

## Challenges of Former Seminarian Students and Their Coping Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

Seminary provides rigorous study, reflection, and spiritual growth for seminarians. Seminary is perfect for continuing to discern God's purpose through study, prayer, and community. However, leaving a close-knit community is hard for seminarians, who leave for different reasons. The study is grounded in the existing literature on the topic, suggesting that more comprehensive and up-to-date data on the challenges former seminarian students face in higher education is needed. The study addressed a gap in understanding former seminarians' problems. The study used a descriptive research design with an exploratory case study design, employing a survey method to gather the data needed for the study. The study uncovered that the former seminarians face financial and personal challenges. The study discovered that the former seminarians coping strategies to overcome challenges fall within the scope of six intrinsic and two extrinsic strategies.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Seminary life typically involves a rigorous academic schedule filled with courses in theology, philosophy, church history, and pastoral ministry. Seminarians may also need to attend formation programs and prayer services and engage in pastoral work, such as volunteering at parishes or serving the local community. It is also common for seminarians to form close relationships with their fellow students as they navigate their journey toward priesthood or ordained ministry (Oakley, 2017). However, leaving a close-knit community can be difficult. Former seminarians may find it challenging to establish themselves outside the community while still practicing the values and routines they are used to in seminary life. Additionally, leaving the seminary can put former seminarians at a disadvantage, making it difficult to adjust to life outside the seminary and support themselves (Wärnberg, 2021).

There are many reasons why seminarians may become former seminarians. Changing personal views or a lack of calling may cause the candidate to leave the priesthood or religious life. Some candidates may suffer from a mental, physical, or financial condition that prevents them from studying. In some cases, the seminary may ask the candidate to leave the seminary due to disciplinary reasons, such as violating the rules or engaging in inappropriate behavior. Nevertheless, once a seminarian decides to leave, they will typically go through a process of informing their seminary and diocese of their intentions. This process may involve meeting with a spiritual director, a vocation director, or a bishop to discuss their decision and determine the best course of action (McDaniel, 2019; Fisher, 2020).

After leaving the seminary, former seminarian students frequently find themselves in a difficult situation. These challenges are often personal, such as family circumstances, health issues, or lack of support networks. Moreover, additional living expenses, including rent, food, and utilities, can add up quickly and strain a former seminary student's budget. These circumstances mean they may have a small amount of savings or ask their family members to support their pursuit of education. Additionally, many seminaries provide room and board to their students, meaning that former seminarians may need to find housing and pay living expenses on their own for the first time. These factors can make it challenging for former seminarians to support themselves financially while pursuing their degrees (Daud, Norwani, & Yusof, 2018).

Based on the available literature on this topic, the study works on the premise that there needs to be more comprehensive and up-to-date data on the challenges facing former seminarian students in college. Most existing studies focus on the experiences of seminarians who dropped out or left the seminary for other reasons rather than those who continue their studies. The struggles of former seminarian students may also be unique to their situation. There needs to be a greater understanding of these students' specific challenges than the general population. Additionally, the experiences of former seminarians may vary greatly depending on their denomination, socio-economic status, and family background.

The study addressed the knowledge gap that there might be a need for more research on the struggles of former seminarians. Although some studies have explored seminarians' educational and vocational outcomes, few have explicitly focused on their difficulties after leaving the seminary. Moreover, the study will show how the former seminarians sustain their daily needs and their different ways of dealing with such adversities.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The study explored the challenges experienced by the former seminarian students of San Isidro College. The research surveys the former seminarians' challenges and coping mechanisms they face outside the seminary. Specifically, the study addressed the following:

1. What are the challenges experienced by the former seminarian students?
2. What coping strategies are used by the former seminarians to help them face their challenges?

