I followed up with the participants for a second interview. Prior to the second interview, I sent a summarized version of initial statements and phrases from everyone's first interview to the participants for member checking. The second interview focused on verifying the participants' feedback on the first interview's summary statements and clarifying the participants' expression of their experience expressed in the first interview. All eight participants stated that the summary statements were "very accurate," and "they looked very good." I invited participants to share if they had new or additional information about their experience of the phenomenon of investigation. The semistructured interview guideline I used for the second interview was as follows:

1. How do you describe your feelings about the first interview?

a. What was good about the interview?

b. What was not good about the interview?

c. What could have been different?

2. How does the transcription of the first interview confirm your expressions of the experience shared in the first interview?
3. Clarify specific expressions and get more information as a follow up from the first interview for each participant.
4. Is there anything that you have forgotten and want to add to your experience in POTT shared in the first interview?

I transcribed the second interview data in Otter software and edited the transcription by repeatedly listening to the audio to capture an accurate description of the participants' experiences. Then, I uploaded the interview data to a MAXQDA document for further review and analysis. I coded the second interview data using MAXQDA like the first interview by questions. Then, through recursive reading of the data I identified the significant statements and phrases that captured the meaning of their experience in POTT.

Journal Data Review

After completing review analysis of the data from the two interviews and initial identification of the significant statements and phrases that captured the meaning of the participants' experience in POTT, I reviewed the journal data to determine if there were any themes or ideas that support or overlap with findings from the interviews. I uploaded the journal data into MAXQDA, organized each participant's journals, and reviewed each journal twice. During my second reading and review of the journal, I began to identify the significant statements and phrases that described their experience in POTT and that supplemented or

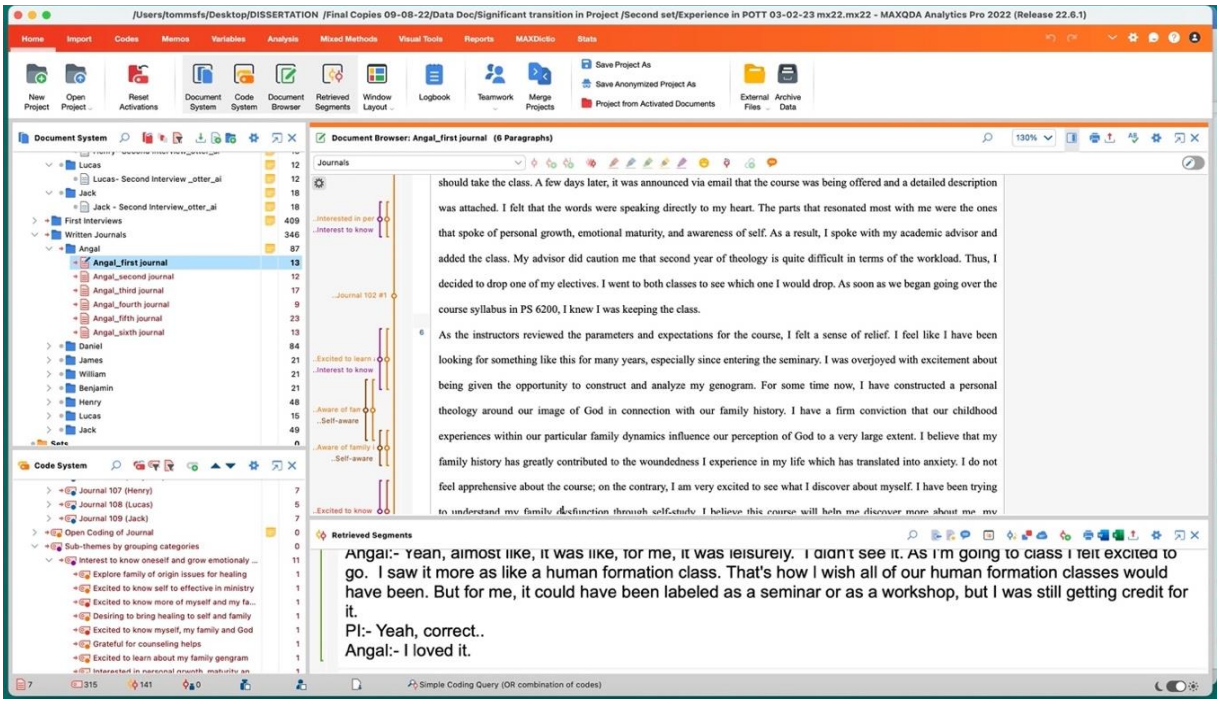
overlapped with the interview data findings. For a snapshot of the MAXQDA analysis on journal data, see Figure 5. Several significant statements and phrases supplemented the findings of the interview data, especially the participants' excitement and interest in getting to know themselves or increasing self-awareness, self-discovery, or increasing awareness of their family, awareness of their emotional woundedness from their family of origin or the impact of family experiences, healing and reconciliation, and growth. Jack expressed his initial experience of discomfort about sharing with the group. Jack said, "There is a certain anxiety that comes with 'putting oneself out there to one's peers.' What will my colleagues think of me?" Although no statements or phrases described the impact of their experiences in POTT, such as self-acceptance, responsible choices, or discernment of vocation, three participants stated that the family experience helped them make decisions and act more responsibly. William said:

> Knowing my family's story does not also mean that I have to carry the burden of solving those things that are needed to be solved alone. Or it does not even mean that I should be responsible in solving them. It only means one thing, that I can responsibly live my life at present and navigate the course of my life according to how I would arrive at my happiness.

Benjamin said, "I try to take care of my victimization or violation of trustworthiness so that it does not affect the way I relate to others, both members of my family and members of my faith community." Henry said, "I find the course to be an excellent tool to be able to grow in my identity." Thus, the journal data provided several significant statements and phrases that supplemented the interview data findings, especially expressions that support the idea of the suitability of the POTT training to promote self-awareness and growth.

Figure 5

MAXQDA Analysis of Journal Data



After identifying the significant statements and phrases that describe the participants' experience from the interviews and journals, I summarized them by looking at the overlapping or supplementing information to arrive at an initial structure and meaning of the experience in POTT. From the recurring and overlapping themes identified from the interview and journal data, I reached data saturation with the information I obtained about the participants' experience in POTT. In discussion with the peer debriefer, I concluded that I had all the information possible about the phenomenon of investigation and reached saturation with the clarifications that I obtained through the second interview. I integrated the summary of the significant statements and phrases from the interview and journal data, giving an initial structure for each participant's experiences in POTT (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants Capture the Meaning of Their Experience

Pseudonym	Summary of the significant statements capturing the meaning of the phenomenon
Angel	• Interested in mental health • Excited about the intimate space to talk about woundedness and emotional struggles and experience healing • Aware of the emotional wounds and their roots in lack of affirmation and attachment disruption with parents • Promotes self-awareness • Self-awareness helps us to be more effective in ministry • Although challenging, good to learn own family dynamics • Genogram helped me to recognize the emotional wounds and experience forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and acceptance • Healing of family of origin issues and improved relationships • Able to communicate and express feelings honestly • Aware of insecurities • Strengthened my conviction about my vocation to priesthood and the desire to help others • Good human formation program
Daniel	• Interested in mental health program • Helped me in self-awareness, especially my strengths and weakness • Reinforced the formation course by knowing more about oneself and one's emotional wounds • Though challenging to recall and share with group about the emotional wounds, it was healing and at the same time interesting to know that I am not the only one struggle with weakness • POTT is an effective as a human formation program for self-awareness and for the discernment of vocation in freedom • Family of origin work is helpful to be aware of emotional struggles and its roots finding ways to resolve them • Became aware of the roots of my experience of loneliness, and sense of abandonment comes from the lack of affirmation from parents and significant members of family • Genogram and journaling gave the opportunity for personal reflection, getting in touch with the early experiences of family • Awareness of the internal feelings and its connection with the experience of the past hurts helped me to relate and deal better or healthy ways • Self-awareness helped me to be more self-accepting and accepting other others that I can associate with people's struggles • Although improved since the program, am aware of lack of self-confidence and still working on it • More convinced of my vocation to priesthood as my personal choice • POTT gave me the internal freedom in making choices in life and in every situation • Learned to be broad-minded and open to relate and integrate from other cultures

Pseudonym	Summary of the significant statements capturing the meaning of the phenomenon
James	• Intrigued about the idea of exploring myself • Informed more about who I am, my family, and the way I react to situation -POTT helps with an extensive study on family or origin and its relevance • Uncovering aspects of family or origin and the experiences of hurts from significant people in life was challenging at the same time listening to others in the group, I learned that it is okay to share • POTT is incredibly beneficial to deal with family-of-origin issues and recommend being offered at initial state of formation • Recognize knowledge of self as the foundation for being an effective human, and a minister rather than letting assumptions take control of life • Awareness of self and the triggers helped me to handle, by responding than reacting • Genogram helped me with self-awareness, and to be more purposeful and consultative with myself and others, especially creative in dealing with loneliness • Became more self-aware, thoughtful, and less reactionary to difficult situations and people, and in different life choices being aware of the situation • Aware of my tendencies, especially procrastination that I am making progress • Helped me in discerning my vocation well and to recognize that a priest is still a human coming from families with its dysfunctionalities like anyone else • Learned to be more open to experiences, develop deeper friendships and listen to others without bias and judgments • Aware of the triggers and its roots that I can respond well than react
William	• Desire to know myself • Promotes self-reflection and self-knowledge to make myself a better person • Expensive study on family of origin • Though self-confrontational to recognize the family of origin issues and my negative and positive interactional patterns, at the same time, it was an opportunity for self-acceptance and growth to maturity • POTT is an internal joumey facilitating psycho-emotional formation of seminarians working through family of origin • Opportunity to have personal and individual conversation about psycho-emotional formation • Helped me to understand myself, my feelings, and the patterns of behavior that I learned to be a better person and to help others • Genogram and journaling helped me to get to know myself, my family, and my attitudes • Awareness helped me to understand and relate to the things happening in my life and to improve • Learned to be more listening and understanding to others • Changed my perspectives and brought meaning to life with the awareness and acceptance of my limitations • Self-awareness helped me to be free in discerning my vocation to priesthood, recognizing it as a call to sacrifice in love

Pseudonym	Summary of the significant statements capturing the meaning of the phenomenon
	• Awareness of priestly celibacy and commitment helped me to stay connected to God as well as live out my vocation with integrity • POTT helped me to be aware of the triggers and to respond appropriately • Gave me openness to relate and talk to people without being judgmental giving opportunity for healing
Benjamin	• Complementary and helpful to pastoral courses • Helped me to know myself and my family background through reflections, journaling, and genogram study to be effective in ministry as priest • POTT's emphasis on family of origin and it influence on ministry was helpful for personal growth as well as to help others • Though challenging to recognize and accept the unhealthy patterns of behaviors that continue to impact present life, awareness helped me to break the patterns and help others to change • POTT is helpful for human formation of priests as it identifies and get in touch with deep emotions, feelings, and its roots • Family of origin work using genogram helps to recognize he learned behavioral patterns from family and experience healing adapting more health ways • Readings and the journaling helped me to know myself • Overcame the difficulties in expressing love, care, and respect for parents and others in ministry • Aware of emotional wounds due to lack of love and respect that affect me and the way I treat others presently • POTT is a tool for discerning vocation and supports all areas of formation in seminary at the same time connect oneself well with family to make a free choice of priesthood • Helped me to take time to strengthen the relationship with God and my family as I am more self-aware and self-accepting • Helped me to choose not to let my feelings of worthlessness, anger, and resentment to take control of my choices • Helped me to relate compassionately with others
Henry	• Found helpful as a minister to have counseling skills • Enhanced all areas of formation to priesthood with greater self-awareness of the success and failures to be effective in ministry • Though challenging to recognize and share our vulnerable areas of life and family with others, learned that it is okay to be vulnerable, that it opened way for growth • POTT helped me in gaining genuine self-awareness, awareness of triggers and vulnerabilities that it touched every aspect of formation to be effective as a priest • Genogram and journaling facilitated the self-awareness, especially the dysfunctionalities and patterns of learned behavior and work towards becoming a better minister • Sharing our vulnerabilities with the group was a healing and rewarding experience • Self-awareness helped me to have better dialogue with my family members as well as with my peers rather than blaming

