

# Strategies for Enhancing a Sense of Belonging for Psycho-Social Wellbeing of Priests in the Diocese of Dedougou, Burkina Faso

By

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## ABSTRACT

*This article is on the strategies for enhancing a sense of belonging for psycho-social wellbeing of priests in the Diocese of Dedougou, Burkina Faso. The objective of the study was to identify the strategies that can enhance a sense of belonging for psycho-social wellbeing of priests in the Diocese of Dedougou. The study adopted the Embedded mixed method research design. The target population was 107 Diocesan Catholic priests of the Diocese of Dedougou. The study used a sample of 97 priests using the census sampling method. It also interviewed 10 priests. The data collection was done using questionnaires that were administered using Google Forms while qualitative data was collected using interview guides. The findings of the study revealed that most of the priests of the Catholic Diocese of Dedougou had moderate sense of belonging. The research also revealed that there were many factors that affected priests' sense of belonging such as team work, learning from other priests, adaptation of communication style, learning of cultural protocols, accessibility to information of the parish, and the diocesan affairs, concerns, and anxieties, paying attention to others, taking into consideration priests' need, and specially culture influence sense of belonging for the psycho-social wellbeing of the priests in the Catholic diocese of Dedougou. The findings of the study conclude that the strategies which can foster sense of belonging for the psycho-social wellbeing of priests in the Catholic Diocese of Dedougou are: self-acceptance as multicultural diocese, feeling as members of one family with same rights, privileges, opportunities, chances, reduced inclinations to ethnic groups, and the improvement of bishop-priests' relationship. The study will be beneficial to all priests in the Catholic diocese of Dedougou.*

**Key Words:** Priests' psycho-social well-being; Sense of well-being among priests; Priests of Dedougou Diocese, Burkina Faso.

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## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

To have a sense of belonging is important for every human being in the society regardless of their religion, organization, tradition or culture. It is a positive character which fosters individual's well-being. Moreover, lack of sense of belonging can lead to mental illness. There is therefore a continuous need to foster sense of belonging to everyone including priests. This study looked at sense of belonging among the priests in the diocese of Dedougou, and how the sense of belonging can contribute to the building of their psycho-social well-being in the diocese.

In all societies and organisations, the sense of belonging is a key factor on the psychosocial well-being of its members. The Catholic Church in general, and particularly the diocese of Dedougou are not an exception to this rule. The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence of the sense of belonging among priests and how it affects their psychosocial well-being. Lee (1995) finds that, most of research on sense of belonging has taken place outside of the context of the Catholic Church. Moreover, Hayward and Krause (2013) studied belonging in the Church, primarily they were concerned with whether belonging is associated with either physical well-being, or a sense of belonging on physiological well-being (Hayward 2009). In contrast, far less attention has been given to know a sense of belonging on the psychosocial wellbeing among priests.

Oyserman (2007) finds that the notion of social identity is closely akin to that of belonging. Despite the rapid changes in the world, many people still identified themselves with the Church. Most Catholics are born into the church, baptized, and socialized into these beliefs and practices. Many catholic children attend catholic primary, and secondary schools where they have their communion, and confirmation. Most children develop a catholic deep embodied, and create a catholic sense of self, but it appears to be a pattern of believing without belonging (Inglis, 2007). This seems also to affect the world of the priests in their sense of belonging for the Catholic Church. Woods (2019) argues that each priest brings his unique stories, talents and gifts. Therefore, developing, and giving an input (formation) to the new comers in the group, and to always recycle the old members, can make them feel more belonging in the diocese. Sense of belonging, and the whole formation program are oriented to the psycho-social wellbeing of the candidate in formation. When mention is made of psychosocial well-being in formation, it refers to the combination of cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual, and how this sense of belonging process leads to wellbeing ( John Paul II, 1992).

In the light of the teaching of Pope John Paul II (1995), there are four dimensions that would assist in development of self-determination among priests. The four dimensions are human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. By so doing, dioceses may promote effective pastoral ministry as well as the better psychological well-being of priests (Ecclesia in Africa, 1995). Thus, the US Catholic Bishops in 2001, found that, there is a special and unique formational needs of all members of diocesan and religious congregation (US Catholic Bishops, 2001). From the teaching of the pope, it is clear that, to be able to exercise the ministry of priesthood, the priest is one who accepts to respond to a particular vocation. The content of the seminary training has the sense of belonging. And this must continually work for the priest in the diocese to mature his belongingness to the diocese. Automatically seminary becomes a place of training. To be called to this training ground, one must belong to a parish, when it is a minor seminary or belong to a diocese or to a religious

congregation, when it is the major seminary. Similarly, the priest has to be proud as he belongs to a diocese or to a religious congregation. Therefore, the sense of belonging is nurtured during the formation, and must keep growing. Pope Paul (1965) recognized that the priests are taken from among men and ordained for men in the things that belong to God in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins—are the gifts and sacrifice offered for sins? They live on earth with other men as brothers. The choice to belong to his religious congregation or to be a diocesan priest is a total self-gift. During the training in the seminary, the program equips the candidate all the necessary tools to be well engaged for the pastoral work, which gives fulfilment in life. Rainer (2014) states that most pastors love their callings. Most pastors enjoy most of what they do in ministry. In addition, most pastors would change their role if they could. Still, many pastors have ongoing challenges and struggles.

