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Struggle, Silence, and Meaning: Lived Experiences of Spiritual Dryness Among Filipino Former Religious Individuals

Kristine P. Bacong*

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

Spiritual dryness refers to experiences of emotional exhaustion, perceived distance from God, and existential questioning. Despite its relevance to psychological and spiritual well-being, this phenomenon remains underexamined among individuals who have exited formal religious life, particularly within the Filipino context. This qualitative study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological design grounded in the phenomenology of meaning and value articulated by Max Scheler, operationalized through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study was further informed by Existential Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, and Stress and Coping Theory. Eight former religious individuals (ex-seminarians, priests, and religious sisters) from Batangas were purposively selected, with the Spiritual Dryness Scale (SDS) used as a screening guide. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed to capture participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Findings indicated that spiritual dryness involved emotional fatigue, internal conflict, disrupted faith, and a perceived absence of divine presence. Participants also reported experiences of reflection, self-understanding, and re-negotiation of faith and identity. The analysis yielded ten overarching themes that reflected the emotional, spiritual, and existential dimensions of spiritual dryness. Spiritual dryness emerged as a complex and potentially transformative process rather than a simple loss of faith. Supportive relationships, reflective practices, and compassionate accompaniment may facilitate personal integration and renewed meaning among individuals navigating this experience.

Keywords: *existential struggle, hermeneutic phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis, spiritual dryness, stress and coping*

Introduction

Spiritual dryness has been increasingly recognized in international research as a complex inner experience marked by emotional fatigue, diminished spiritual motivation, and a perceived absence of God. Rather than being a simple decline in faith, it often emerges during periods of prolonged stress, vocational strain, or disrupted spiritual routines (Büssing et al., 2020). Related studies have associated spiritual dryness with psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, heightened stress, and negative affective states (Prusak et al., 2023). While some scholars note that such experiences may later contribute to personal or spiritual transformation, the dominant emphasis in the literature remains on struggle, confusion, guilt, and emotional exhaustion.

In predominantly Catholic contexts such as the Philippines, spirituality is deeply woven into cultural identity and daily life. This centrality of faith, however, may also intensify feelings of shame, silence, and self-blame when individuals experience spiritual desolation. Leaving the seminary or convent is frequently perceived not merely as a vocational transition but as a spiritual failure, making it particularly difficult for former religious individuals to articulate experiences of doubt, dryness, or perceived divine absence. International studies among clergy and religious populations suggest that prolonged spiritual struggle is often accompanied by guilt, detachment, loss of meaning, and unresolved inner conflict, all of which significantly affect psychological well-being (Büssing et al., 2021; Pietkiewicz et al., 2025).

Although Philippine scholarship has explored spirituality, religiosity, and coping among lay Catholics, students, and community populations, empirical studies focusing on former religious individuals remain notably scarce. Existing local research tends to emphasize resilience, faith commitment, or spiritual growth, leaving experiences of spiritual struggle, silence, and vocational dissonance largely underexamined. Where direct studies on spiritual dryness in the Philippine context are absent, related literature on religious struggle, faith-related distress, and meaning-making among Filipino Catholics provides partial insight but does not fully capture the lived experiences of those who have exited formal religious life.

This gap highlights the need to examine how Filipino former religious individuals experience, interpret, and navigate spiritual dryness after leaving the seminary or convent. For many, this transition represents more than a vocational decision; it reflects an existential crisis shaped by emotional fatigue, unanswered questions, and perceived abandonment. Without structured spaces for reflection and support, such experiences are often endured in isolation.

In response to this gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of spiritual dryness among Filipino former religious individuals through existential, psychoanalytic, and stress-and-coping perspectives, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). By foregrounding both struggle and meaning-making, this research seeks to contribute contextually grounded insights to the psychological and spiritual literature while informing counselors, educators, and faith communities who accompany individuals during periods of profound spiritual distress.

Research Questions

Guided by a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do Filipino former seminarians, priests, and religious sisters describe their lived experiences of spiritual dryness after leaving formal religious life?
2. What personal, relational, and contextual challenges do they associate with these experiences?
3. How do they interpret, cope with, and make meaning of spiritual dryness in relation to their faith, identity, and sense of purpose?

Literature Review

Spiritual dryness has been increasingly examined as a multidimensional experience characterized by emotional fatigue, diminished spiritual vitality, and a perceived absence or silence of God. Contemporary research emphasizes that spiritual dryness is not merely a decline in religious practice but a disruption in the experiential and meaning-making dimensions of faith (Büssing et al., 2020). Individuals often continue religious routines while internally experiencing emptiness, confusion, and loss of spiritual connection.

From an existential perspective, spiritual dryness represents a crisis of meaning that challenges previously held beliefs, identity, and life purpose. Studies have shown that experiences of silence and uncertainty provoke existential questioning, particularly among individuals whose identities were once anchored in religious vocation (Wortmann, 2022). Rather than indicating spiritual failure, such experiences reflect encounters with ambiguity that necessitate personal meaning reconstruction.

Psychoanalytic scholarship further interprets spiritual dryness as an expression of unresolved intrapsychic and relational conflict. Luyten and Fonagy (2022) noted that emotional withdrawal, repression, and guilt often emerge during periods of spiritual disconnection, delaying the processing of deeper questions related to attachment, authority, and belonging. Research involving clergy and religious professionals has linked spiritual dryness to unresolved relational tensions and emotional strain, reinforcing its psychological dimension (Pietkiewicz et al., 2025).

Stress and coping frameworks situate spiritual dryness within broader psychosocial contexts. Empirical studies have associated dryness with emotional exhaustion, burnout, depressive symptoms, and diminished perceived meaning in life (Büssing et al., 2020; Prusak et al., 2023). These findings suggest that spiritual dryness frequently arises during periods of cumulative stress rather than from weak faith or moral inadequacy.

Qualitative investigations have identified contextual and interpersonal triggers of spiritual dryness, including excessive responsibilities, strained relationships within religious communities, and loss of spiritual orientation (Gerundt et al., 2020). Structural demands and limited spaces for vulnerability in religious life have been found to prolong experiences of spiritual disconnection (Ballano, 2021).

