



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 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.



Tier 4
53 Dioceses
<100,000 Catholics in Diocese

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Diocese Abbrev.	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2024	Total Seminarians 2024	Seminarians Needed 2024**	% of Total Seminarians 2024 vs Need**	Priestly Ordinations 2024	Priestly Ordinations Needed 2024*	On Avg % Ordained vs. Need 2024	Parishioners Each Active Priest Serves in 2024
Alexandria, Louisiana	ALEX	39,513	7	11	63%	1	1	50%	706
Altoona-Johnston, Pennsylvania	ALT	68,043	0	13	0%	0	1	0%	1,134
Amarillo, Texas	AMTX	41,762	3	10	31%	0	1	0%	908
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	ANCH	24,786	1	7	14%	0	1	0%	689
Baker, Oregon	BAKE	28,006	1	7	14%	0	1	0%	824
Beaumont, Texas	BEAU	76,843	7	11	62%	2	1	100%	1,671
Belleville, Illinois	BEL	74,484	5	12	43%	0	1	0%	1,520
Biloxi, Mississippi	BIL	51,399	8	11	71%	0	1	0%	952
Bismarck North Dakota	BIS	61,342	13	14	93%	2	1	100%	916
Burlington, Vermont	BUR	100,000	3	14	22%	0	1	0%	1,852
Cheyenne, Wyoming	CHE	48,256	8	9	88%	0	1	0%	1,177
Covington, Kentucky	COV	83,989	5	14	36%	0	1	0%	1,377
Crookston, Minnesota	CROO	33,662	3	7	43%	0	1	0%	1,020
Davenport, Iowa	DAV	83,438	5	13	38%	2	1	100%	1,490
Dodge City, Kansas	DODG	56,403	4	7	58%	0	1	0%	2,256
Duluth, Minnesota	DUL	42,268	12	10	119%	0	1	0%	863
Evansville, Indiana	EVAN	69,791	17	10	165%	1	1	50%	1,662
Fairbanks, Alaska	FAIR	10,216	0	6	0%	0	1	0%	681
Fargo, North Dakota	FAR	76,469	16	17	94%	0	1	0%	933
Gaylord, Michigan	GAY	43,972	5	11	47%	0	1	0%	846
Grand Island, Nebraska	GINE	49,398	7	8	83%	0	1	0%	1,335
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	BILL	27,793	5	8	62%	0	1	0%	678
Helena, Montana	HEL	48,573	13	9	149%	0	1	0%	1,245
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	HUM	77,995	4	12	35%	0	1	0%	1,659
Jackson, Mississippi	JACK	44,710	6	12	50%	0	1	0%	733
Jefferson City, Missouri	JEFF	76,929	9	14	63%	2	1	100%	1,202

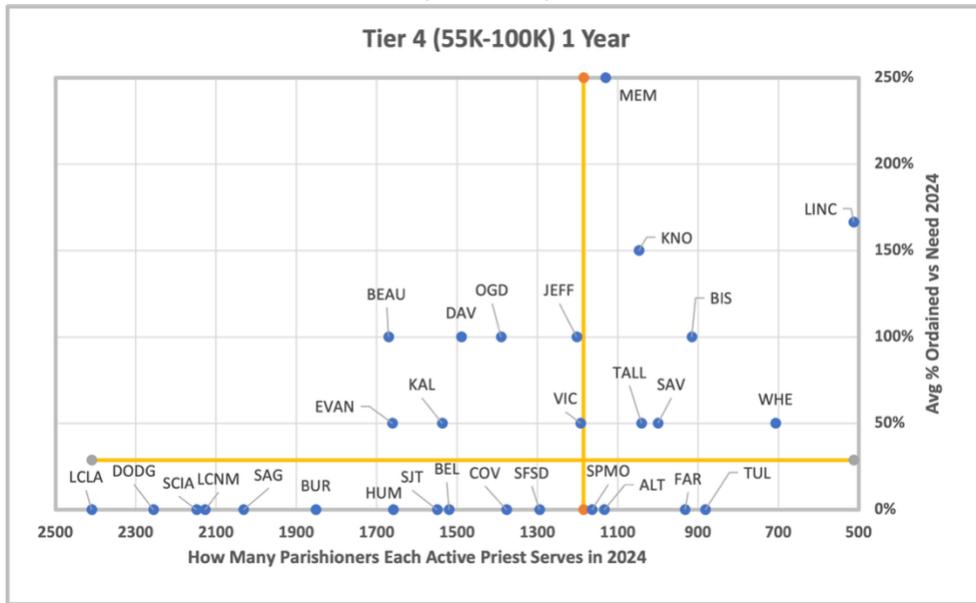
**See formulas for calculations in appendix.



