

WORK LOAD FOR PRIESTS

*CARA Working Paper No. 5 Priests in the United States: Satisfaction,
Work Load and Support Structures. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate,
Georgetown University, Washington DC, 2002*

Satisfaction

The level of satisfaction among priests is quite high. Those rating it "good" or "very good" includes about 88% of priests. This is not to say that priests have no feelings of discontent in their daily lives.

Work Load

In a nationwide study (D. Hoge et al, 2002), priests were asked how important each of fifteen problems was for them on a day-to-day basis. The one most frequently cited as a problem was "Too much work." Almost 60% of diocesan priests described this as either "somewhat of a problem" or a "great problem."

In a related study by CARA in 2001, 72% of diocesan priests reported that they experience the problem of "too much work" either "a great deal" or "sometimes." Most of the priests in the 2001 study were included in the 2002 follow-up to determine the parameters of this problem.

In the 2001 study, priests were asked how many hours they work in a typical week. A large proportion responded that they work "24 hours a day," which may seem like it to us but was not quantifiable for the research. So they removed this particular question from the follow-up study.

First, they asked how many priests were "on call" 24 hours a day. A staggering 91% said they were. They followed up by asking, "How many hours do you *actually* work during a typical day?"

Excluding retired priests, the results showed that priests work, on average, from a low of 40 hours a week to a high of over 80 hours.

Estimated Hours Worked in a Typical Week

CARA Priest Poll 2002, Retired Priests Excluded

Hours Worked	Percentage of Respondents
40 hours or less per week	9%
41 to 50 hours per week	20%
51 to 60 hours per week	30%
61 to 80 hours per week	23%
Over 80 hours	18%
Median (midpoint)	58 hours
Mean (average)	63 hours

Less than one in ten priests reports working 40 hours or less in a typical week. Four in ten report working over 60 hours a week. And two out of ten report working more than 80 hours. The researchers concluded, "*Most priests are working an exceptionally large number of hours.*" Seventy-six percent of diocesan priests in parish ministry report working over 50 hours a week.

There are differences depending on the size of the parish. Priests in this study assigned to very large parishes tended to work slightly more hours than those in very small parishes. Once over 500 households, regardless of size, the size of the parish creates little change in the amount of time a priest works.

Types of Work

The CARA study asked priests the percentage of time they spent on each of four pastoral tasks: *Administrative or Supervisory work*, *Visiting or Counseling parishioners*, *Personal Prayer*, and *Preparing for the Sunday Homily*.

Of the four activities, the priests in this sample tend to spend the least amount of time preparing their Sunday homily. They tend to spend slightly more time in administrative work than in visiting or counseling parishioners, or in personal prayer. On average, parish priests spend about 16% of their work time in parish administrative or supervisory work.

There was little relationship between the size of the parish and the amount of time spent in administrative work, except when pastors alone were examined. Pastors of very small parishes, with 200 or less registered households, spent about 15% of their time on administration and supervision. Pastors of parishes with over 2,000 parishioners reported spending about 21% of their time on supervision and administration.

Catholic and Protestant Clergy

An important finding compared the CARA research with a study of mainline Protestant pastors (Perl, 2002) and found that Protestant pastors who spend a greater percentage of their time on administrative tasks tend to spend a proportionately smaller percentage of their time in one-on-one interaction with congregation members.

The 2002 CARA study found no such trade-off among priests. Priests don't choose between administration and visiting or counseling parishioners. The ministers made a trade: if more time was needed for administration, they had less time for one-on-one interaction with members of their church. Priests simply increased the overall number of hours they worked when their administrative responsibilities increased. This may account for the large number of priests working 80 hours or more.

The conclusion of CARA's researchers was that, "Catholic priests do not 'trade-off' functions so much as they 'trade up' functions—thereby working longer and longer hours. This is also related to the strong finding that most priests do not want to be spending as much time on administration and supervision as they currently do."

The CARA study also examined the belief that priests who work longer hours doing administration are doing so because they get greater satisfaction from these activities. The researchers found, if anything, that the opposite is true.

- 83% of parish priests who report spending sixteen hours a week or more in administration or supervision would prefer doing them less.
- They found that the *more* time these priests spent on these activities, the *less* they want to do them.

Although there is no direct trade-off between the proportion of hours that parish priests spend in administrative work and the proportion they spend visiting and counseling parishioners, a sense of conflict does appear when examining time spent in administration and *whether priests feel too busy to meet the needs of those they serve*.

Priests who report spending twenty hours a week on administrative or supervisory work are twice as likely to agree that they are too busy to meet all the pastoral needs of the people they serve (44 percent compared to 20 percent).

Priests Assigned to Multiple Parishes

Priests who responded "Yes" to the question, "Do you serve in more than one parish?" were given special consideration because of the presumed added stressors associated with multiple pastoring.

Anecdotal evidence uncovered concerns about the amount of extra time spent traveling between parishes and dealing with multiple parish councils, staffs, sets of volunteers, etc. The researchers presumed this would translate into reports of working longer hours, feeling busier, and expressing greater dissatisfaction with their administrative responsibilities than other priests. This was not shown to be the case.

- Priests serving in multiple parishes did not report working significantly more hours than their counterparts who serve in only one parish. This is most likely due to the already large number of hours worked reported by all parish priests.
- Priests assigned to the pastoral care of multiple parishes were no more or less likely to report having too little time to pray or to meet the needs of their parishioners.
- They were no more or less likely to say they would prefer less administrative work.