In a study done in Indonesia, spirituality, social support, priestly commitment, and well-being are factors which influence compassionate love, and bring out positive affect in those pastoral ministry; receiving support from multiple motivate the priests to love others. Well-being played an important role (Sasmito & Lopez, 2020). Thus, spirituality was the factor that contributed to compassionate love. Besides, there are factors for stress among catholic priests which are; work overload among younger priests, a sociocultural context that disturbs the clergy, living alone, not having sufficient support from the church authorities, excessive demands. However, there are important protective factors: collaborative way of resolving conflicts, physical exercises, eating balanced diet, finding time to rest, strengthening personal identity, social support from parishioners, collaborators, colleagues, superiors, and leading an active spiritual life ( Ruiz-Prada, Fernández-Salinero, García-Ael, & Topa, 2021). According to Man-Ging, Frick and Bauman's (2018) study in Germany, it is desirable for aging priests to be aware of protective factors like role identification, task-orientated coping, and low negative religious coping, which may be helpful in improving their psychological well-being.

Besides, social aspects of congregational life, according to Krause (2016), promote feelings of belonging in congregation. The author discovered that individuals who go to church more often will receive more spiritual support from fellow church members; people who get more spiritual support from coreligionists will have more practical wisdom; those with more practical wisdom will be more likely to provide emotional support to the individuals in their congregation; people who provide emotional support to fellow church members will be more highly valued by their coreligionists, and individuals who feel they are valued by their fellow congregants will be more likely to believe that they belong in the place where they worship.

On the contrary, a study by Pietkiewicz and Bachryj (2016), among Roman Catholic Secular Clergy discovered that there is little empirical evidence about how Roman Catholic secular priests cope with stressors. Consequently, the priests recognized existing resources of social support. They even underutilized them, due to various personal, and cultural factors. They found that religious coping was perceived as an expected strategy to maintain emotional balance. A study done in Burkina Faso titled, *Burkina Faso: premier Aggiornamento doctrinal des prêtres*, by Yanogo (2012), found that there is a financial crisis which leads some priests to disengagement, and intellectual laziness. Therefore, it is necessary to provide the needs for the priests and to seek for formation which aims to cultivate a strong sense of belonging to the Catholic Church, and to the catholic diocese of Dedougou.

This formation in essence is meant to touch the past, the present, and future life of both the person being formed, and the institution (diocese) to which they belong at large. Thus, it is initial and permanent, a pedagogical system that is meant to mould the thoughts, emotions, and behaviour of the individual to a certain level of maturity for a life of service and consecration to God (Cencini, 2016). However, the geographical location makes the diocese to host lot of ethnics groups of various cultures. The significant difference of age among priests, with different experiences seems to increase the gravity of the problem (Lougué & Zan, 2009). Thus, the daily life of the Priests in the diocese of Dedougou is affected by this cultural diversity, but seems not to have sense of belonging for the same diocese. Therefore, there is need to base this study on the priests of Dedougou, for sense of belonging (for the priests in the diocese of Dedougou), which will favour the Catholic Church development plan. Hence, the need to investigate the diocese of Dedougou on the sense of belonging to see its impact on the psycho-social well-being among the priests for the good of the Christian community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many complaints arise in the Diocese of Dedougou. The diocesan priests seem to be undergoing some crisis. Having unmet basic needs predicts adverse physical and mental health outcomes and mortality, and is a strong predictor of psychological stress, which also adversely effects, and is experienced disproportionately by low income (Cappelletti, Kreuter, Boyum, & Thompson, 2015). Currently, there is a kind of disengagement of the priests in the parish and diocesan activities. There are many complaints among priests, and many do not come to the diocesan meetings. However, many priests are trying to work for their self-gain. This problem impacts the relational, spiritual, financial, and pastoral life of the diocese. The diocese sometimes has difficulties even paying the allowances to the priests and carrying out the diocese's ongoing projects. Many possible factors contribute to this problem are divisions, discriminations, and "regionalisation" (ethnicism), gossip among priests, which affect the people of God in the diocese. When these problems come to the candidates' consciousness, it becomes the cause of their departure from the Seminaries. This crisis gives the priests room for reflection to change the diocese or leave the priesthood. All these problems can be the effects of a low sense of belonging among priests in the diocese. This study helped to identify the cause of low, and middle sense of belonging and contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address in greater depth this issue. Consequently, it has identified the gap in and shared the feedback which if implemented, will make the priests happy, and comfortable. Besides, it could help redefine the priests' role and functions and review the bishop's action toward the priests of the diocese. Wong (2014) states that there is the need to search for a radical shift from self-focus to meaning-focus as the most promising way to lift up individuals (the priests of the diocese) from the dark pit of despair to a higher ground of flourishing.

