

Level of Pastoral Satisfaction among Catholic Priests in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya

Ebubechukwu Bruno Okoli¹, Joyzy Pius Egunjobi, PhD^{1,2}, Eunice Namonywe Emusugut, PhD¹

¹Department of Counseling Psychology, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

²Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Pastoral satisfaction is an important indicator of clergy work-related psychological wellbeing because it reflects the extent to which priests experience ministry as meaningful, effective, appreciated, and personally fulfilling. Although Catholic priesthood is grounded in vocation and spiritual commitment, the daily experience of ministry is also shaped by workload, institutional relationships, available resources, community expectations, and opportunities for rest and renewal. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests serving in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. The study was anchored on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed. The target population comprised 145 Catholic priests, yielding 70.3% response rate. The study used census sampling determination because of the small size of the target population. Pastoral satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS), which demonstrated high internal consistency in the study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that more than half of the priests (55.9%, $n = 57$) reported low pastoral satisfaction, 29.4% ($n = 30$) scored moderate satisfaction, while 14.7% ($n = 15$) were at high level of pastoral satisfaction. Thus, 85.3% fell below the high-satisfaction category. The study concludes that pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese is generally low, with few priests experiencing high fulfilment in ministry. The study recommends that the Diocesan administration should strengthen supportive leadership, priestly fraternity, recognition, continuing formation, psychological services, adequate resources, meaningful participation, and opportunities for renewal.

Keywords: Pastoral satisfaction, Catholic priests, clergy wellbeing, Satisfaction in Ministry Scale, Eldoret Diocese, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic priesthood is a vocation rooted in spiritual calling, ecclesial service, sacramental responsibility, and pastoral care. At the same time, it is a demanding form of human-service work that requires priests to remain emotionally available, administratively competent, spiritually grounded, and relationally responsive across multiple contexts (Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). Priests celebrate the sacraments, preach, provide pastoral counselling, administer parishes and institutions, accompany families through major life transitions, visit the sick, respond to bereavement, mediate conflicts, supervise projects, manage finances, teach, attend meetings, and often remain available outside ordinary working hours (Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). These responsibilities can generate deep meaning, but the same responsibilities may become psychologically draining when they accumulate without adequate organisational support, rest, recognition, or relational connection.

Pastoral satisfaction concerns the positive psychological experience priests derive from ministry. It includes the perception that pastoral work is meaningful, effective, worthwhile, appreciated, and personally fulfilling (Francis et al., 2005). Fabri et al. (2025) conceptualised satisfaction in ministry as an important positive dimension of clergy work-related psychological well-being, reflected in priests' sense of personal accomplishment, fulfilment, effectiveness in ministry, appreciation by others, and the experience of purpose and meaning in their priestly

vocation. Their balanced-affect approach is important because it distinguishes positive ministerial experience from the mere absence of distress. A priest may not meet clinical criteria for psychological disorder and may remain strongly committed to his vocation, yet still experience low satisfaction in his current ministry because he feels ineffective, unsupported, unappreciated, isolated, or overwhelmed.

International research shows that many clergy remain strongly satisfied with ministry even under conditions of occupational strain. In Portugal, Gomes Fabri et al. (2023) reported substantial positive work-related psychological wellbeing among Catholic priests. More recent evidence similarly indicates that many priests endorse high levels of accomplishment, positive influence, personal satisfaction, and meaning in ministry (Fabri et al., 2025). In the United States, the National Study of Catholic Priests reported that a large majority described themselves as very or somewhat satisfied with ministry, although satisfaction varied across age groups and was accompanied by concerns about workload, leadership trust, and expectations extending beyond priestly calling (Vaidyanathan et al., 2025a, 2025b).

Research from other contexts demonstrates that this positive picture cannot simply be generalised to every priestly population. George and Shukla (2024) highlighted the importance of vocational calling and spiritual meaning among Indian Catholic clergy, but their work also underscored the complexity of maintaining wellbeing within demanding religious roles. Studies of clergy in Africa similarly indicate that pastoral commitment often coexists with substantial occupational pressure. Phoseka (2017), studying Catholic priests in Durban Metro, found high levels of work engagement alongside elevated burnout dimensions. Onuigbo et al. (2025) reported that occupational stress was associated with reduced psychological wellbeing among Catholic priests in Enugu Diocese, Nigeria. These studies suggest that commitment and engagement may remain high while positive day-to-day experiences of ministry become strained.