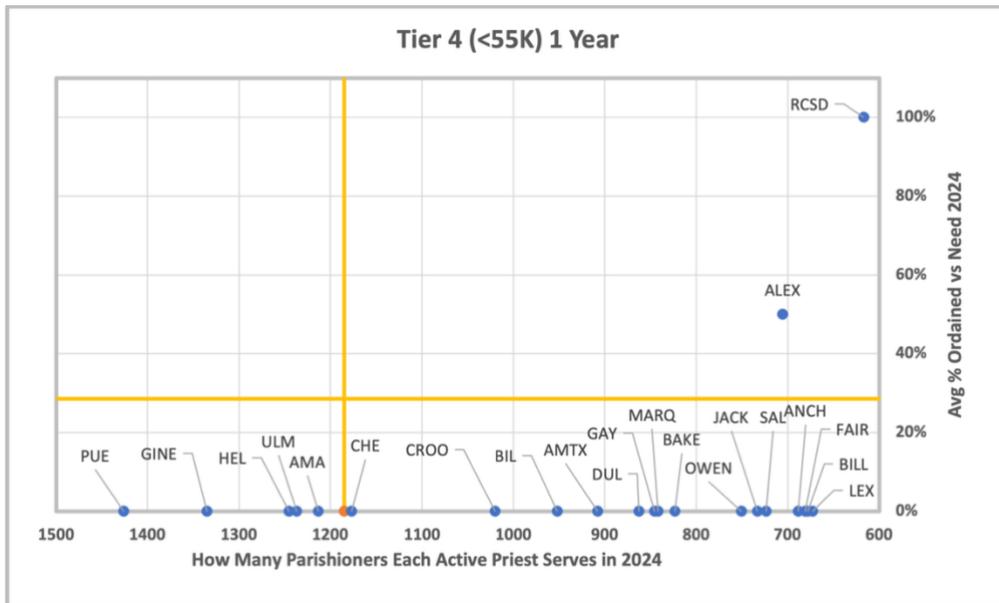
(ARCH)DIOCESE	Diocese Abbrev.	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2024	Total Seminarians 2024	Seminarians Needed 2024**	% of Total Seminarians 2024 vs Need**	Priestly Ordinations 2024	Priestly Ordinations Needed 2024*	On Avg % Ordained vs. Need 2024	Parishioners Each Active Priest Serves in 2024
Kalamazoo, Michigan	KAL	73,760	8	11	70%	1	1	50%	1,537
Knoxville, Tennessee	KNO	78,566	7	16	44%	3	1	150%	1,048
Lake Charles, Louisiana	LCLA	94,000	10	11	91%	0	1	0%	2,410
Las Cruces, New Mexico	LCNM	100,000	12	13	95%	0	1	0%	2,128
Lexington, Kentucky	LEX	39,020	3	11	26%	0	1	0%	673
Lincoln, Nebraska	LINC	74,255	37	27	136%	5	2	167%	512
Marquette, Michigan	MARQ	47,145	10	11	87%	0	1	0%	842
Memphis, Tennessee	MEM	65,569	14	13	110%	5	1	250%	1,131
New Ulm, Minnesota	ULM	42,068	5	8	66%	0	1	0%	1,237
Ogdensburg, New York	OGD	79,255	7	13	53%	2	1	100%	1,390
Owensboro, Kentucky	OWEN	51,043	3	14	22%	0	1	0%	751
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	TALL	79,121	22	16	135%	1	1	50%	1,041
Pueblo, Colorado	PUE	48,490	5	8	63%	0	1	0%	1,426
Rapid City, South Dakota	RCSD	20,984	9	7	137%	1	1	100%	617
Saginaw, Michigan	SAG	85,334	4	11	36%	0	1	0%	2,032
Salina, Kansas	SAL	35,465	14	10	144%	0	1	0%	724
San Angelo, Texas	SJT	74,361	11	11	96%	0	1	0%	1,549
Savannah, Georgia	SAV	80,000	15	17	88%	1	1	50%	1,000
Shreveport, Louisiana	AMA	32,764	6	6	100%	0	1	0%	1,213
Sioux City, Iowa	SCIA	88,122	9	11	81%	0	1	0%	2,149
Sioux Falls, South Dakota	SFSD	85,438	13	15	87%	0	1	0%	1,295
Springfield- Cape Girardeau	SPMO	64,033	4	12	33%	0	1	0%	1,164
Steubenville, Ohio	STEU	28,885	10	10	98%	0	1	0%	535
Superior, Wisconsin	SUP	56,038	5	10	51%	0	1	0%	1,303
Tulsa, Oklahoma	TUL	66,997	14	16	89%	0	1	0%	882
Victoria, Texas	VIC	70,349	6	13	46%	1	1	50%	1,192
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	WHE	61,485	17	17	99%	1	1	50%	707