### **Objective of the Study**

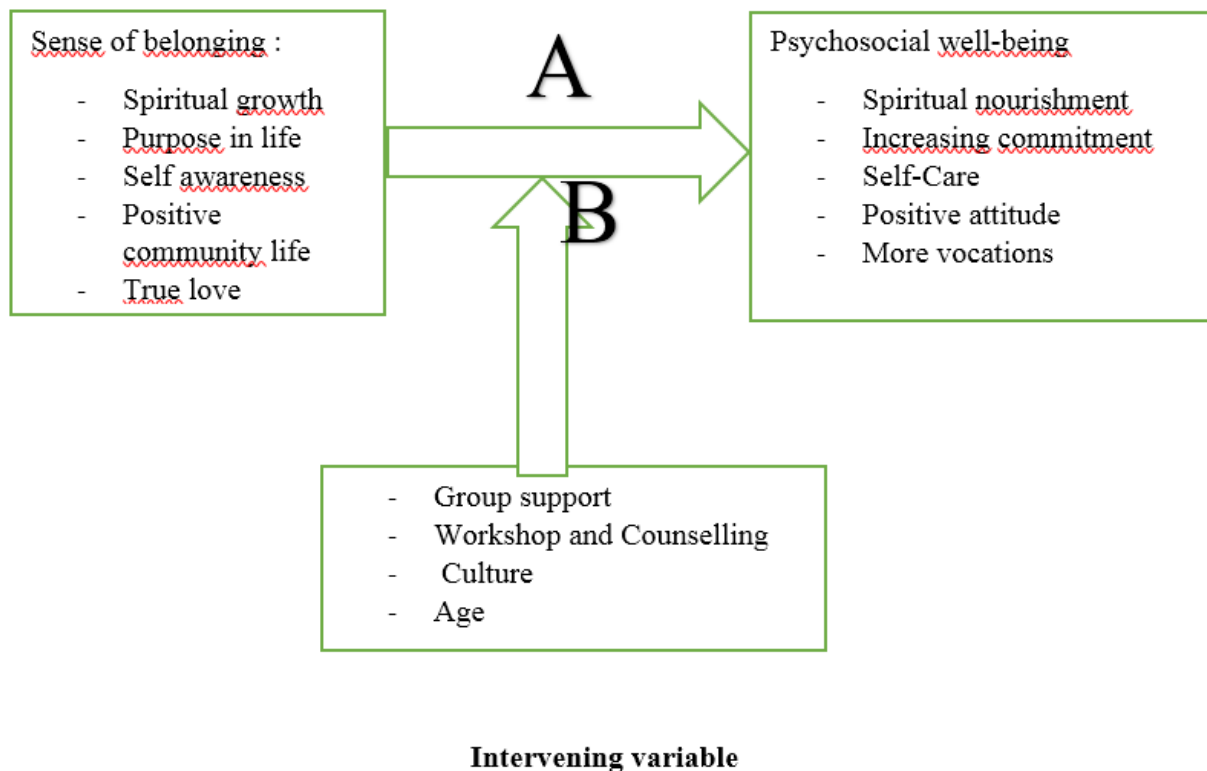
To identify the strategies which can enhance the sense of belonging for psycho-social wellbeing among the priests in the diocese of Dedougou.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this study is to explore how the elements of sense of belonging influences the psycho-social wellbeing of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou. This framework shows that there is a relationship between the variables in the research topic. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of the sense of belonging on the psycho-social wellbeing among priests. Therefore, the sense of belonging as presented as the independent variable that influences the psycho-social wellbeing which is the dependent variable. However, the intervening variables are presented as a strategy to enhance the sense of belonging. When there is lack of sense of belonging, it can occur negative consequences.

#### **Independent Variable**

#### **Dependent Variable**



In this conceptual framework, the arrow “A” represents how the independent variable (the sense of belonging), effects on the dependent variable (the psycho-social wellbeing) among the priests. It explains how sense of belonging can affect the psycho-social wellbeing among the priests. The arrow “B” represents how the intervening variables, that are, self-care, group support, culture, age, workshop, culture, and positive attitude helps to understand the sense of belonging and the psychosocial well-being. These intervening variables shows the relationship between the independent variable, and the dependent variable.

## **LITURATURE REVIEW**

## **The Coping Strategies for Psycho-Social Well-Being**

Cohen (2021), in her study titled “*the role of occupational therapy in the prevention and management of chronic conditions at a free Primary Care Clinic*”, shows that there are chronic conditions, whose prevalence is growing. Method was mixed-methods, descriptive study design. This study took place at a free primary care clinic in the US, and the participants were the clients for at least 18 years old, and opened for 5 week clients of the clinic. The physical, social, and emotional impacts of chronic conditions are exacerbated by social and physical determinants of health, resulting in occupational injustice. This research sets out to determine the need for occupational therapy services for the prevention and management of chronic conditions, supports and barriers to clients participating in occupational therapy services. The results of this study indicate that clients with chronic conditions could benefit from occupational therapy to address the everyday impacts of their conditions, and even clients without chronic conditions could also benefit from occupational therapy to prevent the development of chronic conditions. The outcomes of this study add to literature supporting occupational therapy intervention for this population; and can be supported by Wrong (2016) who presents Victor Frankl’s logotherapy of the positive psychology interested in meaning research. This meaning-seeking model facilitates the research for meaning in life.

