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Saan ba 'to Patungo? An Individualized Career Guidance Program for a Former Seminarian

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Abstract

Where is this leading? This study aims to assist a former seminarian in understanding where his life will be heading after deciding to leave the seminary formation program. The study facilitates self-assessment using the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale, followed by interviews and an action plan. Grounded in the Self-Determination Theory, researchers aim to create a career guidance program tailored to the individual's experience. The program aims to aid the individual in establishing autonomy, competence, relatedness, and career adaptability as he transitions. This study provides researchers with insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered by individuals in developing a comprehensive career guidance program, encompassing initial assessment and goal setting, academic and career counseling, personal growth and readiness, mentorship, and peer support, as well as ongoing support and follow-up. The study's findings have a significant impact on the field of career guidance, particularly in enhancing the career adaptability and adjustment of former seminarians.

Introduction

The Catholic community widely views the priesthood as one of the highest forms of calling. This "divine calling," known as a conviction, ignites an individual's pursuit of service through the priesthood. Pope Francis highlights this sentiment in Christus Vivit (2019), describing vocation as "a call from the Lord, who invites us to follow him in a particular state of life" (para. 286). In order to have a more intimate relationship with God, a priesthood vocation requires one to live a solitary personal life. Finding one's vocation demands both discernment and commitment to a path, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful personal reflection (Wärnberg, 2021).

Many Filipino families view this calling as both an honor and a blessing, frequently signifying God's favor upon the household (Gallagher, n.d.). As a result, many families take pride in having a family member embrace the priesthood and provide support, encouragement, and prayers for this esteemed path (Valera, 2020).

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According to a study by Smith and Johnson (2022), this calling provides a compassionate and non-judgmental space for individuals to seek solace and guidance in the community.

A recent article by Anderson and Garcia (2023) emphasizes that the priests' service entails leadership and a commitment to social justice, allowing them to mobilize communities and create lasting change. Truly, priesthood, considered a career, entails a positive contribution to the community.

However, there are challenges associated with answering the call to priesthood, leading some individuals towards a different path. According to Wärnberg (2021), understanding a calling to the priesthood or religious life can feel overwhelming, and it often brings about feelings of inadequacy regarding such a noble vocation. In the Philippines, the Catholic Church provides various programs and retreats, aiming to support seminarians in exploring and deepening their vocation (Guanzon, 2020). This support fosters a community that helps seminarians discern and prepare for a lifelong commitment to service.

In addition to this, Risnasari & Basuki (2020) conducted a literature review and concluded that it is crucial for students to understand careers in order to make well-informed career decisions. Teachers and career counselors play a crucial role in providing relevant career guidance and information. This support helps students explore various resources and gain self-awareness related to potential career paths. Making the right career choices can positively impact students' future welfare, promoting independence and reducing poverty, unemployment, and dependency on others. On the other hand, the Vocations' Director, the Formators in the Seminary, and the Presbyters of the Diocese or Congregation to which the Seminarian belongs are the key players in the formation process (Okafor, 2021).

While there is ample assistance available for seminarians, there are instances where individuals undergo changes in their convictions as a result of personal challenges, social influences, or intellectual doubts. For these seminarians, the realization of a different calling can lead to an eventual departure from the priesthood. Furthermore, only a few studies have been conducted on the topic of seminary dropouts (Greene, 1967; Stone, 1990; Ventimiglia, 1967), and these studies are somewhat outdated, particularly from a Filipino perspective to the best of the researcher's ability.

This action research seeks to explore the development of a career guidance counseling approach specifically tailored for former seminarians who, after discerning, feel led toward an alternative path. By focusing on the unique needs of these individuals, this study aims to contribute to the broader community by developing support systems that respect their initial vocation while facilitating a compassionate transition to a different calling.

