Tier 4

The Tier System:

Vocation Ministry introduced a **Tier System** in the 2023 *State of Priestly Vocations* report to categorize dioceses into one of four tiers based on overall Catholic population size. This system allowed for a nuanced analysis of key metrics related to vocations, such as ordination rates and seminarian enrollment, recognizing that dioceses face different challenges and opportunities depending on their size and resources. The tiers were as follows:

Tier 4

- **Characteristics:** These dioceses serve fewer than 100,000 Catholics, often spread across large geographic areas with rural or sparsely populated communities.
- **Challenges:** Limited resources and fewer candidates make it difficult to sustain strong vocation programs. The cities have larger parishes with multiple priests, and many times, the rural areas have become (or remain) mission territories where priests oversee multiple, smaller parishes.
- **Opportunities:** The smaller scale can allow for closer priest-parishioner relationships, creating fertile ground 3 for personal mentorship and vocation encouragement

Purpose of the Tier System:

The tier system was designed to:

1. **Provide Contextual Comparisons**: Comparing dioceses within the same tier helped identify what works for similarly resourced and sized dioceses.
2. **Highlight Best Practices**: The system spotlighted dioceses excelling within their tiers, allowing others to learn from their strategies.
3. **Facilitate Customized Solutions**: Recognizing that a "one-size-fits-all" approach would not be effective, the tier system encouraged dioceses to tailor their vocation efforts to their unique circumstances.

By analyzing data through the lens of these tiers, the report offered actionable insights and practical recommendations that were relevant to dioceses of all sizes.

VOCATION MINISTRY

Tier 4
53 Dioceses
<100,000 Catholics in Diocese

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Diocese Abbrev.	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2023	Total Seminarians 2023	Seminarians Needed 2023**	% of Total Seminarians 2023 vs Need**	Priestly Ordinations 2023	Priestly Ordinations Needed 2023*	On Avg % Ordained vs. Need 2023	Parishioners Each Active Priest Serves in 2023
Las Cruces, New Mexico	LCNM	100,000	6	22	27%	0	2	0%	2,083
Burlington, Vermont	BUR	100,000	8	22	36%	0	2	0%	1,695
Lafayette, Indiana	LAIN	99,656	11	22	49%	2	2	100%	1,510
Lincoln, Nebraska	LINC	94,423	30	34	89%	3	3	100%	684
Covington, Kentucky	COV	90,497	6	22	27%	1	2	50%	1,560
Reno, Nevada	RENO	89,622	5	11	45%	0	1	0%	2,490
Davenport, Iowa	DAV	87,363	6	22	27%	2	2	100%	1,506
Saginaw, Michigan	SAG	86,333	4	22	18%	1	2	50%	2,158
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	TALL	81,082	19	22	85%	1	2	50%	891
Savannah, Georgia	SAV	80,000	11	22	49%	1	2	50%	1,013
Sioux City, Iowa	SCIA	78,045	8	22	36%	1	2	50%	1,815
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	HUM	75,761	4	22	18%	3	2	150%	1,578
Knoxville, Tennessee	KNO	75,191	11	22	49%	3	2	150%	1,194
Jefferson City, Missouri	JEFF	74,413	10	22	45%	0	2	0%	1,145
Beaumont, Texas	BEAU	74,185	9	22	40%	1	2	50%	1,578
Belleville, Illinois	BEL	73,771	3	22	13%	0	2	0%	1,341
Fargo, North Dakota	FAR	72,799	14	22	63%	0	2	0%	856
Ogdensburg, New York	OGD	71,899	7	22	31%	1	2	50%	1,198
Victoria, Texas	VIC	70,675	7	22	31%	2	2	100%	1,178
Evansville, Indiana	EVAN	70,534	17	22	76%	1	2	50%	1,679
Kalamazoo, Michigan	KAL	68,934	7	22	31%	1	2	50%	1,044
Altoona-Johnston, Pennsylvania	ALT	67,682	4	22	18%	1	2	50%	1,209
Memphis, Tennessee	MEM	66,690	12	22	54%	0	2	0%	1,258
Springfield- Cape Girardeau, Missouri	SPMO	63,382	2	22	9%	1	2	50%	1,039
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	WHE	62,974	11	22	49%	0	2	0%	649
Bismarck North Dakota	BIS	61,000	10	22	45%	3	2	150%	910