This model gave the opportunity to explore the five hypothesis that Victor Frankl sets as guidelines for the meaning seeking. The scholar explained the basic assumption of logotherapy and translate them into testable meaning-seeking model to facilitate meaning research, and intervention. The scholar explained the five meaning as follows:

- i- Self-transcendence: the will to meaning is spiritual, and primary motivation for self-transcendence. Self-transcendence predicts the spiritual pathways, and enhance the meaning life, and well-being even when other pathways to well-being are not available.
- ii- The ultimate Meaning: the belief in the intrinsic meaning, and value of life, regardless of circumstances, is more functional than global beliefs. That belief in ultimate meaning facilitates the discovery of meaning of the moment.
- iii- The meaning Mind-set: this meaning leads to greater meaningfulness, compassion, moral excellence, eudemonic happiness, and resilience.

- iv- The freedom of will: people who believe in inherent human capacity for freedom, and responsibility, regardless of circumstances, will show higher autonomy, and authenticity than those without such beliefs.
- v- The value of discovering Meaning: this meaning is more likely to be discovered through creative, experiential, and attitudinal values which are motivated by self-transcendence rather than by self-interest.

The five assumptions are the centrality of meaning seeking. To seek for meaning is a process of healing, and well-being. It reveals that in every human being, it can be a “dark pit” of despair, including priests. The author presents the five indicators of a higher flourishing ground, which comes from meaning seeking. These assumptions help the individual to move on the discovery of self-transcendence, rather than looking for self-interest.

From this conclusion related to this current research, it must be said that the priests in the diocese of Dedougou may first of all build self-confidence and a strong belief for ultimate meaning in their lives.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design used the embedded approach mixed method. The purpose of this was to help the researcher to collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, as well as to have one form of data play a supportive role to the form of data. Qualitative research is to examine the way participants make sense out of their own concrete, real-life experiences in their own minds, and in their own words. The researcher focused on discovering and understanding the experiences and thoughts of the participants. It is more subjectivity. In contrast, quantitative research focuses on the way the world is understood in researchers’ minds. This method attempted to emphasize on the objectivity (Cropley, 2015). The fundamental principle of mixed method research allowed multiple kinds of data collection using different strategies and methods in a way that reflects complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses. Mixed methods of study provide insight not possible when only qualitative or quantitative data are collected ( Tashakkori,, Teddlie,, & Teddlie , 1998).

The target population was the group of priests that the researcher intended to conduct the study, and draw conclusions from. In cost-effectiveness analysis, characteristics of the target population and any subgroups should be described clearly. The choice of characteristics depends on the

medical literature and practices, the objectives of the study, and contextual information (Steel, 2011). But, to increase the chance of success of the study, it is important to choose an appropriate study population (Zhao, Tian, Cai, Claggett, & Wei., 2013). In this population, the target population was the priests of the diocese of Dedougou. There were 14 parishes with 107 priests (Directory of Dedougou 2021). The diocese is made up of formation houses, institutions like the seminaries, health centre, radio centre, priests (*fidei donum*), and priests in and out of the country for studies. So, they need sense of belonging for their psychosocial well-being. The chosen participants were targeted and the researcher believes that the outcome reached the rest of the dioceses of the episcopal conference Burkina-Niger for the priests, and the formation houses in the country.

Census sampling method was used in this study; meaning that all the priests were given the quantitative questionnaire. According to Hayes (2014), simple random sampling is a sampling technique where every item in the population has an even chance, and likelihood of being selected in the sample. But in this study, all the priests of the diocese were the respondents: 97 priests for the questionnaire and 10 priests for the interview; and all participants were grouped according to their age of birth, and of ordination as follows: 0-5 years of priesthood, 6-10 years of priesthood, 11-15 years of ordination, 16 -20 years of priesthood, 21-25 years of priesthood, 26, and above. Total participants are 107 priests. The researcher planned to take part of the yearly diocesan priests meeting, and request the priests to fully participate, and request the priests to participate in the research.

The data collection instrument intended for this study were questionnaire, interview guide which the researcher used to gather data from the large sample of participants that were engaged. A questionnaire is a series of questions asked to individuals to obtain statistically useful information about a given topic. When properly constructed and responsibly administered, questionnaires become a vital instrument by which statements can be made about specific groups or people or entire populations. They are a valuable method of collecting a wide range of information from a large number of individuals, often referred to as respondents (Satya Rani Menta, 2012). The purpose of this instrument is to collect in-depth information from the respondents. It consists of: demographic information, questionnaire and interview guide. The first part (section A) will collect the demographic information. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first set of questions were the causes of lack of belonging on the respondents. The second consisted of finding

the impact of the lack of sense of belonging. The third was the influence of culture on sense of belonging. The fourth was on coping strategies or the intervening variables. In this study, 10 priests of the Catholic diocese of Dedougou were selected based on non-probability sampling technique; 97 priests were given the questionnaire, making a total target population 107 priests.

The questionnaire was for all the 97 priests of the Catholic diocese of Dedougou who were not selected for the interview. This questionnaire was divided into section B, C, and D. Section B questions were on the levels of sense of belonging on the psychosocial well-being among priests in the diocese of Dedougou. Section C, dealt with the influence of culture, and the other factors in sense of belonging on the psychosocial well-being among priests in the diocese of Dedougou. The section D was on the strategies which can enhance sense of belonging among priests in the Catholic diocese of Dedougou. The questionnaires were sent by using Google form through WhatsApp, to the respondents.