Kenyan clergy work in contexts that may intensify these pressures. Priests frequently serve large and geographically dispersed communities and may carry pastoral, administrative, educational, financial, and social responsibilities simultaneously. In some areas, limited personnel and material resources increase the number and complexity of demands placed on individual priests. Kenyan research has documented clergy wellbeing concerns and the role of psychosocial resources in mitigating occupational strain (Shikanda et al., 2024). Nganga et al. (2025) likewise identified pastoral burnout as relevant to psychosocial wellbeing among Catholic clergy in Kiambu County. These findings make direct examination of positive ministerial satisfaction especially important.

The pastoral environment of Eldoret Diocese adds contextual significance. Priests serve in urban, semi-urban, and rural settings and minister within communities facing varied economic, social, pastoral, and security-related challenges. The broader study from which this article is derived involved priests assigned to parishes, schools, diocesan offices, hospitals, and other forms of special ministry. The diversity of assignments means that pastoral satisfaction cannot be assumed from ordination status alone; it must be measured empirically.

Despite the growing international literature on clergy burnout and wellbeing, research directly measuring pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in sub-Saharan Africa remains limited. Many studies rely on broader wellbeing measures, life satisfaction, work engagement, or burnout indicators rather than clergy-specific satisfaction instruments. The scarcity is particularly evident in East Africa, where ministerial structures, resource constraints, cultural expectations, patterns of community life, and relationships with ecclesiastical leadership may differ substantially from Western settings. The present study responds to this gap by providing a focused quantitative description of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese using the SIMS.

Statement of the problem

Priestly vocation is generally associated with commitment, service, spiritual meaning, and a lifelong dedication to the Church. Such commitment can create an assumption that priests who remain active in ministry are necessarily satisfied with their pastoral work. This assumption may obscure important differences between vocational fidelity and the positive psychological experience of ministry. A priest may continue to serve conscientiously while feeling underappreciated, overburdened, ineffective, isolated, or insufficiently supported.

Available international evidence is inconsistent. Studies in Portugal and the United States have reported relatively high satisfaction among many Catholic priests, whereas African clergy research documents substantial occupational strain, psychological distress, limited resources, and organizational challenges. Direct quantitative assessment using the SIMS among Kenyan Catholic priests remains sparse. Without local evidence, diocesan leaders may lack an empirical basis for identifying whether low pastoral satisfaction is a meaningful wellbeing concern and for designing support that extends beyond addressing burnout after it becomes severe. The objective of this study therefore sought to determine the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to determine the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. This was done by assessing the extent to which priests experienced fulfilment, contentment, motivation, and a sense of meaning in carrying out their pastoral and ministerial responsibilities.

Significance of the study

The study is significant for diocesan administration, counselling psychology, clergy formation, priestly support, and scholarship on religious professionals. For diocesan leadership, evidence on pastoral satisfaction can inform assignment practices, continuing formation, mentoring, sabbatical planning, peer support, and psychological services. For counselling psychologists, the findings identify an occupational group whose positive work-related wellbeing deserves attention alongside symptoms of stress or burnout. The study also contributes to the African clergy-wellbeing literature by using a ministry-specific measure rather than inferring satisfaction from general wellbeing or burnout indicators. This is important because positive ministerial functioning may have consequences not only for individual priests but also for parish communities, institutional continuity, pastoral effectiveness, and the quality of relationships between clergy and the faithful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which offers a complementary framework for interpreting pastoral satisfaction. Ryan and Deci (2020) propose that human motivation and wellbeing are supported by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy concerns experiencing one's actions as volitional and meaningfully endorsed; competence concerns feeling effective and capable; and relatedness concerns experiencing connection, belonging, and mutual care. These needs have clear relevance to Catholic priestly ministry. Competence may be reflected in a priest's sense that his preaching, sacramental ministry, leadership, counselling, or pastoral programmes make a meaningful difference. Relatedness may be reflected in supportive relationships with parishioners, brother priests, friends, family, and ecclesiastical leadership. Autonomy must be interpreted within Catholic ecclesial structures, but it can still involve meaningful participation, responsible pastoral discretion, and a sense that assignments and expectations permit the priest to exercise his gifts effectively.