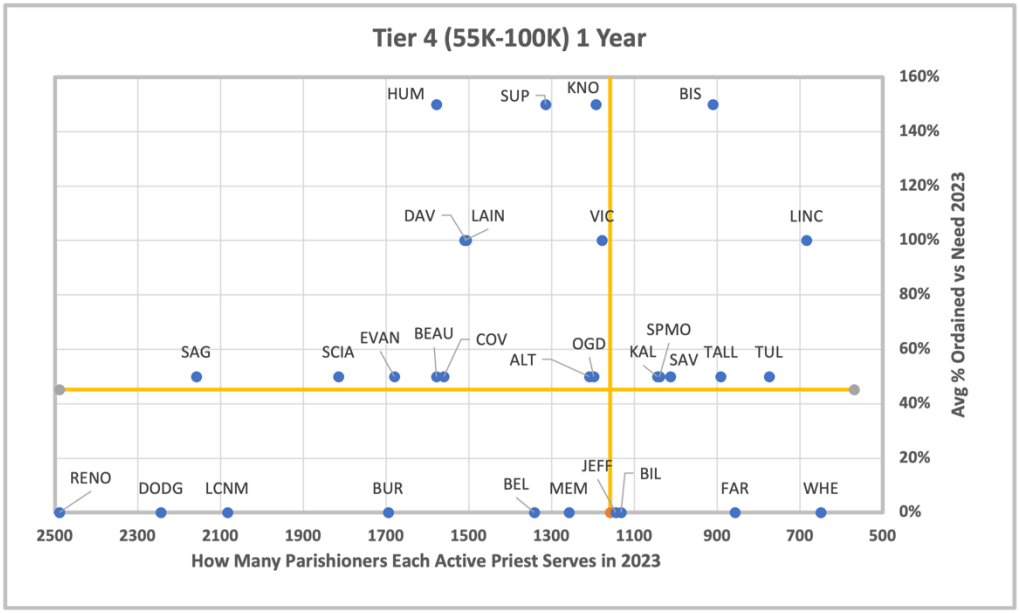
See formulas for calculations in appendix.

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Diocese Abbrev.	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2023	Total Seminarians 2023	Seminarians Needed 2023**	% of Total Seminarians 2023 vs Need**	Priestly Ordinations 2023	Priestly Ordinations Needed 2023*	On Avg % Ordained vs. Need 2023	Parishioners Each Active Priest Serves in 2023
Tulsa, Oklahoma	TUL	60,408	12	22	54%	1	2	50%	774
Biloxi, Mississippi	BIL	56,638	6	22	27%	0	2	0%	1,133
Dodge City, Kansas	DODG	56,097	4	11	36%	0	1	0%	2,244
Superior, Wisconsin	SUP	55,205	4	22	18%	3	2	150%	1,314
Lake Charles, Louisiana	LCLA	53,213	8	22	36%	1	2	50%	1,209
Owensboro, Kentucky	OWEN	51,043	3	22	13%	1	2	50%	663
Pueblo, Colorado	PUE	49,872	5	11	45%	0	1	0%	1,385
Marquette, Michigan	MARQ	49,372	8	22	36%	1	2	50%	866
Helena, Montana	HEL	48,291	12	22	54%	1	2	50%	1,238
New Ulm, Minnesota	ULM	47,737	4	11	36%	0	1	0%	1,326
Cheyenne, Wyoming	CHE	47,613	8	22	36%	0	2	0%	1,161
Grand Island, Nebraska	GINE	45,999	7	11	63%	0	1	0%	1,278
Gaylord, Michigan	GAY	43,751	5	22	22%	0	2	0%	754
Jackson, Mississippi	JACK	43,590	7	22	31%	1	2	50%	752
Amarillo, Texas	AMTX	42,235	4	22	18%	0	2	0%	1,083
Duluth, Minnesota	DUL	41,860	11	22	49%	1	2	50%	837
Lexington, Kentucky	LEX	38,673	5	22	22%	0	2	0%	569
Salina, Kansas	SAL	38,552	10	22	45%	0	2	0%	741
Alexandria, Louisiana	ALEX	36,228	8	22	36%	1	2	50%	659
Baker, Oregon	BAKE	33,356	1	11	9%	1	1	100%	981
Shreveport, Louisiana	AMA	33,325	3	11	27%	2	1	200%	926
Crookston, Minnesota	CROO	29,764	4	11	36%	1	1	100%	930
Steubenville, Ohio	STEU	28,327	8	22	36%	0	2	0%	616
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	BILL	27,793	4	22	18%	1	2	50%	591
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	ANCH	24,592	2	11	18%	0	1	0%	723
Rapid City, South Dakota	RCSD	20,940	11	11	98%	0	1	0%	582
Fairbanks, Alaska	FAIR	11,235	0	11	0%	0	1	0%	803