Hayes (2014) found that Non-probability sampling is a sampling method in which not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study. Each member of the population has a known chance of being selected. Thus, 10 priests of the diocese were chosen based on their work experience, the number of years in priesthood, and WhatsApp accessibility. The interview guide was divided into section D1 and section D2. Section D1 was dealing with the influence of culture, and other factors in the sense of belonging. Section D2 was dealing with the coping strategies for the psychosocial well-being among the priests in the diocese of Dedougou. This study gave the participants a chance to express their points of view, and experiences, beyond what was asked in the questionnaire, opening up space for an in-depth understanding on sense of belonging on the psychosocial well-being among priests in the diocese of Dedougou.

Validity is the accuracy and meaning of inferences, which are based on search results. This is the extent to which the results obtained from the analysis of the data represent the phenomenon, under study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Therefore, truthfulness of the measurement is essential. The researcher used face validity to review the questionnaire which was used in the study to ensure that the content of the articles had sufficient information to measure what the researcher intended. After establishing the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher performed a pilot test to test the questionnaire before going to the field to verify its effectiveness. In order to increase the validity of the content of the instruments, the elements of the questionnaire were tested using the questions with different participants. The researcher used 10 diocesan priests from the PSI student priests,

who are not part of the sample size of the study for the testing of the research instrument using a practical sampling techniques. This helped the researcher to identify unclear items in the questionnaires and rephrased them for clarity.

The term reliability in psychological research refers to the consistency of a research study or measuring test (McLeod, 2013). Internal consistency is a way of determining the reliability of the test elements by which the data are determined from the scores obtained from a single test administered by the researcher to a sample of subjects after which the scores obtained from the article are correlated with scores obtained from other elements of the instrument to establish their coefficient (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The reliability of the instruments is decided by pre-testing each at a time before managing the instruments equivalent to the respondents. Reliability refers to the consistency attribute of results to the extent of a research instrument (Gregory, 2000).

The researcher determined the reliability of the instruments by internal coherence. The researcher used the Cronbach Alpha to measure the reliability of the questionnaire instrument. This was to know reliability using the correlation coefficient of 0.7 and above to confirm that the instrument was reliable.

## **DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **The Demographic information**

The study shows that 50% of the respondents are in the bracket of 1-10 years in the priesthood, 29% of the respondents fell within the range of 11-20 years in the priestly ministry, 15.6% of the respondents are in the bracket of 21-30 years as priests, and 4.7% are priests for the last 31 years and more. This results of age of ordination shows that 85.6% of the respondents in the study are the active priests between 1-30 years, and they are highly involved in the pastoral activities of the Diocese.

Similarly, 37.5% have diploma, 27.7% have degrees, 25% have master's degrees, and 7.8% are PhD holders. The respondents who have reached the levels of diploma and degree in their education

are 62.2%. This number is significant, and they have appropriate understanding to respond to the questions.

Additionally, 82.8% of the respondents were shown to depend stipend only which is 8.000 shillings per month, 3.1% of the respondents receive financial help from their families, 9.4% of the respondents have support from their friends, and 4.7% of the respondents generate income from some activities. This shows that a significant number of the respondents depend on stipends, because many of the priests are not engaged in any income generating activities.

Regarding the demographic information of the interview participants, all respondents fell under the age bracket of 35-55. This shows that the respondents interviewed are the young, and adult priests between 6-24 years of work experience as priests, and they are more involved in the pastoral activities of the diocese. The majority of the respondents (7) have Masters, showing that they can appropriately understand the questions for good responses. This result also shows that significant number of the respondents depends on their friends, and on the stipends. This supports the statement that there is a need from the diocesan authority to better the financial income of the priests of the Catholic diocese of Dedougou.

### **The Strategies Used to Enhance the Sense of Belonging and the Well-Being of Priests in the Diocese of Dedougou**

The statements used to explore respondents' view on the strategies to enhance sense of belonging, and the well-being of priests in the diocese of Dedougou were 10. The research question was the strategies which can be used to enhance the sense of belonging, and the well-being of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou. The respondents were asked to identify their experience rated on the scale of Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree. Data was analysed on participants' experience.

#### ***Strategies for enhancing the sense of belonging among Priests***

| <b>Statements</b>                                           | <b>SD<br/>f %</b> | <b>D<br/>f %</b> | <b>A<br/>f %</b> | <b>SA<br/>f %</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| I am troubled by feeling like I have no place in this world | 26(40.6%)         | 27(42.2%)        | 8(12.5%)         | 3(4.7%)           | 100          |
| I feel like I observe life rather Participate in it         | 18 (28.1%)        | 30 (46.9%)       | 12 (28.1%)       | 4 (6.3%)          | 100          |

|                                                                                                                              |           |            |           |           |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| I could disappear for days and it wouldn't matter to my community                                                            | 25(39.1%) | 28 (43.8%) | 6(9.4%)   | 5(7.8%)   | 100 |
| I am not valued by or important to my colleague priests. It is important to me that I am valued or accepted by other priests | 11(17.2%) | 41(64.1%)  | 8(12.5%)  | 4 (6.3%)  | 100 |
| I have qualities that can be important to other priests                                                                      | 2(3.1%)   | 7(10.9%)   | 42(65.6%) | 13(20.3%) | 100 |
| It is important to me that my thoughts and opinions are valued                                                               | 1(1.6%)   | 7(10.9%)   | 47(73.4%) | 9(14.1%)  | 100 |
| Generally, other people recognize my strengths and good                                                                      | 2(3.1%)   | 9(14.1%)   | 46(71.9%) | 7(10.9%)  | 100 |
| I would describe myself as a misfit in most social situations.                                                               | 15(23.4%) | 39(60.9%)  | 7(10.9%)  | 3(4.7%)   | 100 |
| I generally feel that priests accept me                                                                                      | 1(1.6%)   | 6(9.4%)    | 43(67.2%) | 14(21.9%) | 100 |
| I would like to make a difference to people or things around                                                                 | 1 1.6     | 2 3.1      | 40 62.5   | 21 32.5   | 100 |

