

Navigating Celibacy: The Lived Experiences of Kalenjin Catholic Priests in Kenya

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Cite this article in APA

Rop, M. K. (2025). Navigating celibacy: The lived experiences of Kalenjin Catholic priests in Kenya. *Journal of pastoral and practical theology*, 4(1), 22-43. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jppt.v4i1.751>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

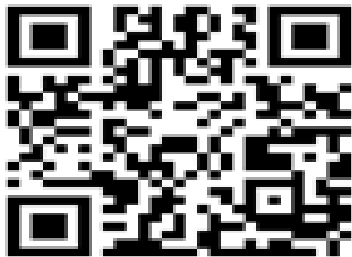
Article history

Received: 2025-05-02

Accepted: 2025-06-01

Published: 2025-07-01

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of Catholic priests from the Kalenjin community in Kenya, focusing on their perceptions of the Church's mandatory celibacy rule within the context of African cultural values that often view celibacy with skepticism. This exploratory study conveniently sampled 27 Catholic priests from the Kalenjin community in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret through key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The collected data was transcribed, analysed, and interpreted into themes, and was further complemented by narrative analysis. The findings indicate that young men are often stirred up into the the Catholic priesthood by a strong Catholic background and strengthened by idealized motivation from an older priest. However, priests still face social and cultural rigidities in their quest to join the priesthood. While many African priests have accepted the mandatory celibacy rule, they often feel burdened by the overt sexuality in their environment. The priests acknowledge the challenges in priestly service but have concretised their persona to fully serve God and humanity. In the African context, the celibacy debate is only marginally connected to the priesthood and remains largely undefined. The study concludes that Catholic priests are mentally and socially weighed down by the demands of celibacy life and priesthood. It recommends that the church hierarchy in Africa re-evaluate the relevance of their training programs for African clergy.

Key terms: African priest, Catholic Church, Catholic priest, and priestly celibacy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The introductory sections provide a contextual overview of the lives of the catholic priests in the contemporary world. The background reviews the social, societal, cultural, individual and personal facets in addition to providing the Church's position on celibacy in the Catholic Church. By definition, celibacy as a practice takes a social or religious definition with the accompanying meanings (Olson, 2007). When considered as a social phenomenon, celibacy entails shared values where individuals jointly endeavour to abstain from all sexual relationships for a specific goal or objective, such as the attainment of one's personal goals (Olson, 2007). When celibacy takes a religious phenomenon, it entails a perpetual vow to forego the instinct to procreate, coupled with an occupational career of priesthood that goes with the renunciation of marriage (Parish, 2010) and enforced and justified by a religious order or legal framework such as the Canon Law (Cozzens, 2006). The review section focuses on African studies on the lives of priests, and communal perceptions towards celibacy to contextualise the study and provides a gap that the current study delves into.

A contemporary Catholic priest in today's environment faces contextual situations that range from social, economic and cultural changes; secularisation through the loss of religious influences and large-scale decrease in religious practice; the lack of personal fulfilment through restrictions on spiritual practices; loss of social status and standing in the community and increasingly technological changes in the Christian societies (Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). The priests seem mainly to struggle with relational aspects of life, as the isolating conditions of the catholic priesthood are reinforced with potentially long-term consequences, as the focus on spirituality may unintentionally disregard the isolating conditions (Cornelio, 2012).

From the social viewpoint, Catholic priests in their religious roles are socially isolated without a close family or support group, which normally provides social bonding and spiritual support (Ballano, 2021). Since humans are social beings, social alienation can intensify the loneliness of the parish clergy (Benz et al., 2009). In particular, diocesan priests in highly urbanised settings are more likely to be socially alienated (Ballano, 2021). In their study, Schnabel and Koval (2009) insinuated that Catholic priests are more likely to experience alienation when they perceive and attribute some form of structural limitation in their social networks to the Church hierarchy. As such, mandatory celibacy has meant that the congregants unwittingly become the substitute family for the priest (Prince, 1992), which may indicate a life of solitude, isolation and alienation for the priest (Ballano, 2021).

Concomitantly, the Catholic priesthood requires social acceptance due to its unique nature, which incorporates mandatory celibacy practice. As read from Canon 277 of 1983, celibacy is a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind (Code of Canon law of 1983). It is from this foundation that the Roman Catholic Church supports the notion that 'celibacy is a state or lifestyle full of mystery and necessarily linked to the ministerial priesthood that is a service to God's people' (Edumalichukwu, 2020). Furthermore, Pope Paul VI spoke of celibacy as a "precious jewel", leading to a life of selflessness for the man who seeks to follow Jesus Christ in the priesthood. Thus, when Catholic priests talk about the subject, it is often in terms of its symbolic value as a total commitment to the service of the Lord (Frazee, 1972).

Undergirding the social acceptance of priestly celibacy is the historical development of the Latin Christian church where the 'Latin Christendom' envisioned a coherent community of believers bounded together by its common rite, sacred language, and obedience to the Pope in Rome (Whalen, 2007) and later laid the foundation of that supremacy which eventually dominated Christendom (Lea, 1907). Furthermore Cozzens (2006) maintains the Church's position that clergy are required to uphold perfect and perpetual celibacy in the interest of the kingdom of heaven. This viewpoint justifies why priestly celibacy is a prerequisite for would-be Catholic priests to imitate and share in the perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ (Gwaza, 2019).

Over centuries, there has been a gradual societal acceptance of priestly celibacy from the European perspective (Kung, 2010) and the American perspective (Rossetti, 2002). From the Western viewpoint, priestly celibacy has gained social acceptance from would-be priests as well as congregants, not because of a personal calling to celibacy but because of the conditional requirement for priesthood service (Prince, 1992). Considering that much of the practices of celibacy require the social acceptance of the community at large (Wubbels, 2011), the African viewpoint contradicts the Western viewpoint and therefore holds that the person in the Catholic priesthood is not distinctively different from the celibate individual, which is an anomaly. From an African perspective, priestly celibacy negates social values and cultural attitudes (Olson, 2010) and is considered an anomaly in most African communities (Wubbels, 2011; Gwaza, 2019).