Research on coping indicates that outcomes of spiritual dryness vary. Reflective practices, relational support, and meaning-centered coping have been associated with renewed perspective and psychological integration (Beerenbrock, 2023; Wortmann, 2022). Conversely, avoidance strategies and emotional suppression have been linked to prolonged distress and disengagement from faith (Pargament & Exline, 2022). Importantly, positive transformation is not guaranteed and appears contingent upon supportive environments and opportunities for reflection.

Despite growing international scholarship, empirical studies examining spiritual dryness among Filipino former religious individuals remain absent. Philippine research has largely focused on lay religiosity and resilience, leaving post-vocational spiritual struggle underexplored. This gap underscores the need for a phenomenological investigation into how Filipino former religious individuals experience and interpret spiritual dryness. The present study addresses this gap by examining lived experiences through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, informed by existential, psychoanalytic, and stress-coping perspectives.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design grounded in Max Scheler's phenomenology of meaning and value to examine the lived experiences of spiritual dryness among Filipino former religious individuals. A qualitative approach was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the topic and the limited empirical research within this population. Scheler's framework informed the understanding of spiritual dryness as an affective, value-oriented experience shaped by emotional conflict and meaning disruption.

The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the analytic approach. Consistent with Scheler's phenomenology, IPA emphasizes lived experience and interpretive meaning-making through a double hermeneutic process, wherein participants reflect on their experiences and the researcher interprets these reflections. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how participants understood and made sense of spiritual dryness.

Participants

The participants were eight (8) Filipino former Catholic religious individuals, including former seminarians, priests, and religious sisters who had experienced spiritual dryness and had withdrawn from formal religious life. All participants had lived or undergone religious formation in the province of Batangas. In this predominantly Catholic context, religious vocation is closely embedded in family life, community expectations, and cultural identity. This shared contextual background provided a coherent setting for examining how spiritual dryness was experienced and interpreted following vocational departure.

Participants were selected through homogeneous purposive sampling, consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes depth of exploration within a group sharing a common lived experience. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old, to have voluntarily exited seminary or religious formation, and to have experienced spiritual dryness, as indicated by a minimum mean score of 2.0 on the Spiritual Dryness Scale (SDS). The SDS was used solely as a screening tool to establish experiential relevance and was not treated as a quantitative measure.

Although participants differed in age, gender, and personal circumstances, these variations were considered contextual rather than analytic, in keeping with IPA's idiographic focus. All participants provided informed consent and participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in English or Filipino, depending on preference. Integrating the participants' shared cultural and religious context into this section supports a phenomenological understanding of spiritual dryness as a lived, meaning-laden experience shaped by relational, vocational, and cultural factors rather than by geography alone.

Instrument

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide with ten open-ended questions was used to explore participants' lived experiences of spiritual dryness. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for qualitative research as they combine consistency with flexibility, allowing for clarification and deeper exploration of participants' reflections (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

To establish content validity and credibility, the interview guide was reviewed by five experts in psychology, spirituality, and qualitative research. Items were evaluated for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study aims. Item retention followed Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR), which requires a minimum CVR of 1.00 when five experts are involved (Lawshe, 1975). Based on expert feedback, minor revisions were made to improve clarity and conceptual alignment, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the instrument.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through formal digital invitations and informed consent forms distributed via Facebook Messenger, used as a secure research communication platform. Only individuals who provided consent completed the Spiritual Dryness Scale (SDS) (Büssing et al., 2021) to confirm eligibility. Eligible participants then chose either face-to-face or online interviews, with in-person sessions prioritized when feasible to capture non-verbal expressions relevant to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Interviews followed a validated semi-structured guide and began with a review of the study purpose, rights, and confidentiality. The researcher practiced epoché to minimize presuppositions (Smith et al., 2021). Interviews were audio-recorded using a secure digital device and transcribed verbatim. Analysis employed interpretative coding and theme development consistent with IPA's idiographic focus, emphasizing depth of understanding rather than data saturation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), consistent with the study's hermeneutic phenomenological orientation grounded in Max Scheler's phenomenology of meaning and value. IPA was selected to capture the affective and value-laden dimensions of participants' lived experiences of spiritual dryness. Analysis followed established IPA procedures (Smith et al., 2021): repeated reading of transcripts, initial descriptive and interpretative noting, development of emergent themes, and clustering into superordinate themes while maintaining an idiographic focus. QDA Miner Lite was used to support data organization and coding; however, all interpretative decisions and theme construction were undertaken by the researcher to ensure phenomenological depth and methodological integrity.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Graduate School before data collection. Given the sensitive nature of participants' spiritual experiences, strict ethical safeguards were implemented. Participants were former seminarians, priests, and religious sisters who had withdrawn from religious life. Recruitment was conducted through secure digital platforms (Facebook Messenger or email), and informed consent was obtained before any screening or interviews.

Eligibility screening using the Spiritual Dryness Scale (SDS) (Büssing et al., 2021) was conducted only after consent was secured. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participant preference.

Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts. All data were

stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher, and audio recordings were deleted after transcription and verification. To minimize potential bias, participants were recruited from outside the researcher's former religious community. The study complied with the institution's Research Manual, the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research, and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173).

Results and Discussion

Theme A: Suffering, Sin, and Busyness

This theme describes the circumstances participants identified as contributing to the onset of their spiritual dryness. Participants attributed their experience to a combination of personal suffering, perceived moral shortcomings, competing life demands, and diminished spiritual motivation. These factors did not emerge as isolated causes but as overlapping conditions that gradually weakened their spiritual engagement.

Subtheme A1: Emotional and Existential Suffering

People experience various personal difficulties such as loss, prolonged waiting, and repeated disappointment. When these difficulties continue over time, individuals may feel emotionally tired and begin to struggle with prayer and spiritual routines. As personal suffering increases, prayer may feel heavier and less meaningful. For some individuals, spiritual dryness develops alongside these life challenges, not because they reject faith, but because emotional strain makes spiritual engagement more difficult to sustain.

Participant 1 shared:

"I was already tired emotionally. I kept asking why I had to go through so much. Eventually, praying felt heavy."

Participant 8 described a similar experience:

"For years, we tried to have a child. Every disappointment made it harder for me to pray. I still believed, but I felt distant."