See formulas for calculations in appendix.

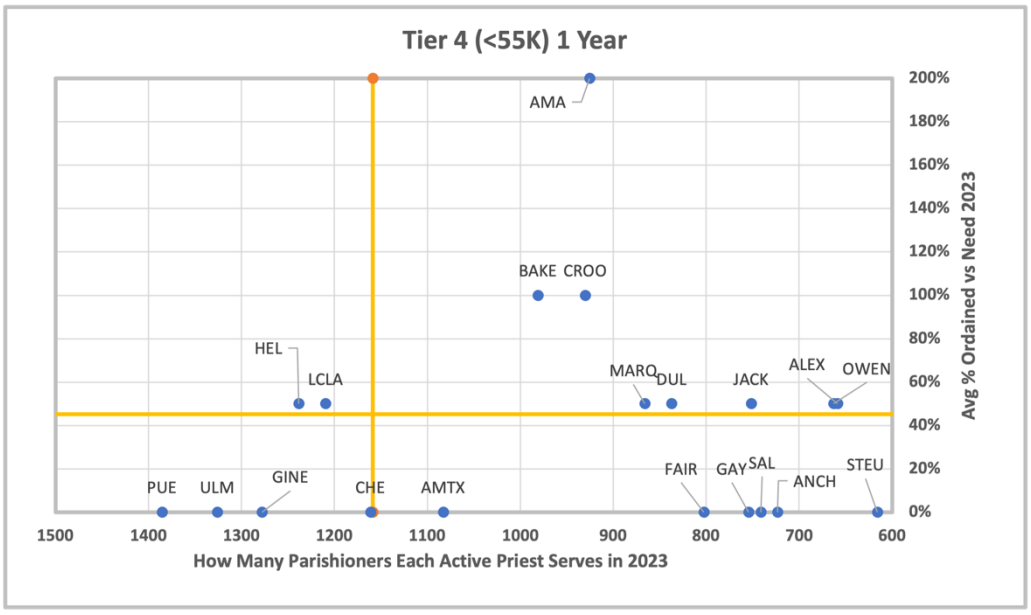
Tier 4 – Quadrant

55,000-100,000



Tier 4 – Quadrant

<55,000



*Abbreviations of dioceses can be found in the spreadsheet on the previous page.

Tier 4 – Quadrant Analysis

These Quadrant Charts are graphs of "How Many Parishioners Each Active Priest Serves" compared to "Average Ordination Rate vs. Need". Each dot on these charts represents the data for a diocese. The vertical and horizontal orange lines provide the overall averages for all the dioceses in their group. Let's define what each quadrant represents:

Upper Right Quadrant-
Current Situation: The dioceses in this quadrant generally have good numbers of active priests and smaller numbers of parishioners that each priest serves. Ordinations are relatively high compared to the other dioceses in the demographic group. Since each priest serves smaller numbers, access to priests is greater, and relationship potential, necessary for developing vocations, is more possible.