In addition to societal acceptance, cultural acceptance is a consideration in the priesthood in the Catholic Church (Chu Ilo, 2017) as the Catholic Church in the Western world has built a much more cohesive cultural form of Christendom (Perzyński, 2017) where celibacy is a clerical discipline (Parish, 2010). While cultural homogeneity embodied in Western culture supports priestly celibacy (Rowe, 2016), there are dialectical cultural differences between African and Western viewpoints (Chu Ilo, 2017). As informed by Wubbels (2011) and Gwaza (2019), priestly celibacy has still not gained cultural acceptance among African communities as it contradicts marriage, which is revered as Africans have a unique philosophical and cultural heritage to it (Juma et al., 2017).

The divide between the African and Western worldviews may partly inform the reason why Catholic priests struggle to fit within African expectations. As early as 1964, in an African ecclesiastical review, Hastings (1978) called for the Church to change its celibacy rule for the African priest to allow the ordination of 'tried and tested married men' such as the trained catechists (Juma *et al.*, 2017). Since religion permeates African social and cultural life (Mbiti, 1969), the African religious and spiritual values may not necessarily be aligned with all Christian spiritual values, specifically the ideals stipulated by the Catholic Church, such as celibacy for its priests (Gyekye, 1996). As such, this would portend alienation and isolation from the African social grounding, which promotes social and communal values as a way of life (Ballano, 2021).

In the contemporary world, celibacy seems little more than a cultural survival of the priesthood than an aid to spiritual growth for priests (Scheper-Hughes & Devine, 2003). Mission does not start with denominational self-interpretations but with the life of Jesus Christ (Hastings, 1972). Ministries are time and culture-bound responses to the gospel, and the starting point should be ecclesiological: the whole Church is the primary ministry. It is wholesome to see the ministry respond to the local pastoral needs (Johann, 2011). As observed by Prince (1992), priesthood in the Catholic Church is perceived as a valuable vocation and a means of serving the Church and people, and its requirements preclude one from personal family life, and its requirement is sometimes viewed to be unnecessary and unjust.

On a personal front, the celibate priest left all and risked everything in a heroic response to the gospel (Prince, 1992) while at the same time being surrounded and affected by sexuality (Wubbels, 2011). Several authors support the notion of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church (Gwaza, 2019; Prince, 1992; Whalen, 2007), among others. Cozzens (2006) observed that underneath the sacerdotal celibacy are the apostolic privileges, power and secrecy associated with clerical culture. The consequential effects of priestly celibacy include personal and/or individual deleterious effects of celibacy as expressed by disillusionment (Prince, 1992), loneliness (Ballano, 2021), self-doubt (Covell, 2005), the socially unacceptable practices of sexuality and illicit relationship with women (Sipe, 1994; Serbin, 2006), and concubinage (Mayblin, 2019). Further, there is a growing number of priests quitting the priesthood after ordination, and some are disillusioned (Prince, 1992).

Anderson (2003) contends that there is personal acceptance from would-be priests but expresses concern for celibate priests who struggle to live faithfully their vocation. The priests are challenged to re-examine their lifestyle and commitments to live faithfully their priestly celibacy. Celibacy hurts the morale of many priests and causes contagion in the congregations; therefore, studying the lives of priests is helpful in understanding their present social and emotional conditions (Cornelio, 2012). Moreover, Hastings (1978a), having wrestled with his conscience as a priest and later got married in 1976, justified celibacy from a practical consideration as it allowed him to work unhindered in the pastoral ministry in Africa and freed him from worldly anxieties. He reported that the African Bishops in the 1970s called for the ordination of married catechists to answer the most elementary pastoral needs.

In Africa, the nascent Church in the 1960s grew exponentially because of the serving white priest and in the mission of evangelisation, the Catholic Church brought with it several doctrinal beliefs and values to Africa, including celibacy (Oduyoye, 2009). As pointed out by Okolo (1994) the Catholic priesthood from the African perspective still faces cultural and social constraints due to the cultural and social challenges attributed to priestly celibacy. African cultural practices and beliefs may contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church. If a priest is not able to integrate his indigenous African philosophical grounding with the Catholic Church's philosophical and theological arguments, the priest may find it difficult to cope with or manage the resulting cognitive dissonance. For instance, if the vows of poverty and celibacy are not internalised, the priest may appear neither authentic nor committed to the values that they are expected to live by (Juma et al., 2018). Hence, the study delves into the views of African Catholic priests from the Kalenjin community in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret to gauge their priestly experiences from formation to current contemporary challenges and views of their lives.

The Catholic Church's position on Priestly celibacy

Celibacy as a religious phenomenon draws from two perspectives, the observance of religious practises in service to God and humanity (Parish, 2010) whose history is drawn from the lives of priests such as Melchizedekas documented in Genesis 14:18, Hebrews 5:6, Aaron as read from Numbers 3:10, Eli as read from I Samuel 1:9 or prophets such as Samuel as read 1 Samuel 2:21 and the long list of prophets that include Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others. The second perspective relates to ritual purity, which involves the observance and maintenance of purity during religious rituals (Lea, 1884), which largely draws from Jewish or pagan tradition or culture relating to sacerdotalism (Prince, 1992; Lea, 1884).

In Mathew 19:3-12 juxtaposes the need for Christians to make a rational choice of getting married or staying celibate. First, based on Jesus' teachings, marriage is prescribed to all adults because it is a natural phenomenon that they should be married. Jesus then elaborates on circumstances where an individual may not partake in marriage whatsoever, 'it is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.' This means that some are unable to marry because of natural sterility; some, because of forced sterilisation; while others are unable to marry because they willingly renounced marriage, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (voluntary celibacy to partake in preaching the gospel to the pagans) (New Jerusalem Bible, 1985). 1 Corinthians 7:32-38, Paul chastises individuals against anxieties and recommends marriage for those who are not able to persevere and are anxious about the things of the world, while advocating celibacy for propriety and devotion to the Lord without distraction. Further, he asks those who can freely stand firm in resolution to have power over their own will and have made up their mind to stay celibate to do so (New Jerusalem Bible, 1985). This means that, in Paul's view, once sworn, one should not violate one's vows of celibacy.

