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## Information Needs and Behavior of Catholic Priests in Croatia

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents a segment of the results gathered in a doctoral study that investigated information needs and behavior of Catholic priests in Croatia. The study focused on parish priests in particular and their information needs and behavior in the liturgy and care-giving role. The research was conducted with the help of quantitative and qualitative methodology. Print questionnaires were filled out by 327 respondents, while in the follow-up interviews 20 respondents took part. Research results show that respondents, in the care-giving role and liturgy, require information about theology, general culture, psychology, and pedagogy. More than half of respondents find information for liturgy on religious websites and in their personal parish libraries. However, in their care-giving role they seek information most often from their parishers, members in parish pastoral and economic boards, and from colleagues at their regular meetings organized by the (arch)diocese. Both in liturgy and care-giving role, respondents use religious publications to a much larger degree than secular books, magazines, or newspapers. The respondents explained that in liturgy they consult colleagues and parishers in order to exchange advices and ideas, while in the care-giving role some respondents also prefer to seek an advice from an expert in specific field. The results of this study can help Catholic Church and theological faculties when preparing the information literacy courses for future parish priests.

### KEYWORDS

Information needs; information sources; information behavior; liturgy; care-giving; catholic priests; Croatia

### Introduction

Studies into information-seeking needs and behavior of the clergy in pastoral work were first launched at the end of the 20th century in North America (in particular in Canada and United States). The initial studies focused primarily on the members of Evangelical, Protestant, Baptist, and Catholic Church (Roland “Qualitative research in the new century” n.p.; Roland “The information behavior of clergy members” 1–15; Wicks “Defining information worlds for information needs and uses research” 155–168; Lambert 1–19; Michels 16–27; Curran and

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Burns 92–108). In these small-scale studies, which were in most cases of qualitative nature, the researchers investigated information needs, sources and channels used by priests in their everyday pastoral practice (e.g., liturgy, religious teaching, care-giving, advising, parish management), and the role of information and communication technology (ICT) and libraries in their information behavior in general. For example, in the study conducted by Wicks among ministers from different Christian denominations in Canada the results showed that respondents preferred official sources of information for preaching, while informal sources of information were used in care-giving service and when making administrative decisions related to the parish management (Wicks “The information-seeking behavior of pastoral clergy” 205–226). Curran and Burns are among the rare authors in the United States who were interested solely in the use of information by Catholic priests

The results of their interviews showed that in different pastoral roles (liturgy, religious teaching, care-giving, advising, personal development, parish management) respondents depended most often on print publications (which they in most cases owned) and personal sources. Libraries and the Internet were used to a much lesser degree (Curran and Burns 92–108). Results of interviews conducted by Lount and Hargie in one Irish bishopry indicated that people turned to Catholic priests for advice or psychological support, in most cases, regarding marital problems (Lount and Hargie 247–259). Pickard studied the perception of members of clergy about their preparedness to advise senior citizens and discovered that priests required sources of knowledge where they could find information about mental illness of older people (Pickard 276–288). Aračić and Džinić investigated the perception of Croatian Catholic priests, nuns, and citizens about the support that priests can offer to people with their everyday problems. The results of their survey showed that the responding priests thought that they could provide support in the cases of religious doubt (91.9%), marital problems (75%), serious illness (70.6%), raising of children (65%), and drug and alcohol addiction (58.8%) (Aračić and Džinić 217–241). The results of several quantitative studies indicated that Catholic priests in most cases used the Internet to communicate via e-mail (Zyga and Cantoni 291–309; Smith 25–45). On the other hand, in a smaller scale study conducted in Croatia by Dugalić and Džinić, it was discovered that a third of parish priest in one bishopry did not use Internet in their pastoral work at all (Dugalić and Džinić 343–361). Lacović, Badurina and Džinić in their larger study also found that many Croatian priests were not very familiar with the information and communication technology, although most of them sometimes used the Internet to find religious information for pastoral work (Lacović, Badurina and Džinić 1–14).

In this paper only a segment of the data that has been gathered in a large, mixed-method, doctoral study into information needs and behavior of Croatian Catholic priests, will be presented. It will focus, in particular, on the clergy’s information needs and practices in liturgy and care-giving service. A review of the relevant literature indicates that this is the first study into this topic in Croatia.

## Research methodology

The research methodology for this study is primarily based on the theories developed by Chatman (1999). According to these theories, social norms of a particular group can determine the perception and use of information outside that group (*Theory of life in the round*), members will not use information arising from outside of their social group although it can be useful (*Small world theory*), and affiliation to a particular social group (in this case Catholic clergy) may cause information poverty (*Information poverty*) (Chatman 207–217).

Since this study involves pastoral roles and tasks that priests perform, the *General model of the information seeking of professionals* was also used. According to this model, professionals have many complex and different roles (provision of service, management, providing advice, etc.) and tasks from each role influence information needs and seeking strategies (Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain 161–193). Also, in this research, the *theory of social network* was used, since the Catholic Church has its own hierarchical structure, which can be regarded as a specific social network for information sharing among their members.

In this article, the authors seek to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What types (thematic areas) of information do Catholic priests require in specific pastoral roles of liturgy and care-giving?
2. How do Catholic priests obtain information required for their pastoral service?
3. Is there any difference in types of information required and information sources consulted by Catholic priests in different pastoral roles (liturgy vs. care-giving)?
4. Are there any differences in information needs and information seeking and use of Catholic priests in relation to their age, education level, size of the location of the parish, and the length of their service?