Pseudonym	Summary of the significant statements capturing the meaning of the phenomenon
	• Became more open to accept, embrace, and acknowledge internal triggers and its roots that it promoted growth • Aware of the traits of impatience and its triggers that I am working to improve • POTT helped me to be aware of my vulnerabilities and to turn to God in faith for healing and growth to holiness • Challenges me to be in touch with my emotions and its connections to the past experiences by being self-reflective that I can make better choices and experience growth • Helped me to be authentic, being aware of my vulnerabilities that I can use self in helping people to be self-aware and experience healing • POTT training in a mix group context is very useful to get to know our vulnerabilities, to become self-accepting and for discernment of vocation to priesthood
Lucas	• Opportunity to learn about self, and be open to share with others though it was challenging • Focus on the awareness of the self and the family was helpful to become more self-accepting though challenging to share with the group • Recommends POTT being offered at least a yearlong program in the initial stage of formation for the healing of emotional wounds and prepare oneself for ministry • Self-awareness helped me to understand and accept myself and my parents with all the limitations, experiencing healing, reconciliation, and sense of freedom to relate well with parents and above all patience with self and others • Presentation of my genogram, listening presentations of other's and the readings helped me in understanding, and accepting myself and be open to others • Improved communication and the way I relate with others especially the superiors or those in authority • Self-awareness and awareness of areas of my growth strengthened my conviction about my priestly vocation • Helped me to be more open to God, pastorally be available to people and committed to the responsibility • Helped me to be respectful to people, patient, and value their time • Helped me to be aware of my internal feelings and set appropriate boundaries while being respectful in relationship

Pseudonym	Summary of the significant statements capturing the meaning of the phenomenon
Jack	• Interesting course concept • Positive experience for self-awareness by getting know personal and family background • Comprehensive study on family dynamics and the broader perceptive family dynamics and its impact on ministry • Made me cringe initially listening to others sharing their vulnerabilities but ended up being beneficial that everyone felt comfortable with each other with a greater level of authenticity • Recommends POTT at the initial stage of formation as necessary help the seminarian to know oneself and to learn to deal with their pitfalls and obstacles • Everyone felt, open and safe for honest conversation about their background and feelings, giving an opportunity for personal growth through knowledge of the self, and family to build better relationship with parents. • Gave me greater awareness of my limitations and baggage that I carry and learned to be more patient with self and make informed choices • Family of origin work and the conversation with members of family helped me to become aware of the learned patterns of behavior • Self-awareness helped me to be more tranquil and controlled in dealing with various situations on life as everyone has their struggles • Developed greater degree of self-acceptance of my limitations that I feel a sense of freedom and empowered to seek what brings fulfillment and happiness • Learned to be listening and be patient with wife and have honest conversation, and I don't get upset or react like before, although it is still an areas of growth • POTT did not directly help me in discerning my vocation but has lightened the load that I felt carrying and helped me not to be too hard on myself, knowing that I am not alone • Began to see life and things from a broader perspective, focusing on what is possible than what should be • Helped me to look deep into the nuances of the situation and respond than react immediately, a move from being reactive to being calculative • Helped me in my pastoral roles to be patient with people and to help them see problems from broader perspective and to recognize its roots • Free from toxic influences, I was able to calm down and see things from other person's perspective and let things cool down on its own • POTT is a great program to get to know ourselves helping me to change positively my life and help others to change

Extraction of Meaning Units

As a third step of phenomenological analysis, I extracted meaning units. I examined the participants' expressions of their experiences again for overlapping and redundant statements

and grouped them together as meaning units (Sheperis et al., 2017). This process is also called horizontalization, as each participant's expressions and significant statements are treated as having equal worth. Using MAXQDA, I extracted analyzable meaning units from the summary of participants' significant statements and phrases identified earlier that captured the meaning of their experience in POTT training. The following were the eight meanings units: (a) safe and intimate space to talk about personal struggles, (b) effective for human formation, (c) awareness and acceptance of familial impact on self, (d) awareness of the experience of healing, (e) awareness of growth and maturity, (e) responsible decision making, (f) authentic expressions, (g) facilitated discernment. I present the emerging meaning units in Table 3 with textured examples.

Table 3

Emerging Meaning Units That Describe the Experience of the Participants in POTT

Research question	Extracted meaning units	Respondents	Textured description of the experience
Experience in POTT training	Safe space	5	"It seemed like a small intimate space to be able to talk about woundedness, (or) to talk about brokenness or to talk about issues. It seemed like a safe space."
	Effective for human formation	8	"This course brings some tangible or enhances, especially the human formation, but at the same time, the spiritual formation, because everything is triggered for within our own development and who we are, including our relationship to God and how that has an effect on how we behave, or how to see patterns in our lives."
Influence on self-awareness	Awareness and acceptance of familial impact on self	8	"It is very helpful to first to know who I am. And each activity, the genogram and the journal, were very helpful for me."
			"I know in my attachment, early relationship with my caregivers, with my mom and my dad. I think at that time, I think I remember I focus a lot on my mom. . . . I've realized that there was a large father wound. And that's where a lot of my brokenness or my woundedness comes from is a lack of affirmation, or attachment there."
			"I have a greater degree of self-acceptance."
	Awareness of the experience of healing	4	"I remember, I showed the picture of my grandparents and my brothers, my parents and along with that, the way they behaved and how I was continuing the pattern of behavior. I was able to identify those in my family and experience healing too, in the process."
Impact on growth and maturity and responsible choices	Awareness of growth and maturity	8	"I deal with things in a much more tranquil manner than I did previously. And in a much more a much more controlled way, I would say that I have a greater sense of control simply because I'm aware of some of the other factors that are influencing certain types of behave that certain types of behaviors or reactions that I might have."
	Responsible decision making	8	"Instead of letting my anger or resentment to take control of my behavior. I think, just to, through prayer and by taking time to reflect how I'm doing things, I learned to change. Especially, how I am treating others or respecting others, or caring, caring for others, that's helpful for, for me."
	Authentic expressions	8	"I am careful to set appropriate boundaries for my safety as well for their safety."
	Facilitated discernment	8	"POTT helped me to discern and well that priests are just as human as everybody else."

I identified the frequency of some expressions that relate to the meaning units by each participant in the study (see Table 4). Table 4 gives the frequency of the significant expressions about the participants' experience in POTT identified from the data. Four out of eight participants identified POTT training as a safe space. Angel repeated this assertion 7 times. All eight participants expressed the phrase human formation or formation. Henry used the phrase 12 times. The term awareness was the most significant word expressed by all eight participants. Henry expressed it 64 times. All eight participants also used the term self-acceptance or acceptance. Angel used it 15 times in his description of the experience. The word healing was used by seven out of eight participants, and Angel expressed it 5 times. Six out of eight participants used the word growth, with Henry stating it eight times. The word choice was used by five out of eight participants, and Benjamin used it twice. Finally, all eight participants used the word discernment or vocation. William used it 6 times while describing his experience in POTT training.

Table 4

Frequency of Some Expressions That Relate to the Meaning Units

Meaning units	Angel	Daniel	James	William	Benjamin	Henry	Lukas	Jack
Safe space	7	2	1	0	2	0	0	1
Human formation/ formation	6	4	5	7	9	12	2	7
Awareness	6	3	2	14	1	64	1	11
Self-acceptance/ acceptance	15	6	1	5	6	2	2	6
Healing	5	2	2	3	4	2	1	0
Growth	2	0	2	0	1	8	1	2
Choice	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	1
Discernment/vocation	2	2	2	6	1	3	2	1

Identification of the Themes

The fifth step of the phenomenological analysis is the identification of the themes by determining the essence of the overall group (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Sheperis et al., 2017). During the fifth step, I remained reflective about personal bias, especially my assumptions about the POTT training and its potential, paying attention to the seminarians' expression of their experience in the POTT training program. The goal of transcendental phenomenological research is to capture the essence of the participants' experience in the phenomenon of investigation. Table 5 presents the emerging meaning units and the themes in developing the essence of the experience of the seminarians in POTT. Through analysis of the interview data, three themes emerged in relation to the participants' experience in the POTT training: sanctuary, impact on awareness, and impact on choices. Each theme represents the collapsing or collation of similar ideas among the eight meaning units developed from the participants' expression of their experience in the POTT training; therefore, the reader should note that identifying the eight meaning units preceded the development of the three developed themes. I described the meaning units in a written narrative known as the textured description of the experience with verbatim examples.

Table 5

Emergent Themes and the Meaning Units From Open-Ended Questionnaire and Interview Responses and Journal

Themes	Meaning units
Sanctuary	Safe place
	Effective for human formation
Impact on awareness	Awareness and acceptance of family of origin impact on the self
	Awareness of the experience of healing
	Awareness of growth and maturity
Impact on choices	Responsible decision making
	Authentic expression
	Discernment of vocation

Theme 1: Sanctuary

The theme of sanctuary encompasses two meaning units: (a) safe place and (b) effective for human formation. The word sanctuary comes from the Latin *sanctuarium/sanctus,* meaning holy and refers to a sacred place such as a shrine (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). The Oxford Dictionary states that by medieval law of the church, it became known as a sacred place where a fugitive was immune from arrest. Today, sanctuary commonly refers to a safe place of protection or refuge for illegal migrants until they receive their asylum. The sanctuary theme describes the experience of the participant seminarians in the POTT training as a safe place, a place of refuge to unpack and work through their vulnerabilities and experiences of brokenness and woundedness, gaining a sense of freedom to be their true selves. The experience of the sense of freedom was necessary for them in knowing and being in their true self, discerning their vocation and giving themselves to the way of life they chose. The sense of safety and the experience of sanctuary in POTT provided the platform for self-exploration, which was instrumental for the effective human formation of the seminarians, which is foundational for spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. Thus, the second meaning unit (i.e., effective for human formation)

described the experience of the sense of safety or the sanctuary that facilitated the opportunity to unpack and work through emotional issues and gain freedom to discern their vocation to priesthood and serve effectively.

Safe Place

The first meaning unit identified within sanctuary is that it is a safe place. Five out of eight participants expressed the experience of safety, a comfortable space to talk freely and to have an open and honest conversation about their emotional struggles, vulnerabilities, woundedness, and brokenness. Angel stated, "It seemed like a small intimate space to be able to talk about woundedness, to talk about brokenness or to talk about issues. It seemed like a safe space." Henry explained the experience in POTT saying, "It is a kind of safe space to open oneself and where one can be vulnerable." Jack stated that it was not only a free space but also a freeing space where one could be authentic without pretension or show. Jack said, "I found this to be a very safe space and a freeing space. And it was just kind of nice to see everybody as being the same without people putting on a show." Daniel said, "When I know that I am safe, I can explore and know myself, my strength and weakness, and my signature theme."

James stated, "I have a safe group of people I can rely on to help me to know myself and work through the issues of the family of origin experience." Although it was initially challenging for all of them to be open and share their emotional woundedness, brokenness, and vulnerabilities among the members of the group, most of the participants expressed that they felt the training program provided a safe place to have open and authentic conversations. Six of the participants recognized it is important to have open and genuine conversation about personal struggles and vulnerabilities early on in their formation. One of the participants recognized that it is equally important to have a safe place to talk about personal struggles, which he recommended

as necessary for the formation of seminarians. Angel said, "I feel like it's something that's very important to talk about, but it isn't given a lot of attention in seminary formation. And there are not many classes that address and deal with it."

Effective for Human Formation.

The second meaning unit identified within sanctuary was effective for human formation, and all eight participants expressed that POTT training is an effective program for human formation. The participants expressed the POTT program was a safe place to explore themselves, their emotional issues, and vulnerabilities and gain the freedom to discern their vocation and effectively minister as a priest. The program provided a safe space and the opportunity to self-explore and gain knowledge of their family background through elaborate study of the family background from a three-generational perspective genogram. They had the opportunity to present this three-generational genogram in the group and discuss the impact of those experiences in their current life in an atmosphere of safety and trust. The genogram presentations and the opportunity to listen to each other's presentation and their struggles in life further facilitated the process of self-awareness, self-acceptance, healing, and growth. The safety and support the participants experienced in the group was instrumental in their self-acceptance, healing, and growth. Thus, the experience of sanctuary was necessary and effective for formation. Seven of the participants recognized that the program complements every aspect of the formation of the seminarians in preparing them for their ordination to priesthood, mainly by providing greater self-awareness, awareness of the family background, and the learned patterns of behaviors that continue to impact the life of a priest. However, two of the participants stated that POTT is unique, exceptionally effective for human formation, and different from all other courses offered in seminary formation. William said, "It was entirely different, and first of its kind that there was

no other course to compare with POTT." Angel said, "It was completely different form all other courses that it helped me in my personal life, very practical and applicable to ministry." Three participants stated that the course not only enhanced human formation but saw it as foundational for all pillars of formation, especially the spiritual and pastoral formation, as one's life and behavior—including their relationship with God—is influenced by the developmental experiences from family providing an opportunity for awareness and growth. Henry said, "It is very helpful across all pillars of formation, although it has a lot to do with human formation and growth, it helps the pastoral and spiritual formation."