Emotional suffering has been widely identified as a factor that affects spiritual engagement and religious practices. Studies have shown that prolonged hardship, loss, and repeated disappointment can make prayer feel difficult and emotionally draining (Gerundt et al., 2022). When individuals experience ongoing stress, they may struggle to sustain spiritual routines, even when belief remains present. Research on spiritual dryness has also indicated that emotional exhaustion and unanswered life concerns often coincide with feelings of spiritual distance (Büssing et al., 2021). These findings suggest that spiritual dryness may develop alongside emotional and existential challenges rather than as a result of weakened faith or loss of belief.

Subtheme A2: Sin and Guilt

People may interpret spiritual dryness as a result of their own actions, such as neglecting prayer or engaging in behaviors they consider sinful. When individuals feel guilty, they may begin to distance themselves from spiritual practices rather than returning to them. Guilt can make prayer feel uncomfortable, leading some individuals to withdraw quietly from spiritual life even when belief remains present.

Participant 4 explained:

"I thought maybe this dryness was because I became careless with prayer and committed sins. I started asking if God was still there for me."

Feelings of guilt have long been recognized as influential in shaping religious behavior and spiritual engagement. When individuals perceive themselves as morally failing, they may experience discomfort in prayer and religious participation (Beerenbrock, 2023). Research has shown that unresolved guilt can lead individuals to withdraw from spiritual practices rather than seek reconnection, especially when shame accompanies moral self-evaluation (Vos & Vitali, 2021). Guilt-related withdrawal may reduce opportunities for reflection and support, making spiritual distance more likely to persist over time.

Subtheme A3: Busyness and Worldly Distractions

People often manage multiple responsibilities related to work, family, and daily life. As these responsibilities increase, time and attention for prayer may be reduced. Spiritual activities may be postponed or treated as less urgent. Over time, this pattern can lead individuals to feel less connected spiritually, even though they do not intend to abandon their faith.

Participant 5 stated:

"Work became my focus. Prayer was always postponed. One day, I realized I no longer felt connected."

Busy schedules and increasing life demands have been identified as common factors affecting spiritual engagement. Studies indicate that work pressure, family responsibilities, and daily obligations can reduce the time and attention individuals devote to prayer and reflection (Wortmann, 2022). When spiritual practices are repeatedly postponed, they may gradually lose personal significance, even among individuals who maintain religious beliefs. Research among religious individuals has shown that spiritual dryness often develops alongside prolonged role overload and fatigue rather than through intentional disengagement from faith (Gerundt et al., 2022).

Subtheme A4: Feelings of Unworthiness and Spiritual Apathy

People may feel unworthy or inadequate in their spiritual life, which can affect their willingness to engage in prayer or religious practices. When individuals believe they do not belong or are not spiritually prepared, they may choose silence over participation. This can result in a gradual loss of motivation to engage spiritually, even when belief in God remains.

Participant 5 stated:

“Work became my focus. Prayer was always postponed. One day, I realized I no longer felt connected.”

A sense of unworthiness has been linked to reduced participation in religious practices and diminished spiritual motivation. Individuals who feel inadequate or excluded may continue to believe in God while feeling emotionally distant from spiritual life (Vos & Vitali, 2021). Studies on spiritual struggle have noted that perceived unworthiness can lead to quiet withdrawal, where individuals remain externally connected to faith communities but internally disengaged (Büssing et al., 2021). This pattern suggests that spiritual apathy may arise from self-perception rather than loss of belief.

Theme B: Shifting Faith and Inner Disconnection

This theme describes how participants experienced a gradual shift in their relationship with faith during spiritual dryness. While many continued participating in religious activities, they reported feeling internally disconnected, emotionally distant, and uncertain about their spiritual identity. Rather than a sudden loss of belief, this disconnection developed slowly as participants struggled to align their inner experiences with their outward religious roles.

Subtheme B1: Disconnection from Practices

People may continue religious activities out of habit or responsibility even when they no longer feel spiritually connected. When practices feel routine or burdensome, individuals may begin to question their role and place within their faith community.

Participant 1 shared:

“I was still doing ministry, but it felt heavy. I started to wonder if I was still fit to serve.”

Religious participation may continue even when individuals feel spiritually disengaged. Studies have shown that sustained involvement in religious activities can become mechanical when emotional exhaustion or spiritual fatigue is present (Beerenbrock, 2023). Research on spiritual dryness suggests that practices may lose personal meaning when individuals feel overwhelmed or disconnected, even if belief remains intact (Gerundt et al., 2022).

Subtheme B2: Sin and Guilt

When people believe they are unworthy, they may avoid prayer and spiritual practices. Self-doubt can make spiritual engagement feel uncomfortable, leading individuals to withdraw quietly even while maintaining belief.

Participant 3 shared:

“When I prayed, I felt like I wasn’t being heard. I started thinking maybe I wasn’t worthy.”

Participant 8 expressed a similar struggle:

“I wondered if this dryness was my punishment. I felt like I wasn’t good enough.”

Feelings of unworthiness have been associated with reduced spiritual engagement and withdrawal from prayer. Research indicates that individuals experiencing spiritual dryness may interpret silence as rejection, leading to increased self-doubt and guilt (Vos & Vitali, 2021). Such interpretations can deepen feelings of distance and discourage spiritual expression (Gerundt et al., 2022).

Subtheme B3: Loss of Purpose

When spiritual connection weakens, people may also struggle to find meaning in their daily responsibilities. Loss of purpose can develop gradually as individuals continue functioning without a clear sense of direction.

Participant 5 shared:

“I was doing everything I was supposed to do, but I didn’t know why anymore.”

Participant 6 added:

“There were so many responsibilities that I couldn’t see where my life was going.”

A reduced sense of purpose has been commonly reported during periods of spiritual dryness. Studies have shown that when individuals feel distant from God, they may also experience uncertainty about life direction and meaning (Wortmann, 2022). Spiritual silence can affect how individuals understand their vocation and personal goals.

Subtheme B4: Shift in Perspective

Spiritual dryness may prompt reflection for some individuals. Over time, this reflection can lead to changes in how people understand faith and personal meaning, though this does not occur for everyone.

Participant 7 shared:

“Looking back, that time helped me understand my faith and myself better.”