Apart from asceticism, there was no legal foundation for celibacy until the inceptions of canons (Frazee, 1972), decretals (Lea, 1884) and canon law (Komonchak, 1986) and the Catechisms of the Catholic Church (Joseph *et al.*, 2010) and encyclicals (Ballano, 2019; Flannery, 1996). Celibacy practices were considered a matter of personal choice (Frazee, 1972). The first viewpoint on celibacy emanates from the canons or legal frameworks as indicated by the first canon, *Didascalia apostolorum*, which focused on the sexual continence among the episcopates (Frazee, 1972). The canons just become the official and standard propositions and commands to the ecclesiastics in their work (Frazee, 1972).

The extant literature on celibacy takes three viewpoints; the philosophical thought that emanates from the recommendations from encyclicals from the Popes (Ballano, 2019), the legal framework in the form of canons (Joseph *et al.*, 2010; Prince, 1992) and canon law as from 1917 (Horvat, 2022; Mayblin, 2019; O'Loughlin, 1995) such as canon 277 (Horvat, 2022). The third viewpoint on celibacy largely relates to the consequential effects of celibacy and this has largely examined the celibacy practise, its effects on the individual (ecclesiastics) as expressed through loneliness (Ballano, 2021), self-doubt (Covell, 2005), disillusionment (Prince, 1992), sexuality and illicit relationship with women (Sipe, 1994; Serbin, 2006), and concubinage (Mayblin, 2019); the community of the believers (Church) through resignations by priests (Prince, 1992; Wubbels, 2011; Schoenherr, 2004); the silence of episcopates and prelates during the sexual abuse pandemics in America among others (Böhm *et al.*, 2014); and the society through clerical sexual abuses (Rossetti, 2002; Kung, 2010; Frick *et al.*, 2021; Doyle *et al.*, 2004).

Over the centuries, synods and councils, which are either provincial or regional, possessed many instruments from the Church hierarchy used to manage and sustain the hierarchy itself. It is part administrative, political, as well as spiritual (Lea, 1884). The synods and councils have taken unique dimensions regarding the question of priestly celibacy. The other defining mechanism is the encyclicals, which are the official communication from the office of the Roman Pontiff himself. This was defined by the first encyclical called the *princeps ecclesiarum* (Principal Church) and the *Maximae et apostolicae ecclesiae* (greatest and apostolic Church) (Siecienski, 2017). The other important encyclical was issued in the 11th century and was referred to as *saeculum obscurum* or the 'Rule of the Harlots' and focused on the

concubinary, licentiousness and sexual continence in the Church Hierarchy in Rome, which had brought the Roman Catholic Church to its historic lows (Lea, 1884). The Union decree, *Latentur caeli*, signed by both Greek and Latin churches in 1439, sought to heal the schism between the East and West churches (Lea, 1907). The Vatican Council 1 (1869-70) promulgated *Pastor Aeternus* (Eternal Shepherd) (Siecienski, 2017) and decreed *societa perfecta* (Perfect Society) concerning the government of the clergy (Komonchak, 1986).

The post-Second Vatican Council saw the Church Hierarchy issue *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* (Of priestly celibacy) in 1967, which exclusively dealt with the issue of celibacy (Joseph *et al.*, 2010). The Code of Canon Law of 1983, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church of 2002 and there have been 26 synods in Rome on family life, marriage and sexual morality (Allen, 2015). The specific synods on Priestly celibacy include Synod on *Ultimis Temporibus* (ministerial priesthood) in 1971; the *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Of Priestly Formation) in 1988; *Vita Consecrata* (The Consecrated Life and its Function) in 1995; Ecclesia in African (African Synod) in 1994 which examined the issue of priestly celibacy in Africa, Amazonian Synod in 2019 called for the ordination of married men (*virii probati*) and caused consternation among the Catholic Church worldwide (Edumalichukwu, 2020).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on priests' experiences from African perspectives on a continuum of African viewpoints (Makamure, 2004; Machoko, 2013) to Indigenous religious viewpoints (Gwaza, 2019) and lastly, the interjections between African perspectives and Christian Catholicism (Olson, 2007; Wubbels, 2011; Kangethe, 2009). Within the African indigenous religion, celibacy was viewed indifferently as it upset the social order and the necessity to procreate. Empirical studies showed that celibate Catholic priests were frowned upon at a societal level (Mbiti, 1969; Gwaza, 2019; Wubbels, 2011) because the African culture emphasises paternity, which conflicts with clerical celibacy (Juma *et al.*, 2018). Celibacy in the context of African indigenous religions was not a lifelong commitment, but was adopted by the religious functionaries and was associated with indigenous cultural ceremonies, such as the rite of passage (Shorter, 1998). The review noted that celibacy is symbolised by chastity and/or sexual abstinence during the rituals and highlight two opposing views on celibacy and juxtapose the study gap in trying to explain priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church.

The studies in West Africa highlight the glaring differences between the indigenous African culture and the Catholic Church concerning celibate individuals. Adebayo (2013) questioned the priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church as a deviant and anti-social practice, while Gwaza (2019) focused on the contradictions between the Tiv culture and the Catholic Church. Both studies share similar findings that celibacy is unfathomable. Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) also shared similar observations concerning priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church and observed that it appeared awkward in African traditional societies, while Aroh (2014) also acknowledged that celibacy is unreasonable, unnatural and against African cultural traditions. These viewpoints are summarised by Sunardi (2014), who concluded that priestly celibacy will continue to pose problems because of enculturation.