**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.

Tier 4 – Priestly Availability Index

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Active Priests for 2024	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2024	Total Parishes 2024	Priestly Availability Index**
Alexandria, Louisiana	56	39,513	50	71
Altoona-Johnston, Pennsylvania	60	68,043	87	77
Amarillo, Texas	46	41,762	38	42
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	36	24,786	32	46
Baker, Oregon	34	28,006	36	44
Beaumont, Texas	46	76,843	42	25
Belleville, Illinois	49	74,484	99	65
Biloxi, Mississippi	54	51,399	43	45
Bismarck North Dakota	67	61,342	93	102
Burlington, Vermont	54	100,000	66	36
Cheyenne, Wyoming	41	48,256	36	31
Covington, Kentucky	61	83,989	48	35
Crookston, Minnesota	33	33,662	66	65
Davenport, Iowa	56	83,438	74	50
Dodge City, Kansas	25	56,403	47	21
Duluth, Minnesota	49	42,268	70	81
Evansville, Indiana	42	69,791	45	27
Fairbanks, Alaska	15	10,216	46	68
Fargo, North Dakota	82	76,469	127	136
Gaylord, Michigan	52	43,972	75	89
Grand Island, Nebraska	37	49,398	36	27
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	41	27,793	44	65
Helena, Montana	39	48,573	57	46
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	47	77,995	39	24
Jackson, Mississippi	61	44,710	73	100
Jefferson City, Missouri	64	76,929	91	76

**See formulas in appendix.

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Active Priests for 2024	Total Catholics in Diocese in 2024	Total Parishes 2024	Priestly Availability Index**
Kalamazoo, Michigan	48	73,760	46	30
Knoxville, Tennessee	75	78,566	50	48
Lake Charles, Louisiana	39	94,000	37	15
Las Cruces, New Mexico	47	100,000	47	22
Lexington, Kentucky	58	39,020	52	77
Lincoln, Nebraska	145	74,255	133	260
Marquette, Michigan	56	47,145	73	87
Memphis, Tennessee	58	65,569	40	35
New Ulm, Minnesota	34	42,068	55	44
Ogdensburg, New York	57	79,255	80	58
Owensboro, Kentucky	68	51,043	78	104
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	76	79,121	52	50
Pueblo, Colorado	34	48,490	52	36
Rapid City, South Dakota	34	20,984	58	94
Saginaw, Michigan	42	85,334	56	28
Salina, Kansas	49	35,465	85	117
San Angelo, Texas	48	74,361	45	29
Savannah, Georgia	80	80,000	58	58
Shreveport, Louisiana	27	32,764	27	22
Sioux City, Iowa	41	88,122	39	18
Sioux Falls, South Dakota	66	85,438	114	88
Springfield- Cape Girardeau	55	64,033	66	57
Steubenville, Ohio	54	28,885	50	93
Superior, Wisconsin	43	56,038	103	79
Tulsa, Oklahoma	76	66,997	78	88
Victoria, Texas	59	70,349	51	43
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	87	61,485	92	130