Some studies have noted that reflective engagement during spiritual struggle can lead to new perspectives on faith and life. Individuals who take time to reflect on their experiences may develop a more personal understanding of spirituality (Scharf et al., 2021). However, such shifts are not uniform and vary across individuals.

Theme C: Guilt, Sadness, Confusion, and Reconnection

This theme describes the emotional experiences that accompanied spiritual dryness among the participants. Rather than being emotionally neutral, spiritual dryness was described as a period marked by guilt, sadness, uncertainty, and an ongoing desire to reconnect with God. Participants’ accounts show that spiritual dryness affected both their emotional state and their engagement with faith, often unfolding as a gradual and complex inner struggle.

Subtheme C1: Guilt and Inadequacy

During spiritual dryness, feelings of guilt may arise when individuals compare their inner experience with expected spiritual standards. When personal struggles are interpreted as failure, spiritual practices can feel burdensome rather than supportive. This sense of inadequacy may discourage engagement with prayer or ministry, even when faith itself has not been rejected.

Participant 1 shared:

“I felt like I was expected to be strong spiritually, but inside I felt empty.”

Participant 5 stated:

“I knew what I should be doing spiritually, but I didn’t have the strength to do it.”

Feelings of guilt often emerge when individuals evaluate themselves against internalized religious expectations. In the context of spiritual dryness, this self-evaluation can intensify feelings of inadequacy and distance from spiritual practices. Beerenbrock (2023) explained that when spiritual struggle is interpreted as personal failure, individuals may respond with self-criticism rather than openness, leading to reduced engagement in prayer and reflection. Such guilt can deepen spiritual withdrawal even when belief remains present.

Subtheme C2: Overwhelming Sadness

Spiritual dryness may be accompanied by deep sadness that affects emotional well-being and daily functioning. When spiritual comfort is absent, individuals may cope by withdrawing or remaining silent. This emotional heaviness can make it difficult to express spiritual concerns or seek support, allowing distress to persist over time.

Participant 3 stated:

“I chose to stay quiet and let time pass rather than deal with what I was feeling.”

Participant 3 shared:

“I felt extremely sad and helpless during that time.”

Emotional sadness has been frequently associated with experiences of spiritual struggle, particularly when faith previously served as a source of comfort and stability. During spiritual dryness, the absence of perceived spiritual consolation may heighten feelings of loss and emotional heaviness. Gerundt et al. (2022) noted that individuals experiencing spiritual distance often described sadness and withdrawal, reflecting the emotional impact of losing a sense of closeness to God rather than a loss of belief itself.

Subtheme C3: Confusion and Inner Division

Periods of spiritual dryness can create uncertainty when beliefs no longer align with emotional experience. This inner division may lead to hesitation, indecision, or spiritual stagnation. Unresolved confusion can prevent individuals from moving forward spiritually, even when a desire for reconciliation remains.

Participant 4 shared:

“I believed God was merciful, but I felt too broken to return.”

Periods of spiritual dryness may give rise to confusion when personal beliefs no longer align with emotional experience. This inner

division can leave individuals uncertain about how to respond spiritually, leading to hesitation or silence. Scharf et al. (2021) described such moments as times of spiritual ambiguity, where faith persists but clarity and confidence are diminished, contributing to feelings of inner tension and uncertainty.

Subtheme C4: Desire and Struggle to Reconnect

Even amid difficulty, the desire for spiritual connection may continue. Attempts to pray or reflect, though marked by doubt or questions, indicate ongoing engagement rather than withdrawal. This struggle to reconnect suggests that spiritual dryness does not eliminate faith but reshapes how individuals relate to it during challenging periods.

Participant 6 shared:

“I had doubts and felt alone, but I still tried to hold on.”

Participant 8 stated:

“I kept praying, even if my prayers were full of questions.”

Persistence in spiritual practices despite emotional difficulty has been observed among individuals experiencing spiritual dryness. Even when prayer feels uncertain or unfulfilling, the desire to reconnect may remain active. Wortmann (2022) highlighted that continued engagement—marked by questioning rather than certainty—can reflect ongoing spiritual involvement, indicating that spiritual dryness does not necessarily lead to disengagement from faith.

Theme D: From Wounds to Support

This theme describes how participants linked their experience of spiritual dryness to past emotional wounds, internal pressures, and unresolved personal issues, while also recognizing the role of supportive relationships in helping them endure or make sense of this period. Participants’ narratives show that spiritual dryness was shaped not only by present circumstances but also by earlier life experiences and relational contexts.

Subtheme D1: Painful Past Experiences

Spiritual dryness may reopen unresolved emotional wounds from earlier life experiences, particularly those that were never fully acknowledged or processed. When past pain resurfaces, individuals may find it difficult to engage in prayer or experience spiritual closeness, not because faith has weakened, but because emotional memories influence present spiritual perception. These experiences suggest that spiritual dryness can be closely intertwined with personal history, highlighting the importance of recognizing how earlier life events continue to shape spiritual engagement in adulthood.

Participant 5 shared:

“There were things from my childhood that I thought I had already moved past, but they came back during that time.”

Participant 6 recalled:

“Something that happened when I was still young stayed with me. During my dryness, it affected how I prayed.”

Emotional wounds from earlier life experiences have been linked to later spiritual difficulty, particularly during periods of vulnerability. Experiences involving neglect, betrayal, or distress—especially those connected to authority figures—can influence how individuals understand trust and closeness in their relationship with God. Gerundt et al. (2022) noted that unresolved emotional pain may resurface during spiritual struggle, shaping prayer experiences and perceptions of divine presence during times of strain.

Subtheme D2: Internalized Pressure

Internalized expectations to appear spiritually strong can intensify spiritual dryness by limiting honest self-expression. When individuals feel compelled to maintain a faithful image, admitting doubt or struggle may feel unsafe. This pressure can prevent individuals from seeking support or articulating their experiences, allowing spiritual distress to remain hidden. Over time, the gap between outward behavior and inner reality may deepen feelings of isolation and spiritual fatigue.

Participant 1 shared:

“I felt like I always had to look strong spiritually, even when I wasn’t.”

