



## The Bishop's Expectation and the Seminary's Responsibility: Integrating Psychological, Moral, Social, and Theological Assessment in Clergy Formation and Ordination

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the necessity for a cohesive framework for clergy formation that connects seminary education with episcopal requirements. It contends that proficient ordained ministry necessitates more than scholarly and theological expertise, highlighting the importance of comprehensive growth encompassing psychological stability, moral purity, social maturity, spiritual profundity, and pastoral leadership. Theological institutions have traditionally emphasised academic and doctrinal training; however, bishops and diocesan authorities are increasingly prioritising emotional resilience, ethical character, and relational skill in ordination decisions. The study emphasises that clergy formation has consistently entailed holistic personal development grounded in spiritual and moral reform, drawing on biblical, historical, and current views. Contemporary concerns, including psychological stress, ethical failures, relational difficulties, and swiftly evolving societal demands, expose substantial deficiencies in current formation theories. The document delineates essential partners in clergy formation, comprising seminaries, dioceses, psychiatric experts, parish communities, families, mentors, and spiritual directors, underscoring their collective obligation in cultivating well-rounded ministers. The research advocates for a comprehensive strategy encompassing ongoing review, organised mentorship, psychological assessment, leadership cultivation, and enhanced coordination between seminaries and dioceses. It contends that ordination ought to be predicated on comprehensive preparedness rather than solely on academic accomplishment. The conclusion emphasises that a cohesive formation system is crucial for cultivating clergy who are spiritually anchored, emotionally stable, morally reliable, socially adept, and pastorally effective in modern ministry settings.

**Keywords:** Bishop's Expectation, Seminary's Responsibility, Psychological, Moral, Social, Theological Assessment,

### 1. Introduction

Priest formation has been emphasised by the Church since the apostolic age. Quality of pastors called, trained, ordained, and commissioned determines church mission effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability. Theological schools teach clergy ministry, spirituality, character, and academics (Wang et al., 2023). Bishops and diocesans choose, approve, and ordain pastors. Theological institutions and dioceses share a mission, yet seminary formation and episcopal ministry competency standards diverge.

Theological schools emphasise scripture, doctrine, liturgy, and ministry. Seminarians preach, teach, administer sacraments, provide pastoral care, and defend the faith. Priests must be intellectually and theologically educated to lead their communities. Pastoral leadership demands more than theology in current ministry (Whittaker, 2025). Despite their academic credentials and theological knowledge, clergy may struggle with interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, ethical decision-

making, psychological stability, and moral accountability. Contemporary churches face cultural variety, technological innovation, globalisation, economic uncertainty, family instability, mental health issues, and public criticism of religious leaders. Pastors face loss, trauma, marital strife, youth growth, substance misuse, social injustice, and community difficulties (Kanco-Ackep, 2024). These realities require spiritually mature, intellectually qualified, emotionally knowledgeable, psychologically robust, socially capable, and ethically trustworthy preachers. Bishops desire personal growth and theological competence.

Recently, clergy have struggled with character, emotional maturity, psychological health, and social competency, not doctrine (Bennett, 2025). Moral transgression, power abuse, financial impropriety, interpersonal breakdowns, and emotional instability challenge current formation paradigms. Such situations impair church credibility, congregational trust, and ministry effectiveness (Thomas,

2024). No technique can eliminate human error, but comprehensive and integrated clergy development can lower risks and better prepare candidates for ministry issues.

Theological colleges and episcopal authorities cannot fix these issues. Seminaries educate, spiritualise, and prepare ministers, whereas dioceses understand pastoral needs and ecclesiastical aims (Cruz, 2026). These institutes must work with spiritual directors, psychologists, counsellors, parishes, mentors, families, and experienced clergy to train priests. Collaboration assesses candidates' strengths, weaknesses, risks, and growth needs.

Mental health is given priority in ministry training. Congregational issues, pastoral crises, administrative tasks, and personal sacrifices make pastoral work emotionally exhausting. Ministry candidates without emotional awareness, coping skills, and resilience risk fatigue, depression, anxiety, and poor leadership (Oluwalana, 2024). Thus, many faiths train priests in mental evaluation, counselling, and emotional intelligence. Together with spiritual formation, these therapies can improve ministerial effectiveness and well-being.

Moral and ethical leadership matters. Clergy shape communities. Influence requires humility, responsibility, honesty, and fidelity (Umeanolue & Nwoko, 2026). Moral formation requires Christian character, not just church norms. Candidates must be honest, kind, disciplined, accountable, respectful, and servant-led. Mentoring, community living, intentional character training, and supervised ministry shape these traits.

Social competence is another priest training prerequisite. Ministers must work successfully with varied populations because ministry is relational. Pastors must bridge generational, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic gaps to unite diverse congregations. Ministers need empathy, dispute resolution, collaboration, and cultural awareness (Bodie et al., 2023). Theological seminary must promote social awareness and interpersonal skills.

Developing clergy need spiritual formation. Personal God-contact and discipleship underpin Christian service. Spiritual growth improves academics, mental health, morality, and social abilities. Spiritual training involves prayer, worship, biblical reflection, vocational discernment, and Christlikeness (Pathak, 2025). Theological schools and dioceses must incorporate spiritual formation into ministry training.

Comprehensive pre-ordination evaluation methods have arisen as holistic clergy formation has grown. Assess academic accomplishment, spirituality, mental health, morality, social competence, leadership, and ministerial effectiveness. Multidimensional evaluation systems may help dioceses and seminaries assess ministry candidates better than academic transcripts or theology examinations. Developmental rather than punitive exams should assist candidates identify and receive formation support.

To form clergy, theological colleges, bishops, diocesan authorities, and others must collaborate (Richardson, 2024). An integrated framework for clergy candidates' psychological, moral, social, spiritual, and academic

growth should balance seminary and episcopal needs. The Church can better educate future clergy for modern ministry while preserving pastoral leadership's integrity, efficacy, and credibility by using a comprehensive approach to formation.