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The challenges faced by former seminarian students as they transition out of the seminary environment are multifaceted and demand a unique set of coping strategies. Having devoted considerable time to a structured and insulated setting, these individuals often encounter difficulties in adapting to the secular world, such as navigating relationships, career choices, and personal identity. Moreover, the loss of a strong support network and the need to redefine their sense of purpose can lead to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. In response, effective coping strategies among these individuals may involve seeking professional counseling, engaging in peer support groups, and embracing opportunities for personal growth and skill development outside the seminary context. Embracing a new sense of spirituality and reframing their experiences within the framework of personal growth can empower former seminarians to thrive in their post-seminary lives.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized the descriptive method with an exploratory case study design (Creswell, 2013) to determine the approaches used by the former seminarians to overcome the challenges they faced outside seminary life. The study explores the challenges faced by former seminarians as a student. The study's participants are former seminarian students of San Isidro College (SIC) of age 18 and older. The study utilized the total population sampling (Lavrakas, 2008) since only a few former seminarians are currently enrolled at San Isidro College.

The researcher employed a survey method to collect the necessary information used in the study using an exploratory case study within a real-life experience of the former seminarian (Yin, 2014). The researchers developed and administered their researcher-made questionnaire, which was reviewed and approved by a panel of experts that assessed the challenges and experiences of

the former seminarian students as they continue to earn their degrees. The questionnaire aims to gather the former seminarians experience on their life outside the seminary. In order to attain the objective of the study, the researcher identified and surveyed nine (9) former seminarians of San Isidro College. Table 1 presents the demographic information that has been collected from the participants.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Former Seminarians in the Study**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Year</b>
FS-1	23	AB - Philosophy	2
FS-2	23	AB - Philosophy	4
FS-3	21	AB - Philosophy	2
FS-4	24	BSEd - Values Education	3
FS-5	20	AB - Philosophy	1
FS-6	23	AB - Philosophy	3
FS-7	20	AB - Philosophy	2
FS-8	23	AB - Philosophy	2
FS-9	24	BSIT	1

Table 1 displays nine (9) participants, seven (7) are taking up a degree in Philosophy, one (1) is taking up a degree in education with a major in Values Education, and one (1) is taking up a degree in information technology. The average age of the participants is 22 years old (the youngest is 20, and the eldest is 24). Two (2) of the participants are first-year college, four (4) are second-year students, two (2) are third-year students, and one (1) is a fourth-year student.

The research utilized a qualitative survey method to collect data from the participants regarding the challenges experienced by former seminarians and the strategies they utilized to overcome those challenges (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012). The participants highlighted the difficulties they faced after leaving the seminary formation and the strategies they used to overcome them. The participants also discussed the coping strategies the former seminarians found helpful. Additionally, the study used a descriptive method to gather the former seminarian's experience of their challenges and coping strategies (Best & Kahn, 1998). The survey questionnaire is divided into two categories. The first category explores the challenges of the former seminarians after they left the seminary formations. Moreover, the second category has two parts; the first part explores the support the former seminarians received as they continued to pursue their college degrees. Furthermore, the second part ascertains the former seminarians coping strategies towards the challenges they have faced in college.

The study only focused on the challenges and experience of the former seminarian. The data analysis used a thematic analysis to categorize the former seminarians' responses into a common theme. The study followed Kiger and Varpio's (2020) six-step approach throughout the research process. These steps included familiarizing oneself with the data, developing preliminary codes, searching for themes, assessing themes, defining and labeling themes. The

finalization of a report signified the end of the process. The researchers held all the information acquired in the strictest confidence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the challenges faced by the former seminarians of San Isidro College and their coping strategies while pursuing their degree. Data gathering from the responses of the participants was through surveys. The study used frequencies and percentages to treat the data, and the narrative responses were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

### *Challenges Experienced by the Former Seminarian Students*

Figure 1 presents the overview of the thematic chart of the challenges faced by the former seminarians of San Isidro College. Three (3) major themes were generated: financial challenges (66.67%), personal challenges (44.44%), and academic challenges (22.22%). Per themes, a sub-theme was also generated and recorded.