Furthermore, this is in response to the recommendation from the study conducted by Lim, Lucmayan, and Taja-on (2023), which stated that research could be conducted to design an intervention program for seminarians who are struggling with assimilating into their new environment, with the aim of helping them adapt and adjust.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan formulated the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2015). This theory is predicated on an individual's motivation to direct their behavior toward an alternative trajectory, highlighting the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the capacity for self-determination or self-generated outcomes in behavior, contrasting with external influences or control (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The emphasis is on the individual's aspiration to govern their choices and behaviors, highlighting their intrinsic motivation for meaning and fulfillment. This facilitates an understanding of the individual's needs and experiences on their newly selected path, informing the development of their skills and abilities.

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Lastly, relatedness highlights the individual's need for social connection and belongingness. It refers to the need to feel connected to, supported by, or cared for by other people (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Psychological well-being requires the fulfillment of all three needs, according to SDT. Furthermore, understanding these aspects provided a better grasp of their goals and aspirations.

Purpose of the Study

The study involves an individual who has transitioned away from the seminary but did not receive any structured support or career guidance during this process. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide a structured support system for former seminarians, an area currently lacking in targeted career guidance. By addressing the unique needs of individuals who have left the seminary, this study aims to benefit both the individual, through a clearer career path, and the broader community by contributing to improved support resources for those experiencing similar transitions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed an action research design commonly employed by educators and practitioners to improve teaching methods and professional practices. While educators frequently engage in reflection and self-assessment in their classrooms, action research offers a more structured and critical framework for analyzing and improving their practice. This method allows for deliberate, substantial reflection that is systematically documented and analyzed to foster meaningful improvements (Clark, 2020).

Research Participants

In this study, a former seminarian was selected as the research respondent. The action research aims to develop a counseling and career guidance approach tailored to his unique journey as he transitions from the seminary to a new calling. Additionally, this study seeks to explore and honor the individuality and distinctiveness of his experiences throughout this transition.

Research Instruments and Techniques

To achieve the study's purpose, the researchers utilized the following instruments and techniques:

Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale. The self-determination theory, which centers around the concept of basic psychological needs as inherent and universal, served as the foundation for this scale. The theory states that for individuals to develop and function healthily and optimally, they must consistently fulfill these needs, including competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The concept of basic psychological needs forms the foundation for many of the principles and ideas proposed by self-determination theory, and it has proven indispensable in providing meaningful explanations for a diverse array of observed phenomena in empirical research.

Interview. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to gather data for the study. Questions created by the researcher, which included inquiries about personal details, family history, hobbies, educational background, reasons for joining the seminary, various experiences during his seminary journey, reasons or factors for leaving, and the process of transitioning to his new program.

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Action Plan

Phase 1: Pre-Gathering

- Choosing a scale
- Reviewing related literature about vocation, career guidance, and counseling approaches for career guidance.
- Understanding the Case.

Phase 2: Data Gathering

- Collecting baseline data through the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale.
- Interview

Phase 3: Crafting of the Career Guidance Program

- Analyzing the data
- Creating the individualized Guidance Program

Data Analysis

In this study, the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale is used to analyze and compare scores, uncovering the individual's level of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This will provide a partial basis for the crafting of the individualized career guidance program. Additionally, researchers anchored the semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions and conducted thematic analysis to gain deeper insight into the participant's experiences. Researchers identified relevant information and emergent themes to assist in designing a customized career guidance program for the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This action research carefully addressed several ethical considerations to ensure respect for the participant's rights and privacy. The researcher obtained informed consent by fully briefing the participant on the study's objectives and the data-gathering process. The researcher strictly adhered to R.A. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, at every stage of this study. From data collection to analysis, all procedures complied rigorously with the act's provisions, ensuring stringent privacy protections during participant interactions and data handling.

