



# Effects of Ongoing Pastoral Formation on the Ministry of Priests in Bungoma Catholic Diocese in Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Given its nature and mission, Priestly ministry is dynamic and requires continuous formation to remain relevant and effective. This study explored the effects of pastoral formation on the Ministry of Priests in Bungoma Catholic Diocese, Kenya. The objectives of the study were: how pastoral formation have promoted the pastoral ministry; how pastoral activities of priests have contributed to the growth of the diocese; pastoral charity as a motivating factor for priests' pastoral ministry in Bungoma Catholic Diocese. This study employed the theory of Psycho-Social Dynamics of Christian Vocation postulated by Rulla. The 78 priests of Bungoma Catholic diocese were the study population, among which a sample size of 52 priests was employed in the research. The study adopted a stratified sampling technique to categorize the target population into four strata according to the years they have served as priests. To select priests in a stratum, simple random sampling was done using lottery method sampling. The entire population of each stratum was numbered alphabetically, then a sample was chosen randomly by 'drawing from a hat'. The parallel mixed-method research design was used during the study. In this design, coding and data analysis were done both qualitatively and quantitatively. The comparison of both findings was done and values established.*

**Keywords:** *Priestly, Ministry, Formation, Pastoral, Effects, Diocese, Kenya*

## How to cite this work (APA):

Wafula, W. W., Soko, J. & Chisanga, J. Effects of ongoing pastoral formation on the ministry of priests in Bungoma Catholic Diocese in Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 5(4), 12 – 21.

## 1. Introduction

Formation may be understood differently by different people. For the purpose of this paper, formation is what is offered by the church to a person being prepared for a definite mission. The program of formation comprises human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions of formation (Paul, 1992). Effectiveness of priestly ministry depends on the ongoing formation exercise. No wonder, the church in her documents; *Optatam Totius*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and *Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, have given universal guidelines and outlined the four pillars of priestly formation. However, these universal guidelines need to be contextualized (Flannery, 1996). This study focuses on the particular context of the church in Kenya.

And if you ever pondered why ongoing formation, this article explains why it is essential in the life of the church. The priestly ministry and its dynamism, calls for relevancy in the modern world (Flannery, 1996).

This study shades light on the effects of pastoral formation on the ministerial service of priests. Pastoral formation should be understood to mean the dimension of formation which integrates elements of the entire process of formation with the aim of preparing priests as charitable shepherds of the people of God after the example of Christ (Paul, 1992). In reading this article you will recall the appropriate and specific alignment in the process of forming agents of evangelization (Francis, (2013). The findings of this study aim at benefiting the church of Christ with due considerations that priests are strategic agents of

the church's mission. It is deemed to benefit the Church in Kenya by highlighting crucial areas of ongoing formation among her priests in the unique pastoral context of Bungoma diocese. The study has made clear the areas of great interest by being attentive to the functions of priests as the bridge between God and humanity in a concrete context of people. Therefore, the questions that guided the study are; What are the effects of Pastoral formation on the Priestly ministry of service in Bungoma Catholic diocese? How have Pastoral activities of the priests led to significant growth of the diocese and how is Pastoral charity a motivating factor for every priest's pastoral activity?

## 2. Literature Review

Formation is not a new phenomenon in the church. The church prepares her ministers for the mission through the process of ongoing formation. Therefore, the formation is a lifelong process. The church integrates the four dimensions (Human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral) of formation in the entire formation process. The ongoing formation of Priests is a vital process for the effectiveness of their ministry. This was elaborated on by the twenty-first Ecumenical Council which talks of priestly formation as a dynamic affair. During the proceedings of this Council, a decree was issued on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1965 on priestly training (OP) that called on the Episcopal Conferences to come up with formation programs that address pastoral needs of the people in different vicinities using the four dimensions (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral) of priestly formation (Anello, 2014). For Priestly ministry to be effective, priests are to be updated from time to time. This fact is explained in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of priests 'Presbyterorum Ordinis' issued on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1965. According to this decree, priesthood is a configuration to the person of Jesus Christ; prophet, priest, and king (Confoy, 2008).