Expectations within religious environments can shape how individuals respond to spiritual difficulty. In settings where strength and consistency are highly valued, admitting spiritual struggle may feel unsafe. Beerenbrock (2023) observed that pressure to maintain a faithful image often leads individuals to suppress doubts and struggles, limiting opportunities for honest reflection and support. This dynamic may intensify spiritual distance rather than relieve it.

Subtheme D3: Unresolved Issues

The presence of unresolved issues suggests that spiritual dryness may not stem from a single event but from a gradual accumulation of emotional strain. Rather than immediately seeking spiritual explanations, individuals experiencing dryness may benefit from recognizing and naming unresolved concerns in their lives. Creating space for reflection, whether through conversation, personal writing, or guided reflection, may help reduce emotional overload and allow spiritual engagement to become more accessible again.

Participant 7 shared:

“There were many things I didn’t deal with properly. Eventually, everything felt heavy.”

Participant 8 stated:

“It wasn’t just one problem. It was many things piling up.”

Accumulated emotional concerns, such as unresolved disappointments or strained relationships, can affect spiritual clarity over time. When these issues remain unprocessed, individuals may experience difficulty focusing during prayer or engaging meaningfully in religious practices. Scharf et al. (2021) described how emotional buildup can contribute to spiritual confusion and numbness, especially when individuals lack space to reflect on unresolved experiences.

Subtheme D4: Healing Influence of Relationships

The presence of supportive relationships suggests that spiritual dryness does not have to be faced in isolation. When individuals have access to trusted companions, they may feel safer acknowledging uncertainty and struggle. Such relationships can create space for sharing experiences without pressure to resolve them quickly, allowing individuals to remain connected to faith while navigating spiritual difficulty.

Participant 3 shared:

“Having someone who listened made things lighter.”

Participant 4 reflected:

“The guidance I received before stayed with me, even when my faith felt weak.”

Supportive relationships have been identified as important resources during periods of spiritual struggle. Connections characterized by trust, understanding, and acceptance can provide emotional stability when individuals experience uncertainty in their spiritual life. Wortmann (2022) noted that relational support within faith or personal communities can help individuals remain engaged with spirituality, even when clarity, reassurance, or answers are not immediately available.

Theme E: Personal and Family Struggles

This theme describes how participants experienced spiritual dryness in connection with personal uncertainty, family-related difficulties, and broader social pressures. Rather than arising from theological doubt alone, spiritual dryness was often situated within everyday struggles that affected participants’ emotional stability and sense of direction. Participants’ narratives show that the demands and disruptions of ordinary life shaped spiritual distance.

Subtheme E1: Uncertainty

Uncertainty in life direction may weaken an individual’s sense of spiritual stability. When questions about the future or unresolved concerns from the past remain present, spiritual practices may feel less meaningful or reassuring. Rather than providing comfort, prayer and reflection may mirror the individual’s lack of clarity. This suggests that spiritual dryness can emerge alongside broader struggles with decision-making, identity, and life transitions.

Participant 1 shared:

“I felt mentally exhausted and unsure where my life was going.”

Participant 2 stated:

“I kept thinking about my past, and it made me feel like God had already left me.”

Periods of uncertainty have been associated with spiritual difficulty, particularly when individuals face unresolved questions about identity and direction. Wortmann (2022) noted that uncertainty can weaken a sense of spiritual grounding, especially when individuals struggle to find meaning or reassurance during transitional phases. Experiences of role change and unresolved life questions may contribute to feelings of spiritual confusion.

Subtheme E2: Family-Related Stress

Family-related stress, particularly experiences of loss or disrupted relationships, may shape how individuals experience spiritual

closeness. When emotional security is affected, spiritual connection may also feel fragile or distant. The absence of supportive family relationships can influence how individuals perceive care, presence, and reassurance in their spiritual life. This indicates that spiritual dryness may reflect emotional strain tied to family experiences rather than a deliberate withdrawal from faith.

Participant 5 shared:

“After my father died, everything felt empty, even my prayers.”

Participant 4 reflected:

“Being orphaned early and having problems with my siblings affected how I saw God.”

Family relationships play an important role in spiritual development and emotional security. Beerenbrock (2023) noted that early loss or disrupted family bonds may influence how individuals perceive care and protection in their spiritual life. Kim and Spiller (2022) also highlighted that grief-related stress can contribute to spiritual disorientation, particularly in contexts where family is closely tied to religious identity.

Subtheme E3: Family and Personal Pressure

Sustained pressure to meet family, work, or spiritual expectations may gradually deplete emotional and spiritual energy. When individuals prioritize responsibilities without sufficient space for rest or reflection, spiritual practices may become routine rather than sustaining. This pattern suggests that spiritual dryness can develop as a response to prolonged effort without renewal, particularly when individuals feel unable to pause or acknowledge fatigue.

Participant 7 shared:

“I just kept going even when I was already tired.”

Pressure to perform well in personal, professional, or spiritual roles has been linked to emotional fatigue. Scharf et al. (2021) observed that individuals in high-responsibility roles may internalize expectations that discourage rest and reflection. Rios and Barrow (2022) further noted that when spiritual identity is tied to performance, individuals may suppress struggle, increasing emotional and spiritual strain.

Subtheme E4: External and Community Stressors

Stress arising from community dynamics may influence spiritual engagement by affecting a sense of belonging. When communal spaces become sources of tension rather than support, individuals may feel spiritually disconnected even while remaining involved. This suggests that spiritual dryness can be shaped not only by personal circumstances but also by the quality of social and communal environments in which faith is practiced.

Participant 3 shared:

“Problems in the community really affected me.”

Community dynamics can influence spiritual well-being, particularly in contexts where faith is lived collectively. Scharf et al. (2021) noted that conflict or disconnection within religious communities may lead to feelings of isolation. In Filipino religious settings, Estrada and Reyes (2023) found that unresolved leadership and group tensions could contribute to spiritual burnout among active members.

Theme F: Doubting God’s Presence, Plans, and Silence

This theme describes how participants experienced spiritual dryness through doubt, questioning, and perceived divine silence. Rather than expressing rejection of faith, participants narrated an ongoing struggle to understand God’s presence, intentions, and response to prayer. Their accounts reflect a tension between belief and lived experience, where faith persisted alongside uncertainty.