Results

The case is a young man who was raised by his parents, with his grandmother being the primary caregiver during his early school years. His family's strong religious faith, particularly on his mother's side, deeply impacted him, leading him to become an active altar server at their local parish. This experience, along with recurring thoughts and dreams, solidified his conviction in his spiritual vocation. His uncle's aspirations to become a priest and the priests he encountered at his parish further influenced him. With his parents' support, he pursued this calling and joined a major seminary to become a priest.

During his time at the seminary, he engaged in counseling sessions with a priest to explore his vocation further. He made the difficult decision not to return to the seminary, opting for a different direction instead. Currently, he is pursuing a psychology major, signaling a shift in his interests and aspirations.

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The participant completed the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale, with results divided between his experiences in the seminary and life afterward. During his time in the seminary, he scored moderately on autonomy (4.57), indicating limited decision-making freedom, and demonstrated a high level of competence (6.5) in handling seminary tasks., with moderate relatedness (5.5) in social interactions. After leaving the seminary, his autonomy score increased slightly to 5, reflecting a somewhat higher sense of control over his choices. His competence score dropped to 3.85, suggesting a reduced sense of capability in new tasks, while his relatedness score remained moderate at 5, showing a steady ability to build relationships outside the seminary. Overall, the results highlight shifts in autonomy and competence as he transitioned from seminary life to his current path.

In the interview, the participant was asked retrospective questions to gain insight into his journey at the seminary. He was able to state and explain the motivations behind why he entered the major seminary, which are as follows:

- Family upbringing
- Inspiration from priests
- Fascination with philosophy
- Confirmation of a calling through a dream and remuneration

During the interview, the reasons why the case decided to leave the major seminary were also explored, and they are listed below:

- Financial constraints
- Challenging environment within the seminary
- Feeling unprepared for seminary life
- Impact of the pandemic
- Crisis with the calling while at the seminary

Finally, the caseworkers were able to understand how he chose another college course to enroll in, which includes the following motivations:

- Pursuing something he is passionate about (Spiritual Counseling)
- Feeling inspired to establish his psychological clinic

Based on the interview and the scale, the researcher now suggests individualized career guidance for the case.

Initial Assessment and Goal Setting. Aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the driving forces behind their decision to transition from the seminary to a different course. Also to explore their academic background, interests, strengths, and any obstacles they faced in their past studies.

Academic and career counseling. Provide guidance on the compatibility of his previous academic credits with probable college courses, as well as discuss the job options and growth potential associated with various college courses to assist him in making an informed selection.

Personal growth and readiness. Address any emotional or psychological issues that may arise because of the transition from seminary to a secular collegiate setting. Counsel them to help them manage difficulties and changes during this shift.

Mentorship and peer support. Provide opportunities for the case to join peer support groups or communities where he can share experiences and gain encouragement from others in similar situations. Connect him with mentors or college students who have successfully navigated similar transitions, providing valuable advice and support.

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Continuous support and follow-up. Conduct follow-ups to monitor his progress, resolve any issues, and provide continued support throughout the transition and studies. Encourage the formation of an academic and personal support network in the new school setting.

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the life of a former seminarian and to develop an individualized career guidance program that will facilitate the case's establishment of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and career adaptability. The reasons for his decision to leave seminary life can be attributed to financial, physical, and social factors.

The research participant mentioned that pursuing studies in a seminary is highly expensive, and his parents may not be able to cover all of his seminary-related expenses. These factors are in consonance with Lim, Lucmayan, and Taja-on's study (2023), which stated that former seminarian students often find themselves in challenging circumstances after leaving the seminary. These difficulties, like family situations, health problems, or a lack of support systems, are frequently personal.

Furthermore, extra living costs like rent, food, and utilities can quickly mount up and put a strain on a former seminary student's finances. Former seminarians may find it difficult to maintain their financial stability while obtaining their degree as a result of these circumstances (Daud, Norwani, & Yusof, 2018). Expensive tuition costs, a lack of scholarships, high living expenses, and payments for other goods and services are just a few examples of financial obstacles (Daud, Norwani, & Yusof, 2018). Another study revealed that the cost of obtaining a seminary education is comparable (Oakley, 2017).