The participants identified the POTT training program as practical for personal growth and an effective human formation program for preparing individuals for the ministry. The majority of the participants recommended offering POTT training as part of seminary formation, especially in the early years of formation, and three of them recommended offering it for an extended period of two or more semesters. Angel was happy and grateful that the course on person of the therapist was offered for seminarians and said, "It's very practical and it helped me in my personal life and ministry. So, for me, it was a very hands-on approach very hands on class." He recommended that the POTT training be offered in every seminary for two or three semesters because, unlike the other courses, it is not so much academic but on personal growth. Benjamin stated that the POTT training is very effective, unlike all other courses in seminary, as it "focuses on family origin experience and its impact on current life, helping me to be self-aware that it does not become a stumbling block in ministry." The majority agreed that the study of the three-generational genogram about their family of origin helped them be aware of family experiences and their triggers so that it does not become a stumbling block in their ministry and pastoral relationship. Jack opined that the POTT training was helpful for human formation unlike

any other courses offered during seminary formation because of the skills provided for self-reflection and comprehensive study of family of origin issues that continue to affect one's life. Lucas and Angel stated that the POTT training is very effective and significant for formation. They recommended it be offered for at least a year or more than just a semester, giving ample opportunity and time for healing. The participants of POTT training unanimously agreed that the training was effective, suitable, beneficial, and significant at some point of formation. Five of the participants recommended that POTT training during the initial stages of formation, at least at the beginning of theological studies, would be beneficial for discernment of vocation and other areas of formation. Jack stated:

> It is necessary for men who are going through the formation, to really come to know themselves so they wouldn't have to deal with perhaps some of the pitfalls or obstacles in their lives. Rather, they might have a better chance of navigating those. . . . It probably should be done a lot earlier.

All the participants shared that it was challenging and initially embarrassing to share with the group about their emotional struggles, woundedness, and vulnerabilities, yet the intimate space and the openness they experienced in the group made it a positive experience that allowed for healing and growth. For example, Jack said:

> It was very difficult for me kind of hearing other people share and open about themselves . . . it made me kind of cringe. But what was challenging ended up being the benefit, because I think everybody was able to share so well, and everyone felt comfortable in that dynamic sharing.

Henry said, "We took the risk. Let's put it that way. It was very healing, at the same time, gratifying, to be able just to vent it out." The participants felt that the group setting, the level of

safety and comfort they experienced in the group increased the openness and authenticity to facilitate the process of healing and growth.

Theme 2: Impact on Awareness

The theme of the impact on awareness was comprised of three meaning units: (a) awareness and acceptance of familial impact on self, (b) awareness of the experience of healing, and (c) awareness of growth and maturity. All three meaning units were frequently found in the expressions of the participants throughout the interviews and in their written journals. The analysis of the interview and the journal allowed me to contextualize the participant seminarians' lived experience in POTT training. I learned that the participants in POTT training gained greater self-knowledge through awareness of the family background, early childhood experiences in the family, and the significant others in their life. I learned that the increased awareness and knowledge of the self and the family background enabled participants to accept themselves and embrace their experiences in the family with a sense of empathy, leading to an experience of healing and growth toward maturity.

Awareness and Acceptance of Family of Origin Impact of the Self

The first meaning unit within impact on awareness I identified to describe the experience of participant seminarians was awareness and acceptance of family of origin impact on the self. All eight participants confirmed that the training allowed them to gain greater self-knowledge and self-acceptance. They recognized that the training helped them be aware of their emotional struggles, vulnerabilities, and familial experiences that continue to impact their current life because of lack of love, affirmation, and secure emotional attachments with significant persons in life, such as parents or caregivers. Angel recognized the disrupted relationship with his mother as well as the lack of affirmation from his father from his early life and how it continues to

impact him. However, the awareness gained through the genogram work changed his perception in the sense that he has come to a level of acceptance; although he recognized he held a lot of resentment toward his parents. Angel said:

> I accept the things that happened to me, the wounds, the brokenness, and the scars I carry. They are real. Yet I accept them, and I don't need to be ashamed of them. . . . I can't do anything about my past, but I can do something in the present and in the future, you know.

The training program has helped them be aware of the roots of their emotional struggles in their family of origin, allowing them to accept them and change their attitudes about those experiences and behavioral patterns. William stated that the family-of-origin work has helped him to be more self-accepting and accepting of the family. He said:

> I love both of my [family's] heritage even though not all stories found there are pleasant like the stories of rape, of vices, of oppression, of violence run part of my own blood story . . . I have embraced this reality as part of the foundations of my person.

Benjamin stated that although the genogram work was challenging, it was helpful in gaining greater self-knowledge, acceptance of oneself, and the family. He said:

> It is very helpful to know who I am . . . my feelings, my background with my family, with my parents . . . although it was challenging to go back to those experiences and to accept the things with my parents and grandparents.

Self-awareness and the awareness of the family origin experiences, and how it relates to their emotional struggles and behavioral patterns, were not only insightful but helped them to be more self-accepting, giving them a sense of freedom to move forward in life with patience. Jack stated:

> Being able to accept myself regardless of what had been in the past with my family, my family dynamics. . . . I would say self-accepting, and like, because I guess, I was able to see that I was not alone. . . . Also, a bit more patience and grace with myself.

Daniel stated that the awareness of his family background and early experience that continues to impact his current life and struggles gave him the openness to share with the group and the freedom to accept himself and helped him develop better relationships with his siblings. Daniel said, "It made me so free, gained the freedom to accept myself."

The training not only helped the participants be aware of and accept their family background but also helped them be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and internal insecurities, feelings, emotions, and triggers that have roots in the early experiences in their families of origin. Daniel said, "I learned how I can know my strength and weakness and my emotions." The participants stated that they became aware of the familial roots of the learned patterns of behavior and tendencies that trigger them to react emotionally to people and situations in ministerial settings. Four of the participants expressed that the POTT training assisted them in making sure that they take time to be patient with themselves and others. Especially in stressful situations, they learned to respond appropriately rather than reacting emotionally. Henry stated that the training helped him to be more aware of the internal triggers that stir up in ministerial settings and areas that he needs growth and improvement. However, at times he tends to blame others for his internal experiences due to a lack of love and respect. Seven of the participants stated that it was an experience of relief and a ray of hope promoting self-acceptance to know that they are not the only ones with personal struggles. Still, others have similar struggles. Reflecting on the family of origin and presenting the genogram in the group setting about the family of origin and its influence on various aspects of their current life was a

positive experience in terms of self-awareness. The genogram presentation in the group helped everyone feel that they are not alone in this journey. Jack said, “I could say that I didn’t feel so alone. That was what I think was very positive about the experience.”

James similarly expressed that the family of origin work not only made him more self-aware but also was helpful to be aware of internal feelings of the lack of love and trust which trigger emotional reactions and learned behavior patterns. Benjamin stated “My mother’s side, grandparents were alcoholic. Now that I sometimes tend to take drinks, I have watch myself that I don’t let drinking take control of me, although I am not an alcoholic.” Awareness of the intergenerational trajectories and his propensities to alcohol helped him be watchful. On the other hand, Daniel recognized that the long-term experience of his loneliness and a sense of abandonment had its root in the loss of his mother when he was a child. Daniel said, “I come to realize that the death of my mom has affected me a lot. I can be in a group, yet I feel that I am alone.” Henry stated, “When I start looking into the family, not just relational but behaviors, illnesses, and relationship conflicts, I can have a greater understanding of who I am and how those familial patterns become foundational to our current life, including my life and ministry as priest.”

Two of the participants stated that they were aware of the subconscious emotions and feelings resurfacing from early experience of hurt in their ministerial interactions and that they can handle them well without letting the emotions take control. Henry recognized the dysfunctionalities on both sides of the parent’s family, although there are differences in patterns of behaviors and serious illness. The awareness of the family-of-origin experience was insightful and beneficial for every participant in helping them to understand themselves as well as the roots of some of their personal struggles and behavior patterns. Though experience and degrees of

self-awareness varied from person to person, everyone recognized that the POTT training initiated greater self-awareness in them, facilitating opportunities for change and growth and continuing to impact them over the years.

Awareness of the Experience of Healing

The second meaning unit that describes the experience of the participants in POTT training was awareness of the experience of healing. All eight participants confirmed their experience of healing in some form as a result of their participation in the POTT training program. Healing and reconciliation were a big part of the participant's experience in the program, which they recognized as ongoing, especially in reconciling with their parents and other family members. Angel stated that it was an experience of healing, reconciliation with his parents, and a sense of internal freedom that he is in a place where he can communicate with his parents without getting angry. The experience in the program and the intergenerational genogram work helped the participants not only become aware of their resentments toward their parents and members of their family but helped them ask forgiveness and express their love, which many of them stated as a healing experience. Lucas said:

> I was able to ask forgiveness and to tell my parents that I love them. It wasn't usual in my family to tell each other that we love [one another]. I felt like I opened the door for everyone to experience healing. I felt like everyone was waiting for a moment of healing.

Benjamin said he was able to recognize and identify the unhealthy behavioral patterns that he learned in his family and that had continued to impact his behavior and that he experienced healing. William said:

> I am not perfect, but I must accept the imperfection that I have. At the same time, deal with it in terms of how I would relate myself to the people around me. That was the most challenging because it not only takes the effort but personal conversion.

Daniel said although he experienced abandonment and neglect since the death of his mother, the POTT training helped him recognize that the other members of the family loved and cared for him. So, he was able to reconcile and appreciate the members of the family. For some, the awareness and acceptance of their vulnerabilities and limitations enabled them to turn to God in deeper faith and experience healing. Henry stated that the awareness and the openness to accept his vulnerabilities instilled humility to turn to God in faith and recognize that it is not a sign of weakness but an invitation to depend on God. Jack expressed that through POTT he experienced healing that brought internal freedom from the culture of institutional expectations that bound him. He gained the internal freedom and the courage to leave the priesthood. As I stated earlier in this chapter, Jack expressed that if this course had been given earlier, he probably would have left the seminary and discontinued his studies to priesthood. He said that it was the personal and institutional expectations of perfection that made him choose his path to seminary formation and priesthood, expecting that the priesthood would perfect him. However, the training helped him to realize not only that the priesthood does not bestow perfection but that he can let go of those expectations and experience internal freedom, accepting himself with all his weaknesses. Jack said:

> We can become institutionalized in our expectations in addition to our own difficulties that we bring with us, that we can let ourselves be guided in a negative way. . . . I let that happen to me both with myself and the expectations of others. And I felt I was

> imprisoned by them. . . . It was like a chain that just broke open, even though I didn't realize it at that time.

He journaled that he was aware of the need for healing in his dysfunctional family. To escape from the dysfunction of the family, he sought a controlled environment and controlled narrative of his own, relying on the theology of ontological transition. Jack wrote:

> I saw a lot of healing needing to take place in my family that I myself had ignored. In wanting to escape from the dysfunction of my family, I sought a controlled environment and a controlled narrative I could create and live. I could prove I was good enough on my own two feet. If I follow the theology of the ontological change I could even be something else than what I was. However true and nice it may look on paper, at the end of the day I will always be a man with a family that is broken like anyone else's and that is something I need to be comfortable living now. If I am to indeed be a priest, a healer, it wouldn't hurt so much to look at the healing at home as I continue to deal with what needs healing in my own life. This process left me much to reflect on.

James expressed that he experienced healing from the misconception that he had as a young seminarian about the priest as a kind of marble man or a perfect person. The POTT training helped him realize that priests are human, liable to make mistakes, and need help like any other person. He said, "It's helpful to realize that I too am human . . . priests have human triggers . . . priests are sinners and are just as much in need of human assistance." The majority of them expressed that it was challenging to share their stories of emotional struggles, dysfunctionalities, and the experiences of hurts from their families of origin, but they realized it was an opportunity for talking about and reconciling with significant people and experiencing reconciliation, healing, and conversion in their attitude toward significant others.