The research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methodologies (print survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews). The sample consisted of priests from a Croatian Catholic Church who managed parishes in five archdioceses (Djakovo-Osijek, Rijeka, Split-Makarska, Zadar, and Zagreb) and ten dioceses (Bjelovar-Križevci, Dubrovnik, Gospić-Senj, Hvar, Krk, Požega, Poreč and Pula, Sisak, Šibenik, and Varaždin). Priests who manage parishes were selected for the sample of the study because they carry out many different pastoral services including the organization of liturgy, religious teaching in the parish, care-giving and parish management. Prior to launching the survey, a permission was obtained to conduct the study from all archdioceses and dioceses, and the print questionnaire subsequently was mailed by post. Data was collected from April 24 to June 1, 2014. Altogether, 1,025 print survey questionnaires were distributed, and 327 were returned. A response rate of 31.9% was considered satisfactory, since the research covered nearly one third of the entire population of parish priests in Croatia.

The survey questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight questions divided into the following groups: demographic data (priestly order, education, foreign-language proficiency, location of the parish, number of believers in the parish, and length of service in parish management), questions about the parish library, areas of pastoral work and believers' concerns, information needs, information sources for liturgy (sermon) and care-giving services, and usefulness of information sources as well as computer and Internet use in pastoral work. Respondents were offered closed multiple-choice questions and the possibility to give their own answers if none of the options matched their attitude(s) and experiences. In the research descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA, Chi-Square test, *T*-test) were used to account for possible differences. Statistical difference was tested at the level of 95%.

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, 20 respondents were interviewed using the critical incident technique (CIT). The interview protocol consisted of 18 questions, divided in two thematic sections. In the first section respondents were asked about situations in which they did not possess enough information to fulfill their pastoral duties. In other words, respondents had to describe some problem, which they had to solve or to make some decision for the liturgy (e.g., preparation for the sermon, sacraments, or religious education). Respondents had to indicate what (additional) information they required, which information sources they used, and how they solved the problem. They were asked to indicate reasons for using or not using Catholic or secular sources, electronic sources, and other persons as sources of information. Moreover, respondents had to indicate the information sources that were most useful and reliable to them and what was important to them in finding and using information for specific cases or for preparing the liturgy in general. In the second section of the interview, respondents were asked to explain how they seek and find information for some problem or decision making in care-giving services (such as marriage counseling, visiting ill believers, funerals, weddings, etc.) and where they experienced some difficulties in relation to information searching for the liturgy. The interviews were conducted over the phone with approximate duration between 20 and 40 minutes. They interviews were voice recorded with the permission of the respondents. Data from the interview sessions were transcribed and processed by the content analysis.

## **Research results**

### ***General characteristics of respondents***

The questionnaire was filled out by 327 (male) respondents. The largest number of respondents is from the 55–64 age group (29.4%). Slightly less frequently respondents were from the 45–55 age group (18.7%), from the 35–55 age group (18.0%), and 65–74 age group (17.1%). Least represented are respondents from the 25–34 (8.9%), and over 75 age group (8.0%). Results are shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1.** Age of respondents.

Age group	%
25 to 34	8.9
35 to 44	18.0
45 to 54	18.7
55 to 64	29.4
65 to 74	17.1
Over 75	8.0

When asked about their educational level, a large majority of respondents indicated that they held a Bachelor degree (77.4%). To a much lesser degree respondents hold Masters degree (13.1%) or a PhDs (3.4%). Only one respondent has finished only high school (0.3%) and has been left out of the statistical significance. Since quite a small number of respondents held a PhD, the results referring to this group should be taken with care. These findings were expected because priests holding posts in parishes are expected to have higher educational levels. Results are presented in [Table 2](#).

A majority of the respondents have significant work-related experience: slightly more than half of them (51.4%) reported that they have served over 20 years in parish management. To a much lesser degree, respondents reported experience of 3–5 (11.9%), 11–15 (11.9%), 6–10 (10.7%), 16–19 (7.3%) and up to two years' service (6.1%). In testing statistical significance, categories with a small number of respondents were merged in order to better delineate differences between respondents with short- and long-term (over 20 years of service in parish management) working experience. Results are presented in [Table 3](#).

A majority of respondents lived in smaller locales: almost half indicated that their parishes were located in places with 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants (48.3%), and nearly a third in places with less than 1,000 inhabitants (27.2%). To a much lesser degree, respondents' parishes were situated in places with 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants

**Table 2.** Respondents' education.

Education	%
High school	0.3
Two-year college	5.5
Bachelor degree	77.4
Master degree	13.1
PhD	3.4

**Table 3.** Respondents' length of service in parish management.

Years of service	%
Up to 2	6.1
3 to 5	11.9
6 to 10	10.7
11 to 15	11.9
16 to 19	7.3
Over 20	51.4

**Table 4.** Respondents by place of parish.

Number of inhabitants in place	%
Up to 1,000	27.2
1,000 to 5,000	48.3
5,000 to 10,000	11.6
10,000 to 30,000	7.3
30,000 to 50,000	1.2
50,000 to 100,000	0.6
Over 100,000	3.4

(11.6%), 10,000 to 30,000 inhabitants (7.3%) and places with over 100,000 inhabitants (3.4%). Only a few respondents came from parishes in places with 30,000–50,000 (1.2%), 30,000–50,000 (1.2%), and 50,000–100,000 inhabitants (0.6%). Categories encompassing larger places (with more than 10,000 inhabitants) were merged for the purpose of testing statistical significance due to small number of respondents choosing those categories. Results are presented in [Table 4](#).