Research on basic psychological needs supports the importance of organisational context. Van den Broeck et al. (2024) emphasised the relationship between work motivation, need satisfaction, and wellbeing, while Reyes Unanue et al. (2024) showed longitudinal links between need frustration and burnout. These findings suggest that ministerial satisfaction may be undermined when priests experience persistent lack of control, ineffective work, relational disconnection, or environments that frustrate basic psychological needs. SDT is especially useful in clergy research because it does not reduce wellbeing to the absence of symptoms. It asks whether the environment helps people flourish. Applied to a diocese, this directs attention toward assignment structures, feedback, leadership relationships, participation, opportunities for growth, priestly fraternity, and access to resources. These organizational features can be modified even when the vocational demands of priesthood remain substantial.

Level of Pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests

Recent international findings present a complex picture of priests' pastoral satisfaction. Vaidyanathan et al. (2025a, 2025b), drawing on a national study of Catholic priests in the United States, reported generally high morale and ministerial satisfaction alongside meaningful concerns about expectations, leadership, and workload. Their findings indicate that vocational satisfaction can remain high even when priests face significant structural pressures. In Portugal, Fabri et al. (2023) reported high endorsement of many positive satisfaction-in-ministry items. Later work continued to demonstrate the coexistence of positive ministerial affect with symptoms of occupational strain (Fabri et al., 2025). These findings are important because they show that burnout and satisfaction are not simple opposites. Priests may remain proud of their vocation and satisfied with important dimensions of ministry while simultaneously experiencing fatigue or discouragement.

Di Stefano et al., (2024) found that occupational stressors, trust, and religious resources were relevant to flourishing among Roman Catholic priests. Their work broadens the understanding of wellbeing by showing that both organizational stressors and religious meaning influence the psychological experience of priesthood. Similarly, Plante (2023) argued that Catholic clergy wellbeing requires a combination of personal self-care, spiritual practices, boundaries, and institutional support. George and Shukla (2024) emphasised vocational calling, spiritual meaning, and wellbeing among Catholic clergy. Although such findings underline the protective role of religious meaning, they do not imply that vocation neutralises all occupational strain. Instead, they suggest that spiritual calling may coexist with challenges that affect how ministry is experienced on a daily basis.

African clergy research has increasingly highlighted the interaction between demanding ministry contexts and psychological wellbeing. Phoseka (2017) found high work engagement among Catholic priests in Durban Metro while also reporting substantial burnout dimensions. The coexistence of engagement and strain resembles international findings showing that clergy can remain highly dedicated while experiencing compromised wellbeing. Onuigbo et al. (2025) studied Catholic priests in Enugu Diocese, Nigeria, and reported that occupational stress negatively affected dimensions of psychological wellbeing, including self-acceptance and purpose. Although their study did not directly measure pastoral satisfaction with the SIMS, it is relevant because diminished purpose, mastery, and wellbeing can undermine the positive experience of ministry.

Within Kenya, Shikanda et al. (2024) emphasised the role of psychosocial resources in mitigating clergy burnout, while Nganga et al. (2025) identified significant wellbeing concerns among Catholic clergy in Kiambu County. These studies demonstrate the importance of social and organisational resources. They also reveal a methodological gap: many African studies rely on burnout, general mental health, or broad psychosocial measures instead of a direct ministry-satisfaction scale. This study extends this literature by focusing specifically on positive work-related affect. The use of the Satisfaction in Ministry Scales (SIMS) makes it possible to distinguish whether priests merely remain functional in ministry from whether they experience ministry as fulfilling and rewarding. This distinction is especially important in settings where priests may feel a strong moral and vocational duty to persevere despite difficult working conditions.

Pastoral satisfaction may also be understood as an important resource for sustained ministry. Frederick et al. (2023) found that ministerial job satisfaction was strongly relevant to work-related burnout and intention to leave ministry among clergy. Although their sample was Protestant and their measure differed from the SIMS, the findings support the broader proposition that satisfaction is not incidental; it may be central to occupational sustainability.