Priests as shepherds of God's people are called upon to give pastoral care to their flock by assembling and leading them to God. This role is a sign of the messianic activity of Christ among the people they serve. Therefore, they ought to be good role models and remain charitable in their mission (Willimon, 2002). As a shepherd of God's people, a priest encounters many opportunities, challenges, and temptations (Willimon, 2002). Pastoral formation plays a significant role in forming a priest who is reliable, relevant, and effective in his ministry.

Due to the dynamism of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and the significance of Priests as agents in the mission of the church, continual formation as per the changing mission circumstances is required (Philibert, 2011). To that effect, various regions have come up with ongoing formation programs. For example, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) came up with approaches to be adapted by different Catholic dioceses across the US

(Gillespie, 2007). In Africa, AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) bishops instituted the Ggaba Pastoral Institute (API) for the ongoing formation of priests in their region (Lusabe, (2017). In Kenya, the Murang'a Catholic Diocese established her sabbatical Centre which offers renewal courses for priests and religious men and women (Lusabe, 2017). This study looked at how effective ongoing formation is on the pastoral ministry in Bungoma Catholic diocese.

## The Pastoral Ministry of Priests

Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* outlined the building of Christ's Church as one of the special duties of a priest. He performs this task by helping the faithful attain the maturity of their calling. In this special ministry, he is to defend the marginalized in the society and provide special care for the religious and all his collaborators in the ministry (Schloeder, 1998).

Every priest is called and entrusted with the mission of taking care of the flock of God. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* brings out the pastoral role of each priest as a participation in the apostolic ministry of the church. They are called upon to imitate Christ the good shepherd (Paul II, 1992). To be effective in his functions, a priest should be connected with the people he serves; to know their needs, expectations, sufferings, and joys. Adequate information about the church's social teachings is an avoidable requirement for a priest to function well in pastoral ministry. Pastoral formation orient a priest to enter into a good working relationship with the people he serves. It forms him to exercise pastoral charity.

*Pastores Dabo Vobis* calls on priests to be good shepherds following the example of our Lord and Savior. He should be ready to provide servant leadership, form a good rapport with people, and be ready to sacrifice his life for the salvation of the people (Paul II, 1992). The unity of priests is paramount for the success of their mission. To foster communion, cultural structures that shape collegial priestly family is to be established in a diocese. Sometimes Presbyterate unity is threatened when priests start forming cliques among themselves.

Witnessing the Gospel through their way of life is required from each priest. According to *Ecclesia in Africa*, the "Church proclaims the Good News of Christ not only by the proclamation of the word which she has received from the Lord but also by the witness of life" (Catholic Church. Pope (1978-2005: John Paul II), & Paul II, 2003, April) *Ecclesia in Africa* points out Inculturation as an important component in the church's pastoral ministry. Though the Gospel message which the Church proclaims, supersedes the individual culture of people, it has to be lived by people in a particular culture. Therefore, priests as pastoral

agents need to be aware of the culture of the people they serve.

The Synod Fathers consider Inculturation not only as an important but also an urgent priority for effective evangelization. Further, the Synod Fathers proposed the family image as the model of the church in Africa. This model is the guiding idea in forming the pastoral agents of the church in Africa. This image (church as a family) portrays the communal character of the African culture; love and care, solidarity and cordial relationships, and dialogue and trust among the members of the church (Basera, 2021).

Pastoral charity is therefore significant in a priest's relationship with God and the people he serves. In *Caritas in Veritate* (Encyclical letter on integral human development in charity and truth, 2009), Benedict XVI states that "charity is at the heart of the church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teachings of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (VERITATE, 2009)

However, *Evangelii Gaudium* points out the increasing lack of pastoral charity among people involved in the work of Evangelization. This is visible in the lives of priests when they seek personal comfort and freedom to the extent of seeing their work as nonessential. This is contrary to their calling which has pastoral charity as a unique identity (Barrett, 2018). If pastoral charity lacks in the ministry of priests, the intended goal as shepherds is not achieved. Ongoing pastoral formation aims at updating and facilitating priests to carry on an ever-challenging pastoral work.