### **Information needs**

Respondents indicated that parishioners were most concerned about finances (76.6%), raising children (64.2%), sacraments (61.1%), and marital problems (60.1%). Nearly a third of the parish priests advise their parishers regarding drug, alcohol or gambling addiction (28.0%), and religious doubt (27.1%). To a lesser degree, respondents help believers with family violence (10.9%) and choice of career (9.0%). Only 7.2% of the respondents dealt with some other concerns of their parishers (such as a death in the family). The results are presented in [Table 5](#). It is interesting to note that marital problems were identified in two earlier studies as the main concern of believers addressed by parish priests (Lount and Hargie 247–259; Aračić and Džinić 217–241).

These results were confirmed by respondents in interviews who emphasized that additional information was, in most cases, required in relation to sacraments and specific personal problems of parishers (R9, R11, R12, R14, R15, R16, R18).

“If we are talking about liturgy, then there are these specific situations ... For example, how to baptize a child outside of the church. You need to obtain a permission from the bishop, and that calls for specific tasks and procedures (...)” (R11)

**Table 5.** Concerns requiring parish advice.

Concerns	%
Finances	76.6
Children	64.2
Sacraments	61.1
Marital problems	60.1
Addiction	28.0
Religious doubt	27.1
Family violence	10.9
Career selection	9.0
Other	7.2

“Sometimes there are some issues, for example very often with divorced parishers who would like to marry again. They have some specific questions. Although you know in general how to respond, there are always specific concerns (...)” (R12)

The results presented in Figure 1 show that, in their everyday pastoral activities relating to liturgy, most of the respondents require theological information (96.6%). More than half of the respondents also require information relating to the general culture (67.3%), psychology (52.6%), and pedagogy (50.2%). To a much lesser degree, parish priests require information related to philosophy (41.1%) and literature (41.1%), sociology (32.1%), art (30.8%), politics (20.2%), medicine (10.9%), economy, and management (7.8%) and biology (7.2%). Such results were expected and indicate the topics on which parish priests base their sermons.

On the other hand, information needs of priests in care-giving roles were found to be somewhat different. For example, theological information was sought less frequently (60.9%) than information from psychology (79.6%) and pedagogy (72.0%). Almost half of the respondents indicated that they required sociological information (49.1%). Nearly a third of the priests need information about economics and management (31.9%) and to a lesser degree from sources dealing with politics, literature, etc.

In relation to the priests’ information needs in the field of psychology, the Chi-square test showed statistical significance regarding the respondents’ age ( $p = 0.000$ ), location of the parish ( $p = 0.001$ ), and the length of service in parish management ( $p = 0.017$ ). Information from psychology was required more often by priests

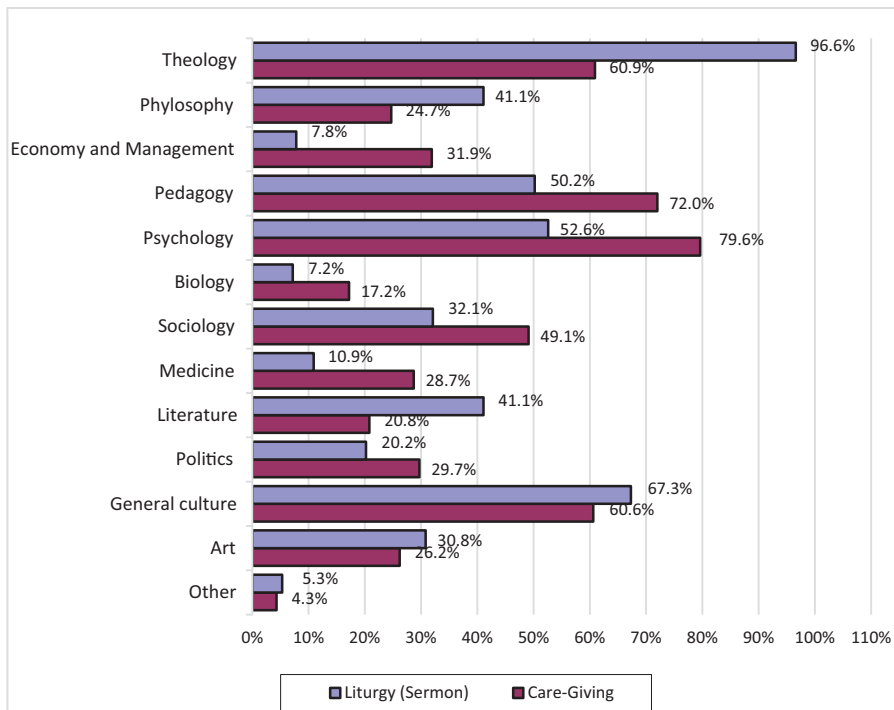


Figure 1. Comparison of information needs in liturgy and care-giving role.