Existing literature demonstrates three important gaps. First, much of the best-developed evidence on satisfaction in ministry comes from Western contexts, limiting confidence in its applicability to African Catholic clergy. Second, African studies more commonly focus on burnout, stress, wellbeing, or work engagement than direct pastoral satisfaction. Third, many studies use generic psychological instruments or satisfaction proxies rather than a clergy-specific measure such as the SIMS. The present study addresses these gaps by providing a direct quantitative profile of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese. Rather than treating satisfaction as a secondary outcome or inferring it from burnout, the study places positive ministerial affect at the centre of analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study reports exclusively the quantitative evidence addressing the objective under study. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used to determine the level and distribution of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests. The design was suitable because the research question required a numerical description of how respondents were distributed across low, moderate, and high pastoral satisfaction categories. This article reports exclusively the quantitative evidence addressing the objective which sought to determine the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in the Diocese of Eldoret, Kenya. Although the broader study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the present article focuses specifically on the quantitative component relevant to this objective. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed to provide an empirical and measurable account of priests' pastoral satisfaction at a specific point in time. The design was appropriate because the objective was not to manipulate variables or establish causal relationships, but rather to systematically describe the prevailing levels of pastoral satisfaction within the study population.

This methodology enabled the collecting and analysis of numerical data, using a standardized measure of pastoral satisfaction, increasing consistency and objectivity in evaluating respondents' experiences. Descriptive statistics were utilized to describe frequencies and percentages of the respondents into low, moderate and high pastoral satisfaction groups. This categorization helped to identify the dominating level amongst the priests and provided a clear picture of the distribution of pastoral satisfaction. Thus, the quantitative descriptive approach was an appropriate methodological framework in measuring the level of contentment and fulfillment of Catholic priests in the Diocese of Eldoret in their pastoral ministry.

Study area

The study was conducted in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. The Diocese serves communities across Uasin Gishu and Elgeyo-Marakwet counties and includes priests working in parishes, schools, diocesan offices, hospitals, chaplaincies, and other special ministries. The area includes urban, semi-urban, and rural settings, allowing the study to capture priests serving under diverse pastoral circumstances. The wider regional context includes substantial social and pastoral demands. Some communities face economic pressures, geographically dispersed settlements, and insecurity in parts of the wider Kerio Valley region. Such contextual realities can affect workload, mobility, community expectations, and the psychological experience of pastoral ministry.

Population, sampling and response rate

The target population comprised 145 Catholic priests serving in Eldoret Diocese, including both diocesan and religious priests. Because the population was relatively small and accessible, the quantitative component adopted a census approach in which the standardised questionnaire was made available to the target population. This approach sought to maximise representativeness and minimise sampling error within the Diocese. A total of 106 questionnaires were initially returned. Following data screening, 102 usable questionnaires were retained for analysis. The usable response rate was therefore 70.3%. The final quantitative sample for this study comprised 102 priests.

Data Collection Instrument

Pastoral satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). The Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS) was developed by Francis, et al, (2005) to capture experiences that are especially relevant to religious professionals: accomplishing worthwhile things, gaining satisfaction from working with people, dealing effectively with people's problems, having a positive influence on the lives and faith of others, feeling appreciated, finding meaning and purpose, and remaining glad about entering ministry. Such experiences are deeply connected with the pastoral identity of priests. Unlike generic measures of job satisfaction, the SIMS recognizes that ministry is not simply employment; it involves vocation, identity, religious meaning, interpersonal service, and institutional belonging. Respondents rated the SIMS items on a five-point Likert

format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency in the present study, with Cronbach's alpha of .92. This reliability coefficient indicates that the items functioned coherently as a measure of pastoral satisfaction in the study population.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected using standardised self-administered questionnaires distributed through electronic and hard-copy approaches. Completed questionnaires were screened, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The study underwent descriptive analysis where frequencies and percentages were used to classify respondents into low, moderate, and high pastoral satisfaction according to the scoring criteria applied in the study. The overall mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores were also computed. Results were presented in a table and accompanying narrative interpretation.