Despite being aware of her mandate, the church faces many challenges in the mission of evangelization. The impact of the church's mission is felt when real-life challenges of the people are addressed. This is underlined

in a systematic literature review study carried out in postcolonial Kenya that explored the theology of missions because of its tasks and prospects (Obiero, 2017). It found out that mission and evangelization remain superficial and ineffective in people's life if it fails to confront the current challenges facing the people. It was recommended that the focus of mission and evangelization is on the development and good of all human people. The church must consciously discern the signs of the time to remain relevant to its mission (Kaunda, & Hewitt, 2015).

### 3. Methodology

The parallel mixed-method research design was used during the study. In this design, the quantitative data was coded and analyzed separately using the quantitative method, and the qualitative data was duly coded and analyzed in its category (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Data collection for this study was carried out by use of questionnaires and interviews. The questions that were asked in both questionnaires and interviews aimed at examining the views of the sampled population both qualitatively and quantitatively. This study was carried out in Bungoma Catholic Diocese in Kenya. The diocese has a population of 1,484,885, with 64% being Catholics. It is composed of 4 deaneries, 40 parishes and 78 priests.

The study adopted a stratified sampling technique to categorize the target population into four strata according to the years they have served as priests. The strata were classified as follows; priests within the ordination bracket of zero to five years, those in the bracket of six to ten years, those between the bracket of eleven to twenty-four, and those between the bracket of twenty-five and above in the priestly ministry. In doing this, a balanced selection of respondents was achieved (Leech, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The Vicar-General, Diocesan Secretary, and Vocations Director of Bungoma Catholic Diocese were interviewed. The sample frame is presented in table 1

**Table 1: Sample Procedure**

Participants	Population	Sample	Percentage of Population in the Strata	Sampling Procedure
Priests 0-5 years stratum	12	10	83%	Simple Random
Priest 6-10 years stratum	9	7	78%	Simple Random
Priest 11-24 years stratum	27	23	85%	Simple Random
Priests above 25 years in ministry stratum	30	25	83%	Simple Random
Total	78	65	83%	

To select priests in a stratum, simple random sampling was done using lottery method sampling. The entire population of each stratum was numbered alphabetically, then a sample was chosen randomly by 'drawing from a hat'. A sample size of 65 priests was used. All ethical

requirements were observed during this research (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, B. (2018). The researcher acquired all required documents beforehand. These included: authorization letters from Tangaza University and a research permit from the National Commission for

Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The audience with the representatives of targeted participants was sort to explain the aim of the research. After receiving permission, the researcher interviewed the Vocations Director, Diocesan Secretary, and Vicar-General and distributed questionnaires to the sampled priests of Bungoma Catholic Diocese. The goal of the research was clarified during the distribution of the questionnaires and at the time of the interviews.

This chapter presents the results, discussion, and interpretations that focused on the objectives of the study. The main purpose of the study was to present the responses in a way of addressing the research objectives. The study was analyzed in a descriptive manner and findings were summarized as percentages and presented as figures and tables.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Questionnaire Return Rate

The return rate of the questionnaires administered to the priests of Bungoma Catholic Diocese is presented as a summary in table 2.

**Table 2: Questionnaire Return Rate**

Participant Category	Sample Size	Response Rate	Percentage
0-5 Years	10	9	90%
6-10 Years	7	6	85%
11-24 Years	23	18	78%
Above 25 Years	25	19	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>80%</b>

### Interview Response Rate

The response rate of the interviews administered to the Vicar-General, Diocesan Secretary, and Vocations Director of Bungoma Catholic Diocese is presented as a summary in table 3.

**Table 3: Interview Response Rate**

Participant Category	Sample Size	Response Rate	Percentage
Vicar-General	1	1	100%
Diocesan Secretary	1	1	100%
Vocations Director	1	1	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is illustrated in Table 3 that all the sampled people for the interview responded bringing to 100% participation.

in retreats and recollections. This demography will help in putting into perspective the findings and formulation of appropriate recommendations. A summary of the demographic details of the respondents is presented below.