In East Africa, Wubbels's study (2011) and Nkurunziza (2003) shared similar opinions with studies from other African regions that priestly celibacy goes against African customs and called for a paradigm shift on

celibacy that reflects the socio-cultural context of Africa. These studies offer insights into how the indigenous African culture perceived and viewed celibacy. However, there is a lack of appreciation for the profound religious meaning of celibacy. Further, these studies highlighted the challenges facing priests and, as such, inform the current study on the way an African priest may confront societal and communal beliefs.

In studies touching on the celibate lives of Catholic priests, Adebayo (2013) observed that celibacy is a life of self-sacrifice, alongside the enormous physical and psychological challenges that are detrimental to the development of a mature and well-balanced personality. Besides, Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) highlighted the physiological struggle of celibate priests as the vows require them to be conscientious all the time. Furthermore, Gwaza (2019) observed that celibacy vows took psychological as well as social facets as potential Catholic priests were outrightly rejected or disowned by their families because of the choice of celibate life. The findings indicate that there is insufficient recognition of the deep spiritual significance of celibacy. Save for Tambudzai (2011) who contextualised the specific African Indigenous culture where celibacy took a contextualized meaning in a specific community in Zimbabwe. However, the study cannot support the generalization of priestly celibacy because of cultural heterogeneity among Africans communities.

To sum up the celibacy phenomenon, there is a need to examine the view of the Catholic Church in Africa. The Church in Africa has, over the years, remained unshaken by the Africans' dismal enthusiasm to embrace celibacy, as attested by the Second African Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2009, which consistently and strongly defended priestly celibacy. Further, the questions of scriptural interpretation, apostolic precedent, the nature and order of the priesthood, the practical and symbolic value of celibacy to the faithful, and the desirability and attainability of a celibate priesthood have prominently featured in modern literature (Parish, 2010). Another scholar, Nkurunziza (2003) sought to recapture the meaning and value of celibacy in the contemporary Church in Africa but provided no proper justification for what his study advanced. Considering that challenges specific to the African context have not been adequately addressed by the Catholic Church in Africa, the study examined the experience of the African catholic priest from the Kalenjin Community to appreciate the meaning of priesthood in the Catholic Church in Africa.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The exploratory study was a cross-sectional design that conveniently sampled 22 Catholic priests from the Kalenjin community in the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret. There were five key informant interviews with senior priests ordained before the year 2000, aged between 60 and 73 years, and three Focus group discussions with a total of 22 priests ordained after the year 2000, aged between 39 and 55 years. The informants were senior diocesan priests and diocesan administrators, and the discussants were largely diocesan priests in local parishes. The data was transcribed, reviewed, analysed, and interpreted into themes and meanings and complemented with narrative analysis to interpret the stories told within the context of the research. The study observed all the ethical considerations by obtaining regulatory permits and approvals, as well as informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. An authorisation letter for the study was obtained from the NACOSTI and county administrative structures, after which consent was verbally sought and registered from the key informants and discussants.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conversation during the FGDs covered several aspects such as their lives before and during priestly formation, experience in the clerical assignments, indigenous communal perceptions and attitudes towards priesthood, relationships within the community and societal concerns on mandatory celibacy rule. To begin with, the priests talk about their motivation to become priests and seemingly the would-be priests were inspired by a strong catholic family background supported by idealised motivation from an older priest. Essentially, it seems that a good catholic family standing and background with parental encouragement and influence is a starting point and later supported by idealised motivation from the older priest. These observations show that there is an underlying background, that is a catholic upbringing, as an intrinsic motivation, as indicated by the following remarks;

The Indigenous Nandi Community had pioneering late Catholic priests like the Late Fr. Cheboryot, Late Fr. Lelei and Late Fr. Toror. Through their stewardship, the community accepted celibate priests even though they held marriage in high regard. Once someone chooses to be a priest, the community has willingly acknowledged and accepted that individual's choice to become a priest (Ordained in 1985).

I was inspired by Fr Martin Boyle to the extent that I asked him if he could allow me to serve in the Mass service, and he did, and that attracted me to the priesthood (Ordained in 1988).

I accepted to be a priest because of my Catholic background, and because the community had accepted Christianity (Ordained in 1998).

I would attribute the desire to become a priest to my strong catholic upbringing, and was inspired by black Catholic priests like Fr Khaemba, who was in Chesoi, and Fr Kiriswa, among others. This motivated me to join the priesthood and embrace celibacy as a higher value and good, and to stand out in society and culture and serve people (Ordained in 2008).

The evangelisation by the missionaries was an eye-opener as it imparted the Christian faith to our grandparents and parents. The missionaries became role models and inspired us to take up the challenge of evangelisation and become Catholic priests. I grew up in a strong catholic family and was inspired at a young age to become a priest as I was involved in church activities. As I grew up, I got involved in Young Catholic Students during my school years and through this, I asked myself, 'does it mean that there is no black person who can serve in the Church?' (Ordained in 2009).

I embraced the priesthood after having individuals become priests living the 'good life', and even people encourage others to become priests. There was no fear in joining the priesthood (ordained in 2009).

The remarks show the fact that the catholic priesthood is probably a preserve of the few who accepted Catholicism and all its regulations governing mandatory celibacy for its priests. The mention of the

pioneering African priest may indicate some initial reluctance or pullback due to the unknowns touching on mandatory celibacy rule, which is antithetical to their cultures that are rooted in marriage and family, and the idea of continuity of lineage. It is only the pioneering African Catholic priest that priests overcame 'personal' barriers to the priesthood by accepting all the mandatory conditions attached to the Catholic priesthood, including celibacy, poverty and vocation. In support, Hankle (2010) noted that those seeking priesthood in the Catholic Church seem to undergo an early discernment process entailing early awareness and identification with the idea of priesthood. The initial discernment is traceable to the would-be priest's family's participation in the Catholic faith, where the specific experiences help them identify in some way with being a Catholic priest in the future. However, social support from the family and others is critical in idealising their discernment to becoming a priest, as this enables the would-be priest to concretise the discernment and manoeuvre around the social and cultural constraints of the priesthood.