Ethical considerations

The ethical guidelines were followed in the study to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants. Every research technique was carried out in compliance with the recognized ethical guidelines that regulate research involving human subjects. For permission to conduct the study, the researcher got approval from CUEA's Department of Counseling Psychology. It applied for and was granted national permission by Kenya's National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). It got a formal permission from the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret to work within the diocese. Participation was totally voluntary. Priests responded after giving their informed consent: they knew what the research was about, the methods the researcher was using, the possible risks, and any benefits. No one was pressured to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity was highly guided and respected during the study. To protect privacy, each priest got a number instead of using names, so no one can trace the data back to them. Moreover, any priest who decided to leave the study or not to participate, did so without any questions asked nor any kind of penalties. Those who showed signs of breakdown were debriefed with their consent. Therefore, this article reports only aggregate quantitative results and includes no personally identifying information.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings on the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya based on the responses obtained from the study participants. The valid participants were 102 in number out of 145 representing 70.3% response rate. The analysis sought to establish the extent to which priests experience fulfilment, meaning, and satisfaction in their pastoral ministry, with the results categorized into low, moderate, and high levels of pastoral satisfaction.

Level of Pastoral Satisfaction among Catholic Priests in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya

The objective of this study was to examine the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic Priests in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The outcome of the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Level of Pastoral Satisfaction among Catholic Priests in Eldoret Diocese

Level of Pastoral Satisfaction	Frequencies	Percentage
High	15	14.7%
Moderate	30	29.4%
Low	57	55.9%
Total	102	100%

As seen in table 1, the outcome of the study revealed generally low pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in the Diocese of Eldoret. More than half (55.9%) reported low satisfaction, suggesting limited fulfilment,

happiness, and personal satisfaction in pastoral ministry. A further 29.4% experienced moderate satisfaction, indicating that although they continued to derive meaning and purpose from their vocation, ministerial challenges may have reduced their overall sense of fulfilment. Only 14.7% reported high pastoral satisfaction, reflecting strong fulfilment, joy, and meaning in ministry. In general, 85.3% of the priests reported low or moderate pastoral satisfaction, demonstrating that only a small proportion of respondents experienced high pastoral fulfilment. The findings further suggest that low pastoral satisfaction may coexist with the high levels of burnout identified in the study, providing an important basis for examining the level of pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in the Diocese of Eldoret.

DISCUSSION

The most important finding of the study is that pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in Eldoret Diocese was predominantly low. The distribution in the level of pastoral satisfaction indicates that the positive psychological experience of ministry warrants serious attention within clergy wellbeing and diocesan pastoral planning. The result is particularly significant because pastoral satisfaction is not equivalent to vocational commitment. Catholic priesthood is ordinarily understood as a lifelong vocation, and priests may continue to fulfil sacramental, pastoral, and administrative responsibilities even under difficult conditions. Consequently, persistence in ministry can conceal important variations in fulfilment. The present data suggest that many priests may continue to serve faithfully while experiencing limited positive affect in the day-to-day practice of ministry.

This distinction is consistent with the balanced-affect framework of Francis et al. (2005). Satisfaction in ministry represents a positive dimension of clergy work-related psychological health, not simply the inverse of distress. Low satisfaction therefore reflects a relative absence of positive experiences such as accomplishment, appreciation, effectiveness, purpose, and meaningful influence. From this perspective, a clergy wellbeing programme that focuses only on preventing breakdown or reducing burnout is incomplete. The goal should also be to cultivate environments in which priests experience ministry positively. This study's pattern differs sharply from findings reported among Catholic priests in Portugal. Fabri et al. (2023) found high endorsement of multiple positive satisfaction-in-ministry items among Portuguese priests. Similarly, Fabri et al. (2025) reported substantial positive work-related wellbeing despite the presence of some occupational fatigue. The contrast with Eldoret indicates that satisfaction in ministry may be highly context-dependent. Differences in pastoral workload, resources, community expectations, priestly living arrangements, leadership relationships, opportunities for rest, and institutional support may shape how ministry is experienced. The result also contrasts with recent United States evidence. Vaidyanathan et al. (2025a, 2025b) reported generally high levels of ministry satisfaction among Catholic priests in a nationally representative study, although younger priests and older priests reporting organisational concerns showed different patterns. Their findings suggest that vocation, identity, and pastoral meaning can sustain satisfaction despite substantial workload. Yet the study's findings demonstrate that such a pattern cannot be assumed in every Catholic context. Socioeconomic and organisational differences may matter considerably.