This paper affects Church mission beyond clergy candidates. Healthy, competent, and well-formed clergy foster congregational health, evangelism, leadership, and ministry sustainability. However, clergy formation issues affect congregations, dioceses, and Christian witness (ADEREMOLU et al., 2026a). Thus, seminary-diocese ties are crucial to the Church's global outreach, not only an institutional concern.

## 2. Theological and Ecclesiastical Foundations of Clergy Formation

Church history and Scripture shape clerics (Haynes, 2023). God trained leaders via spiritual growth, moral discipline, communal accountability, and practical service before seminaries and theology. Christianity has traditionally taught that ministry is a calling to be discerned, nurtured, and polished in the community. The Church understands clergy formation through its theological and ecclesiastical foundations.

### *Bible-Based Ministerial Formation*

The Bible shows intentional leadership formation many times. Old Testament God-called persons were usually ready for duty (DININNY, 2023). Moses spent years in Midian before leading the Israelites out of Egypt. He gained humility, patience, endurance, and God-dependence. He learned leadership via spiritual and practical experiences. Joshua learnt leadership from Moses through observation, interaction, and increased responsibility.

The prophetic tradition likewise values formation (Wasman et al., 2023). Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel prepared for ministry. Their lives show instruction, spiritual growth, character development, and experience learning. Prophetic ministry required emotional strength, moral courage, and unwavering loyalty to God's goals in difficult times. These examples demonstrate that divine calling needed character growth and purposeful preparation. Christ's mission best illustrates clergy formation in the Bible. Jesus developed His disciples, not just taught doctrine. His three-year adventure comprised living, travelling, teaching, correcting, challenging, and mentoring. Through instruction, prayer, service, observation, and practice, the disciples learned doctrine, spirituality, compassion, leadership, and ministry. Jesus saw His disciples' knowledge and development. He showed holistic leadership by addressing their issues, ambitions, prejudices, misconceptions, and moral failings.

Apostolic churches emphasised purposeful formation. Paul mentored Timothy and Titus as a missionary. His pastoral letters highlight doctrine, morality, family, emotional maturity, and leadership. Paul advised Timothy to guard his life and teachings, prioritising character and theology development. Morality, relationship health, self-control, reputation, and spiritual progress are more important than intellect for church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus

1:5–9.

These biblical examples show that service must be spiritual, moral, social, and practical. Holistic formation strategies in modern churches follow biblical leadership training. Scripture constantly portrays service as a calling that needs personal development, not theology.

### ***Historical Development of Seminary Training***

Church-sponsored theology education. Mentorship and apprenticeship created early Church priests (Aneke, 2025). Church leaders, bishops, and elders trained ministers. The notion includes personal discipleship, theological education, spiritual formation, and ministry. Church leaders evaluated candidates' character, commitment, and ministry fit throughout time. Education standardised as Christianity spread. Alexandria and Antioch clergy and laity catechetical schools taught theology (Kyriacou, 2023). These schools sought biblical knowledge and spirituality. Academics grew, but faith and community remained vital. Cathedrals and monasteries trained clergy in the Middle Ages (Uyen, 2023). Monasteries were organised, prayerful, academic, communal, and moral. Though efficient, these schools understood spiritual leadership required more than academic preparation. Formation needs lifelong virtue and devotion (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025). Mediaeval universities advanced theology. Oxford and Paris became important theological colleges. Academic theology sometimes hampered learning and ministry. Pastors sometimes thought theology education was losing pastoral relevance.

The Protestant Reformation changed ministerial training. Reformers prioritised biblical knowledge, expertise, and pastoral care. Seminaries teach clerical skills (Laurent, 2022). Academic, spiritual, and practical training were these schools' goals. Different theologies balanced intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral formation. Pastoral counselling, leadership, missiology, ethics, psychology, and social sciences are taught in seminaries and theological colleges (Seminary, 2024). These revisions reflect that ministry requires diverse skills in different social circumstances. These advances have not resolved the academic rigour and personal formation argument.

### ***Episcopal Expectations in the Ordination Process***

Bishops preserve ordained ministry in many Christian traditions. An ordinand is publicly declared fit for Church service (Gibaut, 2024). Therefore, bishops must thoroughly analyse applicants before granting ecclesiastical authority and duty. Episcopal principles transcend academia (Francis et al., 2024). Bishops value theological understanding, spiritual development, emotional stability, moral purity, pastoral sensitivity, and leadership. The realities of diocesan service determine these aspirations. Bishops witness clerical tensions and recognise theology does not guarantee pastoral leadership.

Bishops seek vocation and Church mission commitment. Ordained ministry requires sacrifice, accountability, and service. They must be humble, devoted, and ready to serve God's people (LOVELL, 2025). Bishops, spiritual directors,

mentors, and formation institutes aid vocation discernment. Episcopal examinations require morality. Priests must be honest because their communities trust them. Bishops evaluate applicants' social, financial, ethical, and community standing (Koggani, 2025). Character may matter more than academic performance since integrity issues might affect ministry and public trust in the Church. Bishops also respect mental health. Pastoral problems, congregational conflicts, administrative tasks, and personal obligations make modern ministry emotionally draining (Taylor, 2025). Ministry candidates without self-awareness or emotional resilience may struggle. Therefore, several dioceses use psychiatric tests, therapy, and wellness programs for formation and ordination. These episcopal aims emphasise the need for non-academic applicant evaluation. Seminary-episcopal collaboration on ordained ministry requirements reduces the gap.

### ***The Concept of Holistic Formation in Christian Ministry***

Service-oriented holistic formation develops the full individual (Surbakti et al., 2024). It acknowledges that clergy leadership requires intellectual, spiritual, moral, social, emotional, and practical integration. Overall growth is supported by holistic formation. Humans are integrated creatures made in God's image in Christian holistic formation. Spiritual growth impacts moral, intellectual, emotional, and social well-being. Syaffii & Azhari (2025) say all dimensions support each other. Weakness may impede ministerial effectiveness.