Awareness of Growth and Maturity

The third meaning unit under impact of awareness that describes the experience of participant seminarians in POTT training is awareness of growth and maturity. All eight participants recognized that they experienced growth and maturity in various aspects of their life by attending the POTT training program. Awareness and acceptance of one's flaws and struggles helped the participants to be more patient, compassionate, and empathic with themselves and others, especially in their ministry. Angel said, "Confronting and accepting my humanness and being patient with myself, I'm able see the humanness of other people. We all go through the same struggles. . . . It gave me compassion and empathy for people." Jack said:

> I deal with things in a much more tranquil manner than I did previously and in a much more controlled way. I would say that I have a greater sense of control simply because I'm aware of some of the other factors that are influencing certain types of behave that certain types of behaviors or reactions that I might have.

William stated that the awareness of his humanity and self-acceptance of human limitations brought meaning to his life but also helped him to bring meaning to his life and helped him become more present with others and listen to them without judging. He said, "I am aware of the other's individuality. I can treat others with respect."

As a result of the awareness of the self, the participants recognized personal growth in the priorities they place in their life, their choices in life, and their ability to listen and communicate well with others. Awareness of their limitations and weaknesses helped them develop healthy ways of handling their struggles. Angel said, "I've grown a lot. Not that I'm not nervous anymore. I still get nervous, but I'm learning how to manage and to cope with it. Yeah, so it's been a great . . . a lot of growth has occurred." Daniel, aware of the growth in self-confidence

said, “This course has helped me to know myself and to build my self-confidence.” Daniel said that the awareness and acceptance of self and the family helped him to better his relationship with his siblings and family. Benjamin said, “For me to be aware of who I am, my family dynamics, parents and grandparents helped me to, not to not bring that to my present or to work and my choice.” Jack said, “I was able to make better and more healthy decisions for myself.” Lucas said, “My communication is better with the people . . . especially the way I relate with my superior has improved. . . . I feel more comfortable in working with the authorities.” William said:

> POTT had helped me to realize first and foremost, that I can be better. And then if I can be better, I must look at those aspects in my life that I need to improve and that I need to harness myself. POTT has ushered into that maturity.

Jack added:

> Learning about my limitations and weaknesses, I found that I didn’t have to say yes all the time to something . . . or force myself say yes. . . . I could say no . . . as I don’t need to be perfect. It gave me freedom to seek the things that bring fulfillment and happiness.

James said he feels more mature today, is more self-reflective on his tendencies to react to the situation, and chooses to respond appropriately rather than react with negative emotions.

Theme 3: Impact on Choices

The theme of the impact on choices was comprised of three meaning units: (a) responsible decision-making, (b) authentic expression, and (c) discernment of vocation. The experience in POTT, especially the increased knowledge of the self, the acceptance of the self, including family experiences, ensured healing and growth toward greater maturity and empowered them to make more responsible decisions. Awareness and acceptance of oneself and

one's triggers with roots in familial experiences gave the participants the inner freedom and ability to make responsible decisions. Responsible decision-making describes an inner sense of freedom and the ability they gained to choose the way they respond to situations and people. As a result of taking on healthy perspectives, their choices are not affected by their early experiences of the past.

The second meaning unit is an authentic expression (i.e., the ability to be true to oneself and their relationship with others as they gained greater self-acceptance). POTT gave them the freedom and courage to choose to be their true self and to be comfortable with being vulnerable. The third meaning unit was the discernment of vocation. The experience in POTT training gave the participants internal freedom in discerning their vocation to priesthood, which is most essential in their life and commitment to the way of life they chose, be it priesthood, single life, or married life. The three meaning units are a mutually enriching experience for the participants, especially in their choices. POTT gave them the inner freedom and courage to be authentic and self-responsible in decisions, including their choice to continue or discontinue their priesthood vocation.

Responsible Decision Making

The first meaning unit within the impact on choices that described the experience of the seminarian participant in POTT training was responsible decision-making. All eight participants expressed that the experience in POTT helped them make responsible decisions or choices in life in different situations. Though the ability to make more responsible decisions varies for each participant and their life situation, all of them experienced an increased ability since attending POTT training in making responsible life decisions. Benjamin said:

> Instead of letting my anger or resentment take control of my behavior. I think, just to, through prayer and by taking time to reflect how I'm doing things, I learned to change. Especially, how I am treating others or respecting others, or caring, caring for others, that's helpful for, for me.

Daniel stated that he learned to act self-responsibly rather than react to people according to their behavior or actions. He said, "I came to understand that I cannot act bad because the other people act bad. I learned to act as myself, and I should act in a good way." After recognizing the value of being loved and feeling safe, Angel chose to make people feel valued and safe around him. Angel said, "In my relationships, I always try to make people feel loved and seen and acknowledged, and to feel safe. So that's always my aim." Henry stated that it challenged him to work toward the best version of himself and be more authentic in every aspect of life. He said, "It is bringing this greater awareness as to who we are and how God calls us to be a better version of ourselves every day by being authentic in our interaction with partners or family members." Some of the participants expressed that the experience in POTT helped them become aware of the nuances of situations and people and learn to respond rather than react. Jack said, "It gave me the opportunity to learn to look more deeply within and not just react." James said, "I'm more thoughtful. I'm not as reactionary as I used to be." Lucas said he learned to be more committed to responsibilities in his personal life to take care of himself and in his pastoral duties in serving the community by sticking to schedules with due respect.

Authentic Expression

The second meaning unit within the theme impact on choices that describes the experience of the seminarian participant in POTT training was authentic expressions. All eight participants expressed that they wanted to be honest but were scared. They feared being judged

by people they see and interact with every day. POTT provided them with the opportunity and safe place to experience being authentic and responding from their authentic self; although it was challenging and felt uncomfortable to be authentic. However, they all could risk going beyond their comfort zone in the group and found it provided liberation and growth. Jack explained:

> A certain anxiety that comes with putting oneself out there to one's peers. What will my colleagues think of me? I am not comfortable with it but now I am. I was greatly put at ease once I learned more about how this course could help me better engage with others in pastoral ministry by learning about myself.

Henry stated that POTT helped him be more authentic with himself and others. He learned to be comfortable and accept his vulnerabilities and imperfections. He realized that he does not need to have everything in place to feel that he is a perfect priest. He stated that to be aware of one's limitations and imperfections, one needs to depend on Jesus the redeemer who came to lead us to perfection. Henry reiterated the constant self-awareness that challenges him in his journey to be a better person and to be authentic to himself and others in his ministry as a priest. Lucas stated that he learned to be more respectful and empathic in being present with people in his ministry at the same time he learned to be responsible and set appropriate boundaries in his relationships, being aware of his internal triggers, feelings, and vulnerabilities. He said, "I am careful to set appropriate boundaries for my safety as well for their safety." William recognized that young people do not respect or value people in authority on account of their position but respect and value the integrity of those in authority. Therefore, William stated that POTT challenged him to be more self-aware and authentic with people in his ministry, especially in their ministerial relationship with children. Angel stated that he has grown in his ability to express his feelings using I statements; however, he said it is still hard for him to be

honest and authentic in expressing his feelings, fearing that he will hurt people's feelings or lose their friendship. He said he is aware of his struggle to be authentic in his expression. Although, he has made progress and his journey of growth and healing is ongoing. He said, "I still can't be completely honest. I'm afraid to tell how I really feel because I'm afraid of hurting the friendships or losing. I'm a lot better than before. The healing and growth in formation continues."

Benjamin is gradually learning that he had trouble receiving and expressing love and care from early in his life, even to his parents. The POTT training helped him become more self-aware about his struggles and make an authentic effort to receive and give love and care to those he ministers to as a priest. James learned to be authentic by being thoughtful and appreciative of others and by taking time to respond appropriately rather than react, especially to people and situations that he knows could trigger certain reactions in him. The awareness and acceptance of one's limitations, vulnerabilities, and imperfections have helped the participants begin a new journey of authenticity in their personal lives and in their ministry as priests. Although all of them found it challenging to accept their vulnerabilities and take the risk of being authentic in their vulnerability, it propelled their journey to growth and inner freedom.

Discernment of Vocation

The third and last meaning unit I identified under impact of choices was discernment of vocation. All eight participants confirmed that POTT helped them discern vocation to priesthood. The participants realized that ordination does not bring about an ontological transition in them or turn them into a superhuman free from imperfections. Instead, POTT helped them accept themselves as humans with flaws, limitations, and imperfections. James said, "POTT helped me to discern that priests are just as human as everybody else." Henry said POTT helped him

discern and affirmed that the awareness and acceptance of the limitations and vulnerabilities enable one to continue the work toward perfection and depend on God who called us to priesthood. He said:

> This self-awareness of my vulnerability challenged me. And it is good for ministry, that there's a constant self-awareness of what God calls us to be and who he's wanted us to be. It is God who called us and so he will transform us gradually. It is an ongoing growth towards holiness.

Angel stated that POTT training motivated and inspired him to consider not only his vocation to priesthood but helped him discern the ministry he should engage in. He said:

> I want honestly to serve God, and I feel God is calling me to serve his people in his church. This class has inspired me to want to continue to seek further studies in counseling as a priest to help people in their marriage and family life.

Benjamin recognized the POTT training as a tool that facilitated the discernment of his vocation and prepared him for his ministry as a priest. Benjamin said, the focus of POTT training on "awareness of the family of origin experiences and improving familial relationships" was an effective tool in integrating all aspects of the formation to priesthood. Daniel stated that the POTT training let him reexamine his motivations and strengthen his vocation to priesthood. He recognized that unmet needs of early life do not drive it and that the sense of abandonment and loneliness that he experienced had its roots in early childhood experiences. Similarly, William and Lucas acknowledged that the POTT training helped them not only to know themselves and the areas that they need growth but also reaffirmed their vocations to priesthood as something they genuinely desired.

Jack, the participant who chose to leave the priesthood, stated that although POTT did not directly help him refine his motivation or discernment to the priesthood, it lightened the emotional load that he has been carrying and indirectly helped him. He said:

> As far as my motivation to become a priest in and of itself POTT did not help. But I think it lightened the load that I felt like I was carrying. . . . And that was kind of nice. It took the load off. That's what I'll say it did in terms of discernment, it helped me. I do not have to be so hard on myself.

However, when I asked during the second interview if POTT training would have made a difference in the discernment of his vocation to priesthood had it been offered in the first year of theological studies or before, he stated, "If I would have taken this earlier, I would have left you earlier." The statement confirms the relevance and the suitability of POTT training in the human formation of the seminarians as well as the discernment of their vocation to priesthood.

Identification and Description of the Essence of the Experience

The fifth step of phenomenological analysis is the identification of the themes by determining the essence of the total group (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). While I remain reflective about the personal bias paying attention to the seminarians' experience in the POTT training program, the goal of transcendental phenomenological research is to capture the essence of the experience of the participants in the phenomenon of investigation. See Table 6 for the emerging meaning units, themes, and the essence of the experience of the seminarians in POTT. Reviewing and analyzing the seminarian participants' description of their experiences in POTT training, all eights indicated that the training was effective for human formation, especially in promoting awareness of self, self-acceptance, growth, and maturity in making responsible choices, which is foundational in all other areas of formation. Ultimately, self-awareness can be

described as the factors that contributed to self-acceptance, growth, and maturity that made them capable of making responsible choices. The awareness of self, vulnerabilities, family background, and early experiences facilitated the process of greater self-acceptance, growth, and maturity, promoting the ability to make responsible choices. The participants shared the essence of experience reflected through three themes and eight meaning units.

Table 6

Meaning Units, Themes, and Essence of Experiences

Meaning Unit	Theme	Essence
Safe place Effective for human formation	Sanctuary	
Awareness and acceptance of familial impact on the self Awareness of the experience of healing Awareness of growth and maturity	Impact on awareness	Self-awareness
Responsible decision making Authentic expression Discernment of vocation	Impact on choices	

As for the first core theme, safe place, the participants initially felt discomfort and fear in sharing their family and personal stories of their vulnerabilities, brokenness, and woundedness with others. However, the experience of safety and trust they experienced within the group enabled them to risk sharing their stories with the group. The awareness of the sense of safety and security they experienced was instrumental to having open and authentic conversations about their personal stories in the group. The participants learned that they are not alone; rather, everyone has areas of vulnerability and brokenness. The awareness not only unlocked the possibility for greater self-acceptance but provided prospects for healing and growth to handle their limitations.