Once the discernment process which involves evaluation of other lifestyle options through encouragement from his family, community, and other mentors is complete (Hankle, 2010), the priests face significant cultural and social rigidities (Rop et al., 2025) arising from the African cultural viewpoints where individual are expected to be married and sire children. Africans ensure continuity in the community through procreation. Not procreating is associated with the interruption of the family lineage as a man without heirs loses stature and respect in the community (Juma et al., 2017). As indicated by the informants and discussants, African priests seem to face the prospect of being outrightly rejected by their own or their choices not being accepted by their family members

All the years, when I was in the seminary, my mother did not accept the celibacy requirements, but two weeks before ordination, she accepted and blessed me for accepting this call and urged me 'not to look back'. She encouraged me to continue serving the Lord and not to shame us. Furthermore, I have met people who have asked me whether I am pretending to live the celibate life, or I have kept a family secretly and have indicated to them that I chose to be celibate (Ordained in 1984).

I have enjoyed my priesthood despite the challenges arising from the societal expectation, which cannot be understood as the reason why I chose to become a priest (ordained in 1998).

There was a young man from Embobut parish who sought to join the seminary but was forced to quit due to family pressure. In the earlier times, Deacon James Misoj and others who studied philosophy left because of family pressure (Ordained in 2002).

When Fr. Kuhn (the pioneering priest in the Nandi community) started working in Chepterit, the community referred to him as kipsongoiya (unmarried) even though they feared and revered him. The first Nandi persons to become priests were also referred to as 'kipsongoiyat' (ordained in 2009).

*Up to date, some of the community members still cannot allow their sons to join the priesthood because of breaking the chains of life (**Kame maa**), the life has been broken (ordained in 2009).*

It was difficult for us to be accepted as priests, save for the old priest who pioneered before us. My uncles and aunts never accepted my choice to become a priest and considered me to be 'kipsongoiyat'. They said that 'we have stopped the fire (kame maa)' and with the spread of Christianity (Ordained in 2011).

Before I was ordained, a certain old lady told me that 'I was to disappear just like that' because I would not be married. She continued to say that 'catholic priests always disappear just like that because they remain celibate' (ordained in 2013).

The priests highlight a significant cultural context impeding the would-be priest from joining the priesthood. As indicated by the discussants, cultural, social, communal and societal expectations of marriage and continuity of life through children weigh heavily on the African priests in their endeavours. This is in concert with studies highlighting the cultural, social, communal and societal impediments to celibate priesthood in the Catholic Church (Hastings, 1978; Gwaza, 2019; Appiah-Kubi & Korsah, 2020; Adebayo, 2013). Within the African indigenous religion, celibacy upset the social and cultural order to procreate, and thus celibate individuals within the African regions were treated with contempt and ostracised by their families and society (Gwaza, 2019). In particular, priestly celibacy is 'awkward' (Appiah-Kubi & Korsah, 2020), 'incomprehensible' (Wubbels, 2011; Adebayo, 2013) and 'unfathomable' (Gwaza, 2019) to say at least. The writings are clear and the indications are that priestly celibacy is still alien to the indigenous African communities probably because of the Western viewpoint of celibate priests (Perzyński, 2017; Prince, 1992; Chu Ilo, 2017) or the lack of appreciation of indigenous African viewpoints (Makamure, 2004; Machoko, 2013).

Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that clerical stress is a complex work-related stress that is not only related to clerical work but also to the lives of the clergy (Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). The life and work of Catholic priests are empathically grounded in comforting tenderness and nurturing (Juma et al., 2018). As such, the Catholic priesthood weighs heavily on them because of the priestly roles and functions required of them. For instance, the priest highlighted the tasks, roles and functions required of them.

As the book of Hebrews says, 'the priest is anointed from the people to partake in spiritual matters about God. I have been chosen from among people to become a priest through prayers, sacraments, and the sacrifice of the Eucharist (Ordained in 1985).

The priest practises celibacy because he perpetually offers sacrifices on behalf of the community, while in the olden days, oblationary sacrifices were offered in particular periods (Ordained in 1988).

We, the priests, are called to sacrifice our own lives because we are living a call to carry a cross and imitate Christ's life. We all struggle to remain celibate as we try to serve Christ (Ordained in 2011)

*With the current understanding and light of Christianity, priesthood is a sacrifice of breaking the chains (flow) of life to become the perpetual **boyop tum** so that you may perpetuate more life by perpetually preparing initiates to propagate and more for the heavenly kingdom (ordained in 2011).*

*Being a priest is a call, as the culture did not choose anyone to become a **boyop tum**. There were qualifications and a sense of calling that would take up the responsibility. As a priest, I have accepted it as a sacrifice as a call to become a perpetual **boyop tum** so that the community can continue serving the people of God (ordained in 2011).*

*The Catholic priest, as per the cultural trend, is currently the perpetual **boyop tum** (celebrant) in the roles in the Church as they perpetually prepare initiates for the heavenly kingdom and therefore is to be celibate. Celibacy then becomes a norm as the priest has the priest continually abstain as he perpetually prepares initiates for the heavenly kingdom (ordained in 2011).*

After evangelisation and knowing the importance of a priest as a person who is perpetually offering rituals and rites, the community accepted the notion of long-term celibacy. As a priest, I came to appreciate celibacy as it comes from a cultural background with the responsibility of perpetually offering sacrifices (Ordained in 2014).

As observed from the discussants, priests faced significant challenges arising from their priestly roles and responsibilities, which weighed on them heavily and included perpetual spirituality for the congregants, celibate life as a gift for evangelisation and many other demands. In support, Fitzgerald (2024) observed that the persona in the priesthood may face significant challenges that weigh him down at any time, and these include the confluence of the function and the roles performed by the priest during evangelisation. Further, Upenieks (2024) observed that catholic priests are fulfilling demanding religious and spiritual functions and roles. The roles, functions, and ministry are considered a calling from God that is expressed in service to others and as such weighs down the priest physically, psychologically, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually. In the context of satisfaction, catholic priests tend to remain faithful to their vocation despite the personal challenges in their priestly vocation (Cornelio, 2012)

Despite the demanding tasks undertaken by the discussant priest, it is evident that mandatory celibacy is also a part and parcel of the priesthood, as each discussant gave their view on celibacy as indicated in the following remarks.