The respondents were asked whether they were troubled by the feelings of not having a place in this world, to which 40.7% strongly disagreed, 42.2% simply disagreed, 12.5% agreed while 4.7% strongly agreed. This implies that a significant number of the priests (82.9%) in the diocese of Dedougou had a sense of belonging while 17.2% did not have a sense of belonging.

Regarding the statement that “I feel like I observed life rather participating in it,” 28.1% strongly disagreed, 46.9% disagreed, 28.1% agreed while 6.3% strongly agreed. This suggest that a significant number of the priests (75%) in the diocese of Dedougou were participating in life and not just observing it.

To the statement that, “I could disappear for days, and it wouldn't matter to my community,” 39.1% strongly disagreed, 43.8% disagreed, 9.4% agreed while 7.8% strongly agreed. This implies that the community minds about the welfare of their priests. It is only, 17.2% of the priests who had a feeling that other members of their community would not mind their absence.

Regarding whether the respondents were valued by their colleague priests, 17.2% strongly disagreed, 64.1% disagree, 12.5% agreed while 6.3% strongly agreed. This is an indication that a significant number of priests (81.3%) in the diocese of Dedougou feels that they are not valued by their colleague priests. This is an area that need to be addressed and resolved.

On whether the respondents had important qualities beneficial to the other priests of the diocese of Dedougou, 3.1% strongly disagreed, 10.9% disagreed, 65.6% agreed, and 20.3% strongly

agreed. This infers that a significant number (85.9%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou have important qualities which are positive for the diocese to consider.

Regarding whether it was important for the priests' thoughts and opinions to be valued, 1.6% strongly disagreed, 10.9% disagreed, 73.4% agreed while 14.1% strongly agreed. This implies that there is a significant number (87.5%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou who felt that their opinions valued. It is a positive need to be considered.

On whether other people recognize the priests' strength, 3.1% strongly disagreed, 14.1% disagree, 71.9% agree, 10.9% strongly agree. This presents that a significant number (82.8%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou view their strength, and good recognized, as a positive need to be embraced.

Regarding whether priests describe themselves as misfits in most social situations, 23.4% strongly disagreed, 60.9% disagreed, 10.9% agreed while 4.7% strongly agreed. This implies that a significant number (71.8%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou do not consider themselves as misfits and therefore have a sense of belonging.

To find out whether the priests generally felt that other priests accepted, 1.6% strongly disagreed, 9.4%, disagreed, 67.1% agreed while 21.9% strongly agreed. This shows that a significant number (89%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou feels accepted by other priests. This is a strong sense of belonging.

On whether the priests would want to make a difference to people or things around them, 1.6% strongly disagreed, 3.1% disagreed, 62.5% agreed while 32.5% strongly agreed. This implies that a significant number (95%) of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou desire to make a difference around themselves. This is an aspect that needs to be embraced and empowered.

Respondents who were interviewed about the strategies which can be used to enhance the sense of belonging, and the well-being among priests in the diocese of Dedougou, suggested some strategies to enhance sense of belonging and the well-being among priests in the diocese of Dedougou.

### **Strategies to Enhance Sense of Belonging**

The interviews revealed that love of Christ, sharing of responsibilities, trainings on interpersonal relationships, avoiding gossip, patriotism, empathy and generosity. Others include conflict resolutions and multiculturalism acceptance. All these were found to be able to greatly enhance sense of belonging among priests.

#### ***Love of Christ***

For instance, Participant A when talking on the subject about the strategies to enhance sense of belonging said the following:

The main strategy is the love of Christ. The second strategy consists of dividing up responsibilities while avoiding the criterion of origins and positioning calculations as much as possible. Training (retreats) on interpersonal relationships and team work. Provide training on pluralism to trainees and deacons of the diocese, provide training in the deanery on the pluralism, and reduce situations of injustice in the processing of files concerning colleagues.