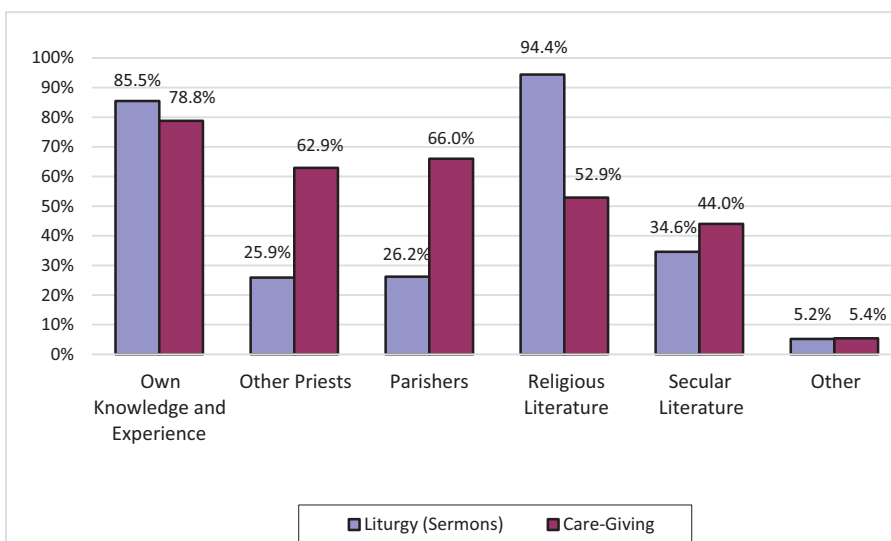


from age group 35–44 (74.6%) than by those over 75 (20.0%); by priests in places with over 10,000 inhabitants (68.3%) than by those in places with less than 1,000 inhabitants (35.2%); and by priests who have served 6–19 years in parish management (64.6%) than those with over 20 years of service (46.3%).

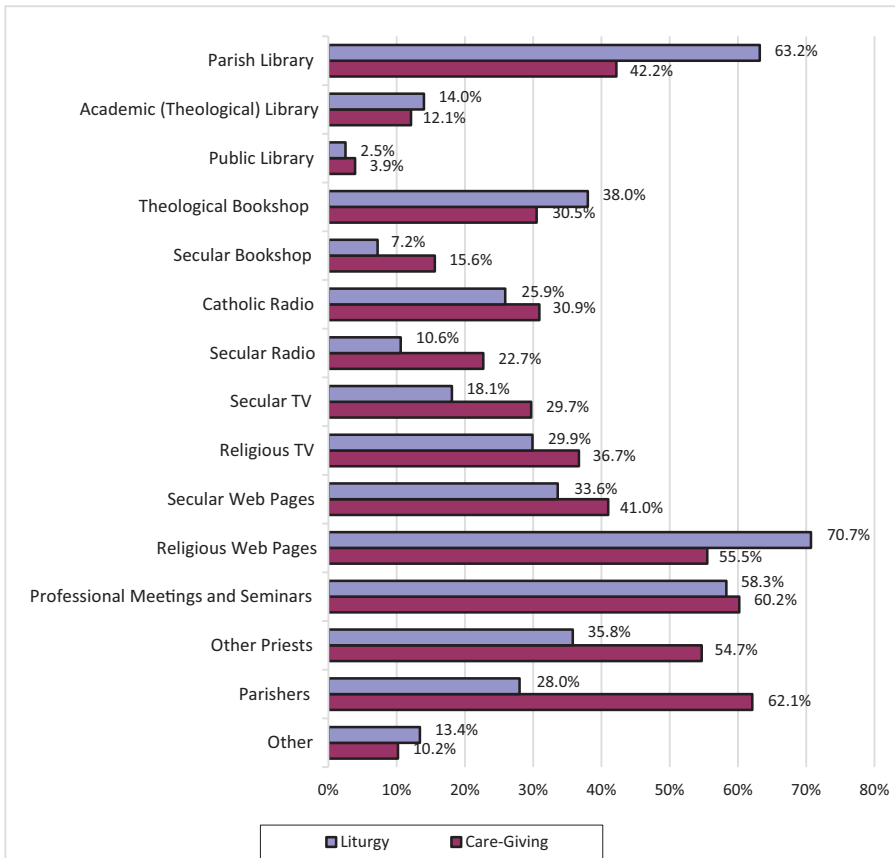
### Information sources

When asked how they prepare liturgy (sermons), the large majority of respondents replied that they consulted religious literature (94.4%) and that they rely on their own knowledge and experience (85.5%). Slightly more than a third read secular literature (34.6%) for this purpose, and around a fourth turned to personal sources of information: parishers (26.2%) and other priests (25.9%). In contrast, respondents reported that in the care-giving role they consulted religious literature to a much lesser degree (52.9%). Interestingly, the largest majority of the respondents revealed that they rely on their own knowledge and life experience (78.8%), or that they turned for additional information to parishers (66.0%) and other priests (62.9%). Surprisingly, less than a half consulted secular literature (44.0%). The complete comparison of the results for the use of information sources in liturgy and care-giving is presented in [Figure 2](#). It shows that for preparation of liturgy priests consulted (religious) literature more often, while in care-giving activities they rely more frequently on other individuals as sources of information (parishers, other priests). These results are in line with those of Wicks who discovered that priests tended to use official sources of information for liturgy, and informal for care-giving activities (Wicks “The information-seeking behavior of pastoral clergy” 205–226).

The Chi-test showed that ages ( $p = 0.013$ ) and length of service in parish management ( $p = 0.002$ ) were statistically significant regarding the use of secular literature for liturgical purposes. Secular literature is consulted more often by priests aged



**Figure 2.** Comparison of information sources for liturgy and care-giving.



**Figure 3.** Comparison of information sources for liturgy and care-giving service.

35–44 (49.2%) and those with 6–16 years of service in parish management (44.9%) than those over 75 (12.0%), and those who have served for over 20 years (25.5%).