Jesus' ministry showed insight, compassion, honesty, relationship skill, spiritual authority, and practical service. A holistic formation follows. Christian leadership training promotes Christlikeness, service, and knowledge (Magezi & Madimutsa, 2023). Educational initiatives must target personal and professional growth.

Holism includes classroom teaching, spiritual disciplines, supervised ministry, mentoring, psychological help, community engagement, and leadership development. Ministry applicants are prepared for various roles. For effective formation, educators, clergy, bishops, counsellors, and church communities must collaborate.

### ***The Role of the Church in Nurturing Future Clergy***

While seminaries and dioceses are important, the Church generates leaders. Most churches identify, promote, and support vocational callings. Families, mentors, youth leaders, pastors, and parishioners impact ministers' spiritual journeys (Bolden, 2025). Church examines ministerial gifts. Through teaching, worship leadership, evangelism, pastoral care, and community service, applicants acquire experience and feedback. These experiences highlight ministry's benefits and challenges.

Accountability helps the Church form well. Candidates develop integrity through mentorship, peer, spiritual director, and congregational leadership (Beagle, 2026). Christian leadership grows via community duty. Churches must develop well-rounded pastors as social and pastoral issues become more complex. Leadership training for Christian mission must be academic, spiritual, moral, social,

and psychological (Mataruka, 2025). To achieve this, clergy candidate discernment, preparation, and ordination parties must coordinate.

### **3. Dimensions of Holistic Clergy Development**

Not merely theological knowledge or qualifications, ordained ministry depends on personal growth (Wang et al., 2023). Modern ministry leaders must read Scripture, encourage spiritual growth, negotiate complex relationships, exercise ethical judgement, manage emotional stress, and lead pastorally. These obligations need a multifaceted personal and professional development process. Thus, holistic clergy formation balances academic, spiritual, moral, social, psychological, and leadership growth. Each dimension affects ministerial efficacy, and neglecting one can impair pastoral service quality.

#### ***Academic and Theological Competence***

Theological and academic competence underpin priest formation. Pastors must know Scripture, theology, church history, ethics, liturgy, pastoral practice, and ecclesiastical traditions. Clergy may struggle to teach, defend Christian theology, address modern theological issues, and lead congregations without intellectual preparation (Dilley, 2023). Candidates learn God's revelation and Christian history through theology. Biblical languages, systematic theology, hermeneutics, church history, and practical ministry teach clerical leadership. Ministers learn to appropriately interpret Scripture, analyse theology, and accurately communicate Christian values in various situations.

Academic competence extends beyond knowledge. Clergy must learn to critically assess complex situations, analyse multiple perspectives, and apply theological teachings to modern issues (Kang et al., 2025). Ministries discuss ethics, social justice, family life, technology, politics, and cultural change. Non-analytical clergy may struggle to advise. Theological competence must reflect pastoral reality. Academic talent without pastoral application is impressive but useless (Pestalozzi, 2022). Theological schools must combine ministry and study. Encourage students to apply classroom learning to church, community, and pastoral care. However, academic excellence does not guarantee ministerial effectiveness. History has seen outstanding leaders thwarted by character, emotional maturity, or relationships. Thus, intellectual competency is crucial to complete development.

#### ***Spiritual Formation and Ministerial Vocation***

The core of Christian service is spirituality. Spiritual formation is ongoing growth toward God and Christ. Without spiritual growth, theological and ministry skills may lack authenticity, depth, and transformation (Saghoa et al., 2025). Spiritual formation begins when service is seen as a calling, not a job. Ordination candidates must demonstrate vocational discernment and a genuine desire for ministry based on God's call. Praying, introspecting, spiritual guidance, mentoring, and communal affirmation are discernment practices.

Spiritual practices are crucial to clergy formation. Spirituality and God-relationship are fostered via prayer, fasting, Scripture meditation, worship, silence, confession, and service. These disciplines educate candidates ministry-long spiritual habits (Turner, 2023). Spiritual growth is challenging to integrate into intellectual accomplishment in theology education. Schoolwork, exams, and ministerial obligations can distract students from spiritual growth. Ministry thrives on spirituality. Intellectually successful clergy without a spiritual life may burn out, discourage, or perform poorly. Spiritual formation fosters humility, compassion, patience, faithfulness, self-control, forgiveness, and love (Gulo & Sihombing, 2025). These Christ-like attributes form clerical leadership. Churches choose Christian leaders over theologians. Spiritual formation strengthens resilience in difficult situations. Ministry usually involves criticism, disappointment, strife, and sadness. A deep spiritual life gives clergy faith, understanding, and perseverance to overcome such challenges.

#### ***Moral Integrity and Ethical Leadership***

Christian ministry's credibility depends on ministers' morality (Kretzschmar, 2023). Priests' powerful positions require ethics. Comprehensive clergy growth requires moral formation. Morality is consistency in values, beliefs, and actions. Must be honest, accountable, trustworthy, self-disciplined, and ethical. Righteous clerics inspire confidence and respect. But unethical behaviour can hurt congregations, public trust, and the Church's witness (McNamara, 2024).

Ministry nowadays raises ethical difficulties. Finance, secrecy, sexual boundaries, power dynamics, pastoral counselling, and organisational leadership may affect clergy. Character and morality, not merely ethics, are needed to solve these issues (Lee, 2025). Leaders develop ethics through contemplation, mentoring, accountability, and experience. Candidates should evaluate their motives, weaknesses, and integrity-promoting habits. Students apply ethical theories in real-world circumstances with experienced mentors in supervised ministry.

Moral development requires responsibility structures. No one is immune to temptation or error. Accountability partnerships promote ethical behaviour and personal growth (Peteet et al., 2023). Seminaries and dioceses should encourage honesty, transparency, and accountability. Ethical leaders use power properly. Spiritual leaders should empower and serve without self-interest. Christ said that such leadership represents God's kingdom's splendour from helping others.