Subtheme F1: Abandoned by God

Feelings of abandonment may deepen spiritual dryness by disrupting emotional security within one’s faith. When reassurance is absent, individuals may struggle to draw comfort from spiritual practices even while maintaining belief. This experience suggests that spiritual dryness can involve relational longing rather than rejection of God, leaving individuals suspended between trust and disappointment.

Participant 1 shared:

“*Natutulog ba ang Diyos?*”

Participant 3 stated:

“I know that He’s here, yet He’s far.”

Experiences of perceived divine absence have been widely discussed in the context of spiritual struggle. Rather than signaling disbelief, this experience often reflects a gap between cognitive belief and emotional experience. Scharf et al. (2021) described perceived

abandonment as a condition in which individuals maintain a belief in God's existence but struggle to feel relational closeness or reassurance. This tension is particularly pronounced during periods of emotional vulnerability, when individuals seek comfort or guidance and instead encounter silence.

Subtheme F2: Meaning Behind Suffering

The search for meaning behind suffering may intensify spiritual dryness when clear explanations are unavailable. Individuals may remain engaged in faith while simultaneously feeling unsettled or conflicted. This unresolved questioning can prolong spiritual uncertainty, affecting confidence in both belief and practice.

Participant 2 asked:

“What have I done wrong? Why do these things happen to me?”

Participant 4 reflected:

“Bakit nangyayari ito sa aking pamilya?”

Efforts to understand suffering are central to many experiences of spiritual struggle. When hardship is interpreted through moral or theological lenses, individuals may question whether suffering reflects personal failure or divine intent. Vos and Vitali (2021) emphasized that such questioning arises when lived experience conflicts with beliefs about divine justice or care. In these moments, meaning-making becomes difficult, especially when traditional explanations fail to provide relief.

Subtheme F3: Unanswered Prayers

When prayers remain unanswered, individuals may experience doubt about the relational aspect of faith. Continued prayer in the absence of perceived response may feel emotionally draining, contributing to spiritual fatigue. This pattern suggests that spiritual dryness can coexist with commitment, even as emotional assurance diminishes.

Participant 6 shared:

“Why, until now this request or prayer of mine is not yet answered or granted?”

Unanswered prayers have been associated with frustration and spiritual insecurity, particularly when prayer is central to one's faith life. Beerenbrock (2023) noted that prolonged silence following prayer may challenge individuals' sense of spiritual worth or belonging. Rather than abandoning prayer, many continue praying while questioning its purpose or effectiveness, highlighting the emotional complexity of spiritual persistence during dryness.

Subtheme F4: Wondering About God's Plan

Uncertainty about God's plan may affect how individuals view their identity and future. When desired outcomes do not materialize, individuals may struggle to interpret their experiences within a spiritual framework. This uncertainty can sustain spiritual dryness by leaving individuals unsure how to move forward while remaining faithful.

Participant 7 asked:

“What He really wants me to be or plan to be?”

Participant 8 shared:

“Is this really the will of God? Am I not worthy to become a mother and raise a child?”

Questions about divine purpose often surface during periods of unmet expectations or disrupted life goals. Wortmann (2022) explained that uncertainty about God's plan becomes especially salient when individuals face loss, delay, or disappointment. In such contexts, faith is not abandoned but reexamined, as individuals attempt to reconcile personal desires with spiritual obedience.

Theme G: Faith, Meaning, and Self Amidst Silence

This theme describes how participants experienced spiritual silence not only as an absence but also as a context for reflection, reinterpretation, and continued engagement with faith. Rather than withdrawing completely, many participants gradually reframed silence as part of their spiritual journey. Their narratives show that spiritual dryness, when marked by silence, became a space where faith, personal meaning, and self-understanding were reexamined. This theme highlights how silence functioned in multiple ways—challenging, sustaining, and shaping participants' spiritual lives.

Subtheme G1: Silence as a Test

Experiencing silence as a test may reshape how individuals understand faith itself. When spiritual reassurance is unavailable, faith may shift from an emotionally driven experience to a more deliberate choice. This transition can be difficult, as it removes familiar sources of comfort, yet it may also deepen spiritual engagement by encouraging persistence grounded in intention rather than feeling.

Participant 1 shared:

“Even if I felt dry, I tried to talk to others about what I was going through. That helped me stay grounded.”

Spiritual silence has often been described as a challenging phase in which faith is sustained without emotional or experiential reinforcement. Rather than providing reassurance, silence may confront individuals with uncertainty, requiring them to continue believing without immediate confirmation. Scharf et al. (2021) noted that such periods frequently test the stability of faith, as individuals are compelled to rely on commitment and personal meaning rather than emotional consolation. Silence, in this sense, exposes how faith operates when external signs of divine closeness are absent.

Subtheme G2: Silence as Presence

Viewing silence as presence may help individuals remain spiritually connected during periods of dryness. This perspective can reduce feelings of abandonment and allow individuals to tolerate uncertainty without disengaging. Accepting silence as meaningful may foster patience and trust, enabling spiritual practices to continue even in the absence of emotional reassurance.

Participant 2 reflected:

“Maybe God is silent so that I can also be silent and listen.”

Some individuals reinterpret spiritual silence as a subtle form of presence rather than absence. This reframing allows silence to be approached with openness rather than resistance. Beerenbrock (2023) explained that when silence is perceived as companionship instead of neglect, individuals may retain a sense of relational closeness with God. In this perspective, silence becomes an invitation to attentiveness and patience, emphasizing that spiritual connection does not always rely on clarity or verbal affirmation.

Subtheme G3: Silence as a Call for Introspection

Silence may function as a catalyst for introspection, encouraging individuals to reflect on their spiritual life beyond routine practices. This inward focus can clarify personal values and reveal areas of misalignment or neglect. While such reflection may initially intensify discomfort, it may also support a more intentional and self-aware spiritual orientation.

Participant 3 shared:

“I felt confused about myself, not just about God.”

Participant 4 stated:

“I asked myself if I was the one who became distant.”

Periods of spiritual silence have been linked to increased self-examination and reflection. Vos and Vitali (2021) noted that when external spiritual cues diminish, attention often turns inward, prompting individuals to question their values, motivations, and spiritual alignment. This introspective process can be uncomfortable, as it exposes inconsistencies or unresolved concerns, but it may also lead to greater awareness of personal priorities and beliefs.