### Demographic Information

The researcher collected information on the years in priestly ministry, academic status, and their participation

### Respondents' years in the priesthood

**Table 4 Respondents years in the priesthood**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0-5 Years	9	17.3
6-10 Years	6	11.5
11-24 Years	18	34.6
Above 25 Years	19	36.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 above shows that the researcher collected information on 52 priests comprising of the young priests, middle-aged and elderly priests. This helped the researcher to get experiences from all groups of priests bearing in mind the unique needs of each group.

### **Respondents' level of Education**

**Table 5: Respondents Level of Education**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gone for further studies	12	23.1
Not gone for further studies	40	76.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From Table 5, only 23.1% of priests have gone for further studies which are less than a quarter of the priests who responded. This shows the need for the Diocese to consider taking more priests for studies. Further studies is one aspect of the ongoing intellectual formation of priests. From the analysis of the qualitative data, the majority of the respondents indicated that the Diocese needs to take more priests for further studies in different fields.

### **The Effects of Pastoral formation on the Priestly ministry of service in Bungoma Catholic Diocese**

Building the Church of Christ is the key pastoral endeavor of all priests. Therefore, they are called upon to imitate

Christ the good shepherd (Paul II, 1992). The researcher sought to find out the influence ongoing formation has on the pastoral ministry of priests. The outcome was analyzed and presented in tables and figures.

### **Ongoing formation have greatly helped priests of the diocese in their pastoral ministry**

The researcher wanted to find out the great help pastoral formation has rendered on the pastoral ministry of priests. The majority of the respondents confirmed that the success of the pastoral ministry depends on the ongoing pastoral formation. The findings are presented in table 6.

**Table 6: Ongoing Formation and Pastoral Ministry**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	30	57.7
Agree	21	40.4
Not Sure	1	1.9
Total	52	100.0

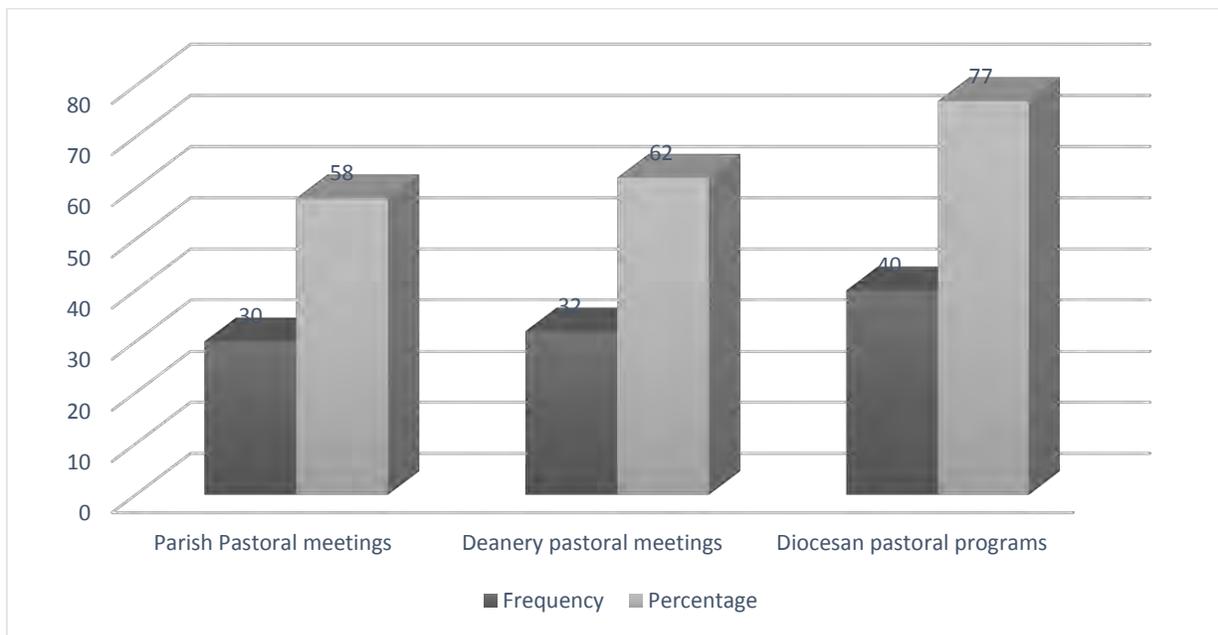
**Some of the pastoral formation programs that have majorly helped priests as pastoral agents in the diocese**