#### ***Social Maturity and Interpersonal Relationships***

Many clergy have relationships with people, families, congregations, leaders, and organisations. Effective ministry involves social maturity and interpersonal skills. Social maturity involves positive interactions. Includes empathy, communication, emotional awareness, cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, and diversity. These attributes help clergy build vibrant communities and partnerships. Effective communication matters. Ministers

must communicate clearly in preaching, teaching, counselling, administration, and daily interactions (Wallander, 2023). They must also listen and adequately address others' concerns. Poor communication can cause misunderstandings, conflicts, and distrust.

Diverse congregations are typical. Age, culture, education, social status, and personal experiences affect ministry opportunities and obstacles. Socially evolved clergy value diversity and foster spiritual harmony and respect.

Interpersonal competency includes conflict management. Every institution, including churches, disagrees. Many clergy mediate, resolve, and reconcile. These tasks require patience, wisdom, emotional intelligence, and communication.

Setting and maintaining healthy limits is social maturity. Ministers must balance professionalism, compassion, impartiality, and self-care (Cochran, 2026). Lack of boundaries can generate role confusion, emotional exhaustion, and ethical concerns. Practical experience, mentoring, group contacts, and supervised ministry enhance social competency. Classroom education cannot prepare candidates for ministry's relational challenges.

#### ***Psychological Health and Emotional Resilience***

Psychological wellness is important in priest training. Ministry offers misery, strife, pain, criticism, loneliness, and high expectations. Pressures may affect psychologically vulnerable clergy. Mental health comprises emotional stability, self-awareness, coping skills, flexibility, and well-being (Moore, 2026). Managing challenges constructively while maintaining personal effectiveness is what it entails. Self-awareness is essential in ministry. Priests can lead and avoid toxic behaviour by understanding their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, goals, and vulnerabilities. Ministers can recognise improvement areas and seek support with self-awareness.

Ministerial effectiveness requires emotional intelligence. Recognition, understanding, management, and proper response to others' emotions are included. Ministers with high emotional intelligence interact, resolve conflicts, and give compassionate pastoral care (Olabode, 2025). A high rate of clergy burnout highlights psychological resilience. Extended work hours, high ambitions, minimal support, and human suffering can induce emotional exhaustion. Thus, formation programmes should educate stress management, self-care, work-life balance, and mental health. Psychological evaluations and counselling aid development. These resources should be used to grow individually and ministerially, not as weakness (Shaw, 2022). Integrating psychological care improves clergy health and ministry.

#### ***Leadership and Pastoral Competence***

Third, holistic clergy formation includes leadership and pastoral skills. Church leaders manage resources, coordinate events, mentor others, and provide spiritual leadership. Beyond theology and character, these roles require other skills.

Leaders need vision, inspiration, decision-making, change management, and organisational success (Shaw, 2022). Complex churches require strategic thinking and adaptability. Ministers must lead responsibly in stable and fast-changing contexts. Pastoral competence includes community caregiving skills. This includes preaching, teaching, counselling, visiting, dispute resolution, discipleship, evangelism, and community engagement. Pastoral care requires empathy and ability (Stoddart, 2023). Service, not power, drives Christian ministry leadership. Stewardship, sacrifice, and humility are required of Christian leaders. Authority comes from position, integrity, credibility, and faithfulness.

Practical ministry experience is crucial to leadership. Supervised placements, internships, parish assignments, and mentoring allow candidates to apply theory. Activities like this link classroom learning to ministry.

Leadership and pastoral skills integrate all formation. Academic knowledge informs decisions, spiritual maturity inspires, moral integrity establishes credibility, social competence strengthens relationships, and psychological health sustains effectiveness (Surbakti et al., 2024). These traits enable clergy serve the modern Church honestly and successfully. Thus, holistic clergy growth requires intentional attention to these interconnected areas. Dioceses, seminaries, and other stakeholders must create balanced ministerial preparation structures. The Church must equip leaders for 21st-century ministry's problems using comprehensive techniques.

#### **4. Challenges in Contemporary Clergy Formation**

Theological education and ministerial training have improved, but clergy formation is still tough. These challenges result from changing social realities, institutional limits, pastoral expectations, and formation system deficiencies. Seminaries and dioceses train qualified pastors, but modern ministry is complex and demands innovative methods. Some clergy's moral, psychological, leadership, and relationship concerns indicate formation needs improvement. These challenges must be understood to improve clergy preparation and inclusion.

#### ***Overemphasis on Academic Achievement***

Clerics often worry about prioritising academic excellence above ministerial development. Theological colleges value education. Assessments include exams, research, classroom participation, and theology (Mukhibat et al., 2024). Thus, intellectual success is usually most obvious.

Prioritising intellect over academic rigour may influence formation. Students may concentrate academics over spiritual, emotional, character, and interpersonal growth. Without proper examination, academically gifted applicants may be considered for ministry.

The risk of imbalance exists for academically accomplished clergy who need emotional intelligence, pastoral sensitivity, ethical discernment, or relationship aptitude (Kujur, 2025). Ministry typically involves non-theological situations. Pastoral counselling, conflict

mediation, crisis intervention, and congregational leadership require more than academic skills (Oluwalana, 2024).

Academic success might hide personal concerns. Academically gifted students may have emotional, character, or interpersonal challenges (He et al., 2022). If formation approaches emphasise academic metrics, these issues may not be addressed until ordination. Theological schools must mix academics with human growth. Not only academic performance should be evaluated for ministerial preparedness.

### ***Inadequate Psychological Screening and Support***

Additionally, clergy formation programs neglect psychological evaluation and emotional well-being (Davis, 2023). Theological education emphasises spiritual and intellectual growth, anticipating psychological well-being. However, new research and ministerial experience suggest intentional support for emotional wellbeing.

Many theological candidates have suffered trauma, family dysfunction, sadness, unresolved conflicts, or emotional wounds. These events may affect leadership, relationships, and emotions, but they do not preclude ministry. Without help, psychological issues might hamper ministerial performance.