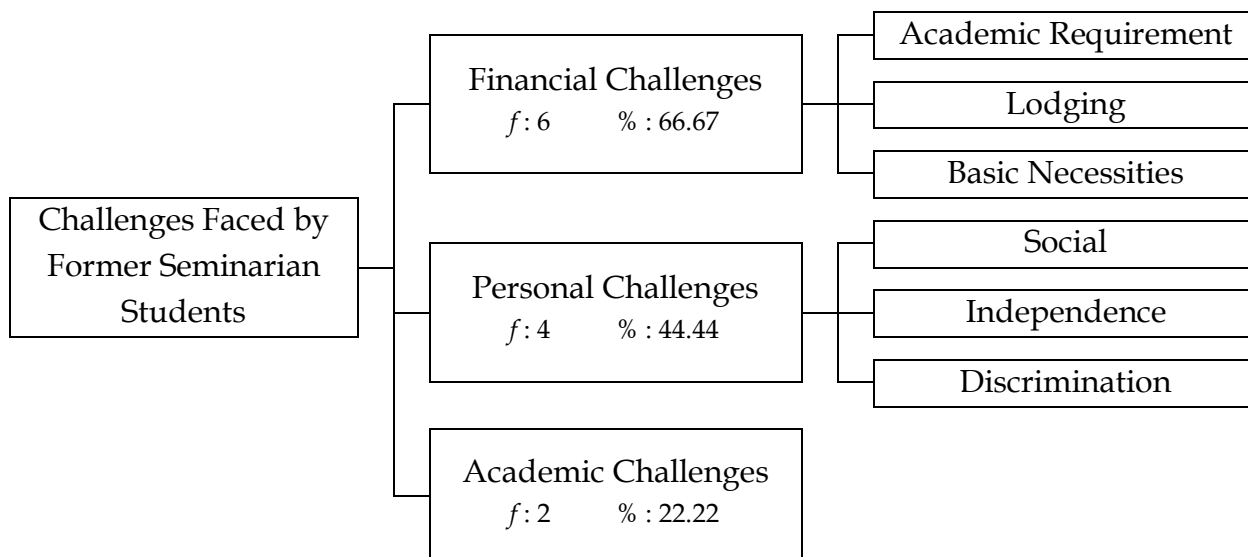


Figure 1. Overview of the Thematic Chart on the Challenges of the Former Seminarians

The qualitative themes of the challenges faced by the former seminarian students of San Isidro College are displayed in Matrix 1. In addition, the themes and sub-themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the Qualitative Themes on the Challenges Faced by the Former Seminarian Students

Themes	Sub-Themes	Samples Statements
Financial Challenges	Academic Requirement	"...The allowance given by my parents is not enough to sustain my academic projects..."
	Lodging	"...it is not enough for rental of dormitory..."
	Basic Necessities	"...problems such as food supply, etc."
Personal Challenges	Social	"...I encountered difficulties in terms on having friends and socializing with others..."
	Independence	"...the fact that I'm not bound to any authority figures so I was independent..., too much independence was never okay..."
	Discrimination	"...I am being criticized and discriminated... because I quit the seminary formation..."
Academic Challenges		"...the challenges that I encountered is on academic..."

NOTE: Responses are copied verbatim

The financial challenge's theme has three (3) sub-themes: academic requirements, lodging, and basic necessities. The result shows that the former seminarian's respondents need help to sustain their needs in financial matters. They need to balance these subthemes to survive their financial challenges, where money is needed for such individuals to survive. Having this kind of difficulty or challenges, a former seminarian could find any means to sustain themselves. Furthermore, the themes show a former seminarian's importance or need to have financial support to continue pursuing and finishing the degree chosen.

Students confront various financial obstacles for various reasons, including but not limited to expensive tuition costs, lack of scholarships, high living expenditures, and payments for other goods and services (Daud, Norwani, & Yusof, 2018). Many students may have difficulty paying their tuition or meeting their necessities due to the financial difficulties caused by the issues listed above. Another comparable instance is the cost of obtaining a seminary education (Oakley, 2017). Many students who enroll at seminaries need help financially due to the high cost of attending, including tuition, lodging, and board. In addition, they cannot rely only on their allowances and the financial assistance of their parents to make ends meet, making it challenging for them to provide for themselves after they leave the seminary (Price, Schneider, & Quick, 2016).