Future Situation: The dioceses in this quadrant, even though it may not be ordaining as many as it would like, is in the best situation of all the quadrants heading forward. Since ordination rates are higher, and the replacement of existing priests is ongoing, as we approach the high retirement rates of baby boomer priests, this group will most likely handle this situation the best of the four quadrants.

Upper Left Quadrant-
Current Situation: The dioceses in this quadrant generally have smaller numbers of active priests and large numbers of parishioners that each priest serves. This reason can be different in the tiers. Some dioceses are Catholic population-dense in a smaller geographic area; others may have a small number of priests serving vast numbers of parishioners. Either way, the result is that access to priests is reduced. We generally see very few dioceses in the quadrant, which means developing a strong, nurturing vocational environment is almost impossible. This doesn't mean that individual parishes cannot do this successfully. Still, dioceses that average high parishioner numbers have found it impossible to generate more than 60% of the ordinations needed in this quadrant.

Future Situation: Since there are very few dioceses in this quadrant, with many parishioners that each priest serves and a high ordination rate, it's hard to see a model that shows us what success looks like.

Bottom Right Quadrant-
Current Situation: The dioceses in this quadrant generally have good numbers of active priests and smaller numbers of parishioners that each priest serves. Ordinations are relatively low compared to the other dioceses in the demographic group. Since each priest serves smaller numbers, access to priests is greater, and relationship potential, which is necessary for developing vocations, is more possible.

Future Situation: If the addressable steps are taken, it will take time to see positive change in these dioceses because of the number of years needed for priestly formation. But this group has all the tools and inputs necessary for revival.

Bottom Left Quadrant-
Current Situation: Dioceses in this quadrant struggle in many cases with a lack of existing priests, and each existing priest serves large numbers of parishioners. Ordination rates are very low compared to the other dioceses in their demographic group. With all the demands of handling these large parishes, priests find it very challenging to create a vocational environment to develop sustaining numbers of vocations to the priesthood. Therefore, very few ordinations are fostered in these dioceses.

Future Situation: The question is what changes can be made to make it possible to create a more vocational environment. The first step is awareness. Changes of some priorities from administrative to vocational are possible. Defining roles where religious priests, lay people, and retired religious can fill gaps to alleviate the situation outlined can help create a vocational environment.

VOCATION MINISTRY

Tier 4 – Priestly Availability Index

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Active Priests for 2023	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2023	Total Parishes 2023	Priestly Availability Index
Las Cruces, New Mexico	48	100,000	47	23
Burlington, Vermont	59	100,000	66	39
Lafayette, Indiana	66	99,656	59	39
Lincoln, Nebraska	138	94,423	133	194
Covington, Kentucky	58	90,497	48	31
Reno, Nevada	36	89,622	28	11
Davenport, Iowa	58	87,363	74	49
Saginaw, Michigan	40	86,333	56	26
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	91	81,082	49	55
Savannah, Georgia	79	80,000	57	56
Sioux City, Iowa	43	78,045	41	23
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	48	75,761	39	25
Knoxville, Tennessee	63	75,191	50	42
Jefferson City, Missouri	65	74,413	91	79
Beaumont, Texas	47	74,185	42	27
Belleville, Illinois	55	73,771	99	74
Fargo, North Dakota	85	72,799	127	148
Ogdensburg, New York	60	71,899	80	67
Victoria, Texas	60	70,675	51	43
Evansville, Indiana	42	70,534	45	27
Kalamazoo, Michigan	66	68,934	46	44
Altoona-Johnston, Pennsylvania	56	67,682	87	72
Memphis, Tennessee	53	66,690	41	33
Springfield- Cape Girardeau, Missouri	61	63,382	66	64
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	97	62,974	92	142
Bismarck North Dakota	67	61,000	93	102

See formulas for calculations in appendix.