As for the second theme, impact on awareness, the underlying experiences described in the three meaning units—awareness and acceptance of the familial impact on self, awareness of the experience of the healing and awareness of the growth and maturity—expounded the influence of POTT training on the seminarian participants and how the training is helping, especially in their human formation, which is the foundation for all others areas of formation towards the priesthood. The third theme, impact on choices, responsible decision-making, authentic expressions, and discernment of vocation, explains the direct influence of the healing, growth, and maturity gained through the experience of self-awareness and acceptance in POTT training. The seminarians learned to be self-responsible and authentic as they know and accept themselves and their vulnerabilities. They can also discern their vocation to priesthood with a greater sense of freedom.

Research Questions

In this section, I review findings based on the research questions. First, I respond to the study's three secondary research questions, answering each of the questions based on the finding of the study. Then I present the overall experience or the essence of seminarians' lived experience in POTT training by addressing the study's primary question. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the chapter.

Secondary Research Questions

In this study, I proposed three secondary questions on the experience of the participant seminarians in the POTT training. To meet the secondary research goal, I used the transcendental phenomenological data analysis steps proposed by Sheperis et al. (2017) to analyze the data on participants' experience in the POTT training program, identifying the significant phrases that described their experience in POTT and developing an overarching theme that described their

experience in the program. The first question sought to gather information on participants' experiences in the POTT training. The second question aimed to obtain information on the influence POTT training had on their awareness of self. Finally, the third question focused on gathering information on the impact of POTT training on their emotional growth, maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and the discernment of their vocation to priesthood. The data analysis revealed the following information answering the secondary questions.

Secondary Research Question—The Experience of the Seminarians

I asked the following secondary research question: What were seminarians' experiences in POTT training? The first question inquired about the participant seminarians' overall experience and impression of the POTT training program. The POTT training program was offered as an optional course and the participants had the freedom to choose this course or any other, so they joined the program on their personal interest in the program. Three out of the eight participants stated they were interested and excited about the program, as they were interested in mental health and counseling programs. Four other participants stated they were intrigued by the opportunity to know themselves and become more self-aware. One of the participants stated that he entered the program with the idea that it was about learning counseling skills for their ministry as a priest. As they were coming close to their graduation, six participants stated that POTT training complemented the courses they had during the years of their formation and was helpful to their ministry. The other two stated that it was a unique course, entirely different from all other courses they ever had in their years of formation. All eight participants agreed that POTT training was very effective and helpful for their personal growth in terms of skill. More importantly, the POTT training helped the participants to be aware of their personal issues and not to permit those issues to come in the way of ministry.

The data from participant seminarians' experiences indicated that most participants (i.e., 5 of 8) expressed that the training provided a safe and comfortable space to talk freely and have an open conversation about emotional struggles and vulnerabilities. Although it was initially challenging and culturally uncomfortable for most of them to share their personal stories with others, they were able to take the risk of sharing their stories. Most stated that it was a liberating experience, as though a heavy weight was taken away from them. Participants reported that the POTT training program provided a safe space to take the risk of sharing and having authentic conversations. They expressed that it is not only important to have this conversation about personal stories as part of the seminary formation but also, as one of the participants recommended, providing a safe space for conversations is equally necessary.

All the participants identified POTT training as effective and suitable for the human formation of the seminarians as they prepare for ordination to priesthood, providing greater self-awareness. Three participants acknowledged that POTT training and its focus on human formation is fundamental to all pillars of formation. Most participants recommended that POTT training be integrated into the seminary formation program, especially in the initial years and extended by a year or more. Family of origin work using genogram was found very effective. It helped them be aware of their learned patterns of behaviors and triggers and learn to deal with them healthily.

Secondary Question—Influence on Awareness of Self

I asked the following secondary research question: How do seminarians describe the influence of their POTT experiences on their awareness? The second question focused on understanding the influence or the impact of their experience in POTT training on awareness. Awareness had been a significant experience of the participant seminarians in the POTT training

program, including awareness of oneself through greater knowledge about oneself, one's family background from a three-generational context, early experience in the family, and the impact of familial background and experiences. The data analysis within the context of the participants' lived experience in POTT indicated that the training had a deep influence on awareness on various levels. First, the participants gained awareness and acceptance of the familial impact on themselves. All eight participants reported that the training allowed them to gain greater self-knowledge and the openness and freedom to accept themselves and their family, being aware of the vulnerabilities and emotional struggles they encounter on account of familial experiences, especially the lack of love, affirmation, and secure attachments. They indicated it helped them to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, internal insecurities, triggers, and learned patterns of behaviors, allowing them to adopt healthy ways to respond to people and situations. The participants stated that they became aware of the familial roots of learned patterns of behavior and tendencies that trigger them to react to people and situations in ministerial settings.

Second, the participant seminarians indicated the awareness of the experience of healing they had gained in the POTT training program was equally significant, facilitating the process of reconciliation and healing; however, it is an ongoing process of rebuilding and nurturing the relationships. All eight participants confirmed experiences of healing; however, areas and levels of healing experiences were varied. Experience of healing and reconciliation to self and to those significant others in their life was reported as a big part of the experience in POTT training that facilitated self-acceptance and the acceptance of family members. Self-awareness and healing also helped the participants in their self-acceptance. They developed greater openness to accepting their vulnerabilities. Further, it enabled them to turn to God in deeper faith and humility to gain internal freedom from personal, familial, cultural, and institutional expectations.

Secondary Question—Emotional Maturity, Ability to Make Responsible Choices, and Decrement of Vocation

I asked the following secondary research question: How do seminarians describe the impact of POTT experience on their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and discernment of vocation to priesthood? I asked the question to gain information about the impact of the participants' experience in POTT training on various aspects of their life, especially in their emotional maturity, ability to make responsible choices, and the discernment of vocation to priesthood. The data analysis in the context of the lived experiences of the participant seminarians indicated that all eight participants reported that the POTT training facilitated the awareness of growth and maturity in various aspects of their life through their experience in POTT training.

Most participants stated that the awareness and acceptance of their flaws and struggles helped them be more patient, compassionate, and empathic with themselves and others. Moreover, the participants reported that the awareness and acceptance of self and the family brought new meaning to life and gave them the ability to be present and listen to others without judgment. They reported that the awareness of their limitations and triggers not only helped them develop healthy ways of coping and handling their struggles but also gave them self-confidence. Second, the increased knowledge and self-acceptance empowered them to make responsible decisions and be more authentic with themselves and others. All eight participants expressed that their experience in POTT helped them make responsible decisions in different life situations, especially in being authentic and thoughtful to respond respectfully to people and situations rather than reacting. The participants expressed fear of being honest and authentic in expressing themselves openly to others. However, the experience of safety in POTT provided the

opportunity to be their authentic self, which was liberating; however, they had initial discomforts. The participants reported that the awareness and acceptance of their limitations, vulnerabilities, and internal triggers helped them empathize with others. They also learned to set appropriate boundaries in interpersonal relationships.

Third, the awareness and acceptance of the self with all their human limitation helped the participants discern their calling to priesthood. All eight participants expressed that the POTT training, especially the awareness and acceptance of self, aided the discernment process in varied ways. Three participants reported realizing that the ordination does not bring an ontological transition or turn them into a superhuman; instead, the training helped them accept their human limitations and enabled them to continue to work towards perfection, relying on God's help. The training helped the participants consider not just the vocation to priesthood but also prepared them for ministry and to discern how they can effectively minister to people. Three of the participants stated that the training strengthened their conviction about their vocation to priesthood; although they are aware of their limitations and the areas in which they need growth. One of the participants chose to leave the priesthood after a year. He stated that although POTT training did not directly help him discern or choose his vocation as a priest, it lightened the emotional load that had been weighing on him. The training in POTT gave him the inner freedom to be himself and choose to leave the priesthood. He stated that if he had taken POTT training earlier, perhaps he would have chosen to leave seminary earlier. The statement affirms the suitability and relevance of POTT training in human formation and discernment of vocation to priesthood.

The Primary Question—The Essence of Experience

The primary research question of this study was as follows: What is the essence of seminarians' experience in the POTT training? Based on the data analysis, the essence of the seminarian's experience in POTT training was self-awareness. Participants found self-awareness to be the key component of the three significant areas of the experiences discussed in this dissertation: participants' experiences in POTT, the influence on the awareness of self, the impact on emotional maturity, the ability to make responsible choices, and the discernment of vocation to priesthood. Identifying self-awareness as the essence of seminarians' experience in POTT training provides more illuminated expression to the seminarian participants' experience.

First, the intergenerational study of family-of-origin experiences and the impact on their current life and behavior facilitated the process of greater self-knowledge. The awareness of the impact of familial background and influences facilitated the process of understanding oneself, one's behavioral patterns, and the roots of emotional vulnerabilities and triggers. Second, self-awareness further facilitated the process of self-acceptance and the acceptance of one's family, bringing greater healing and reconciliation. The participants' self-acceptance also meant accepting their flaws and struggles, which helped them be more patient, compassionate, and empathic with themselves and others. Third, self-awareness and self-acceptance helped their personal growth and maturity—above all, the inner freedom to make responsible decisions, including their discernment of vocation to priesthood. In light of this study, one can recognize the suitability of POTT training in the human formation of the seminarians, especially in their growth toward the discernment of vocation and their effectiveness in ministry.

With this dissertation's comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon specific to this demographic of seminarians' experience in POTT training and its suitability for human

formation through self-awareness, I hope to create awareness among those responsible for the formation of seminarians, like the seminarians themselves, the formators, the bishops, vocation directors, spiritual directors, advisors, and mental health practitioners and advocate for providing safe space and effective intervention that promotes greater self-awareness, acceptance, growth, and maturity capable of making responsible decisions and discernment of vocation to priesthood for the well-being of priests and to those they minister.

Summary

The findings of this study indicated that the POTT training positively impacted the seminarian participants' human formation, which was foundational to their emotional, spiritual, and psycho-social development. Although participants reported they were uncomfortable and initially scared to share their stories and vulnerabilities, they risked opening up with the group given the experience of a safe environment and the desire for personal growth.

The findings supported the interpretation that participants primarily experienced greater self-awareness with their experience in POTT training. The self-awareness included becoming aware of themselves, their family background, and their vulnerabilities. It facilitated the process of self-acceptance, growth, and maturity capable of making responsible choices in life, including the discernment of vocation to priesthood. Although each participant had different experiences in their family of origin and participant had different experiences in their family of origin and different social and ethnic backgrounds, they all shared the view that their experiences in the family of origin impacted their current behavior. They agreed that the awareness of their family of origin and early childhood experiences in the context of their intergenerational family background was an experience of healing and reconciliation, providing the inner sense of freedom to navigate the direction of their life. Therefore, all participants confirmed that POTT

training is effective for the human formation of seminarians by providing a safe space for self-awareness, self-acceptance, growth to maturity, and inner freedom to make responsible choices, especially in discerning their vocation to priesthood.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I summarize the study and its findings, including an overview of participants' lived experiences, a summary of the themes, and the essence of participant seminarians' experience in the person-of-the-therapist (POTT) training program. I present conclusions from the findings with emphasis on the essence of experience among the participants' self-awareness about the overall significance that facilitated the process, including a safe place, self-knowledge, self-acceptance, healing, and growth that made them capable of making responsible decisions and discernment of a vocation to the priesthood. I discuss the implications on the formation program, skilled formators, and other responsible people in formation, including bishops and vocation directors. I include implications for general mental health practitioners. Additionally, I provide recommendations for future research to explore further the experiences of seminarians in POTT training and its suitability for human formation. Finally, I call for the replication of the study with different seminaries, especially in the United States, introducing POTT training as a training intervention to facilitate effective human formation.

Summary

In this dissertation, I have presented a Husserlian transcendental phenomenological qualitative analysis of interviews and the journals of the eight seminarian participants who participated in a semester-long course in POTT training. I reviewed participants' narratives to obtain an in-depth description of participants' experience in the course. I aimed to explore and understand the essence of seminarian participants' experience in POTT training, its influence on their self-awareness, its impact on their emotional growth and maturity, the ability to make

responsible decisions, and their ability to discern vocation with internal freedom to continue toward priesthood or to discontinue. Ultimately, the participants' essence of experience was self-awareness. All eight participants described the most significant experience in POTT training as self-awareness, which facilitated the process of emotional growth and maturity and their ability to make responsible decisions and discern a vocation.

Summary of Themes

I uncovered three themes through exploring and coding the participants' interview data and the written journal data related to their experience in POTT training and its influence on self-awareness, emotional growth, and maturity. Additionally, the training influenced their ability to make responsible decisions and discern their vocation to the priesthood. The themes were sanctuary, impact on awareness, and impact on choices. The summary of the themes is based on relevant coding phrases, summarized as meaning units, which characterized the most widely reported interview and journal statements from participants.