The second theme which is the personal challenges has three (3) sub-themes: social, independence, and discrimination. Students face personal challenges, such as psychological, social, and emotional problems, which affects

their academic life, which is the third theme. These issues may stem from relationship difficulties, personal issues, or other personal struggles. These problems can significantly affect a student's ability to focus on academics and overall well-being (Gegajo, 2021). Seminary life can be pretty structured and regimented, and students may struggle to transition to a more independent, less structured lifestyle after they leave (Oakley, 2017). They may also experience difficulties adjusting to a new community and the loss of close relationships formed at the seminary. Additionally, some former seminarians may face feelings of disappointment, confusion, or even guilt about leaving their calling (McDaniel, 2019; Fisher, 2020).

***Coping Strategies Used by the Former Seminarians in Facing their Challenges***

Figure 2 presents the overview of the thematic chart on the academic support offered or made by the former seminarians in pursuit of their degree. Three (3) major themes were generated: familial support (66.67%), budgeting of allowances (33.33%), and part-time job (22.22%).

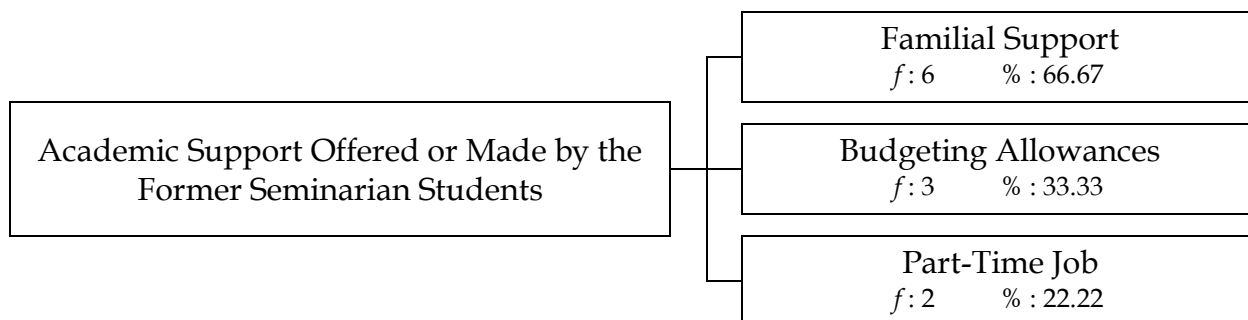


Figure 2. Overview of the Thematic Chart on the Academic Support Offered or Made by the Former Seminarians’ Students in Pursuit of Their Degree

The qualitative themes on the academic support offered or made by the former seminarian students in pursuit of their degree are displayed in Matrix 2. In addition, the themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the Qualitative Themes of the Academic Support Offered or Made by the Former Seminarians

Themes	Samples Statements
Familial Support	“...my parents are well and supportive of my school choice even though I wasn’t inside the seminary anymore...”
Budgeting Allowances	“...I do some budgeting in order to sustain my daily needs...”
Part-Time Job	“...I spend time working at the barber shop.”

NOTE: Responses are copied verbatim

Support from the family is essential to each individual, as sometimes they are the ones who can help in times of need. A former seminarian respondent shows that even though they were not seminarian already, they still felt the love

of their family by receiving support from them. As shown from the matrix above, familial support is the main support of former seminarian. Living outside the seminary is far different from being a seminarian, for everything should come from hard work. Budgeting is one of the best tactics to survive a former seminarian's whole month or per week, especially since they are far from home, based on the participant's responses.

The former seminarians' families helped them with their financial needs in various ways. The parents or family members can provide financial assistance through allowances, paying their tuition, and helping the former seminarian set up a budget to manage their expenses. Additionally, parents can offer guidance on saving money and making informed financial decisions (Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2019). Moreover, budgeting is essential for college students because it helps them keep track of their expenses, prioritize their spending, and stay within their means. By creating a budget, students can identify areas where they may be overspending and make adjustments to suit their budget (Akben-Selcuk, 2015).

One way to survive and sustain the needs of every former seminarian is to look for a job to gain some income. The strategy shows that former seminarians can still make money while taking up a degree in college since there are many jobs a former seminarian can do if he is only willing to give his effort and hard work to survive and support his own needs.

Getting a part-time job while attending college can benefit some students because it gives them an additional source of income, which can be used to pay for various costs, including tuition, textbooks, and living expenses. In addition, having a part-time job can assist students in developing valuable skills, forming professional networks, and acquiring valuable work experience that may benefit them in their future professions (Gbadamosi, Evans, Richardson, & Ridolfo, 2015).