Ministry can be emotionally draining (Marambi, 2022). Priests experience grief, criticism, loss, and great expectations. These situations require resilience, self-awareness, and healthy coping. Lacking these qualities can cause tiredness, anxiety, despair, and poor leadership. Some stigmas limit open discussion of mental health issues. Candidates may fear appearing weak or inadequate by seeking help. Important issues may be ignored until they worsen.

Lack of adequate psychiatric assessment during ordination is another issue. Academic credentials, theology examinations, and spiritual evaluations may overshadow psychological preparedness. Psychologically troubled people may be ordained due to this gap. For these difficulties, formation programs should incorporate psychiatric assessments, counselling, wellness education, and emotional resilience training. These methods can boost clergy health and ministry longevity.

### ***Moral and Ethical Failures Among Clergy***

Clerical moral and ethical breaches plague the Church (Mescher, 2023). Many Christian groups are concerned about sexual misbehaviour, financial impropriety, authority abuse, dishonesty, and other unethical behaviour. These mistakes damage individuals affected and the Church's reputation. Causes of ethical failures are complex. Character formation deficiencies can impair decision-making. Others may have low responsibility, unresolved personal issues, stress, or authority abuse. Such events underscore the importance of purposeful moral formation in priest training, regardless of source.

It's dangerous to assume theology leads to ethics. Theological education teaches morality but not integrity. (Purwaningsih, 2024) Character development requires perseverance, self-reflection, accountability, and ethics. Another problem is influence-related temptation. Local clergy often shape congregational resources, connections, and decisions. Absence of morality and accountability allows authority abuse.

The media and technology have made religious leaders increasingly ethically questionable (Papakostas, 2025). Modern churchgoers want clerical accountability and transparency. Seminaries and dioceses must promote ethical formation alongside academic and theological education. Morality requires more than schooling. Candidates must have ethical decision-making, thoughtful talks, mentoring, and accountability relationships to promote integrity and responsible leadership.

### ***Social and Relational Deficiencies in Ministry***

Social skills and connections are another clergy formation issue. Ministry requires communication, trust-building, conflict management, and diverse group collaboration. Some clergy struggle with theology and spirituality despite their expertise. Social deficiencies vary (Ulu Aydin et al., 2026). Ministers may struggle to communicate with various congregation members from different cultures, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some find teamwork, dispute resolution, and professional boundaries difficult. Challenges like these might hinder ministry and produce congregational discontent. Diversity in current culture makes relationship competency increasingly crucial. Most clergy serve varied cultures, languages, education, politics, and life experiences. Ministry in such contexts requires empathy, cultural awareness, flexibility, and good interpersonal skills. Growing digital communication creates problems. Technology can enhance ministry but negatively impact interpersonal skills (Groce, 2023). Digital candidates may need support developing pastoral and community leadership relationships. Formation programs may overlook social development, expecting ministry to teach interpersonal skills. Although practical experience is crucial, tailored training and mentoring can strengthen relationships. Addressing social deficits requires collaboration, community living, supervised ministry, group learning, and constructive feedback. Experiences like these teach pastoral leadership relational skills.

### ***Disconnect Between Seminary Assessment and Diocesan Expectations***

Priest formation is plagued by seminary evaluations not meeting diocesan expectations (Schuth). However, theological colleges and dioceses may evaluate candidates differently to train successful pastors. Seminaries promote academics, classroom participation, theology, and education. Indicators of intellectual preparedness may not accurately reflect ministerial readiness.

Bishops and diocesan leaders prioritise pastoral sensitivity, emotional growth, leadership, morality, and interpersonal skills (ADEREMOLU et al., 2026b). Church leadership and parish ministry experience inform these expectations.

Insufficient seminary-diocese communication might lead to candidate evaluation discrepancies. A gifted student may struggle in parish ministry if other formation areas are inadequate. Despite ministerial promise, pastoral talent may fail academically.

This gap may frustrate both institutions. Bishops and theological educators may question whether seminaries are adequately preparing candidates for ministry, and diocesan standards may be unclear. Seminaries and dioceses must cooperate more. Regular communication, shared evaluation frameworks, coordinated formation initiatives, and collaborative assessment can help formation programs meet ordained ministry objectives (Nugent, 2025).

### **Emerging Societal and Pastoral Challenges**

Most difficult is modern ministry's fast-changing environment. Pastoral conditions have changed dramatically for modern clergy. Globalisation, technology, cultural values, economic volatility, political division, and mental health challenges have changed ministry (Neugebauer & Vokoun, 2024). Demographic shifts, institutional distrust, and religious commitment are affecting many churches. Thus, clergy must rethink evangelism, discipleship, leadership, and community engagement. Traditional formation models may not prepare candidates for changes.

Society prioritises mental health. Pastors see people with anxiety, depression, addiction, trauma, loneliness, and more. Pastoral care requires compassion, mental health understanding, and referrals. Social media increases opportunities and challenges. Ministers must handle online ethics, accountability, communication, and information management. These roles require talents not taught in ministerial training.

Increasing religious plurality causes issues (Mulyana, 2023). Many clergy have different worldviews. Effective Christian ministry requires respectful engagement with people of diverse religions and cultures. Leadership now involves complex ethical challenges related to technology, family, social justice, environmental stewardship, and identity (Stahl & Eke, 2024). Addressing these issues requires theological and practical discernment. Because of rapid social change, clergy formation cannot rely solely on conventional knowledge and practices. For unexpected and changing situations, formation programs must educate candidates adaptation, critical thinking, emotional resilience, and leadership.

### **5. Stakeholders and Their Responsibilities in Clergy Formation**

Seminaries and bishops alone cannot form clergy (Illathuparampil, 2023). Modern ministry is complicated and involves collaboration from numerous stakeholders with different viewpoints, experience, resources, and support. Holistic priest formation works best when theological institutes, diocesan authorities, psychiatric specialists, parish communities, families, mentors, and experienced clergy collaborate. Each stakeholder influences ordained ministry candidates' academic, spiritual,

moral, social, psychological, and pastoral development. Collaboration among these formation participants is crucial to future church leadership.