Sanctuary

The incentive for the seminarian participants to take the risk of unpacking their personal stories with the group and taking refuge in the group support despite discomforts and fears was the sanctuary experience of safety and security within the group. They experienced and were aware of the internal sense of freedom to be their true selves. Participants expressed the concept of "safe space" or "freeing space" to explain their motivation to share their personal stories and work through their vulnerabilities and experiences of brokenness to gain a sense of freedom to be their true selves. All the participants expressed their sense of safety in having open and authentic conversation. However, it was challenging for most participants and culturally uncomfortable to share and talk about their emotional woundedness, brokenness, and vulnerabilities to others.

The participants recommended providing a safe place for such open and authentic conversation as part of seminary formation. All the participants stated that POTT training is a safe and effective intervention for the human formation of the seminarians in preparing themselves for the priesthood. Further, it enhances all pillars of formation (i.e., spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual) due to its focus on a family of origin, work, and early childhood experiences. It facilitated the process of self-awareness by promoting greater self-knowledge, knowledge of familial background and healing, self-acceptance, and emotional growth and maturity. The emotional growth and maturity further enabled the participants to make responsible choices in life, especially discerning their vocation to the priesthood. Additionally, the participants recommended extending the training for 2–3 semesters, focusing on personal growth. They believed this would be effective in preparing them for ministry, especially to be aware of the triggers and their learned patterns of behaviors and not become a stumbling block to their ministry and pastoral relationship.

Self-Awareness

In tune with the statements about the experience of sanctuary, the participants exhibited the theme of impact on awareness in various ways in their description as most vital in their experience in POTT training that aided the growth process. The participant seminarians explained that they gained a greater awareness of the self and promoted healing and acceptance of self and family through the awareness of the family background and the influences of early childhood experiences with those significant others in their life. The healing experiences were authentic, especially concerning negative experiences of lack of love and affirmation, which continued to impact their current life. Participants mentioned that awareness of self and healing

brought a sense of inner freedom and a new perception in life to move forward with patience with oneself and others.

Some participants mentioned that the awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, particularly of the internal insecurities, triggers, and learned patterns of behaviors, stemmed from their early experiences in the family. This training helped them to relearn and adapt healthy ways of responding. Further, the genogram work on the family of origin and presentation in the group provided a greater sense of freedom and hope that one is not alone in this journey with experiences of vulnerabilities and brokenness. Few of the participants currently serving as priests reported their awareness of subconscious emotions and feelings resurfacing from early experiences of hurt in their current ministerial interactions but stated that they could handle them without letting the emotions take control.

All the participants reported their experience of healing and reconciliation with themselves and their family, especially the parents and their siblings; reportedly, they have enjoyed a better relationship and interaction with everyone since their attendance in POTT training. Some participants reported that awareness of their human limitations and vulnerabilities brought healing and acceptance of their humanity and strengthened their faith and openness to depend on God. Overall, the experiences of awareness of the self, familial experience, and its impact on themself brought greater acceptance and healing and facilitated emotional growth and maturity in every aspect of their lives. Some reported their growth in being more patient, compassionate, and empathic with themselves and others, especially in their ministry as a priest. They report that they can be more present and interact with people nonjudgmentally.

Impact on Choices

Participants reported mainly that due to their experience of increased awareness and acceptance of self, healing, and growth, they gained inner freedom and the ability to make responsible decisions in life, including discernment of a vocation to the priesthood and being more authentic in every aspect of life and expression. Some participants said they could take time to think reflectively and be more intentional in responding to people with respect and love without letting their anger and resentment take control of their life or react to people and situations. Further, they were challenged to work towards their best and true selves by being authentic in interactions with people while being responsible and committed to pastoral duties as a priest. All eight participants reported that POTT provided that safe and intimate space to be in their authentic selves; although, initially, it was challenging and uncomfortable. Despite the initial challenge, it ultimately became a positive experience of liberation and growth. Some participants said they got more comfortable accepting their vulnerabilities and imperfections as a person. They were open to accepting their mistakes, willing to get the necessary help, and/or maintain necessary, appropriate boundaries and discipline.

Furthermore, the participant seminarians found the POTT training and the various experiences in the program helped them to discern their vocation and strengthen their conviction in the vocation to the priesthood. The participants reported their realization that the ordination to the priesthood does not bring an ontological transition in their person, nor do they develop any superhuman qualities. Instead, they realized they continue to remain human with all their flaws and vulnerabilities. However, they described that the awareness and acceptance of their humanity and human limitations could help them work towards perfection, depending on the help of God and personal discipline. Although all participants reported that POTT had helped them in their

discernment and strengthened their conviction in their vocation to the priesthood, it was significant to note, for one of the participants, the POTT training indirectly helped him leave the priesthood. He stated that the POTT training took the load off him and that he did not have to be so hard on himself. Later, while clarifying, he stated that had the POTT training been given during the initial years of his formation, he would have chosen to leave the seminary formation then. POTT training has indeed been influential in forming and discerning the seminarian's vocation to the priesthood.

The Essence of Experience in POTT Training

The most important finding of this study about the experience of the seminarian participants in POTT training was self-awareness. The experience of safety, the level of trust, and comfort within the group were significant in promoting the internal sense of freedom to be in their true self. However, it helped each participant, as the internal awareness of the safety and trust within the group facilitated the ability to be in their true self and to have an open and authentic conversation about their inner struggles and brokenness with the group. Rogerian person-centered theoretical approach (Rogers, 1961) recognizes the need for the subjective experience of a safe and suitable psychological climate for growth and development towards being in true self and self-actualization, as Maslow (1970) stated, or identity integration, as Erikson (1963) stated.

The studies have emphasized the need for integrating psychological intervention programs in seminary formation to develop the capacity to internalize vocational values (Rulla et al., 1978). USCCB (2006), John Paul II (1992), and Congregation for the Clergy (2017) emphasize the fundamental nature of human formation over all other areas of formation for seminarians through greater self-awareness and acceptance that facilitate the growth and

integration of their identity and vocational values as priests. Although studies were made on the process of identity integration (Hankle, 2010, there needs to be more information about the experience of seminarians in human formation practices and its suitability in their integration of identity and vocational values as priests. Similarly, the suitability and impact of POTT training on therapists and their effectiveness as therapists have been established; yet, POTT training has never been introduced outside the therapeutic context. In this study, the participants reported that POTT training is suitable and adequate for human formation. Further, they stated that it enhances all other pillars of the formation, such as spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual, as it provides a safe psychological climate to work through the intergenerational family of origin experiences and facilitates the self-awareness and self-acceptance necessary for growth. Thus, the study's finding reveals self-awareness as central and the essence of the experiences of all eight seminarian participants in POTT training.

In addressing the gap in the knowledge related to the lived experiences of seminarians in POTT training, I analyzed and interpreted the data I obtained through interviews with the participants and their written journals using the following question: What is the essence of seminarians' experiences in POTT training? The data suggested that self-awareness was the essence of seminarian participants' experience in POTT training. The experience of self-awareness was a critical factor that influenced the acceptance of self and family, healing and reconciliation, emotional growth and maturity, and ability to make decisions and discern their vocation to the priesthood.

Implications of the Findings

The essence of experience among the seminarian participants in my dissertation study is self-awareness. Despite the internal fear and cultural discomforts, the interview data reveals that

the participants gained the courage and risked going beyond their comfort zone and cultural limits in sharing their personal stories with the group. The sense of safety and awareness of the self were significant in the participants' experiences of self-acceptance, healing, emotional growth and maturity, the ability to make responsible choices, and the discernment of a vocation to priesthood experienced by the seminarians in POTT training. The experience of self-awareness and the subsequent growth among the participants' experience in POTT training conforms to the Rogerian person-centered, humanistic perspective. Rogers (1961) indicated that individuals could use self-directive resources when provided a conducive climate that facilitates the psychological attitudes for self-understanding, change, and self-direction.

The findings of this dissertation study illuminated the experience of seminarians in the POTT training program and its ripple effect on formation and growth toward the discernment of their vocation to the priesthood. I identified self-awareness as the essence of their experiences in the training. Although most participants expressed their fear and cultural discomfort in sharing their stories of brokenness and vulnerabilities with others, the internal sense of safety facilitated the process of self-exploration of their family of origin experiences that continue to influence their current life and behavior. Additionally, the exploration into and awareness of their familial and early childhood experiences accelerated the process of healing, acceptance, growth, and maturity to make responsible choices in life, especially in the discerning vocation of the priesthood. Though most participants stated that exploration into the family of origin experience was initially challenging, all the participants reported that the experience in POTT was a beneficial and essential intervention for forming seminarians perusing their studies and discerning their vocation to the priesthood. The sense of confidentiality, trust, and safety they experienced in the training program was fundamental for the participants' self-exploration. Two

participants recommended extending the POTT training for a year or more, giving them sufficient time and opportunity to explore their self-awareness and healing. Further, five of the participants recommended that the POTT training be offered during the initial years of formation.

Theoretical Implications

The subjective epistemological stance and social-constructive social paradigm indicate that knowledge is subjective to the individuals' differing experiences and constructed in an interactive process (Daly, 2007). Therefore, the findings from this dissertation study can be understood through the overarching theoretical lenses of the Rogerian existential-humanistic approach called the person-centered approach and theories of development such as Maslow's self-actualization and Erikson's eight stages of development. Rogerian existential humanism sheds light on the essence of the experience of seminarians in POTT training, particularly in providing the psychological climate for self-exploration and awareness, promoting healing and growth (Rogers, 1961). Further, it helps the researcher set aside presuppositions in exploring the subjective experience of the seminarians. The theories of self-actualization (Maslow, 1970) and Erikson's (1968) eight stages of development provide insight into the developmental blocks and emotional immaturity that continue to affect seminarians.

Existential Humanism

Existential humanism, also known as the Rogerian person-centered and non-directive standpoint, recognizes the need for a suitable climate for self-actualization, growth, and maturity, though humans have the capacity for self-direction (Rogers, 1959, 1961). Providing a suitable psychological climate for self-exploration and self-awareness was unique to POTT training and research. In this study on the experience of seminarians in POTT training, the participants

described the sense of safety and trust they experienced in the POTT training program, which enabled them to take the risk of exploring and sharing their personal and familial stories facilitating greater self-awareness. It was scary, uncomfortable, and culturally inappropriate for most of them to share their vulnerabilities, woundedness, and brokenness with others. The participants said their group support experience gave them the confidence to move forward. The participants also stated that as they listened to one another, their stories gave them the hope that they are not alone in the journey of becoming vulnerable, but everyone has their share of struggles.

Again, the person-centered and nonjudgmental presence enabled me to understand and obtain information from personal experience of awareness of the self and the subsequent growth unique to each participant in the training program. Providing a safe and conducive psychological climate and appropriate clinical intervention programs for the seminarians to explore themselves and fostering self-awareness is necessary for growth and maturity toward self-actualization to be an effective priest and minister. This information is helpful for formators in seminaries and those directly involved or responsible for the formation, such as curriculum planners, vocation directors, and the mental health practitioners who assist their formation.

Theories of Self-Actualization and Stages of Development

Through the lens of self-actualization theory (Maslow, 1971), which recognizes that a self-actualized person has self-awareness, an internal sense of freedom, honesty, authenticity, and caring. However, based on the Rogerian perspective, every person has the capacity or the potential for self-direction and self-actualization, provided the suitable climate for self-actualization, growth, and maturity necessary for self-actualization. Seminarians are in no way an exception, although they are discerning their vocation to the priesthood. Moreover, their

discernment of a vocation to the priesthood and their responsibility as a priest necessarily calls for self-actualization, having a greater sense of self-awareness, an internal sense of freedom, honesty, authenticity, and a caring nature. The program for priestly formation (USCCB, 2022) sets these above standards as the benchmark for the human formation of aspiring candidates to priesthood. Therefore, appropriate interventions should be provided to seminarians discerning their vocation to the priesthood, integrating them as part of their formation curriculum. Based on the data obtained from the participants in this study, POTT training is an effective intervention that could be introduced in the initial year of formation for an extended period of 2–3 semesters.