Figure 3 presents the overview of the thematic chart of the challenges faced by the former seminarians of San Isidro College. Two (2) major themes were generated. The first theme was intrinsic strategy (88.89%) which generated five (5) sub-themes: prayer (33.33%), self-discipline (22.22%), aspirations (11.11%), faith (11.11%), and self-confidence (11.11%). The second major theme in extrinsic strategy (22.22%) which generated three (3) sub-themes: sulking (11.11%), social circle (11.11%), and time management (11.11%). Per-themes, a sub-theme was also generated and recorded.

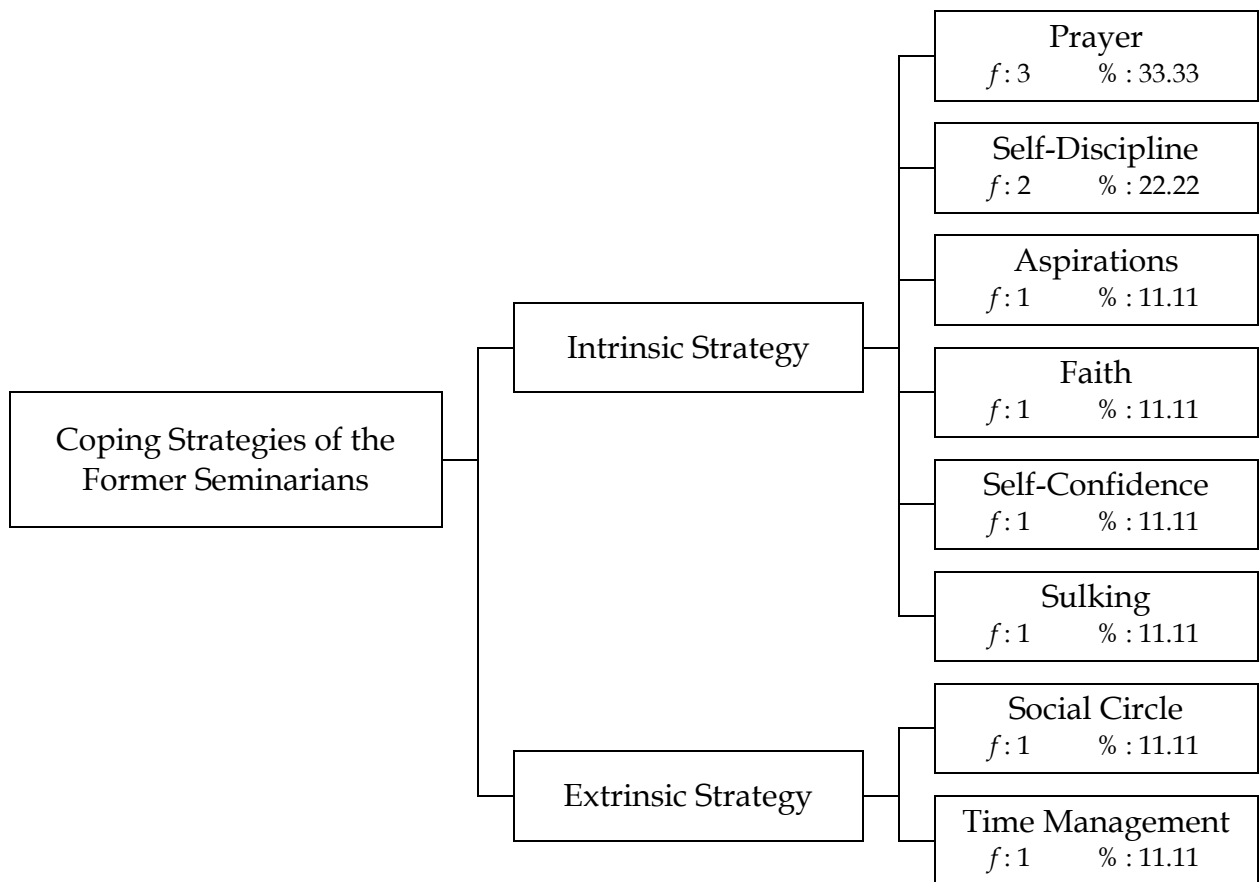


Figure 3. Overview of the thematic chart on coping strategies of the former seminarian students