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Active Priests for 2023	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2023	Total Parishes 2023	Priestly Availability Index
Tulsa, Oklahoma	78	60,408	78	101
Biloxi, Mississippi	50	56,638	43	38
Dodge City, Kansas	25	56,097	47	21
Superior, Wisconsin	42	55,205	103	78
Lake Charles, Louisiana	44	53,213	37	31
Owensboro, Kentucky	77	51,043	78	118
Pueblo, Colorado	36	49,872	52	38
Marquette, Michigan	57	49,372	73	84
Helena, Montana	39	48,291	57	46
New Ulm, Minnesota	36	47,737	56	42
Cheyenne, Wyoming	41	47,613	36	31
Grand Island, Nebraska	36	45,999	36	28
Gaylord, Michigan	58	43,751	75	99
Jackson, Mississippi	58	43,590	72	96
Amarillo, Texas	39	42,235	38	35
Duluth, Minnesota	50	41,860	70	84
Lexington, Kentucky	68	38,673	49	86
Salina, Kansas	52	38,552	85	115
Alexandria, Louisiana	55	36,228	50	76
Baker, Oregon	34	33,356	36	37
Shreveport, Louisiana	36	33,325	27	29
Crookston, Minnesota	32	29,764	66	71
Steubenville, Ohio	46	28,327	50	81
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	47	27,793	47	79
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	34	24,592	32	44
Rapid City, South Dakota	36	20,940	58	100
Fairbanks, Alaska	14	11,235	46	57

See formulas for calculations in appendix.

VOCATION MINISTRY

Tier 4

Marriages in the United States in 2023

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Catholic Marriages	Marriages Between Two Catholics	Interfaith Marriages
Burlington, Vermont	148	118	30
Las Cruces, New Mexico	215	204	11
Lafayette, Indiana	289	213	76
Lincoln, Nebraska	184	131	53
Covington, Kentucky	245	188	57
Reno, Nevada	198	163	35
Davenport, Iowa	241	159	82
Saginaw, Michigan	134	99	35
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	202	147	55
Savannah, Georgia	373	284	89
Sioux City, Iowa	246	163	83
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	182	174	8
Knoxville, Tennessee	279	226	53
Jefferson City, Missouri	268	194	74
Beaumont, Texas	232	195	37
Belleville, Illinois	191	137	54
Fargo, North Dakota	199	134	65
Ogdensburg, New York	122	82	40
Victoria, Texas	272	200	72
Evansville, Indiana	262	187	75
Kalamazoo, Michigan	167	136	31
Altoona-Johnstown, Pennsylvania	200	125	75
Memphis, Tennessee	206	158	48
Springfield- Cape Girardeau, Missouri	166	107	59
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	178	116	62
Bismarck North Dakota	188	134	54

See formulas for calculations in appendix.

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Catholic Marriages	Marriages Between Two Catholics	Interfaith Marriages
Tulsa, Oklahoma	286	232	54
Biloxi, Mississippi	160	113	47
Dodge City, Kansas	97	74	23
Superior, Wisconsin	122	74	48
Lake Charles, Louisiana	171	144	27
Owensboro, Kentucky	194	127	67
Pueblo, Colorado	137	120	17
Marquette, Michigan	147	106	41
Helena, Montana	135	87	48
New Ulm, Minnesota	124	87	37
Cheyenne, Wyoming	123	78	45
Grand Island, Nebraska	178	139	39
Gaylord, Michigan	171	128	43
Jackson, Mississippi	117	70	47
Amarillo, Texas	160	135	25
Duluth, Minnesota	139	94	45
Lexington, Kentucky	134	88	46
Salina, Kansas	216	153	63
Alexandria, Louisiana	108	90	18
Baker, Oregon	92	80	12
Shreveport, Louisiana	141	107	34
Crookston, Minnesota	84	57	27
Steubenville, Ohio	103	66	37
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	74	48	26
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	62	44	18
Rapid City, South Dakota	70	50	20
Fairbanks, Alaska	23	14	9

See formulas for calculations in appendix.

Tier 4 - Correlations

Vocation Ministry was interested in knowing if any diocesan information collected from the Official Catholic Directory publications of 2014 to 2023 could be contributing factors affecting vocations to the priesthood and, if so, how significant the effects may be. Understanding these trends may help all understand what creates a more favorable environment to foster vocations.