Erikson's eight stages of development further enlighten the subjective experiences of the developmental crisis the individuals may have experienced in their family of origin and the areas of their life where they are stuck or unsuccessfully handled due to a lack of supportive psychological climate. Based on this developmental theory, the unsuccessful handling of the developmental crisis would prevent them from advancing to the next stage of life and remaining stuck, which will continue to affect their later life and behaviors. Again, the data from this study show everyone has their flaws and vulnerabilities because of the negative experiences or lack of positive and affirming experiences from their families of origin. Participants have stated that it is essential to have open conversations about their vulnerabilities, and it provides not only the opportunity to become more self-aware but also provides the internal freedom and power to navigate and redirect their lives or gain access to the capacity and resources within to find self-direction as Rogers recognized. Thus, providing opportunities for seminarians during their formation years to explore and open conversation about their family of origin and early years of life and their vulnerabilities is essential.

Implications of Formation Program in Seminaries

Through the lens of developmental theories, such things as developmental deficiencies and lack of a supportive environment in the initial years of life can continue to impact the later life and the ability to function fully. In Rogers's line of thought, although humans have an innate capacity to develop and enhance themselves to their full potential (self-actualization), this tendency can be buried under psychological defenses due to a lack of a supportive psychological climate (Rogers, 1961). The new program for priestly formation (USCCB, 2022) states that although many men are open to priestly calls, they need intensive preparation, as they, with no fault of their own, lack the requisite qualities for priestly formation. Given the complexity of the problem associated with the nature of developmental deficiencies and its continuous impact on the later life of people, including seminarians who are discerning their vocation, I call for a systemic change in the perspective of the formation program.

The formation program in seminaries should be focused on providing a safe, supportive climate that facilitates self-exploration and awareness of developmental deficiencies and promotes growth as part of human formation. Human formation is fundamental to enhancing other areas of formation, such as spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. Therefore, the formation program should include appropriate intervention program(s) as part of the curriculum, skilled formators, and close collaboration with mental health practitioners and counselors.

The formators directly involved in the formation play a significant role in the life of a seminarian, especially in creating a safe space for them to be open and transparent in self-exploration. Rogers (1961) recommended a suitable psychological climate to access one's inner capacity for self-direction and growth toward self-actualization. The findings from the participants' experience in this study show that all eight participants reported their experience of

the sense of safety and comfort in the group. The participants gained the confidence that they would not be judged; further, they learned that everyone has vulnerabilities and limitations. The experience of safety provided a space for self-exploration and the confidence to share personal stories. Subsequently, they experienced a sense of internal freedom for self-acceptance, healing, and growth toward making responsible choices and discernment of a vocation to the priesthood.

Therefore, the formators in the seminary must provide a safe space for the discerning seminarians. Suppose the formators cannot provide that safe and confiding space due to their role in evaluating and promoting seminarians; bringing in outside professionals to augment the reflection process by providing a safe space is essential. Ultimately, the critical factor in the process is to provide a safe space for seminarians to explore themselves. Hence, the seminarian's experience of the sense of safety in the given space is vital for exploring and understanding the self through the family of origin work and early childhood experiences.

This study's findings also show that all the participants had initial fears and cultural discomforts about making this self-exploration work through the three-generational families of origin. They were even more terrified about sharing their personal stories with the group. It was uncomfortable and culturally unseemly for most participants to discuss their vulnerabilities, woundedness, and brokenness with the group. Some participants reported that the seminarians were uncomfortable sharing their personal information with the group and other formators, fearing the information might be used against them in their evaluation and promotion. Therefore, it was essential to ensure confidentiality, help the seminarians overcome their initial fears and cultural discomforts, and be open to genuine conversations about their vulnerabilities and personal stories. All the participants agreed that the internal awareness, safety, and sense of

confidentiality experienced in the POTT training group enabled them to overcome the initial fears and discomforts of talking about their personal stories.

The local ordinaries (e.g., Bishops, Archbishops, and Religious Superiors) and those responsible for planning formation programs are to recognize the need for intervention programs such as POTT training to facilitate the process of self-exploration and self-awareness in seminaries. The local ordinaries could help the process of self-exploration and self-awareness among their seminarians by emphasizing its importance and encouraging them to be open to the process as an essential part of the formation. These local ordinaries could also help the seminarians overcome their initial fears by ensuring and esteeming the confidentiality of the information shared in such a self-exploration process. The local ordinaries and board of administration of seminaries are to ensure the seminaries have qualified and skilled formators or identify suitable mental health practitioners to facilitate the group in self-exploration and reflection process in creating self-awareness among seminarians.

However, the mental health practitioners facilitating the seminarians' self-exploration and reflection for self-awareness must be trained POTT facilitators. They also need to be culturally competent and spiritually grounded in the Catholic faith, familiar with priestly formation to assist the seminarians in self-awareness from their family of origin and early childhood experience. Group facilitators could also assist the seminarians in overcoming their fears and taboos around mental health treatment by helping them normalize their understanding of human flaws and vulnerabilities. When notable issues are identified, professional clinical assistance, interventions, and treatments may be recommended and sought for individual seminarians.

Implications for the Field of Counselor Education and Supervision

POTT training has been found effective in helping marriage and family therapists work through emotional issues and become effective therapists**,** especially by promoting greater awareness and the use of self in therapy **(**Aponte & Kissil, 2017). Although it has never been applied outside the field of marriage and family therapy, the current study gives evidence of its impact for priests on self-awareness and their effectiveness in ministry. The study highlights the significant impact of the experience of safety and trust the participants had on their ability to overcome initial fears and discomforts to begin the process of self-exploration. Therefore, creating a sense of safety, or a suitable psychological climate for self-exploration and self-direction, is the bridge that connects clinicians' services to the seminarians' human formation program.

The study recognizes first the value and the possibility of counselors and mental health professionals, especially the educational department of counseling, to collaborate with the formation of the future clergy, providing effective intervention program that promotes self-awareness, emotional growth, and maturity to be effective priests. Second, it enhances the ability of counselors with additional intervention skills to improve the quality of their service to the clients by creating greater self-awareness and personal growth. Third, multiculturalism and exploring cultural competency are encouraged throughout the training of mental health professionals; intervention programs like POTT encourage the counselors to assess and understand themselves and the clients from the broader perspective of the family and cultural background in the development and implementation of the treatment plan.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

Knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction process and constantly evolving (Vygotsky, 1978). The qualitative research paradigm helped me to enter the subjective world of seminarians and their experience in POTT training. I captured the essence of their experience and co-created the findings of this dissertation study. Developmental deficiencies due to lack of love, affirmation, and a suitable supportive psychological climate are a common problem found among many young men, though generous and open to the priestly call in discerning their vocation to the priesthood. These deficiencies continue to affect their growth and maturity, including their discernment of a vocation to priesthood and priestly commitment, unless a safe and suitable climate is provided in seminary formation to work through these deficiencies with appropriate interventions like POTT training. Future research should provide further knowledge and explanations of the phenomenon and the development of effective interventions.

This study illuminated the essence of seminarians' experiences in POTT training as self-awareness. Although there had been an explicit emphasis on human formation, especially the program for priestly formation (USCCB, 2006) and Congregation for the Clergy (2017) recommend the need for greater self-knowledge and self-acceptance to make oneself a self-gift to others. However, there is a dearth of information about the interventions and their effectiveness in human formation programs in seminaries. Additionally, POTT training, the self-of-the-therapist training, though found suitable for the therapist to be effective, had never been applied outside the mental health practitioners' context. This study described the experience of self-awareness and the subsequent influence on the emotional growth maturity of the seminarians. As a mental health practitioner, educator, and priest involved in the formation of priests, the merit of this study was its help in providing a better understanding of seminarians'

description of their experience of human formation intervention, particularly the POTT training. Mainly, this study narrates the seminarian participants' experience in the POTT training intervention program and its impact on self-awareness and subsequent influence on self-acceptance, healing, ability to make responsible choices, authentic expressions, and discernment of the vocation to the priesthood.

The study requires further research, expanding the scope and substantiating the suitability of POTT training. Therefore, future studies might focus on identifying the suitability and effectiveness of POTT training for human formation among different populations. It is essential to understand the effectiveness and suitability of POTT training among seminarians outside the United States, such as Asian countries and African countries. The study can be further expanded among various formational groups, such as the diocesan seminarians and the seminarians from a consecrated religious community, to see if there is a difference in the experiences. Although the journal data was used to supplement the interview data findings to increase the credibility of the findings, the participants' tendency to overidentify with the researcher was a limitation of this study.

Therefore, future research needs a research team different from the group facilitators or POTT trainers to gather and analyze the information. Including at least one or more priests with experiences of priestly formation in the research team would be beneficial in understanding and obtaining the accuracy of the findings from the perspective of the formation. Two significant elements of POTT training that stood out for the participants in this study were the experience of a safe space to have open and genuine conversations about their personal stories and the use of the intergenerational genogram, which facilitated the awareness of their family of origin and

early childhood experiences. Future research could give further knowledge on the significant elements of POTT training that are effective for human formation practices in seminaries.

The POTT training should be modified to adapt to the seminarians as a human formation intervention by focusing on specific elements that were significant for their self-awareness and growth as the primary purpose to help them be more effective priests than a therapist. The participants in this study reported that the experience of safety in the group helped them overcome their fears and cultural discomforts, begin self-exploration, and openly talk about their personal stories. The participants' experience of a safe space for self-awareness and growth aligns with the Rogerian idea of a suitable psychological climate helping the seminarians access their internal resources for self-direction and enhancement of self or self-actualization.

Therefore, future research should provide further information on seminarians' experience of the sense of safety and trust and its correlation to their experience in self-exploration, self-awareness, and growth. Second, the use of intergenerational genograms was reported to be very significant for the seminarians in this study for their experience of self-awareness. Future research should focus on obtaining more information on the impact of the use of genograms in the self-awareness and human formation of the seminarians. Formators, mental health practitioners, and clinicians who facilitate the group should be culturally competent and professionally skilled in family-of-origin work using genograms to assist the seminarians in processing developmental deficiencies due to the lack of a supportive psychological climate. Group facilitators could use models such as restoration therapy, internal family system therapy, or similar therapy models to process developmental issues.

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Appendix A

Course Syllabus

Required Texts

Selected readings on person of the therapists (see attached reading list).

Hargrave, T. D., & Pfitzer, F. (2011). *Restoration therapy: Understanding and guiding healing in marriage and family therapy*. Routledge.

Richardson, R. W. (2011). *Family ties that bind: A self-help guide to change through family of origin therapy*. Self-Counsel Press.

Recommended Reading

Baldwin, M. (2000). *The Use of Self in Therapy* (2nd ed). Haworth Press.

Course Description

This course is designed to enhance the personal growth, and emotional maturity of students in theology, who are preparing for priesthood, through the person-of-the-priest training model. The POTT model encourages students involved in priestly training to actively explore self of the priest issues to enhance their identity integration as priest. Self of the therapist/priest issues are inherent in clinical/pastoral work and students learn self-reflection and interpersonal skills to identify and work with personal issues that may arise in the context of clinical/pastoral work. This course is designed to complement students' growing clinical competence as students develop an awareness of the self within one's own family of origin, as well as the broader social context.

Course Objectives

The course objectives are based on the MTh Program's Program Outcomes (POs) and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Students will utilize course readings, group interactions/discussions, and self-reflective exercises to engage the process of identifying and understanding therapeutic behaviors that inhibit therapeutic effectiveness.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs)

This course will provide the learning context that will allow you to achieve and demonstrate the MTh student learning outcomes listed below. In this course, students will be provided opportunities to:

PO# program outcome

a. Prepare aspiring candidates for priesthood to recognize and accept as normal the reality of their own flawed humanity, and then to see it and learn to use it to relate, understand and intervene more effectively with their people in ministry.
b. Value self-exploration and accountability as a normative and required activity in the ongoing formation, evolving pastoral and professional life of a priest in the service of God and Humanity.
c. Introduce the theory and thinking behind this methodology as clearly as possible, and then demonstrate its application in as practical and vivid a way that facilitates the students to integrate them into their work and ministry.