Pastoral formation aim at making priests efficient agents of the mission of Christ. The researcher purposed to know from the respondents some of the pastoral formation programs in the diocese by interviews and asking open-ended questions in the questionnaire. It was found out that, diocesan pastoral programs, deanery pastoral meetings, and parish pastoral programs are the basic programs in the diocese.

At the diocesan level, workshops and seminars are organized with themes on priests as pastoral agents. Among the topics handled are parish planning and administration, collaborative ministry, parish strategic management, and school apostolate. These formation programs have helped priests coordinate well in parish affairs. Some of the parishes now have strategic plans

which have made progress of these parishes to be achieved. There is also improved collaboration among the clergy and the laity that has led to the growth of faith. Apostolate to the schools is one of the effective ways of evangelizing young people. Priests are empowered for school apostolate through ongoing seminars on education.

Deanery pastoral meetings which are held quarterly have helped the priests as pastoral agents to know how to handle pastoral challenges in their ministry. It provides a forum where emerging pastoral issues are shared and a common approach is sought. Parish pastoral programs where the common pastoral activities of a given parish are organized have helped priests to become efficient agents of evangelization. Each parish has a monthly pastoral program that contains basic areas of parish apostolate. This is done by the priests working in a parish together with the catechists who are their collaborators in pastoral ministry. The data collected was coded and thematic analysis was done. The outcome is summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 Some Pastoral Formation Programs**

## Pastoral activities of the priests, have led to significant growth of the diocese

The researcher wanted to ascertain that the growth of the Diocese was as result of the pastoral activities of priests. The result is outlined in table 7.

**Table 7: Significant growth of the Diocese**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	37	71.2
Agree	15	28.8
Total	52	100.0

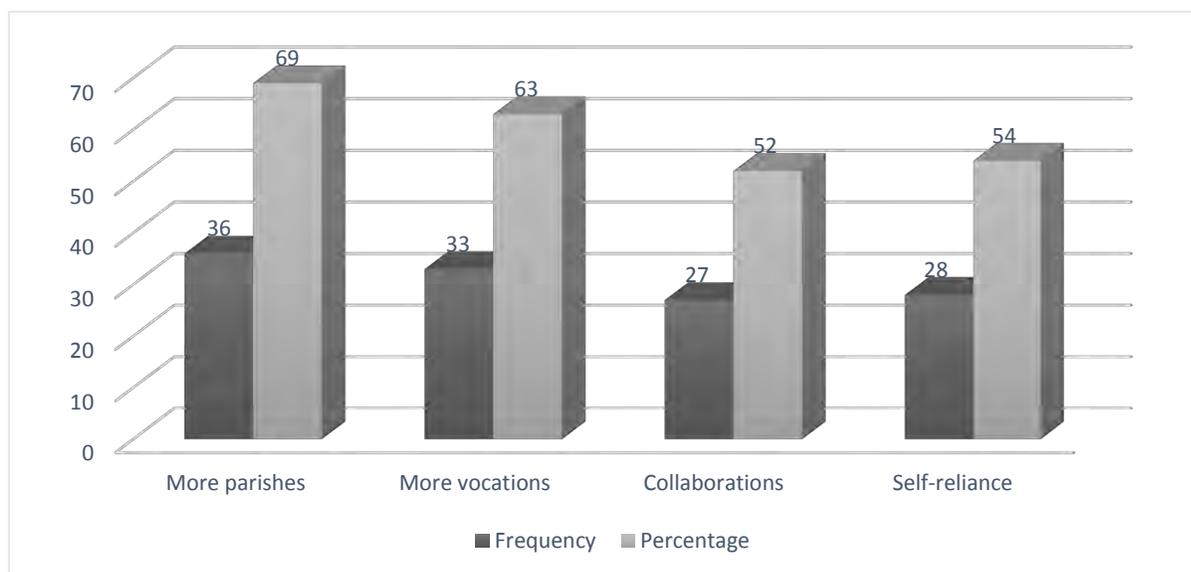
### Specific areas in which the diocese has grown as a result of the pastoral ministry of priests