Pearson correlations are a way to measure the direction and strength of the relationship between two variables. The direction of the effect is indicated by a "+" or "– "sign in front of the reported number. For instance, a "– "sign would indicate the two variables move in different directions, i.e., as one increases, the other decreases. A "+" indicates the two variables move together in the same direction, either higher or lower.

The reported number indicates the strength of the relationship and how perfect it is. All reported numbers are between "0" and "1.0". An ideal relationship would be 1.0, which rarely occurs, and no relationship at all would be "0". To understand the range of reported numbers and their indications, see the table below to describe relationship strengths. While no individual trait should be expected to represent all the variations, those significant ones can be taken as direct contributing factors.

> -0.8	**Very High Negative Correlation**		**> +0.8**	**Very High Positive Correlation**
-0.6 to -0.8	**High Negative Correlation**		**+0.6 to +0.8**	**High Positive Correlation**
-0.4 to -0.6	**Moderate Negative Correlation**		**+0.4 to +0.6**	**Moderate Positive Correlation**
-0.2 to -0.4	**Low Negative Correlation**		**+0.2 to +0.4**	**Low Positive Correlation**
0 to -0.2	**No Correlation**		**0 to +0.2**	**No Correlation**

Tests of significance using *p-values* (*probability values*) of .05, .01, and .001 were applied and are designated as *, **, ***, respectively. To understand the statistical significance, a *p-value* of .05 would indicate a 1 in 20 chance of this outcome being exceeded by chance alone, .01 would indicate 1 chance in 100, and .001 would indicate 1 chance in 1000. Thus, confidence in results increases as reported correlations are strong (in either direction), and *p values* get smaller.

VOCATION MINISTRY

Tier 4 – Correlation Findings

53 Dioceses

Tier 4	Priestly Availability Index	How Many Parishioners Does Each Active Priest Serve	Parishioners per Parish	Total Active Priests per Total Parishes
Total Seminarians 2023	0.45***	-0.16	0.04	0.26
Seminarian Average 2014-2023	0.49***	-0.16	0.02	0.23
% of Total Seminarians 2023 vs Need**	0.28*	-0.08	0.06	0.19
% of Total Seminarians 2014-2023 vs Need**	0.32*	-0.10	0.06	0.19
Priestly Ordinations 2023	0.10	-0.01	0.07	0.13
Priestly Ordination Average 2014-2023	0.46***	-0.23	-0.03	0.23
On Average % Ordained vs. Need 2023	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.23
On Average % Ordained vs. Need 2014-2023	0.31**	-0.16	0.06	0.19
* P <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001				

Appendix

Formulas Used for This Report

Base Need Ordination Rate—To determine how many ordinations are needed by dioceses, Vocation Ministry used the average of two factors:

1. Population Factor equals one ordination per 120,000 Catholics in a diocese
2. Replacement Rate of Priests (see below).

Replacement Rate of Priests—The replacement rate of priests is the number of ordinations needed annually simply to replace the current number of priests in a diocese. The rate used in this report is 2.7 percent. This rate was arrived at by determining the average years of ministry for priests in the US.

Subtracting the average ordination age of priests (34) from the average retirement age (71), the average length of ministry is 37 years. Considering a priest's length of ministry to be a unit, divide that unit by the number of years. Thus, the annual rate of replacement necessary to retain the current number of priests over a given time period (1/37 = 0.027 or 2.7%).

Thus, if a diocese has 83 priests, each year they will need to ordain an average of 2.241 (83 * 0.027) new priests yearly just to replace the current number as they retire.
Depending on a diocese's particular need, a higher replacement rate may be necessary. This calculation does not include other factors of attrition which may cause a decrease in priests, such as a higher than the average normal rate of retirement.

Base Need Seminarian Rate—To determine the number of seminarians needed, the Base Need Ordination Rate was multiplied by the average length of seminary formation (seven years), then increased by the average discern-out rate of 40 percent.

Priestly Availability Index- ((Total Active Priests)/(Total Catholics in Diocese/Total Parishes in Diocese))*1000

Total Catholic Marriages—To determine the number of total Catholic marriages, the number of marriages between two Catholics is added to the number of interfaith marriages (one spouse is Catholic, and one is of a different faith).