Celibacy is not a refuge from marriage, and when celibacy is taken as a refuge, it will burden the priest, but when taken positively, as a God-given Gift, not for the motive of serving oneself but serving God, his people and humanity. Celibacy is possible and is here to stay, and has been therefore since time immemorial and is universal (Ordained in 1984).

I have lived as a celibate priest, as it has given me time to serve people without any reservation, because as a celibate priest, I can dedicate myself fully towards the service of humanity and the Church (Ordained in 1998).

Priestly life is a calling drawn from vocation and is a call from God. Many people wish to join the priesthood, but there are many societal challenges, including poverty, insecurity, and personal and financial challenges, which impede individuals from joining the priesthood (Ordained in 2002).

Celibacy is a choice and has value, and that's why I have embraced it personally. It is a beautiful thing, as some people have accepted me for the way I am (ordained in 2009).

Celibacy is traceable to Jesus Christ himself, then it implies that it is not something that is impossible to live with and gives the priest the option to leave and be married (Ordained in 2009).

Celibacy should be embraced for a purpose, despite the challenges. We are all unique, whether someone is married or celibate, there are challenges. We are created especially for married or celibate life as per God's grace (ordained in 2009).

Celibacy is worthy of being embraced and divinely ordained, and it is good that, as long as people look to God, there must be people to show and lead them the way (ordained in 2009).

From the African cultural perspective, celibacy came with the spread of the Christian faith as a package and based on the vocation, some people have lived a celibate life; therefore, African priests ought to embrace celibacy as it is, despite the challenges. The challenges are everywhere, just like in the world, and we have to live a celibate life as discipline (Ordained in 2009).

Celibacy is a discipline, and as indicated in the Gospel of Matthew 19, not everybody can embrace the discipline and accept the sacrifice, but only those who are granted the grace by God (Ordained in 2011).

Celibacy gives the priesthood a 'bearing' or direction as the priesthood requires the person to give undivided attention and love to Jesus Christ through the ministry. We ought to encourage one another to lead a celibate life and remain undivided in following Jesus Christ (Ordained in 2011).

I am happy with this gift of celibacy as I have lived it and it has given me the freedom to serve God. Perhaps, unlike married persons, I do not have the time to serve the Lord and the family. I am happy that all my energies and time are dedicated to serving the Lord (Ordained in 2013).

The opinions of the discussants highlight the standard view of priestly celibacy as mandated by the Catholic Church and show total acquiescence to the mandatory celibacy rule. As such, their position on priestly celibacy reflects the Catholic Church's position that celibacy is necessarily linked to the ministerial

priesthood in the service to God's people (Edumalichukwu, 2020). In some instances, the diocesan priest endured personal crises surrounding sexuality and as such, the priest may struggle over sexual continence and sexual propriety daily (Cornelio, 2012). Furthermore Gwaza (2019) alludes to priestly celibacy as a manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ. Further, studies have suggested that priestly celibacy is possible with grace and prayer as it provides ample time for pastoral ministry, whereas married men are held up by the needs of their families (Hastings, 1978).

As observed by Frazee (1972) when Catholic priests talk about priestly celibacy, it is often in terms of its symbolic value as a total commitment to the service of the Lord and thus it takes the Catholic Church's position that Clerics are required to maintain perfect and perpetual celibacy in the interest of the kingdom of heaven (Cozzens, 2006). Accordingly, a catholic priest is unencumbered by family concerns and therefore free to move to different places for missionary and pastoral activities (Juma et al., 2017). Despite the acquiescence to the mandatory celibacy life, the priest faces significant emotional and physical challenges attributed to priestly celibacy as observed from the following remarks;

Celibacy is a gift from God, but it has its challenges because of our human nature. When faced with challenges, we share them with a senior priest, the spiritual fathers and prelates, among others. Temptations from women are ever-present, and if you are not a prayerful man, you must consciously keep your boundaries as a celibate priest. I have personally shared my life with pastors from other protestant churches, and they seem to appreciate, admire and see something good in priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church (Ordained in 1984).

You cannot live a celibate life if you think that it is an imposition or take it as a burden, and then it becomes a challenge. Thus, celibacy is quite controversial to those who do not understand (Ordained in 1984).

The ministry comes with challenges in that some individuals cannot practise continence for long periods. That is not to mean that celibacy as a virtue is not bad as such (Ordained in 1985).

A priest encounters many challenges, but then, through prayer, I can overcome these challenges (Ordained in 1988).

Despite challenges, I have been able to live the priesthood through sacrifice for the greater good. Even those in marriages have to make sacrifices, which is equally similar to what the priest sacrifices; their strengths, and intelligence, among other things, for the good of serving the Church (ordained in 1998).

I am enjoying the celibate life through the charisma that gives me strength, both emotionally, psychologically, and physically (Ordained in 2010).

Based on the teachings of the gospel, I have sacrificed myself for the sake of the Kingdom (Ordained in 2010).

For me, celibacy has not been easy, as I had to make a sacrifice to live the celibate life (Ordained in 2011).

I am enjoying living the celibate life despite the challenges of human desire (Ordained in 2011).

Priesthood is a challenge because of cultural viewpoints that a man must get married, procreate and propagate offspring for the perpetuation of the clan and community. It becomes a challenge because not everyone in the community understands that the catholic priesthood breaks the chain of life (ordained in 2011).

The challenges are mainly related to the sacrifices that I make to serve the Lord. Thus, when I encounter challenges, I see them as my cross; I have to carry them and dedicate myself to the Lord (Ordained in 2013).

I have embraced the gift of celibacy despite significant challenges because a man has natural desires which have to be catered for, save for the sacrifices that I have made as a priest (ordained in 2013).