The qualitative themes on the coping strategies of the former seminarian students are displayed in Table 4. In addition, the themes are supported by examples of verbatim responses presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of the Qualitative Themes on the Coping Strategies of the Former Seminarian Students

Themes	Sub-Themes	Samples Statements
Intrinsic Strategies	Prayer	<i>"I overcame all those challenges I encountered... because of prayer..."</i>
	Self-Discipline	<i>"...in order to overcome my difficulties, I must have self-discipline..."</i>
	Aspirations	<i>"...I persevere to work very hard for my dreams..."</i>
	Faith	<i>"I overcome the challenges faced with deep faith to the Lord..."</i>
	Self-Confidence	<i>"...in order to overcome it, I must have self-confidence to face others..."</i>
Extrinsic Strategies	Sulking	<i>"...my life's way of coping for a difficult task was to sulk..."</i>
	Circle of Friends	<i>"Ask help from friends"</i>
	Time Management	<i>"I overcome my difficulties in my studies with time management."</i>

NOTE: Responses are copied verbatim

Prayer and faith help former seminarian students overcome challenges by giving them inner strength and hope. Individuals who have faith in a higher power often believe that their challenges will be resolved through divine intervention or their resilience which comes from their faith (Korhonen, 2007; Maahs, Jessica DuBois, 2019). Prayer and faith are essential for former seminarians to overcome their challenges because they provide a sense of hope and guidance. When individuals pray and have faith, they believe that a higher power is watching over them and feel that they are not alone in their struggles. This coping strategy can offer them comfort and strength to overcome challenges (Aiken, 2010; Michael, 2021).

Self-discipline and self-confidence help former seminarian students overcome their challenges by enabling them to stay motivated and focused on their goals. Individuals who exhibit self-discipline and self-confidence do not give up easily and persist in their efforts once they achieve their objectives (Heslin & Klehe, 2006; Adventist Healthcare, 2023). Self-discipline and self-confidence are essential for former seminarian students to overcome their challenges because they help them to stay focused and motivated. When an individual has self-discipline, they can control their thoughts and actions, which can help them to stay on track and persevere through difficult times. Conversely, self-confidence can help students believe in themselves and their abilities, giving them the courage to take risks and overcome obstacles (Jnah, Robinson, & Dowling, 2015; Dienstmann, 2021).

Remembering goals and aspirations help the former seminarian student overcome their challenges by reminding them of the purpose behind their efforts. By envisioning their desired outcomes, they can maintain enthusiasm and stay committed to their tasks, despite difficulties. Remembering their goals and aspirations helps former seminarian students overcome their challenges by giving them a sense of purpose and direction. When an individual has clear goals and aspirations, they have something to work towards, which can help them stay motivated and focused on their goals. This intrinsic strategy can give them the drive they need to overcome any obstacles that come their way (Jnah, Robinson, & Dowling, 2015; Dienstmann, 2021).

Some individuals sulk when facing challenges because they lack self-confidence and doubt their abilities to overcome obstacles. They may feel hopeless, defeated, or overwhelmed by their challenges and struggle to find a way forward. In such situations, it is essential to encourage and support these individuals, helping them to develop the necessary skills and mindset to overcome their challenges (Jenaabadi, Ahani, & Sabaghi, 2015).

Peer support can help the former seminarians overcome challenges by providing a safe and supportive environment where they can share their struggles and receive encouragement and advice from their peers. Peers can offer different perspectives, helpful resources, and practical solutions that resonate with their experiences. This support can help former seminarians develop greater self-efficacy and resilience to face challenges (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017). Peer influence is helpful in overcoming challenges because it can inspire former seminarian students to emulate positive behaviors and attitudes observed in their

peers. Friends can act as role models, motivate each other to achieve their goals, and provide constructive feedback that encourages personal growth. Additionally, peer influence can help reduce the adverse effects of social isolation, bullying, and discrimination, making former seminarian students feel overwhelmed and hopeless (Nehamas, 2016; Maahs, Jessica DuBois, 2019).