### **Theological Schools**

Theological colleges are essential to clergy formation because they offer structured education, spiritual mentoring, ministry training, and personal growth. Seminaries are the fundamental academic and practical preparation for ministry. Theological schools prioritise academics. Candidates must know Scripture, theology, church history, ethics, liturgy, pastoral care, and mission (Sims, 2026). This academic foundation trains clerics to teach, preach, defend Christian doctrine, and lead.

Religious schools must recognise their duty goes beyond academics. Formation, not simply instruction, transforms (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). Spiritual, character, emotional, and relational growth should be intentional at seminaries. School must contain spiritual disciplines, mentorship, pastoral experiences, and community life. Students admire professors, administrators, chaplains, and formation directors. They mentor and model outside the classroom. Candidates often learn more from their formators' lives and attitudes than from formal training. Formators must demonstrate the ethics, honesty, and devotion expected of clerics.

Theological institutions must identify candidate development needs. Examination, observation, and dialogue in seminaries can help students identify strengths, rectify weaknesses, and establish ministry habits. This method develops well-rounded clergy. Seminaries should consult with diocesan authorities to update formation programs for modern ministry. Collaboration boosts clergy readiness (Kpalam et al., 2026).

### **Bishops and Diocesan Authorities**

Because bishops and diocesan authorities select, approve, and ordain ministers, they are uniquely important to clergy formation. Beyond administrative monitoring, they offer spiritual, vocational, pastoral, and ministerial fitness reviews.

One of bishops' key duties is vocation discernment (LOVELL, 2025). Others want ministry but aren't ordained. Bishops evaluate applicants' vocation, devotion, and ministry fitness through interviews, talks, observations, and ongoing encounters. The discernment process prevents premature or unsuitable ordination for the individual and Church. Bishops safeguard ministerial standards. Candidates must demonstrate theological knowledge, spiritual growth, morality, emotional stability, and pastoral competence for leadership. Bishops know what makes a good minister from working with clergy and congregations. Another duty is to maintain theological partnerships. Bishops should explain diocesan expectations and assess new priests. Seminaries customise pastoral formation programs through communication. Practical ministry, internships, supervised placements, and diocesan mentoring aid formation (Mdabuko et al., 2025). These experiences help candidates understand parish life and

apply theory to ministry. Bishops encourage accountability. They regularly meet with candidates and clerics to promote accountability, openness, and ethics. Oversight enhances church leadership and mission.

### ***Psychological and Counseling Professionals***

The increased importance of mental health and emotional well-being in ministry promotes psychologists and counsellors in clergy formation (Paul, 2025). These professionals bring personal development to theological and spiritual formation that ministerial training neglects. Psychologists assess personality, emotional development, interpersonal functioning, stress management, and mental health. These reviews can highlight ministerial strengths and weaknesses that may hinder effectiveness. These assessments should be used for development, not screening.

Counsellors and psychologists can aid candidates with emotional, familial, or career concerns. Significant change, self-examination, and personal growth are needed for formation. Professional help helps applicants overcome these barriers. Mental health awareness education is essential (Ahad et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023). Pastors witness more depressed, anxious, addicted, traumatised, and mentally ill people. Candidates can understand these issues and offer pastoral solutions with mental health training.

Psychologists recommend self-care and resiliency. Ministry can be emotionally draining, thus applicants should study stress management, coping, and health (Boadi & Starr, 2023). Preparedness reduces ministry fatigue and increases sustainability. Psychological understanding in priest preparation should enhance spiritual guidance, personal growth, and pastoral readiness.

### ***Parish Communities and Lay Leaders***

Priest formation relies on parish communities, which are often disregarded. Ministers serve God's people and develop, test, and perfect their gifts in congregations (Von Allmen, 2024). Parishioners teach candidates ministry. Working with individuals and families gives candidates pastoral care, teaching, leadership, and community engagement experience. These activities relate classroom learning to pastoral care.

Lay leaders reveal important clerical qualities. They may offer advice on communication, relational competency, leadership, and pastoral sensitivity because they work with pastors in congregations. Their observations can improve assessment and provide non-academic insights.

Parish communities motivate and hold people accountable. Supportive congregations can help vocational development by affirming gifts, providing service, and offering advice (Magezi & Nanthambwe, 2022). Community interactions reveal strengths and weaknesses. Lay leaders in development highlight a vital theological principle: the Church owns ministry, not simply ordained persons. Thus, clerical training should prioritise lay perspectives.

Priests are influenced by families and mentors for years. Family shapes values, beliefs, character, and faith before

seminary (Okafor & Olua). Families are essential to formation. Ministerial training can benefit from strong family relationships, encouragement, accountability, and stability. A candidate's family might disclose their personality, strengths, habits, and growth areas. Their opinions can guide career and personal growth.

Family concerns can also shape candidates. Unresolved conflicts, unstable relationships, and past traumas might hinder ministerial performance and well-being (Hydinger et al., 2024). Understanding family dynamics helps formation programs guide families. Mentors matter too. Successful mentors offer guidance, accountability, and knowledge from personal experience. They counsel applicants on ministry, personal growth, and career issues. Mentorship gives future clergy insights not available in school.

Mentors show leadership, spirituality, ethics, and pastoral care (Hilton, 2024). Senior leaders demonstrate theoretical concepts to new hires. This learning improves personal and professional growth. Mentoring helps with training and relationships. Trusting relationships offer open discussions about strengths, weaknesses, worries, goals, and challenges. These interactions often lead to deeper growth than formal education.

### ***Clergy Role Models and Spiritual Directors***

Experienced clergy and spiritual directors help candidates develop spiritually and ministerially. Their contributions matter because they indicate ordained ministry. Theological understanding, spiritual development, pastoral competence, and personal integrity are integrated into priest role models' ministry. By watching and interacting, candidates learn preaching, leadership, pastoral care, conflict management, and congregational service. Ministers gain confidence and identity from positive role models.