According to Francis et al., (2025), one possible interpretation concerns the relationship between ministerial demands and perceived effectiveness where priests may find the ministry satisfying when they can see tangible pastoral outcomes: active parish participation, sacramental growth, functioning institutions, successful formation programmes, or supportive community relationships. When expectations are high but resources are limited, priests may experience a gap between effort and outcome. Over time, such a gap can weaken the sense of accomplishment captured by the SIMS even when the priest remains highly committed. Another explanation concerns recognition and appreciation. Pastoral ministry involves substantial emotional labour, much of which is invisible. Priests accompany grief, illness, family crises, conflict, financial requests, spiritual doubt, and community emergencies (Chirico et al., 2021). When such work is taken for granted or when criticism outweighs constructive appreciation, the positive affective rewards of ministry may diminish. Satisfaction is strengthened not merely by praise but by a credible sense, that one's service is seen, valued, and effective.

Self-Determination Theory helps to explain this finding through the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Low pastoral satisfaction may reflect environments in which these needs are only partially supported. Competence can be undermined when priests lack resources, training, personnel, or

realistic expectations. Relatedness may be weakened by isolation, conflict, mistrust, or inadequate fraternity. Autonomy may be constrained when priests experience little meaningful participation in decisions affecting assignments, workload, or pastoral priorities. Ruiz-Prada et al., (2021) emphasized that the role of competence is especially relevant in the priestly ministry which often involves responsibilities far beyond theological and sacramental training, including financial management, construction projects, staff supervision, conflict resolution, safeguarding, counselling, and institutional administration. When priests are expected to perform across these domains without sufficient support or specialised assistance, they may feel less effective. This may reduce pastoral satisfaction even when their sacramental and vocational identity remains strong.

Fitzgerald (2024) explored the importance of support among priests. He indicated that Catholic priesthood is relational at multiple levels: priest to God, priest to parishioners, priest to fellow clergy, and priest to ecclesiastical leadership. Social isolation can therefore have disproportionate consequences. The contrast between diocesan and religious priests in some international research suggests that community life and shared responsibilities may support satisfaction by providing companionship, informal consultation, and emotional support. Although the present study did not compare priest types, this literature highlights relatedness as a plausible factor requiring further investigation. Also, organisational trust and leadership relationships may shape pastoral satisfaction. Di Stefano, et al, (2024) found that occupational stressors and institutional experiences were related to flourishing among Roman Catholic priests. Frederick et al. (2023) similarly emphasised differentiation, boundaries, and work-related satisfaction among clergy. When priests perceive leadership as supportive, fair, communicative, and attentive to their wellbeing, difficult assignments may remain meaningful. Conversely, persistent mistrust or perceived lack of support may weaken positive ministerial affect.

The findings also resonate with Onuigbo et al. (2025) reported that occupational stress among Catholic priests in Enugu Diocese was associated with poorer psychological wellbeing, including dimensions closely related to purpose and self-acceptance. Although their outcome was not pastoral satisfaction, the study shows how occupational strain can erode the psychological resources through which priests experience meaning and competence. Phoseka's (2017) findings among Catholic priests in Durban Metro are similarly instructive. Priests reported substantial work engagement alongside elevated burnout dimensions. This coexistence supports the argument that dedication and strain can occur simultaneously. The findings of this study extend this logic by showing that a population can remain active in ministry while many priests experience comparatively low satisfaction. Commitment should therefore not be used as a substitute for direct wellbeing assessment. Shikanda et al. (2024) emphasised the protective value of psychosocial resources in clergy burnout, while Nganga et al. (2025) documented pastoral burnout and psychosocial wellbeing concerns among Catholic clergy in Kiambu County. The present findings add a different but complementary perspective: clergy wellbeing should include not only reduced distress but also the active presence of satisfaction, meaning, appreciation, and effectiveness.