**See formulas in appendix.

**Tier 4
Marriages in the United States in 2024**

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Catholic Marriages	Marriages Between Two Catholics	Interfaith Marriages
Alexandria, Louisiana	111	86	25
Altoona-Johnston, Pennsylvania	186	126	60
Amarillo, Texas	130	113	17
Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska	72	49	23
Baker, Oregon	93	80	13
Beaumont, Texas	218	185	33
Belleville, Illinois	184	132	52
Biloxi, Mississippi	169	113	56
Bismarck North Dakota	232	153	79
Burlington, Vermont	235	201	34
Cheyenne, Wyoming	145	93	52
Covington, Kentucky	266	199	67
Crookston, Minnesota	115	35	80
Davenport, Iowa	210	137	73
Dodge City, Kansas	121	97	24
Duluth, Minnesota	130	102	28
Evansville, Indiana	250	182	68
Fairbanks, Alaska	22	16	6
Fargo, North Dakota	205	147	58
Gaylord, Michigan	177	124	53
Grand Island, Nebraska	173	119	54
Great Falls-Billings, Montana	49	26	23
Helena, Montana	148	100	48
Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana	168	153	15
Jackson, Mississippi	149	88	61
Jefferson City, Missouri	228	173	55

(ARCH)DIOCESE	Total Catholic Marriages	Marriages Between Two Catholics	Interfaith Marriages
Kalamazoo, Michigan	159	130	29
Knoxville, Tennessee	280	213	67
Lake Charles, Louisiana	206	162	44
Las Cruces, New Mexico	214	195	19
Lexington, Kentucky	77	65	12
Lincoln, Nebraska	254	176	78
Marquette, Michigan	129	98	31
Memphis, Tennessee	208	159	49
New Ulm, Minnesota	116	78	38
Ogdensburg, New York	101	73	28
Owensboro, Kentucky	221	160	61
Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida	196	148	48
Pueblo, Colorado	125	105	20
Rapid City, South Dakota	77	44	33
Saginaw, Michigan	102	69	33
Salina, Kansas	368	294	74
San Angelo, Texas	316	274	42
Savannah, Georgia	344	263	81
Shreveport, Louisiana	92	61	31
Sioux City, Iowa	265	172	93
Sioux Falls, South Dakota	302	188	114
Springfield- Cape Girardeau	209	122	87
Steubenville, Ohio	102	68	34
Superior, Wisconsin	116	72	44
Tulsa, Oklahoma	269	225	44
Victoria, Texas	238	186	52
Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia	154	93	61

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.

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 2024	0.56**	-0.14	0.03	0.24
Seminarian Average 2015-2024	0.59**	-0.14	0.02	0.22
% of Total Seminarians 2024 vs Need**	0.23	-0.04	0.06	0.10
% of Total Seminarians 2015-2024 vs Need**	0.25	-0.07	0.00	0.02
Priestly Ordinations 2024	0.33	-0.13	0.08	0.34
Priestly Ordination Average 2015-2024	0.52*	-0.13	0.03	0.23
On Average % Ordained vs. Need 2024	0.23	-0.12	0.03	0.22
On Average % Ordained vs. Need 2015-2024	0.41	-0.15	0.09	0.33
* 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 (eight years), then increased by the average discern-out rate of 50 percent.

Priestly Availability Index- $((\text{Total Active Priests})/(\text{Total Catholics in Diocese}/\text{Total Parishes in Diocese})) * 1000$

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).