But role models' responses to successes and disappointments shape formation (Dean, 2023). Candidates might observe how experienced clergy handle criticism, disappointment, ethics, and personal challenges. These observations balance ministry understandings. Spiritual directors provide further assistance. They want to help applicants find God and identify Him in their lives. Through prayer, listening, and coaching, spiritual directors assist people gain spiritual awareness, vocational clarity, and authenticity (Miles & Marburg, 2025). Because action and obligation can drive ministry, spiritual directors are essential. Spiritual directors help candidates stay religious and avoid professionalisation. They inspire personal, social, and spiritual growth.

Spiritual direction lets you honestly discuss doubts, issues, dreams, and goals. These conversations improve self-awareness and spirituality. Candidates clarify vocation, identity, and purpose with regular spiritual direction. Most importantly, clergy role models and spiritual directors assist pastors mature spiritually and competently (Kabore, 2025). All parties must collaborate for clergy formation to succeed. Seminaries provide academic and developmental structures, bishops oversee and discern, psychological

professionals provide emotional well-being expertise, parish communities provide practical ministry contexts, families and mentors support and guide, and experienced clergy and spiritual directors nurture personal and spiritual growth. When these stakeholders work together, they create a comprehensive formation environment that produces academically capable, spiritually mature, morally accountable, socially competent, psychologically healthy, and pastorally successful priest.

## 6. Towards an Integrated Framework for Clergy Formation and Ordination

Due to clergy training issues and bishops, theological institutes, congregations, and society's needs, a more comprehensive and integrated ministerial preparation framework is needed. A framework that goes beyond academic education, spiritual formation, psychological welfare, moral development, and pastoral competence is needed (Muñoz-García, 2025). It should understand that excellent clergy development demands whole-person growth in a supportive, accountable, assessing, and mentoring environment. Seminary training and episcopal requirements are linked to prepare candidates for modern ministry.

An interconnected framework needs cooperation. Seminaries, dioceses, bishops, mentors, spiritual directors, psychologists, congregations, and families form clergy (Levchenko, 2026). No organization has the resources to examine and improve all ministerial preparation aspects.

For collaborative formation, stakeholders must express goals, expectations, duties, and evaluation standards. Seminaries and dioceses should discuss candidate progress, formation priorities, and emerging concerns. Misunderstandings and inconsistent decision-making are avoided with such communication. Also important is intentionality. It takes effort to form holistically. This requires careful planning, structured programming, ongoing evaluation, and coordinated therapies. Every stage of training should produce competent, healthy, and faithful ministers (Gamble, 2025). Transparency counts too. Candidates should know ordained service expectations and assessment standards. For informed ministerial readiness decisions, stakeholders should share vital information, grace and development must underpin collaboration, not punishment and isolation. Deficits are identified and applicants mature and improve. Formation should foster personal growth and ordination.

### Comprehensive Candidate Assessment Models

One of the most significant features of an integrated framework is the use of comprehensive assessment models. Traditional approaches often focus heavily on academic performance and theological knowledge. While these remain important, they do not provide a complete picture of ministerial readiness.

A holistic assessment model should evaluate candidates across multiple dimensions, including:

- i. Academic and theological competence

- ii. Spiritual maturity
- iii. Moral character and ethical conduct
- iv. Psychological health and emotional stability
- v. Social and interpersonal skills
- vi. Leadership potential
- vii. Pastoral competence
- viii. Vocational clarity and commitment

Formation should include assessment, not only ordination (Isacco et al., 2022). Early assessments show strengths and development needs, enabling early help. Assess several sources. Academic reports, ministry supervisor evaluations, psychological exams, peer comments, mentor observations, self-reflections, and diocesan interviews are examples. Multidimensional methods reveal candidate progress more accurately. Assessment models should measure applicant growth with developmental norms. Evaluations should highlight progress, accomplishments, and improvement, not shortcomings.

Candidates need instruction during ordination. Growth, struggle, failure, and change are ministry preparation (Nyatumba & David Poee, 2023). Continuous support enables learning from these events. Monitoring should be pastoral care, not surveillance. Mentors, bishops, and spiritual directors meet to discuss progress, address concerns, and celebrate successes. These events need accountability and advice.

Experienced mentors offer career guidance, emotional support, and professional insight (Sanfilippo, 2025). Mentoring offers outside-the-classroom perspectives. An integrated approach should match candidates with clergy and trained mentors through institutional mentorship networks. These relationships need structure, purpose, and endurance. Mentors help candidates develop leadership, interpersonal, spiritual, and personal skills (Wang et al., 2023). The formation may benefit from peer mentoring. Candidates provide encouragement, accountability, and learning. These networks assist ordained ministers. Mental health is crucial for clergy formation as ministry duties rise. Therefore, an integrated framework should assess and promote mental and emotional health. Psychological tests reveal personality, emotions, coping, interpersonal style, and support needs. Developmentally competent professionals should examine and interpret. Psychological evaluations should be for self-discovery, not ministry. They assist applicants recognise strengths and weaknesses and build resilience.

Formation programs should assess and improve mental health (Harvey et al., 2022). Counselling, stress management, resilience, mental health education, and self-care are examples. Candidates must control emotions, resolve conflicts, and balance work and life. These abilities improve ministerial health and performance. Normalising clergy mental health help reduces stigma and aids treatment. Ministers can improve communities.

### Character and Leadership Development Strategies

Character development is key to clergy preparation (Magezi & Madimutsa, 2023). Academic performance and technical skill are necessary, but personal character is crucial to ministry. Thus, integrated formation frameworks must intentionally foster integrity, humility, responsibility, and servant leadership.

Character development works best with instruction, reflection, practice, and accountability. Candidates should evaluate their motivations, attitudes, habits, and behaviours in light of Christian and ministerial values. Formation programs should encourage moral reflection and decision-making. Realistic case studies, ministry experiences, and supervised practice help students apply ethics to complex situations.