Pastoral formation equips priests as agents of evangelization in the mission of building up the church of Christ. By employing interviews and open-ended questions, the researcher sought to find out specific areas in which the diocese has grown as a result of the pastoral ministry of priests. From the responses received, the diocese has grown in diverse ways due to the well-coordinated pastoral activities of priests.

It was noted by the majority of respondents that more parishes have been created in the diocese. For example, in a period of three years (2018-2021), seven parishes were created bringing the number of parishes from 35 to 42. These are; Myanga, Bulanda, Kanduyi, Cheptais, Bumala, Bumutiru, Kongoli. These parishes were created due to the increase in the number of the faithful.

It was observed that many young people are joining religious and priestly vocations from the diocese. Currently, the number of diocesan seminarians is 65 compared to 20 a few years ago. Therefore the respondents identified the increase in vocations as a sign of the growth of the diocese.

Self-reliance was greatly mentioned by the respondents as one of the major areas in which the diocese has grown. It was observed that many parishes have development projects going on which are funded by the parishioners without sourcing for foreign help. This shows that the local church has now grown and is owned by the people. Among the development projects are magnificent churches, expansion of church land, and building of schools among others. The researcher coded the data, employed thematic analysis to come up with the findings as presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Specific areas of growth in the Diocese**

## Pastoral charity is the motivating factor for every priest's pastoral activity

In this section, the study established that pastoral charity is the motivating factor for priests' pastoral activities. Table 8 presents this confirmation.

**Table 8: Pastoral Charity as the Motivating factor for priests' activities**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	14	26.9
Agree	35	67.3
Strongly Disagree	1	1.9
Not Sure	2	3.8
Total	52	100.0

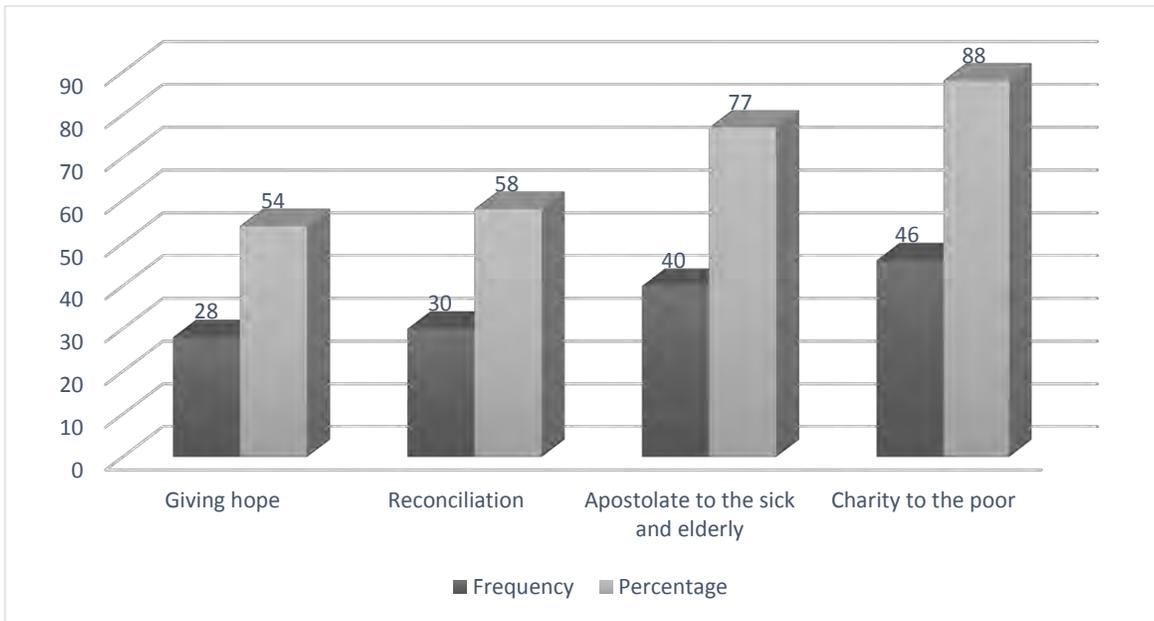
### Some of the common examples of pastoral charity that priests encounter daily in their ministry of service