The finding has important implications for how dioceses conceptualise priest care. Traditionally, support may become most visible when a priest is already in crisis, facing severe burnout, addiction, conflict, disciplinary concerns, or mental health difficulties. A pastoral satisfaction framework encourages earlier and more developmental intervention. Dioceses can ask whether priests experience belonging, whether workloads are realistic, whether assignments use their strengths, whether they receive constructive feedback, and whether they have adequate resources to fulfil expectations (Nganga et al., 2025; Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). Despite these limitations, the study makes a substantive contribution by placing positive ministerial affect at the centre of analysis. Much clergy research asks how exhausted priests are or whether they are psychologically distressed. Those questions are important, but they are incomplete. A sustainable priesthood also requires asking whether priests experience joy, meaning, effectiveness, belonging, appreciation, and fulfilment in the ministry they continue to perform.

CONCLUSION

The study established that pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests in the Diocese of Eldoret, Kenya, was generally low. Of the 102 participants, 55.9% reported low pastoral satisfaction, 29.4% moderate satisfaction, and only 14.7% high satisfaction. Thus, 85.3% of the priests fell below the high-satisfaction category, indicating limited fulfilment in pastoral ministry among a substantial proportion of respondents. The findings further

demonstrate that continued commitment to the priestly vocation does not necessarily indicate high pastoral satisfaction. Priests may remain committed to their vocation and faithfully perform sacramental, pastoral, administrative, and leadership responsibilities while experiencing limited personal fulfilment or satisfaction.

Pastoral satisfaction therefore represents a distinct dimension of clergy work-related psychological well-being rather than simply an expression of vocational commitment or continued ministry. Given the spiritual, interpersonal, administrative, and emotional demands associated with priestly ministry, pastoral satisfaction reflects both personal experiences and the broader relational, psychological, organizational, and ministerial context of priestly service. The findings of this study highlight pastoral satisfaction as an important dimension of clergy well-being and the psychological sustainability of Catholic priestly ministry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Diocesan leadership should include pastoral satisfaction in routine confidential clergy-wellbeing assessment rather than relying only on crisis indicators.

Priestly fraternity should be strengthened through deanery support, mentoring, peer consultation, shared reflection, and opportunities for meaningful community among priests.

Workloads should be reviewed with attention to realistic expectations, available personnel, material resources, and the priest's competencies.

Continuing formation should include practical competencies relevant to contemporary ministry, such as leadership, administration, counselling, conflict management, financial management, safeguarding, and psychological self-care.

Confidential psychological services should be available without stigma and integrated appropriately with spiritual direction and pastoral formation. Psychological support should be framed as a resource for healthy ministry rather than as evidence of vocational weakness.

The diocese should provide a conducive environment for communication, and consultation where priests should be free to open up share their challenges and be strengthened.

Limitations

The study relied on self-report data and may therefore be influenced by social desirability, especially because clergy may feel pressure to present themselves as committed or satisfied. The study was conducted in one Kenyan diocese, limiting generalisation to other dioceses, religious institutes, or national contexts.

The cross-sectional design describes pastoral satisfaction at one point in time and cannot establish how satisfaction changes across assignments or career stages. The descriptive objective also does not identify causal or predictive factors associated with low satisfaction. Finally, this article intentionally excludes the qualitative strand and other objectives of the parent study in order to preserve a focused quantitative account of pastoral satisfaction.

Implications for Future Researches

Future studies should extend the investigation of pastoral satisfaction to Catholic priests in other dioceses in Kenya to determine whether the patterns identified in the Diocese of Eldoret are consistent across different geographical, cultural, socioeconomic, and pastoral contexts.

Comparative studies should examine pastoral satisfaction among different categories of clergy, including diocesan and religious priests, as well as priests serving in rural, semi-urban, and urban settings, to establish whether ministerial context and type of priesthood are associated with variations in pastoral satisfaction.

Longitudinal research should be undertaken to examine changes in pastoral satisfaction over time. Such studies could establish how satisfaction develops across different stages of priestly ministry and how changes in pastoral assignments, workload, leadership responsibilities, and institutional circumstances influence priests' experiences of ministry.

Future research should investigate potential predictors of pastoral satisfaction by examining demographic, organisational, psychological, social, and spiritual factors.

Further studies could examine the relationship between pastoral satisfaction and important ministerial outcomes, including psychological well-being, commitment to ministry, pastoral effectiveness, intention to remain in active ministry, and quality of relationships with parishioners and fellow clergy.

Cross-cultural and interdenominational studies are also recommended to compare pastoral satisfaction among Catholic priests with clergy from other Christian traditions and with priests serving in different African countries.

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