Subtheme G4: Silence as Personal Coping

Using silence as a coping space may help individuals preserve continuity in their spiritual life. Quiet persistence allows individuals to remain connected to faith without forcing meaning or resolution. This form of coping emphasizes stability over certainty and may prevent disengagement during prolonged periods of spiritual dryness.

Participant 5 shared:

“I learned that faith is still important even when I don’t feel anything.”

Participant 7 stated:

“I just stayed calm and kept praying even if there was no answer.”

Maintaining spiritual practices during silence has been described as a form of endurance rather than resolution. Gerundt et al. (2022) referred to this sustained engagement as spiritual perseverance, where individuals continue prayer or reflection without expecting an immediate response. This approach reflects an adaptive response to uncertainty, allowing faith to remain active even when emotional affirmation is absent.

Theme H: Reflection, Relationships, and Redemption

This theme describes how participants navigated spiritual dryness through reflective practices, supportive relationships, and gradual re-engagement with faith. Participants’ accounts show that coping responses were varied and non-linear. Rather than following a single pathway, individuals moved between spiritual practices, periods of withdrawal, and renewed connection as part of their effort to manage spiritual dryness.

Subtheme H1: Prayer and Sacraments

Returning to prayer and sacraments during spiritual dryness may reflect a desire for continuity rather than immediate relief. Even when individuals feel spiritually weak, maintaining these practices can preserve a sense of belonging and spiritual orientation. This suggests that ritual engagement may function as a grounding mechanism that supports endurance until clarity or renewal gradually emerges.

Participant 3 shared:

“Even if I felt empty, I pushed myself to pray more.”

Participant 6 stated:

“I slowly went back to confession and tried again.”

Engagement in prayer and sacramental practices during periods of spiritual dryness has been described as a stabilizing pattern rather than an emotionally driven response. When spiritual consolation is absent, structured religious practices may provide continuity and rhythm. Beerenbrock (2023) explained that rituals such as prayer, confession, and sacramental participation can sustain spiritual identity even when individuals feel disconnected or uncertain. These practices allow individuals to remain within the framework of faith while navigating internal struggle, emphasizing commitment over emotional reward.

Subtheme H2: Nature, Solitude, and Reflection

Seeking solitude and reflective space may help individuals recalibrate their spiritual life during dryness. Time away from routine responsibilities can allow individuals to reassess priorities and experiences without pressure to resolve uncertainty quickly. This reflective pause may support gradual spiritual clarity rather than immediate resolution.

Participant 2 shared:

“I felt closer to God when I was alone and surrounded by nature.”

Periods of solitude and engagement with nature have been associated with reflection and emotional regulation during times of spiritual difficulty. Scharf et al. (2021) noted that stepping away from daily demands allows individuals to process experiences more quietly and deliberately. Natural and solitary environments may reduce external noise, creating conditions that support reflection, meaning-making, and a renewed awareness of self and belief.

Subtheme H3: Social Support and Shared Faith

Supportive relationships may help reduce the isolating effects of spiritual dryness. When individuals feel accompanied by others, they may be more willing to remain engaged with faith despite uncertainty. Shared faith experiences can provide reassurance that spiritual struggle is not endured alone.

Participant 1 shared:

“The ministry itself helped me feel supported.”

Participant 8 stated:

“My husband became my source of strength.”

Relational support has been consistently identified as an important factor in sustaining individuals during spiritual struggle. Gerundt et al. (2022) emphasized that relationships characterized by trust and shared belief can help individuals remain spiritually engaged even when personal faith feels uncertain. Rather than replacing divine connection, supportive relationships may mediate spiritual reassurance through shared presence and understanding.

Subtheme H4: Withdrawal and Worldly Distractions

Periods of withdrawal or distraction may serve as transitional phases within spiritual dryness. Stepping back from religious practices can provide emotional relief or space for reassessment. These periods do not necessarily indicate abandonment of faith but may precede renewed engagement when individuals regain readiness and clarity.

Participant 4 shared:

“I focused on worldly things for a while before I realized I needed to come back.”

Temporary withdrawal from spiritual practices or increased focus on non-religious activities has been described as a coping response rather than a definitive rejection of faith. Wortmann (2022) noted that spiritual life often unfolds in non-linear patterns, where periods of disengagement may occur alongside continued internal searching. Such withdrawal may reflect emotional exhaustion or confusion rather than loss of belief.

Theme I: Uplifted, Disappointed, or Set Aside

This theme describes how participants experienced community relationships during periods of spiritual dryness. Family members, friends, and religious communities were experienced in varied ways, sometimes as sources of strength, sometimes as sources of disappointment, and at other times as spaces that required personal distance. Participants' accounts show that the community was neither wholly supportive nor wholly harmful, but functioned as a dynamic context shaping their spiritual experience.

Subtheme II: Strength and Healing through Community

Experiencing strength through community suggests that spiritual dryness may be more manageable when individuals feel accompanied rather than isolated. Supportive relationships can help individuals endure uncertainty by reminding them that struggle is not faced alone. This indicates that healing during spiritual dryness may emerge through shared presence and empathy, even when clarity or resolution is not immediately achieved.

Participant 1 shared:

“The people around me helped me see my situation differently.”

Participant 8 stated:

“My husband and my family were my biggest help.”

Community support has long been recognized as an important context for navigating spiritual struggle. Relationships characterized by understanding, acceptance, and shared faith can provide emotional grounding when individuals experience uncertainty in their spiritual life. Beerenbrock (2023) emphasized that companionship during periods of spiritual dryness may help individuals remain connected to faith by offering reassurance and validation when internal conviction feels weak. Rather than resolving spiritual questions, supportive communities often function by providing presence, stability, and a sense of belonging that sustains individuals through uncertainty.

Subtheme I2: Disappointment or Disillusionment

Experiencing disappointment within a community may challenge individuals to reassess their relationship with faith and belonging. While disillusionment can deepen spiritual dryness, it may also encourage individuals to rely less on external validation and more on personal conviction. This suggests that difficult community experiences can function as turning points that reshape how individuals define faith, commitment, and spiritual responsibility.