Time management helps overcome challenges by allowing former seminarian students to prioritize tasks, allocate resources effectively, and reduce the risk of procrastination or burnout. Former seminarians can increase their productivity and reduce stress by setting realistic goals, organizing schedules, and breaking down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Additionally, time management skills can help students develop their self-discipline, accountability, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for success in academic and personal life (Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Time management helps overcome challenges in life because it allows individuals to manage their time efficiently. It helps individuals prioritize their essential tasks, allocate resources effectively, and reduce the risk of procrastination or burnout. By setting realistic and measurable goals, individuals can organize their schedules and break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps, which leads to increased productivity and reduced stress levels. Additionally, time management skills can help individuals develop self-discipline, accountability, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for success in all aspects of life (Broadbent & Poon, 2015; Maahs, Jessica DuBois, 2019).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The challenges faced by former seminarians are financial and personal struggles. In their financial aspect, high tuition, lack of scholarships, expensive living costs, and other expenses place students in financial hardship. Seminary education can be expensive, and many seminary students are not affluent, and tuition, board and lodging, and other costs mount up rapidly. In their personal aspect, psychological, social, and emotional issues affect students' academic lives. These issues can impair a student's focus and well-being. After leaving the seminary, students may struggle to adjust to a more independent lifestyle. They may need help to acclimate to a new community and lose old friends. Former seminarians may feel disappointment, perplexity, or remorse at quitting their calling.

Some support the former seminarians gain is from their families, which support them financially, like allowances and tuition payments. Their families can also advise former seminarians about financial planning and saving. Budgeting helps the former seminarian students track expenditures, prioritize, and live independently. The former seminarians can avoid debt by budgeting and identifying areas of overspending. Some former seminarian students get a part-time job to pay for tuition, textbooks, and living expenses.

The former seminarians' intrinsic coping strategies are prayer and faith, which gives them a sense of strength and hope. Faithful individuals think that divine intervention or resilience will fix their problems. Another coping strategy is self-discipline and self-confidence, which drives and focuses students on

overcoming obstacles. Self-disciplined and self-confident students persevere until they succeed. Another coping strategy that former seminarians follow is remembering their goals and aspirations to help people overcome obstacles by reminding them of their purpose. Students can stay motivated by visualizing their goals even when things get tough. However, some former seminarians sulk because they lack self-confidence and question their problem-solving capacity. The former seminarians' extrinsic coping strategies are peer support, giving them a safe place to talk about their problems and get advice from their peers. Moreover, time management helps them prioritize tasks, manage resources, and avoid procrastination and fatigue.

Being a former seminarian with limited and few sources of support, their time not being dependent on a fixed schedule, like when things were in the seminary, and being not under the seminary formation anymore, did have a blow in their lives. The results show that having support from external and internal aspects and various strategies in dealing with such adversities helps them to persevere and pursue their dreams in life. For future reference, if another one decides to ponder and have exposure outside the seminary formation, the study's findings recommend having more intrinsic rather than extrinsic strategies. Because having an inner drive proves to have more effect, especially in the person's psychological aspect, one must also have adequate self-control and discipline and have their time managed well, for they will surely benefit from this. The study's results will give those seminarians pondering going outside the seminary formation a head is up of what a former seminarian life is like.

The study reveals that former seminarians face various personal challenges, such as financial and personal struggles. The study indicates that social interactions can be beneficial for former seminarians. Encouraging social activities, such as clubs and extracurricular activities, can help them build social connections and reduce social isolation. The study highlights the importance of a supportive community for former seminarians. Creating a supportive college community can give them a sense of belonging and a support system. Finally, it is critical to continue tracking the progress of former seminarians to identify further improvements that can be made in circumstances and strategies to cope with their challenges on an ongoing basis.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

The researchers suggest a study that examines the long-term effects of leaving the seminary and their coping strategies. The research could evaluate how the former seminarians' lives unfold from an educational and professional perspective and their experiences with religiosity. On the other hand, research may be conducted which could design an intervention program for seminarians who are struggling with assimilating into their new environment. This study would evaluate the impact of the intervention program on reducing stress and enhancing wellbeing for individuals who are going through a transformative process that presents unique challenges.

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