The results presented in **Figure 3** show that respondents found information required for liturgical purposes most frequently on religious web pages (70.7%), in their parish library (63.2%), and at professional meetings and seminars organized by the (arch)diocese (58.3%). Less than half of the respondents found information in theological bookshops (38.0%), obtained it from other priests (35.8%) or discovered it on secular web pages (33.6%). As expected, priests found liturgical information more frequently on religious TV (29.9%) and Catholic radio (25.9%) than on secular TV (18.1%) and secular radio (10.6%). Almost a third of the respondents obtained information for liturgical purposes from parishers (28.0%). To a lesser degree, they found information in academic (theological) library (14.0%), in secular bookshop (7.2%), and in public libraries (2.5%). Only 13.4% found information in some other way (e.g., in their personal library, in monastery library, in prayer). As expected, the results showed that priests searched and found information for liturgical purposes mainly in religious sources.

Respondents obtained information for care-giving service most frequently from parishioners (62.1%) and other priests (54.7%), and at professional seminars and

meetings organized by the (arch)diocese (60.2%) or on religious web pages (55.5%). Nearly half of the respondents found required information in parish library (42.2%) and on secular web pages (41.0%). Around a third of the priests found useful information on religious TV (36.7%) and Catholic radio (30.9%), and in theological bookshops (30.5%). Less than a third of the respondents found information on secular TV (29.7%) and secular radio (22.7%). To a much lesser degree, respondents found information in secular bookshop (15.6%), in academic (theological) library (12.1%), or in public library (3.9%). The results are presented in [Figure 3](#) and confirm findings of Wicks, and Curran and Burns who also established that respondents found information more frequently through persons than in libraries (Wicks “The information-seeking behavior of pastoral clergy” 205–226; Curran and Burns 92–108).

The Chi-square test identified statistical differences for parish libraries, theological bookshops, secular bookshops, secular web pages, and religious web pages regarding the use of information sources for liturgical purposes. The parish library is used most frequently by respondents from the 65–74 age group ( $p = 0.020$ , 76.9%) and priests who have served over 20 years ( $p = 0.000$ , 69.5%). Theological libraries are frequented most by priests from the 35–44 age group ( $p = 0.001$ , 55.9%), priests from places with over 10,000 inhabitants ( $p = 0.000$ , 61.0%), and priests with 6–19 years of service ( $p = 0.015$ , 49.0%). Secular bookshops are indicated most frequently by priests from the 45–54 age group ( $p = 0.003$ , 16.9%), priests with PhDs ( $p = 0.043$ , 27.3%), and priests with 6–19 years of service ( $p = 0.004$ , 14.6%). Information is found most frequently on secular web pages by respondents from the 25–34 age group ( $p = 0.000$ , 51.7%), respondents with PhDs ( $p = 0.018$ , 63.6%), and respondents with less than five years of service ( $p = 0.000$ , 49.2%). On religious web pages, information is most frequently found by respondents from the 25–34 age group ( $p = 0.000$ , 89.7%), respondents with Masters degree ( $p = 0.000$ , 88.4%), respondents in places with more than 10,000 inhabitants ( $p = 0.000$ , 97.6%), and respondents with less than five years of service ( $p = 0.000$ , 84.7%). Information from other priests is most frequently obtained by respondents from the 25–34 age group ( $p = 0.001$ , 65.5%). Academic theological libraries tend to be frequented by priests holding a PhD degree ( $p = 0.002$ , 54.5%) and priests in places with more than 10,000 inhabitants ( $p = 0.042$ , 24.4%). Such results were expected because academic institutions and bookshops are generally found in larger places. Also, the results imply that younger priests, and those with less experience in parish service, have more pastoral activities (and lack time) and prefer to search for information on the Internet.

For liturgical purposes, respondents consulted most frequently with colleagues from divinity school, priests, friends, and acquaintances (R1, R2, R4, R5, R7, R8, R10, R12, R14, R16, R17, R19), believers and parishers (R4, R7, R10, R12, R13, R15, R20) and their superiors in the (arch)diocese, such as vicars and chancellors (R6, R8, R9, R10, R11, R15). Communication also takes place in person (R1, R2, R4, R6, R7, R8, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R17, R19, R20) or via telephone (R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, R7, R9, R10, R11, R13, R15, R16). These results confirm findings of Curran and

Burns who also investigated the ways in which priests obtained information from other persons (Curran and Burns 92–108).

“Yes, I contacted different persons, for concerns regarding administration or even solving specific problems, such as friends, handymen and parishers who were in some way involved in pastoral activities ( ...)” (R4)

“When I have unclear situations in liturgy, I always call superiors in archdiocese. They always give you a specific and concrete answer. Also, I sometimes phone colleagues – priests with more experience ( ...)” (R10)

When asked about obtaining information from other persons in the care-giving activities, the respondents explained that they consult experts both within and outside of the parish, such as medical doctors, teachers, educators, psychologists, administrators in the social service agencies (R4, R7, R10, R11, R13, R16, R19, R20).