The physical environment, especially the pandemic era and the timely Christmas vacation, significantly influenced his decision. His decision to leave the seminary life was influenced by social aspects, specifically his relationships with his superiors and colleagues within the seminary. The loss of a dedicated support network and the need to redefine a former seminarian's sense of purpose can lead to feelings of isolation and uncertainty, as stated by Lim, Lucmayan, and Taja-on (2023). Social support indeed plays a vital role in his decision. Former seminarians may also experience difficulties adjusting to a new community and the loss of close relationships formed at the seminary. Additionally, they face feelings of disappointment, confusion, or even guilt about leaving their calling (McDaniel, 2019; Fisher, 2020).

Taking into account all these factors—financial, physical, and social—the respondent ultimately decided to leave seminary life.

In the final months, he firmly believed that he had lost his motivation for his priesthood and was unable to maintain the fire within himself. Consequently, he made the decision to continue his education after graduating from the seminary. He's currently taking up AB Psychology. He made this decision because he found the concept of counseling intriguing in his daily activities, such as watching television series. With that decision he made, he was able to respond easier and lighter to the demands of his academics compared to seminary life. At that time, he was not required to adhere to specific study habits. He was able to exercise freedom.

The study's results align with those of Lim, Lucmayan, and Taja-on (2023), who found that a lack of purpose or shifting personal beliefs leads candidates to abandon religious life or the priesthood. Some of them suffer from a mental, physical, or financial condition that prevents them from studying.

Conclusion

The challenges encountered by former seminarians as they move away from the seminary setting are complex and require a distinct range of coping mechanisms (Lim, Lucmayan, & Taja-on, 2023). This includes career adjustments and adaptability.

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The present study primarily offers implications for career decision-making. First, acknowledging that entering the seminary is considered a vocation. Seminarians experience life in the community, working, studying, praying together, sharing meals, and spending leisure time as brothers in Christ. Many people who decide to enter the seminary have their own story of calling. Furthermore, it suggests that the goal of studying at the seminary is to shape the body, mind, and soul of students.

When a man discerns out, he has determined that his true vocation is not priesthood. The study's findings suggest that a person may lose their sense of calling when they enter a seminary and encounter different situations during their stay. Numerous factors can influence an individual's decision-making process. These factors will significantly influence an individual's desired career path in the future.

Second, this study implies many possibilities in life outside the seminary. Some men in seminary will discern that they are not called to the priesthood and withdraw from the program. Since the seminary is an accredited program to grant a degree, the course credit can be transferred to another program. And this entails understanding.

What is more, it is essential to recognize that the vocation to the priesthood encompasses both divine and human aspects (Okafor, 2021). This research indicates that seeking professional guidance is crucial when making significant life decisions, as it can have a profound impact on one’s future. For instance, undergoing career counseling before making these decisions can benefit both personal and spiritual growth.

Recommendations

The insights derived from the study shed light in redirecting one’s life by means of an individualized career guidance program. In real life, one needs to consider such a program to adapt and adjust in his new endeavors. It helps an individual reflect on his ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who he is to who he might become in life and work. This program can assist them fully in visualizing and planning their future.

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of said individualized career guidance program is another strategy to address its effectiveness. This is hereby recommended as it offers support and direction in navigating career choices and goals anchored to general guidance based on experience and expertise. Overall, an individualized career guidance program is truly an essential component which provides competencies to make informed decisions about their future. By being immersed in it, it can help an individual succeed and achieve their full potential.

Lastly, future research should consider including other denominations and increasing the number of participants. It is also important to note that this study focuses exclusively on a single former seminarian. Therefore, we can specifically tailor the developed guidance program to this individual and explore it for criticism and improvement. Additionally, the constraints of the research design, ethical considerations, and the unique perspective of the sole participant limit the researchers.

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