These good attitudes of the priests can be strengthened, so that they positively influence the rest of priests in the diocese: team life without distinction of origin, participation in other people's events, and participation in local events. For the priests to get help to understand themselves better: there should be: an accompaniment in the sense of humanity, an accompaniment to the pedagogy of Christian witness and evangelical (Interview, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

#### ***Avoiding Gossip***

Respondent B, on his part said:

Frank relations (avoid gossip), a real closeness to the Bishop (not only in the context of the office but as a confidant), encouraging and accompanying bishop can help to enhance sense of belonging. The priest fraternity should have more initiative for the assurance of its members than being a place of empty speeches. To enhance sense of belonging, the priests in the diocese should work for the tearing down ethnic or provenance walls, stop labels, and promote the expression of the talents of each priest who is uniquely rich. I would like a priest passing through a parish to have accommodation and be welcomed by his colleagues and not as a stranger. I hope that the priestly house will be the foothold of all priests, a place where we meet and from where we leave happy to have met. I hope that the bishopric and the diocesan curia will not be a domain reserved for an ecclesiastical elite. Without denying the necessary

hierarchy, my ardent desire is that first of all the bishopric should really be where every priest comes and can talk to the father of the family. That as much as the diocesan Economic invests in decent housing that the parishes are supported for presbyteries that do not envy anything in comfort to the bishopric. There are good attitudes to be considered so that priests will be able to enhance sense of belonging: every priest should be aware of the importance of his ministry; every priest should desire a better fraternity and a peaceful coexistence with others. Each priest should work for the spiritual and even material good of the people in his pastoral charge, and the priests to get the necessary needs for the accomplishment of his ministry. A substantial material treatment so that a certain minimum is ensured to each priest avoiding material ditches. Encourage those who have initiatives to give some to those who have none and work towards a common goal (Interview, February 1st, 2022).

### ***Patriotism***

In the same context, respondent C expressed his view by saying that for the diocese to enhance sense of belonging among priests, let every priest consider himself worthy son of the diocese. Learn to let the other different from me by his culture grow. Accept differences as wealth and not as opposition or rivalry. Make the meeting of priests a true place of fraternal communion. The authority must work to be conciliatory in the event of conflict, neutral in decision-making, challenge, and why blame in situations and behaviors with a discriminatory, racist or ethnic tendency, make or remake everyone aware that the diocese is above our families, promote participation in meetings of priests, avoid feeling unloved, excluded from one's diocese, allow everyone to know the different parishes of the diocese through the participation of the meetings, and accepting appointments. He goes further by asking the authority of the diocese to give the opportunity or the chance to each priest to have another pastoral experience outside the diocese, to know the values, and skills of each priest, trust him and empower him, enable training, specialization, capacity building; consider certain characters for nominations; put the priest at ease for his service (treatment; take seriously the question of the health of priests), specify more clearly the collaboration between priests and laity, to have a spiritual director and meet him regularly, promote the role of priest- deans to better support the deaneries can help enhance sense of belonging (January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

### ***Seeking Intimacy with Christ***

Respondent D, on his part suggests strategies that can enhance sense of belonging. To that effect, he had the following to say: pastoral organization, a three-year plan comprising a vision, a mission and strategic objectives are good ways to unite energy around a job to be done. Priests must also relearn how to pray and read (holy and spiritual scriptures), because many are already too worldly; the life of the priest is lost as soon as he does not diligently seek intimacy with Jesus (January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022). These findings are in line with Magondou (2012), whose study revealed that the Catholic Church can prevent such conflicts by developing clear purposes, and goals, ensuring of appropriate representation, and understanding of roles, designing, and conducting effective meetings, building consensus for church decisions.

While respondent E gave his suggestions in the following: “the problem is first personal, before being strategic. We must first accept ourselves as a multicultural diocese and make the effort to adapt to this reality. The Disciples of Christ were of various origins, but they formed the same body. He who has betrayed the spirit of the body has gone to his own destiny. To consolidate the feeling of belonging among the priests of the diocese, it is first necessary that all feel like members of the same family and have the same rights and the same obligations. Then, we must give everyone the same chances (regarding missions abroad), promote the brotherhood of priests of the diocese, and make disappear all inclinations of ethnic groups. To help priests better understand each other, the bishop needs another channel for information about teams, having a culture of truth and justice” (January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

### ***Empathy***

In the same context, respondent F expressed his view as elucidated below:

I encourage what is being done already. I suggest also to start to build the sense of belonging since the seminary and even before that when the candidates express their desires to become priests. The vocational group must be strong and dynamic capable of visiting the families of the candidates and to know their conditions of life, their convictions and beliefs. To organise the vocational camp for through the vocational camp the candidates learn to know each other and to love each other. To listen to candidates and give them the opportunity to express their thoughts. When a priest is appointed somewhere he must learn and speak the local language and celebrate mass in that language. To create a solidarity fund and if a priest is having a problem of all kind he should be helped. Not appoint priests according to their belonging to a particular group. Those who have the duty to send priests to further studies have to do it according to the vision of the diocese. It supposes that the diocese has a vision and a plan. I am in of favour of appointing priests according to their charisms and talents. Create the conditions for the priests to get fulfilment in your ministry.

To accord to each priest the same respect and value. And these can help the diocese to enhance sense of belonging: respect, openness, kindness, simplicity, humility, solidarity, discretion and love (January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

Respondent G on the subject of strategies which can enhance sense of belonging, and the psychosocial well-being said the following: first of all, the bishop must have a fatherly attitude towards his priests. Especially, he must have a great sense of listening and understanding. Second, the council of the African priests must be updated in order to take into account the challenges that the priests have to face both today and in the future. Third, I would suggest a council of wise priests which role would be to listen to priests and to consider seriously whatever they are undergoing in order to find appropriate solution. Finally, all the important decisions in the diocese must be discussed among priests from small to the whole group. This would be the basis that would help the Bishop to take the final decision. This is important as human being tends to consider only things that have required his contribution.