As observed from the discussant priest, there is a broad consensus on acceptance of celibate life for the priest; however, the celibate priest is surrounded and affected by sexuality and continuously struggles and is acutely aware of their human nature, coupled with numbing values drawn from Western cultures (Wubbels, 2011). Priestly celibacy has gained acceptance from would-be priests as well as congregants, not because of a personal calling to celibacy but because of the conditional requirement for priesthood service (Prince, 1992). On a personal front, the celibate priest left all and risked everything in a heroic response to the gospel (Prince, 1992) and throughout, priests have suffered to the point of martyrdom in their pastoral care and fidelity to the human struggle for justice and peace (Cozzens, 2006).

In discernment, the discussant priests acknowledge the fact that the priesthood is a product of God's calling. Living a celibate life is thus a charism, a gift of grace, in which God works through the life of the priest to help him overcome his humanness and embrace his union with God. This is observed in the following remarks.

Celibacy allows the priests in the Catholic Church to dedicate their time and effort to serving the people and are wonderful agents of evangelisation in the most difficult environments, as they are encumbered by family and can serve the people of God. The whole paradigm of celibacy is about not getting married and living a life of continence (Ordained in 1985).

Celibacy has become a part of and way of life that I choose freely, and I am living a satisfied and fulfilling life as a celibate priest. I have no regrets, and if I were told today to go back to the seminary, I would still go back and take the celibacy vow. Celibacy is a gift that sets me free to be able to serve the people of God. People have gradually appreciated celibate

life, especially when they can connect to the service of the community in a dignified way, the case example being Griffith of Starehe Boys Centre, who helped educate young persons from poor families as such, a priest lives a dignified life and works in service to God and humanity (Ordained in 1984).

I freely and willingly choose a celibate life and have lived it fully and enjoyed it. I underwent theological training for six years, and every time I was reminded of celibacy, lastly, during my ordination, I was asked to live a celibate life, which I gladly accepted. I have no regrets about living a celibate life; it is possible to live a life as a gift coming from God (Ordained in 1984).

I thank God for having lived in the ministry through prayer, the Grace of God and support from fellow priests, fellow Christians, brothers and nuns. It is through their social support that I have been able to participate in the ministry. It is a good ministry because I have been able to dedicate myself to serving God through people (Ordained in 1985).

Having gone through the formation and in the light of the gospel, I understood celibacy as a discipline that requires God's grace to become a priest. The formation period also allows a would-be priest to make a conscious decision to become a priest or not (ordained in 2009).

From the biblical perspective, celibacy was ordained by Jesus Christ as read from Matthew 12: 31 – 32 elucidates celibacy and closes with the remark that 'whoever accepts this ought to accept it' Thus, when the Lord has given us the gift of celibacy, then he follows through with the salvific grace to sustain the celibate life of priest (Ordained in 2009).

Celibacy is a discipline from the biblical perspective of the priesthood. There are always people who were set apart and called to serve others and to live well in the community. Celibacy in the community was more of abstinence for the performance of the cultural function or ritual (Ordained in 2009).

Celibate life is a noble and precious life conferred by Jesus Christ and is lived through the charism and grace of God. Not unless we understand God himself can they live the celibate life. I advise the priest to accept the charism of celibacy through prayers and charisms (Ordained in 2010).

Celibacy is a choice that I have embraced, and I ask God through my charism to enable me to live a celibate life. It is something that the Church values, as the gospel indicates, I have decided to embrace and live a celibate life with an undivided heart and hold the responsibility of serving the Church and community (Ordained in 2013).

In support, celibacy is considered a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind (Canon 277 of 1983). As observed by Prince (1992) priesthood in the Catholic Church is

perceived as a valuable vocation and a means of serving the Church and people, and its requirements preclude one from personal family life, and its requirement is sometimes viewed to be unnecessary and unjust.

Catholic priests are faced with struggles daily and are certainly affected by them, as Cornelio (2012) observed, priests are satisfied insofar as their vocation calling is concerned. Concerning the ministry, the discussant priests seem happy about their personal and vocational lives and readily acclaim their ministry in evangelising and preaching the gospel. Their words of encouragement for any young man wishing to join the priesthood are commendable in the following excerpts;

I will continue encouraging young people to join the journey of the priesthood as it is fulfilling and satisfying, and it is for service and more so because it is for service. I have never encountered an objection from anyone, any community that has locked me outside their ceremonies because of my celibate life, because of sanctity and uniqueness. They respected me and preferred to lead them instead. I have personally shared my life story with pastors from other protestant churches, and they seem to appreciate and admire the priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church. Other ministers from the protestant churches see something good in the Catholic priesthood (Ordained in 1984).

I would encourage young priest from the Kalenjin community to stick to their call, not that priesthood is smooth as it has ups and downs, just like in married life. There is also the issue of openness, discussion, and being open to being corrected and taking it positively. There is an expression that goes "Chosei tany agobo kelyek angwan" which means that a cow slips and falls despite having four limbs. This is in comparison to a man who walks on two legs, and when compared to the cow, a man is more likely to slip. Celibacy is something that can be embraced and discussed with all classes of people, whether young or old, for the young individual to succeed (Ordained in 1984).

I usually encourage the young aspirant to the priesthood to join, but at the same time allow them to think through the choice they have made. From my experience as a teacher in the seminary, we are open to them by asking them to reevaluate the choice of becoming a priest, and if they feel that they are not well suited, nobody is forcing them to do it. We encourage married individuals and even unmarried ladies to visit the seminary and talk to the students about their choices. The young novitiates are freely allowed to leave the seminary if they feel that they are unable to continue with the celibacy demands. The training for the priesthood takes approximately nine years, and therefore, the novitiates are free to leave anytime they are unable to continue. The celibacy controversy is present, and the novitiates are free to leave the seminary if they are not able to practise celibacy (Ordained in 1985).

I would like to encourage priests and people to be closer to God, especially priests, seminarians and Christians. There is no life or vocation without challenges, whether you are a teacher, a priest, or a married man. I would encourage young men to join the ministry to perpetuate Christ's work as it is God's Work (Ordained in 1985).