SLO# MTh student learning outcome

a. Demonstrate familiarity with selected traditional and contemporary MFT models, including knowledge of key individuals associated with models, unique terminology,

conceptualization of problems, role of therapist, and goals for process within each model, and applications within individual, couple, and family therapy.

b. Create awareness of one's own worldviews, philosophy, and spirituality that affect influence our life and ministry.

c. Utilize knowledge of clients' and therapists' contexts (i.e., culture, economic, family circumstances, family status) to positively contribute to the therapeutic process and outcomes; Articulate critiques of MFT models based on culture, gender, and socioeconomic status.

d. Recognize and respond therapeutically to differential impact of individual and family life cycle within a family system; Articulate critique of MFT models based on knowledge of child development and factors influencing child development.

e. Demonstrate awareness of one's own professional strengths and limitations and ability to seek and utilize supervision, peer consultation, and involvement of other professionals or spiritual guides to enhance your ministry to people.

f. Utilize our own woundedness, as an opportunity and challenge to stretch ourselves and dig deeper within ourselves and in our relationships to go beyond what we thought were our limitations to change and grow.

Methods of Instruction

This course will provide opportunities for learning through:

- Various forms of experience of self (i.e., journaling, group interactions, group discussions) to invite introspection of self as a person and clinician
- Integration of course readings material within the process of self-reflection and clinical practice

- Opportunities to explore issues of person/self that inhibit therapeutic effectiveness as well as enhance therapeutic presence and impact
- A safe context for engaging the process of personal transparency in service of greater exploration of self and the group relational context

Expectations of Students

Students are expected to contribute to learning through:

1. Listen respectfully to your colleague even if you do not agree; respectful disagreement is encouraged and valued.
2. Disclosure of personal information. Professional development in the CFT field is often enhanced by the exploration of the personal and professional interface. Involvement in this course requires receptivity to thoroughly explore this interface generally and in specific instances where your personal history/experience parallels or conflicts with the client's situation. Please be aware that you may come into awareness of self/family/relationships dynamics that have been previously unavailable to you; this information may be uncomfortable. Also, due to the frank nature of some of the course discussions, you may feel emotional discomfort after some discussions in class.

Course Assignment

1. Daily readings as assigned
2. Reflective Class Journal (total of 6 journals spread out through the semester)
3. Three generational genogram presentations in the class

Appendix B

Letter of Information About the Research Study

Project: Seminarians' Experience of POTT Training: Phenomenological Study

PI: Tomichan Moonnanappillil, Counselor Education & Supervision, PhD Candidate

Advisor: Carolyn Y. Tubbs, PhD, Department of Counseling and Human Services

This is a research study conducted by the Department of Counseling and Human Services at St. Mary's University. The goal is to gain insight into participant seminarians' experience in the person-of-the-therapist training (POTT) and develop an in-depth description of their experience. You are eligible to participate in this study based on your participation in POTT training held in the Fall Semester of 2019 at the Oblate School of Theology. Your contribution can help us shape the future training program and develop an effective human formation intervention program to assist the aspiring candidates pursuing their studies for the priesthood.

Procedures

If you choose to participate in the project and are willing to share your experience of POTT training, you will be asked to do the following.

1. Read and sign a consent form (hard copy or electronically) by which you are stating that you are volunteering to participate in the research project sharing your experience in POTT, which includes:
    a. Your willingness to participate in two to four interviews (in-person or via Zoom) and record the interviews (both audio and video/audio only). The preliminary interview would take about 70 minutes, and the subsequent interviews may take about 15–20 minutes.

b. Your permission to utilize your weekly journals turned in during POTT training for our research study.

2. Take a short web-based demographic survey providing information such as your age, ethnicity, diocese/archdiocese that you study for, educational background, birth order in your family, and your status in the formation or as a priest.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me, Tomichan Moonnanappillil at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email XXXXXX@mail.stmarytx.edu.

You can also contact my dissertation advisor Carolyn Y. Tubbs, Ph.D. at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or XXXXXXXX@stmaytx.edu

Tomichan Moonnanappillil, MA, MS

Counseling Education & Supervision

Doctorate Candidate—St. Mary's University (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Appendix C

Informed Consent

https://stmarys.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9oadFIgQJDLp6PI

This study is being conducted by Tomichan Moonnanappillil, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling Education and Supervision at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Carolyn Y. Tubbs is the dissertation supervisor of this study.

I am being invited to participate in a research study to develop an in-depth description of the seminarians' experience in the person-of-the-therapist training (POTT). The study is investigating the impact of POTT training on aspiring candidates for the priesthood. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I may refuse to participate or may decide to discontinue my participation at any point in this project. I also understand that my decision to quit my participation in this study project will involve no penalty for me personally or for my work as a priest/seminarian. I am being asked to carefully read and give my consent if I choose to participate in this study and sign a copy of this consent form while keeping a copy for myself.

Procedures: Once I choose to participate in the project, I am volunteering to participate in this research project and am willing to do the followings:

1. Read and sign a consent form (hard copy or electronically) by which I am stating that I am volunteering to participate in the research project by sharing my experience in POTT training, which includes that:
    a. I am willing to participate in interviews (in-person or via Zoom) and record the interviews (both audio and video/audio only). The preliminary interview

would take about 70 minutes, and the subsequent interviews may take about 15–20 minutes.

   b. I am also permitting the use of my weekly journals turned in during POTT training for our research study.

2. Take a short web-based demographic survey providing information such as your age, ethnicity, diocese/archdiocese that you study for, educational background, birth order in your family, and your status in the formation or as a priest.

The Purpose of the Study: The interview I am participating in is to develop an in-depth description of seminarians' experience in POTT training. The study aims to investigate my experience and provide insight into my experience in the POTT training program. Mainly the study aims to gain insight into POTT training's influence on my self-awareness, growth, and the emotional maturity in discerning my vocation to the priesthood. This study on my experience in POTT will assist future formators and clinicians in shaping an effective human formation program and expand the scope of research on the human formation of seminarians.

The Benefit of the Sstudy: As a participant, I may have the opportunity to experience the followings: (a) to become aware of my emotional wounds from early life and the developmental issues that continue to affect my current life and choices, including discernment for the vocation to the priesthood; (b) to become aware of areas I need to work through or need help discerning my vocation to the priesthood and to be an effective priest; (c) to begin to experience emotional maturity and freedom in making self-responsible choices in my personal lives and in my ministry as a priest; (d) a resource for my ongoing self-improvement.

Risks: There is minimal risk associated with my participation in this study. One of the possible risks associated with my participation in this study is that it could be psychologically stressful and emotionally draining because I will be asked to share information about my experience in POTT training and its effect on my current life. Therefore, my participation is voluntary. I have the right to discontinue my participation at any time or can choose not to answer one or more of the questions if it makes me feel uncomfortable. Discontinuing my participation or not answering a question will have no direct or indirect consequences. I am also provided with the primary researcher's contact information, Tomichan Moonnanappillil (XXX-XXX-XXXX) in case I have any questions, concerns, or prolonged discomfort due to my participation in the interview.

Confidentiality: I am assured that my interview data will be kept confidential and that only the researcher and his advisor will have access to this information. I am also informed that the interview recordings will be destroyed when transcriptions of the audio/video are complete. The primary researcher and his advisor will store the transcripts and any electronic or printed data in a password-protected computer in a secure location for 5 years after completing this research. After that time, all files will be permanently destroyed. I also assured that all identifiable information would be deidentified or removed from the dissertation, publication, and presentation.

Incentive: For my participation in the study, I will be provided a $50.00 gift card to a local restaurant or a restaurant I designate. I understand that I will receive the gift card after my final interview session.

Contacts for questions or problems: Call Fr. Tomichan Moonnanappillil (Researcher) at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email xxxxxxxxxxxxxx@mail.stmarytx.edu at any point in time, if you have

questions about the study, or unexpected psychological discomforts related to the study. You can also contact Carolyn Y. Tubbs, Ph.D., the dissertation advisor, at her phone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at xxxxxx@stmaytx.edu, with questions or concerns about the study.

The IRB contact information on the informed consent document: If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or concerns about this research study please contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board, St. Mary's University at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@stmarytx.edu. ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY IS GOVERNED BY THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**.**

Consent: I voluntarily consent to participate in a research study. After reading and clarifying my concerns, I am giving my consent to this study with my signature below. I will receive a copy of the signed consent form prior to the start of the interview.

Instructions to print the copy of the consent form: If you would like to keep a copy of this letter for your records, you can save a copy on your computer as a PDF, or you can print a copy by pressing (Ctrl + P) for a PC, or by pressing (command + P) for a mac.

Name of the participant _____

Signature participant _____ Date _____

Signature of the researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire Survey

https://stmarys.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9oadFIgQJDLp6PI

Please choose the option that best reflects your response. You can type in the answers to questions numbers 5 and 6.

1. Age
    a) 21–30
    b) 31–40
    c) 41 +
    d) Prefer not to answer
2. Race/Ethnicity
    a) Caucasian
    b) Latino or Hispanic
    c) Native American
    d) Asian American
    e) Others/Unknown
    f) Prefer not to answer
3. Birth order (1^{st}, 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}, 4^{th}, 5^{th}, 6^{th} . . ..)
4. Educational background prior to admission to seminary
    a) Highschool
    b) Undergraduate
    c) Graduate

5. Diocese/Archdiocese _____ State _____

6. Status

    a) If ordained a priest, the number of years in priesthood:

    _____

    b) If ordained a deacon, the number of years in diaconate:

    _____

    c) If studying theology, the year of theological studies:

    _____

    d) Internship/pastoral year:

    _____

Appendix E

Semistructured Interview Guide for the First Interview

Each participant will be asked the following questions:

1. What was your experience in the POTT training?
    a) Describe how you came to be in POTT training.
    b) How would you describe your experience in POTT training?
    c) How is it similar or different from other courses or training in seminary?
    d) What part of POTT training was most challenging?
    e) How would you describe the suitability of POTT as part of your formation, especially the human formation?
2. How would you describe the impact of POTT training on your self-awareness?
    a) Describe the impact of POTT on your awareness of family of origin and early life experiences that continue to affect your current life.
    b) Describe the impact of POTT on the awareness of the areas that you need growth as you continue to discern or live your vocation to the priesthood.
3. How would you describe the impact of POTT training on your growth and maturity in making responsible choices in life?

Semistructured Interview Guide for Second Interview

4. Share, clarify, and confirm with each participant the significant statements, and phrases that have been identified as describing their experience in POTT from the first interview.
5. How do you describe your feelings about the first interview?

a) What was good about the interview?

b) What was not good about the interview?

c) What could have been different?

6. Is there anything that you have forgotten and want to include about what we shared in the last interview?
7. Is there any new information that I have not paid attention to and that you think is important in this study?
8. Any other suggestions?

Appendix F

Letter of Information and Invitation to be a Peer Debriefer

Project: Seminarians' Experience of POTT Training: Phenomenological Study

PI: Tomichan Moonnanappillil, Counselor Education & Supervision PhD Candidate

Advisor: Carolyn Y. Tubbs, PhD, Department of Counseling and Human Services

You are invited to participate in my research study conducted by the Department of Counseling and Human Services at St. Mary's University as a peer reviewer/peer debriefer. This study aims to gain insight into participant seminarians' experience in person-of-the-therapist training (POTT) and develop an in-depth description of their experience.

In an earlier communication, I reached out to you requesting if you could help in my research project as a peer debriefer, and you gladly expressed that you are willing to help me. Nevertheless, I am required to make this formal request to be a peer debriefer in my research process. I shall briefly describe the definition of 'peer debriefing' and what is expected of you in this process.

Peer debriefing is an external check of the research process. The role of the peer debriefer is to be a "devil's advocate" who keeps the researcher honest. Peer debriefing ensures the trustworthiness of the qualitative research study. The researcher re-examines and explores the process of data collection and data analysis through peer debriefing. As a peer, you would help me as a critical friend, encouraging me to examine the research process from multiple perspectives as I brief you about the process in each meeting.

I have chosen you to be my peer debriefer for this research project for multiple reasons. You are a priest involved in the formation of seminarians, and you have a PsyD background;

above all, I got to know you a bit more closely through the different interactions I had with you since my involvement in Assumption Seminary. Therefore, I thought you would be the most qualified person to help me with debriefing as I complete this research study.

Procedures

If you would accept this request and are willing to be a peer debriefer for my research project, I wish to share the following with you.

1. I would love to have an initial meeting and give you a briefing on my project and the process of data collection and analysis.
2. I would like to schedule a regular meeting, preferably a bi-weekly meeting at your convenience, when I begin my interviews for data collection and the analysis of the interview data.
3. I would rely on your encouragement, feedback, and recommendations to complete this research project.
4. I will maintain a written account of our debriefing sessions for the record.

Thank you so much and have a blessed day

Tomichan Moonnanappillil, MA, MS

Counseling Education & Supervision

Doctorate Candidate—St. Mary's University

(xxx) xxxx-xxxx