Intentional and comprehensive leadership development is needed (Shankman et al., 2025). Modern ministry leaders must convey vision, manage change, handle disagreements, establish teams, and inspire involvement. Leadership training, ministry assignments, mentoring, and practical experience can develop these skills. Christ's example must guide Christian leadership. Church leadership is a vocation of service, not dominance. Thus, leadership training should emphasise humility, stewardship, compassion, teamwork, and accountability. Character and leadership development boost ministerial credibility and effectiveness. Leaders who act consistently with their beliefs are more trusted and followed.

### **Seminary–Diocese Partnership Mechanisms**

This integrated structure aims to strengthen seminary-diocese partnerships. Effective clergy development needs continuing collaboration between educators and ordainers and supervisors.

Seminary leaders and diocesan authorities should routinely discuss formation priorities, candidate progress, and ministry problems to strengthen collaboration. Consultations foster understanding and coordinated decision-making.

Dioceses and seminaries should create evaluation criteria that meet academic and pastoral norms. Shared assessment frameworks enable formation uniformity. Retreats, workshops, leadership seminars, and ministry conferences build institution partnerships and deepen candidate development.

Dioceses should offer meaningful ministry under appropriate supervision. Candidates can apply classroom learning to ministry and receive constructive feedback. Communicating candidate progress should be done confidentially and ethically. Effective information exchange aids ordination preparedness decisions. Partnerships bridge the gap between educational preparation and ministry expectations.

### **Criteria for Ordination Readiness**

The final step of an integrated framework is establishing unambiguous ordination readiness requirements. Ordination grants major obligations and authority,

therefore preparedness judgements must be based on solid evidence.

Candidates for ordination must excel in numerous areas: To minister successfully, candidates must grasp Scripture, theology, ethics, church history, liturgy, and pastoral practice. A strong and true connection with God, spiritual discipline, vocational clarity, and Christlike character should be present. Candidates should be ethical, accountable, honest, and consistent with ministerial standards. There should be emotional resilience, self-awareness, good coping strategies, and psychological wellness.

Show communication, interpersonal sensitivity, conflict management, and collaboration abilities. Candidates should demonstrate pastoral care, organisational leadership, teaching, preaching, and ministry administration. Ordination should initiate growth, not finalisation. Candidates should be open to learning, self-improvement, and professional growth.

Thus, ordination preparedness is the end of a whole formation process, not just academic achievement. Bishops can be more confident that applicants are ready for ordained ministry when they show growth in all these areas.

Academically knowledgeable, spiritually mature, morally trustworthy, emotionally healthy, socially competent, and pastorally effective ministers can be formed and ordained within an integrated framework. This framework meets episcopal expectations and promotes the Church's mission in a difficult society.

### **7. Conclusion**

Our study addressed the pressing need for a more integrated and holistic clergy training technique at the intersection of seminary education and episcopal needs. It claims ordained ministry requires intentional whole-person growth, not just academic and theological skills. Thus, theological schools, dioceses, bishops, and others must work together to form ordination candidates mentally, morally, socially, spiritually, and academically. The conversation began with scripture and tradition being essential to clergy formation. Biblical leadership models, especially Jesus Christ and the early Church, illustrate that ministry preparation always required total change. Spiritual growth, moral discipline, relational maturity, practical training, and theological understanding are included. The Church has always stated ministry is a divine calling that requires character and spiritual depth, not merely academics. While rigorous, modern seminary education often fails to equip students for current ministry roles, the research found. Episcopal aspirations prioritise pastoral efficacy, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and relational skill, which academic assessment may not communicate. This discrepancy between seminary training and diocesan goals may lower ministry quality and longevity. Effective ministry involves theological competency, spiritual growth, moral integrity, social maturity, psychological health, and leadership potential, the study concluded. Each of these traits influences clergy efficacy differently, and deficiency in one can harm performance. Overemphasis on academic

achievement, poor mental screening, ethical shortcomings, marital troubles, and increased cultural pressures were also clergy growth hurdles. In clergy formation, stakeholders were emphasised. Seminaries, bishops, diocesan authorities, psychologists, parishes, families, mentors, and spiritual directors form clergy. Their collaboration ensures Church activity, not academic institutions, anchors formation. Accountability, formation, and ministerial preparation improve with shared responsibility. The study suggested an integrated framework that prioritised teamwork, continuous assessment, psychological support, mentorship, leadership development, and ordination readiness. This framework strives to integrate clergy formation and close gaps. Ordination should be the culmination of a multidimensional growing process that affirms human and spiritual maturity. Effective priest formation depends on the Church's willingness to prepare holistically and integrately. As social, cultural, psychological, and technology developments affect ministry, minister preparation must change. Modern ministry is too complex for fragmentation. We must blend theological education, episcopal oversight, psychological insight, moral development, and pastoral practice. Pastors should be informed, resilient, compassionate, and effective ministers of God and His people. The Church can better produce leaders who truly proclaim the Gospel, care for the faithful, and skilfully navigate modern challenges when seminaries and dioceses work together with all relevant stakeholders. This integrated vision can strengthen 21st-century ordained ministry and the Church's purpose.

### Recommendations

1. Theological schools and dioceses should establish formal structures for continuous communication, joint planning, and shared evaluation of clergy candidates. Regular consultations will help align academic formation with episcopal expectations for ministry readiness.
2. Psychological screening, counseling support, and emotional wellness programs should be made a compulsory component of clergy formation. This will ensure early identification of emotional, behavioural, or mental health challenges that may affect future ministry.
3. Bishops and formation boards should move beyond academic assessment to include spiritual maturity, moral integrity, social competence, emotional stability, and leadership capacity as core criteria for ordination decisions.
4. Every candidate for ministry should undergo supervised pastoral placements under experienced clergy mentors. This practical exposure will bridge the gap between theory and real-life ministry, enhancing competence and confidence.
5. Clergy formation should not end at ordination. Dioceses and theological institutions should provide ongoing training, retreats, leadership development programs, and psychological wellness support to sustain clergy effectiveness throughout ministry.

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