I would encourage young individuals to join the priesthood because, as Jesus said, 'the harvest is huge but the labourers are few'. There are so many people who need salvation, to act as role models, and to bring development to all areas, because work cannot be separated from faith (ordained in 1998).

Many young individuals see us as role models and would wish to become priests, save for personal and financial challenges. This is the time for personal choice, and there are priests who left because of personal reasons (Ordained in 2002).

Lastly, the controversy on celibacy has spurred a conversation on the importance of priestly celibacy within and outside the Catholic Church, depending on the internal or external viewpoints. Whalen (2007) gives a positive internal view of celibacy relating to its positive influence on the Church's mission to evangelise as they strongly advocate for celibacy to free the ecclesiastic from worldly distraction (Prince, 1992) while the negative external view sees priestly celibacy through its harmful and deleterious effects of sexual abuse on the societies (Rossetti, 2002) and the communities and in particular, the Church itself (Prince, 1992; Schoenherr, 2004). Though the celibacy controversy has always existed since the beginning of the Church (Serbin, 2006), the controversy became more pronounced because of clerical sexual abuse in the Catholic Church (Böhm et al., 2014; Rossetti, 2002; Scheper-Hughes & Devine, 2003). Based on this viewpoint, the study sought the opinion of the discussant priest on the controversy surrounding clerical celibacy, and their views are commendable as drawn from the following remarks.

Those who left the catholic priesthood were unable to practise their vocation and thus are using celibacy as a scapegoat for their inability to remain celibate. The Church has a procedure for laicising a priest so that the priest who wishes to quit can follow it (Ordained in 1988).

Priesthood is a choice of celibacy and a free choice to leave. Priesthood is about perseverance and sacrifice. For those who left have left because of minor problems or a misunderstanding. But it is permissible to leave the priesthood because some individuals might have broken down had they been forced to stay (ordained in 1998).

Priesthood depends on your background, personal choice and faith and is ready to withstand the pressures. For the priest who has left the priesthood because it is alien and un-African, there is a narrative that cuts across African communities, which cannot hold water because the majority of the priests are holding on because of faith and charisms. (Ordained in 2002).

Not all priests who have left the priesthood have left because of celibacy; some left because of personal challenges, and therefore, we cannot say in a blanket way that celibacy is pushing priests away. Probably, they erred in their decision-making, as some still seek to become priests and therefore should not be condemned (ordained in 2009).

Celibacy is not a reason for the reduction in the vocation. Maybe the young people were misled and did not believe in the personal sacrifice they made during their ordination. Their exposure to secular life has made them change their view on the celibate life of the priesthood (Ordained in 2010).

Celibacy is alien to African communities, but priests who wish to quit should not use celibacy as a reason for leaving. I have encountered a priest who was suspended but has not requested to be laicised despite being suspended. He prefers to remain celibate (Ordained in 2011).

Celibacy controversy has been around the history of the Church, but being a priest is a 'call from Jesus Christ to imitate Him'. The controversies do not dilute the ministry of Jesus Christ. This means that controversies will be forever present, but should not change the essence of the priesthood; thus, celibacy in the priesthood should be maintained (Ordained in 2011).

For those who left the priesthood because celibacy was imposed on them, they didn't make the appropriate choice of living a celibate life from the beginning. For those years, they have lived the priesthood. I thank them for having lived it, and for their decision to leave the priesthood is a discernment (Ordained in 2013).

On the issue of controversies, celibacy is a discipline and not a doctrine, considering that in the early Church, priests were allowed to marry while bishops had households, but at some point, the Church stopped the ecclesiastical marriage for its clergy (ordained in 2013).

Controversies have arisen because of discipline and not because of doctrine. At some point, there was a push for the priest to marry to resolve all the controversies relating to clerical sexual abuse and avoid the scandals (ordained in 2013).

The celibacy controversies are like teasers to the vocation and thus are part and parcel of the challenges facing the ministry. For me, it does not deter me in my journey as a priest. For priests who are sexually inactive and have left the priesthood, they can get married. It does not mean that celibacy is inappropriate for the clergy, as celibacy is a gift to be lived joyfully and satisfactorily (Ordained in 2013).

The remarks indicate that the celibacy controversy is not a big deal and that priestly celibacy is not to be given prominence. Young priests tend to redirect their focus on pressing expectations in their environment, often without realising the price that they pay. They strive to earn the minimum level of consideration and esteem that provides them with confirmation of their own identity (Ruiz -Prada et al., 2021). Older priests may have become increasingly adept at adjusting to the stress, thus older priests tend to be less lonely than younger priests. It is possible that as priests grow older, they learn to live with and adjust to loneliness so that it is no longer a problem for them (Schnabel & Koval, 2009). Older priests appeared more likely to be satisfied with their priestly vocation even when facing challenges and

difficulties. Furthermore, there is a need to evaluate priestly satisfaction in an ongoing and relational manner (Cornelio, 2012).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Based on the discussion, the study observed that young men are more likely to be inspired and motivated to be Catholic priests by a strong family catholic background and reinforced by idealized motivation from older priests. A considerable number of priests still faces social and cultural rigidities and constraints in their quest to join the priesthood. The Catholic priesthood weighs heavily on the persona in the priest from the celibate life to the demands of the priesthood. Many African priests have acquiesced to the mandatory celibacy rule, but are still weighed down by the overt sexuality in their environment. Priest acknowledges the challenges in priestly service but has concretised their persona to fully serve God and humanity by embracing celibacy. Within the African context, the celibacy controversy is marginally associated with the priesthood and remains undefined.

Recommendations: Considering that the African worldview is distinctly different and there is a trend towards convergence in social values, the Catholic Church in Africa might in the near future face similar circumstances to the Catholic Church in the Western world, there is a need to find relevance in churches' training of African clergy to improve the evangelisation of the African people.

Notwithstanding the gradual acceptance of the Catholic Church and its prescriptions in Africa, there is a need to double down on the enculturation process to align it with the localised and unique African worldview as a broader, inclusive way of evangelising Africans.

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