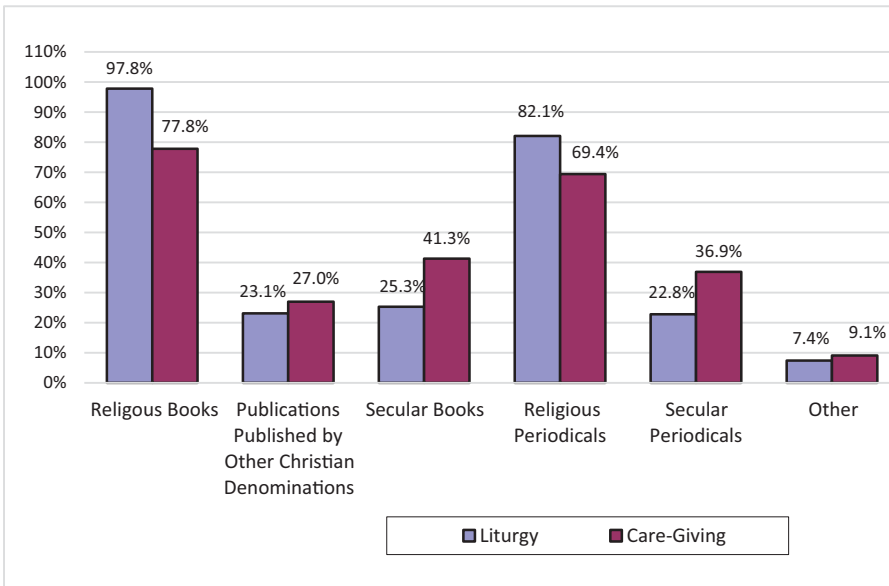
“I have a good collaboration and communication with members of pastoral and economic board in my parish. Also, there are people in the parish who are experts in their respective fields and I contact them, when the need arises. If they cannot help me, I always ask them to direct me to other experts in the country, sometimes even abroad, who might help ( ...)” (R11)

Some respondents in interviews pointed out that the trustworthiness of an information source is an important issue for them when searching for information. For example, respondents as a rule trust persons they know and who have more experience than they do, for example, their superiors (dean, chancellor, archbishop), senior colleagues (R1, R2, R4, R5, R8, R9, R10, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R17, R18, R20), than publications found on the Internet (R1, R5, R8, R11, R12, R14, R15, R19).

“Well, I always try to actively seek information from persons who I know and trust. I find the information they give me more reliable. Because information is never neutral, it is always biased in some way ( ...)” (R10)

Regarding information sources used for liturgical purposes, results show that the respondents consulted religious books (97.8%) and periodicals—newspapers and magazines (82.1%), as was expected. On the other hand, only a quarter of the respondents (or less) used secular books (25.3%), books published by other Christian denominations (23.1%) and secular periodicals (22.8%). Only 7.4% indicated that they consulted some other sources such as psychological and pedagogical literature.

When asked about the information sources consulted in their care-giving activities, the respondents indicated that they most frequently used religious books (77.8%) and periodicals (69.4%). To a much lesser degree they used secular books (41.3%), and secular periodicals (36.9%). Similarly as for liturgical purposes, 9.1% indicated that they consulted some other types of literature and only 2.4% of the respondents reported that they did not consult any literature at all. The comparison of results is presented in [Figure 4](#). As expected, it shows that for liturgical purposes priests mainly used formal Catholic publications while for care-giving purposes they consulted secular literature to a larger degree.



**Figure 4.** Comparison of religious vs. secular sources in liturgy and care-giving.

Regarding the use of secular books for liturgical purposes, the Chi-square test revealed statistical significance in relation to the age of the respondents, place of the parish location, and the length of parish management. Secular books were most frequently used by respondents from the 35–44 age group ( $p = 0.008$ , 42.4%), priests with 6–19 years of experience in parish management ( $p = 0.011$ , 35.1%), and priests whose parishes were located in places with 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants ( $p = 0.043$ , 32.1%). In relation to education, Chi-square test identified statistical significance for religious periodicals ( $p = 0.042$ ), which were used more frequently by respondents with a Bachelors degree (84.8%), and for secular periodicals ( $p = 0.005$ ), which were used most frequently by respondents holding PhDs (63.6%). This finding shows that the more educated respondents are more open to information from outside the Catholic Church.

### ***Preference of specific information sources***

In relation to Catholic information sources, the largest number of respondents explained that they used Croatian and international sources such as *Živo vrelo*, *Katolički tjednik*, *Živa riječ*, *Služba riječi*, website of their diocese, *Lectio divina*, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church for liturgical purposes (R1, R4, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R17, R18, R19, R20).

“Most frequently I search the official web page of my diocese, and *Lectio divina*. I also read various commentaries ... We have different materials available, like print magazines, which can also help ...” (R7)

Respondents consult Catholic sources and literature for liturgical purposes because of the thematic areas they cover, good messages, advices, examples, and

explanations they provide. These sources also inspire them deeply for the preparation of sermons (R4, R8, R9, R12, R16, R18, R20).

“Well, I find in those sources good pieces of advice and explanations for children, good encouraging examples in short stories. This I find sufficient for preparation of myself as a priest, and then through my thinking and experience I try to convey some of that to my parishers attending Sunday service so that they can profit from Gods’ words.” (R18)

In relation to the use of secular sources for liturgical purposes, the majority of respondents described that they consulted different types of secular sources such as web pages, fictional novels, encyclopedia, maps, photographs and illustrations (R6, R7, R9, R10, R13, R17, R20).

“I read books, novels, encyclopaedia. I personally like encyclopaedias and I have quite a lot of them. Also, publications on the geography and history of Israel ...” (R6)

Respondents stated that they used secular sources to stay informed about society, culture, politics, sport etc. but they also emphasized the problem of biased information sources (R4, R9, R10, R14, R17, R18, R20).