Charity is a core value in priestly calling. According to *Caritas in Veritate*, "charity is at the heart of the church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teachings of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law." (Veritate, 2010). Pastoral charity summarizes all the engagements of priests as pastoral agents. Through interviews and open-ended questions, the researcher wanted to find out some of the common examples of pastoral charity encountered by priests of the diocese.

In their response, education of the poor children tops the list. The church pays fees for the bright and needy students to enable them to complete their studies. There is a fund in the diocese that pays fees for some students who cannot afford to pay. Some priests too sponsor students in school by paying for them. The reason behind this is to uplift the social status of the people because education changes lives.

Apostolate to the sick and the elderly is one of the daily engagements of the priests. They visit, pray, administer sacraments and give hope to the infirm. This is done in homes or hospitals. Some priests organize to pay for hospital bills of those who cannot afford to pay. In some parishes, there are programs for visiting and administering sacraments to old people who are unable to reach the church.

Reconciliation is another activity engaged by the priests. Many families that conflicted received peace after the reconciliation done by priests. They are agents of peace and reconciliation in the society experiencing conflict and hatred. The sorrowful and the suffering have always found hope and encouragement from the priests. Priests as agents of hope have brought comfort to many families experiencing sorrow and suffering. In the majority of parishes, funerals and burials are weekly. Comforting the sorrowful and burying the dead is one of the pastoral charity priests' encounters in their mission. The data collected from the interviews were coded and thematically analyzed. The result is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Examples of Pastoral Charity**

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The ongoing pastoral formation of priests was explored. The objectives of the research were: how pastoral formation have promoted the pastoral ministry; how pastoral activities of priests have contributed to the growth of the diocese; pastoral charity as a motivating factor for priests' pastoral ministry in Bungoma Catholic Diocese. The mixed method research design was used in this study. The findings of this study was analyzed, discussed, summarized and recommendations given.

Priests of the Diocese are doing well in their pastoral ministry due to the ongoing pastoral formation programs. Parish pastoral approaches, organizations, and management are some of the areas of pastoral formation programs. This has greatly helped priests in their pastoral ministry, as reflected in the responses of priests. The growth of the Diocese is majorly seen in the increase of the parishes as the effect of the pastoral ministry of priests. All the respondents agreed that the pastoral work of priests has played a great role in the significant growth of the Diocese in varied dimensions. The required motivation for priests' pastoral activities is charity. Their ministry and entire priestly life lead to charity. In their daily engagements, priests of the Diocese are confronted with varied situations that need their help. The success of the

pastoral ministry of priests is due to the programs on the ongoing pastoral formation. Through these programs, priests are formed to respond adequately to the needs of the people. However, the motivating factor for each priest is pastoral charity.

This study is significant in the ministry of priests in Bungoma Catholic Diocese because it has dealt with the practical aspects of the ongoing formation in a unique pastoral context. Its results serve as an evaluation of the entire ongoing formation process. Bearing in mind that priests are strategic agents in the church, the findings of this research is presented as a resource to the church in her evangelizing mission.

The four dimensions (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Pastoral) of formation, constitute the entire process of the ongoing priestly formation. However, these dimensions are interconnected in such a way that they make one unified formation process. Therefore, in dealing with each dimension, it is recommended that it is not done in isolation but connected with the other dimensions of formation. Each dimension is important and unique in the entire formation exercise. This study found out that the ongoing formation of priests influences their ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and service to the people of God. This study recommends a more stable pastoral formation programs anchored on pastoral charity.

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