Generosity is one of the keys to enhance sense of belonging in the diocese of Dedougou. Some priests are very wealthy while some are not. Sharing with others can positively influence the rest of the priests. Besides, defending one another reputation rather than to tarnish it could also be of a great support. Valuing the different talents and capacities of others can also help us build strong communities. Misunderstanding, greediness, selfishness, jealousy, slander, and gossiping are some of the bad attitudes to be left among priests in the diocese. Besides, the Bishop himself should stop his attitude of indifference or carelessness towards some priests. He must take everyone into consideration and under his care (January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022).

### ***Conflict Resolutions***

Respondent H, on his part explained that: the fair treatment, paying attention to each other's difficulties, promoting a decent living condition for priests, development more proximity among class mates (anniversary, ordination, and other events), solidarity in certain events, can help to enhance sense of belonging, and psychosocial well-being among priests (January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021).

In the same context, respondent I expressed his view as stated below:

Bring priests to be fair to their confrere, by contacting him or joining alone to discuss the matters that bring conflicts among both, instead of criticising them outside. The bishop

should ensure that his priests meet every year among classmates; for if there is no unity among classmate in the priesthood, there cannot be unity in the larger group. The diocese should show concern and consideration to the biological families of its priests; then we will really know that we belong to the diocesan family. Through that, our biological families themselves could contribute to maintain us (priests) more united. Occupying the priests in works of education where they get some substantial income, can help avoiding unnecessary conflicts rising around finances. When we are well occupied, we don't have time to brood over others' injuries and offences. The hierarchy (or VG) should try to communicate to have a meeting or online meeting with each of the priest at least once a years. Especially those outside the diocese, and remind them constantly the diocese's expectations about them. Then, we will feel that we belong, Jokes without bias, attentiveness to the needs of the confrere, fair counsels from senior brother-Priests, visiting the parents of a confrere without his knowledge (February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

While respondent J, on his part explained that: on-going formation of priests through further studies, regular diocesan priestly meetings, retreats, recollections and seminars for the diocesan priests can be used to enhance sense of belonging. Good interpersonal relationships between the bishop and the priests, feeling sense of concern by the local ordinary, priestly confraternity. Prayer unites every priest to the bishop, and the priestly collegiality (February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

This objective can be summarized that there are significant strategies which can be used to enhance sense of belonging, and the psycho-social well-being of the priests in the diocese of Dedougou. The priests in the diocese of Dedougou have qualities which are important, and need to be strengthened. They don't feel misfit, and the significant number of them feel accepted with the desire for positive changes around them.

However, there are some priests who feel that they have no place in this world, they are not valued, meaning that they observe life rather than participating. Therefore, they could disappear, and it would not matter to their communities. As supported by Viktor Frankl, and cited by LEAP\_ADMIN (2016), people develop addictions because they feel different from others: lonely, bored, confused, depressed, lacking direction, lacking purpose, lacking goals, etc.

### ***Multiculturalism Acceptance***

In the nutshell, strategies for an ideal sense of belonging, the following should be inculcated. Accepting ourselves as multicultural diocese, feel as members of one family with the same rights, privileges, opportunities, and chances, make disappear inclination to ethnic groups, diocesan council of priests to be strengthened, major decision to be discussed among priests, and the bishop to reach a final decision, concern among priests for each other, for example, defending each other reputation, values, and encouraging talents, and capabilities. Another key strategy is the bishop-priests relationship for example the bishop should treat all priests equally, have a fatherly attitude toward all priests with a great sense of listening. This is supported by Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta, cited by *Harrison (2010)* that the bishop-priest relationships and the relationships among priests have a profound significance for the entire Church and in each diocese. In point of fact, when the relationships between bishops and priests and among their own brother priests are healthy, happy, and well-grounded, the entire Church is the beneficiary of that grace.

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Strategies to Enhance Sense of Belonging**

The study established that many priests of the diocese of Dedougou feels accepted, they desire to make positive changes in their surroundings and do not consider themselves to be misfits. These are attributes that need to be strengthened. The study cautions that it is important to attend to the least number of priests who feels that they have no place in this world and they are not valued.

Some of the strategies that can enhance a sense of belonging among priests in the diocese of Dedougou includes accepting themselves as a multicultural diocese, accepting that they are members of one family with the same rights, privileges, opportunities and chances. They should also desist from the urge to incline themselves to their ethnic groups while major decisions should be discussed among priests with the diocesan council of priests. They should also strive to strengthen their bonds, defend each other's reputation, values, enhance talents and individual capabilities. More importantly, the bishop should inculcate a positive attitude towards all priests and enhance their listening skills.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the findings, the study recommends the following:

- i- The priests of the diocese of Dedougou need to understand their own culture, and learn to integrate their culture to their priestly vocation by organizing workshops, seminars, recollections, retreats, spiritual directions, training that will enhance sense of belonging.
- ii- The priests in the diocese of Dedougou need better self-care, by obtaining the necessary pastoral, and personal needs.
- iii- The priests themselves need to consider the cultural diversity of the diocese of Dedougou, and learn to know more about protocols of the other cultures.
- iv- The relationship between bishop-priests need to be worked on, encouraging more fatherly approach with his priests.
- v- The low level of priests (9.4%) sense of belonging needs to be enhanced. This will subsequently rise the well-being of the priests of the diocese of Dedougou.

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