“For sermons I read newspapers in order to stay informed about what is going on in the world. Although, one should be very careful when reading daily press. (...) I believe that every newspaper is biased, it serves specific masters who direct their policy. One should read at least three different newspapers to know only half of the truth.” (R17)

When asked about the preferred types of secular sources and reasons for their use in care-giving roles, some respondents explained that they used secular books, newspapers and magazines, TV etc. (R1, R2, R4, R5, R7, R10, R11, R12, R13, R15, R18, R20) in order to give adequate advice to their parishers regarding illness, etc. (R1, R5, R7, R11, R13, R15, R20).

“ (...) I have a problem when somebody approaches me, and for example say they want to kill themselves. What can I say? I can listen to them and tell them that they should ask for help from somebody else who has more knowledge and experience in dealing with such situations ... (...) I have to direct them to a another professional, a medical doctor or some other expert who can deal with that.” (R7)

On the other hand, nearly half of the respondents (40.9%) indicated that they did not use secular sources available on the Internet because they are not in line with their beliefs. They also explained that such sources were not of sufficient quality, did not inspire them, were relativistic and demonstrated sensationalism against the Catholic Church and priests, and portrayed unacceptable moral and educational values. Less than 20% of the priests (18.2%) reported that they did not use secular sources because they did not facilitate their pastoral work, but only served as informational literature for general culture and knowledge expansion.

### ***Usefulness of information sources and information selection criteria***

The average mean of usefulness of different sources of information is presented in Table 6. The results show that respondents identified religious books (mean 4.29),

**Table 6.** Assessment of usefulness of information sources.

Information sources	Mean
Religious books	4.29
Religious web pages	3.93
Religious periodicals	3.78
Secular books	2.92
Secular web pages	2.91
Books published by other Christian denominations	2.86
Secular periodicals	2.63

religious websites (mean 3.93), and religious newspapers and magazines as most useful (mean 3.78). The following sources of information were found significantly less useful: secular books (mean 2.92), secular websites (mean 2.91), books published by other Christian denominations (mean 2.86), and secular newspapers and magazines (mean 2.63). These results are in line with the findings regarding the use of specific information sources presented earlier in this paper (e.g., priests use secular sources less frequently than religious sources).

These results were confirmed by respondents in interviews who identified Catholic and religious literature in general as most useful and reliable for liturgical purposes (R1, R3, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R14, R16, R17, R18, R19, R20). Personal sources (other priests, academic professors) (R2, R4, R5, R9, R13, R15), and Catholic web pages were identified as reliable and useful source of information to a much lesser degree (R1, R14, R16).

“I find Catholic sources most reliable because I must always act in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. In relation to care-giving, for example regarding abortion, I cannot take secular opinion but must act in line with the Catholic teaching, which is by the way my personal standpoint (...)” (R1)

The results shown in [Table 7](#) indicate that respondents prefer printed religious literature (mean 4.14) for their pastoral work followed by electronic sources—websites (mean 3.25). Secular literature (mean 2.75) and literature published by other Christian denominations (mean 2.48) was used to a much lesser degree. These findings are in line with the results presented earlier in this paper regarding the pre-dominant use of religious sources.

Results presented in [Table 8](#) show that more than half of the respondents indicated that they selected information and literature based on their accessibility, that is, ease of access (60.2%), positive earlier experience (56.4%), and ease of use (50.6%). These criteria were followed by “good knowledge of the source and the habit of using the source” (39.5%), “quality of the information and literature” (37.6%), “personal

**Table 7.** Frequency of use of specific information sources.

Information sources	Mean
Religious literature	4.14
Web pages	3.25
Secular literature	2.75
Literature published by other Christian denominations	2.48

**Table 8.** Selection criteria.

Selection criteria	%
Accessibility	60.2%
Positive previous experience	56.4%
Ease of use	50.6%
Knowledge of the source and the habit of using	39.5%
Information quality	37.6%
Personal recommendation	37.3%
Reliability of information	35.7%
Time required to search for information	28.0%
Effort required to find relevant information	13.4%
Other	1.3%

recommendation from a priest or parisher” (37.3%), “reliability” (35.7%), and “time needed to search for information” (28.0%). A small portion of the respondents indicated that they selected information sources based on the effort required to find relevant information (13.4%). Therefore, it can be concluded that the criteria related to the physical accessibility of the source (e.g., accessibility, ease of use) were more important for the respondents than characteristics of the source related to its content (e.g., quality and reliability). This must be understood in light of the fact that the respondents who prefer Catholic publications do not raise questions regarding authority, reliability or quality.

In interviews the respondents explained the factors that facilitate their searching for information on the Internet. For example, it is important to know exactly what information is required and where one can find it (R1, R8, R10, R14, R20). They also mentioned the ease and speed with which they could obtain the required information (R6, R12). Several respondents explained that it is easier to search for information if they have some relevant skills such as foreign language proficiency, computer literacy and familiarity with key words (R1, R11, R14). Also, the persistence of the person searching for information was regarded as very important (R1).