Participant 6 shared:

“The ministry changed, and I felt disappointed.”

Participant 7 stated:

“There was a lot of negativity, but I used it to push myself to grow.”

Disappointment within faith communities has been identified as a significant source of spiritual strain. When expectations of support, authenticity, or care are unmet, individuals may experience alienation or frustration. Gerundt et al. (2022) noted that disillusionment with religious communities can intensify spiritual struggle, particularly when individuals feel misunderstood or judged. At the same time, such experiences may prompt reevaluation of beliefs, values, and personal responsibility in one's spiritual journey.

Subtheme I3: Personal Processing Despite Support

The need for personal processing highlights that spiritual healing is not solely relational but also inward. Even when support systems are present, individuals may require space to reflect privately and integrate their experiences at their own pace. This suggests that a balance between connection and solitude is important in navigating spiritual dryness, allowing individuals to reclaim agency in their spiritual journey.

Participant 5 shared:

“The support helped, but I still needed to process things on my own.”

Although community support can be beneficial, integration of spiritual experiences often requires personal reflection. Scharf et al. (2021) emphasized that individuals may need solitude and internal processing to make sense of spiritual struggle, even when relational support is available. Personal reflection allows individuals to organize emotions, reassess beliefs, and regain coherence in their spiritual life without external pressure.

Theme J: Awakening, Returning, and Growing

This theme describes how participants came to understand spiritual dryness as a turning point rather than an endpoint. Instead of viewing dryness solely as loss or failure, participants reflected on it as an experience that led to renewed awareness, reconsideration of faith, and gradual personal growth. Their accounts suggest that spiritual dryness functioned as a period of transition in which faith was

reassessed and reoriented.

Subtheme J1: A Call to Return

Experiencing spiritual dryness as a call to return suggests that struggle may serve as a cue for renewed attentiveness to faith. When individuals recognize distance rather than deny it, they may become more intentional about reconnecting. This implies that spiritual dryness can initiate movement toward reflection and re-engagement, supporting growth rather than signaling spiritual failure.

Participant 2 shared:

“I felt like the prodigal son, far away but wanting to come back.”

Participant 4 stated:

“The dryness woke me up. It made me realize I needed to return.”

Experiences of spiritual struggle have been described as moments that prompt reassessment of one’s relationship with faith. Rather than signaling abandonment or decline, such experiences may reveal misalignment between personal practices, values, and inner conviction. Scharf et al. (2021) emphasized that spiritual discomfort often functions as a signal, drawing attention to areas where individuals feel spiritually distant or disconnected. This discomfort may awaken a renewed awareness of spiritual longing and motivate re-engagement rather than withdrawal.

Subtheme J2: A Normal and Necessary Part of Growth

Viewing spiritual dryness as a normal aspect of growth may reduce anxiety and self-judgment. When individuals accept dryness as part of the spiritual journey, they may respond with patience rather than urgency. This perspective allows struggle to be understood as formative, encouraging openness to change and long-term development rather than immediate resolution.

Participant 1 shared:

“I realized dryness is part of service.”

Participant 5 stated:

“Even emptiness can help you grow.”

Spiritual and existential literature has increasingly framed periods of emptiness as part of developmental processes. Vos and Vitali (2021) noted that experiences of absence or disorientation can contribute to the formation of a more integrated spiritual identity when individuals reflect on them rather than avoid them. Such phases challenge simplistic understandings of faith by introducing complexity, patience, and depth. Rather than indicating regression, emptiness may accompany transitions toward maturity.

Subtheme J3: Invitation to Retreat and Await

Understanding spiritual dryness as an invitation to retreat may help individuals resist the pressure to act or resolve uncertainty prematurely. Waiting and rest can provide emotional and spiritual space for gradual renewal. This suggests that growth during spiritual dryness may occur through patience and receptivity rather than effort alone.

Participant 7 shared:

“I felt the need to retreat and wait.”

Periods of spiritual fatigue have been associated with shifts toward contemplative awareness. Beerenbrock (2023) explained that withdrawal from constant activity and productivity can create space for stillness and attentiveness. In such moments, silence is not framed as absence but as an environment that supports reflection and receptivity. Retreat and waiting have been described as responses that allow individuals to remain engaged with faith without forcing answers or outcomes.

Conclusions

This study examined how former seminarians, priests, and religious sisters in the Filipino Catholic context experienced spiritual dryness. Participants described spiritual dryness as a period marked by emotional fatigue, questioning of God’s presence, personal and family pressures, and disruptions in spiritual meaning. Rather than reflecting a simple decline in religious practice, spiritual dryness emerged as a sustained inner struggle that affected participants’ sense of faith, identity, and relationships, often characterized by silence, doubt, and unmet expectations alongside an ongoing search for meaning. At the same time, several participants reported shifts in understanding over the course of this experience, including renewed clarity, reoriented values, and a redefined relationship with God and community through reflection, supportive relationships, and continued engagement with faith practices. These findings suggest that, within this sample, spiritual dryness was experienced not only as a period of difficulty but also as a process that could prompt reassessment and personal growth, while remaining grounded in the specific cultural and contextual setting of the study.

Future research may extend these findings by examining how specific forms of pastoral accompaniment, such as structured spiritual direction or peer-based support, shape experiences of spiritual dryness, as well as how family dynamics and cultural expectations influence the expression and management of spiritual struggle within Filipino religious contexts. Comparative studies across regions or religious backgrounds may further clarify which aspects of spiritual dryness are context-specific and which are more widely shared. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of pastoral and educational settings providing safe spaces where spiritual struggles can be openly discussed. Religious institutions, formators, and mental health professionals may benefit from approaching spiritual dryness as a legitimate experience that calls for patience, listening, and accompaniment rather than immediate correction or judgment.

By foregrounding the voices of former religious individuals, this study contributes to the limited empirical literature on spiritual dryness in the Philippine context. It highlights the importance of understanding spiritual struggle as an experience shaped by emotional, relational, and cultural factors. The study's relevance lies in its potential to inform pastoral care, spiritual formation, and supportive interventions for individuals navigating periods of spiritual difficulty within faith-based and educational environments.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Kristine P. Bacong

Laguna College of Business and Arts – Philippines

 tinosj04@gmail.com