“Well, it is good to know where to search. Also, I should be clear about exactly what information I need. If this is covered, than there is no problem.” (R20)

Mean values presented in [Table 9](#) show that successful care-giving (e.g., giving advice to parishers) of Catholic priests depends on clergy’s continuing professional education (mean 4.70), and access to the most relevant Catholic literature (mean 4.42). Interestingly, respondents agreed that quality sermons required the use of both religious and secular literature (mean 4.14), although many of them did not use

**Table 9.** Agreement with statements on pastoral service and information use.

Statements	Mean
For successful care-giving priests should regularly participate in professional development courses.	4.70
For pastoral service of Catholic priests the most important source of information is religious literature.	4.42
Quality sermons require the use of both religious and secular literature.	4.14
For preparation of liturgy (sermons) I use exclusively religious literature.	3.92
For quality care-giving service priests should follow current technological (ICT) advances.	3.84
When providing care-giving service I often use secular publications.	3.39
I receive all information required for care-giving service in my parish from the (arch)diocese.	3.12



them both in their daily practice. However, to a lesser degree, respondents agreed with the statement that for liturgical purposes (sermons) they used exclusively religious literature (mean 3.92) and with the statement that for care-giving they often used secular publications (mean 3.39). Respondents also agreed that for quality pastoral service priests needed to follow technological developments (mean 3.84). Respondents agreed least with the statement that they obtained all required information for care-giving purposes from their (arch)diocese (mean 3.12). Such results are not surprising if we remember that older respondents use Internet and secular literature to a much lesser degree than do younger priests.

ANOVA test indicated statistical significance in relation to age, education, and the length of service in parish management. The highest level of agreement with the statement "I receive all information required for care-giving service in my parish from the (arch)diocese." was identified for respondents over 75 ( $p = 0.001$ , mean 3.73), respondents with a two-year college ( $p = 0.005$ , mean 3.67), and priests with over 20 years of service ( $p = 0.005$ , mean 3.33). The highest level of agreement with the statement "For preparation of liturgy (sermons) I use exclusively religious literature." was also indicated by respondents over 75 ( $p = 0.000$ , mean 4.41), respondents with a two-year college ( $p = 0.007$ , mean 4.53), and priests with over 20 years of service ( $p = 0.001$ , mean 4.13). The highest level of agreement with the statement "When providing care-giving service I often use secular publications." was identified for respondents with PhD ( $p = 0.009$ , mean 3.91). Such results were expected if we are reminded that younger and better educated respondents with less experience reported that they use secular publications more frequently.

## Conclusion

This paper presents results from one of the rare studies into information needs and behavior of Catholic clergy that was conducted in Europe. So far, such studies, although of a much smaller scale, have been conducted primarily in the United States. The aim of this study was to identify information needs for pastoral work of parish priests in Croatia, identify patterns of their information behavior in different pastoral roles, with special emphasis on differences in using secular and religious sources of information, and the ways how they make decisions and solve problems for liturgical and care-giving purposes. The study was conducted with the help of quantitative and qualitative methodologies (print questionnaire survey and telephone interview).

In relation to the first research question, the results indicated that for liturgical purposes (sermons) priests required information from a number of fields, such as theology, general culture, psychology and pedagogy. In their care-giving activities they also required similar information, although the focus was on psychology and pedagogy.

In relation to the second research question, the results showed that Catholic priests search for information needed for their pastoral work in different ways. While for liturgical purposes (e.g., preparation of sermons), a large number of

respondents indicated that they predominantly use religious literature and also rely on their own knowledge and experience, they also reported that for care-giving purposes they primarily rely on their own experience, contact their parishers, and consult both religious and secular literature. In relation to the information sources, more than half of the respondents reported that for liturgical purposes and sermons they obtained required information on religious web pages, in their parish library, or at the professional meetings and seminars organized by their (arch)diocese. The surprising result that respondents to a large degree used the Internet to find information for liturgical purposes can be explained by the fact that they predominantly consulted Catholic sources in order to get ideas for a good sermon. As opposed to liturgical purposes, for care-giving purposes the respondents obtained required information most frequently from their parishers (members of economic and pastoral board), at the meetings organized by their (arch)diocese, on the religious web pages and from other priests, their colleagues. Respondents reported that in most cases they contacted their superiors when searching for information or advice relating to liturgical purposes (e.g., sacraments). In contrast, they primarily contacted their colleagues—priests and other experts for care-giving purposes.

In relation to the third research question, regarding the use of information sources, results confirmed that the respondents predominantly used religious books and periodicals both for liturgical and care-giving purposes. To a much lesser degree they used secular books and periodicals, and publications published by other Christian denominations. Therefore, it could be said that different pastoral role did not have a significant effect on the type of information sources used by Catholic priests.

In relation to the fourth research question, the results indicated that there are differences in information needs and behavior regarding the respondents' demographic characteristics. For example, it was confirmed that middle-aged priests whose parishes are located in larger locales require information from the field of psychology more frequently. Also, it was indicated that younger and more educated priests tend to use secular sources of information, more frequently.

In general, the study indicated that the respondents consulted secular sources of information rather infrequently and only as a way to understand the problems and concerns faced by their parishioners or to find examples and stories to make their sermons more germane to the current day situation. Also, a large number of respondents avoided using secular media (TV, radio, and Internet) because they have a negative opinion about them. This opinion was in most cases related to the commercial nature of these media and their relation to the Catholic Church in general. These findings can be explained in the context of the small world theory, which states that individuals belonging to societies with specific world views believe that they do not require information extraneous to these views (which, in turn, can lead to information poverty).

Despite certain limitations, the methodology developed for this study could be used for future studies among members of other churches or denominations

(orthodox, protestant, evangelical) in order to identify differences in their information needs and behavior. Although this study was carried out among members of only one Christian denomination, the results could help Catholic Churches and theological universities when designing the university courses or professional development courses for priests who (will) manage parishes and carry out important pastoral work in their communities.

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