

1. INTRODUCTION

last updated on December 1, 2021

Saint Charles Borromeo SEMINARY exists to be, “in its own way, a continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus, listening to his word, proceeding toward the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit” (cf. [*Pastores Dabo Vobis*](#), n. 60). The Seminary forms priests, deacons, religious and lay men and women who encounter Jesus Christ in the Church’s Sacraments, who deepen their friendship with Him in liturgical and personal prayer, and who grow in this relationship with Him through the study of His teaching. Its graduates will be inspiring workers and effective evangelizers who share with every person the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Church’s worship, preaching, catechesis, and charitable works.

(Catalog 2018-2019, page 4)

Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary undertakes its formation programs in multiple stages:

- Programs in the COLLEGE Seminary are designed to clarify vocational awareness and to prepare seminarians for entrance into the Theological Seminary.
- The SPIRITUAL YEAR affords the opportunity for seminarians to enter deeply into a period of greater solitude so as to solidify their self-knowledge—including their vocational calling—and to profoundly affect their sense of interiority with the heart of Christ.
- Programs in the THEOLOGICAL Seminary have as their primary purpose the four-fold formation (human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral) of potential candidates for priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.
- The SCHOOL OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES educates lay leaders in the Catholic community by offering academically challenging and theologically orthodox programs in the study of Catholic theology in order to form lay ministers to work collaboratively with priests, each respecting the other’s unique role in the Church.
- The SCHOOL OF DIACONAL FORMATION has as its primary purpose the four-fold formation (human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral) of candidates for the permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church.

(Catalog 2018-2019)

In this context, formation in Communications & Homiletics plays a distinctive role.

Formation in Communications in the **College Seminary** and the **Spiritual Year** grapples with the cultural reality that seminarians are, increasingly, members of the generation whose lives are permeated by the ongoing revolution in digital communications and whose prior education shares the characteristics, both positive and negative, of the prevailing culture. As such, formation in communications tends to focus on growth in responsible communications in one’s personal life and on interpersonal relations in one’s social life.

Formation in the **Theological Seminary** and in the **School of Diaconal Formation** more directly prepares students, through theological instruction and pastoral education, for future ministry as a priest or a permanent deacon. As such, formation related to Communications tends to focus, as it should, on strengthening the ability to explain and articulate the Catholic faith, particularly through the study and practice of Homiletics.

At Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, the integration of Homiletics & Social Communications responds intentionally to the ideals expressed in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* promulgated by the Congregation for Clergy on 12/8/2016. This foundational document – entitled [“The Gift of the Priestly Vocation”](#) -- speaks directly and at length about Communications and Homiletics in priestly formation.

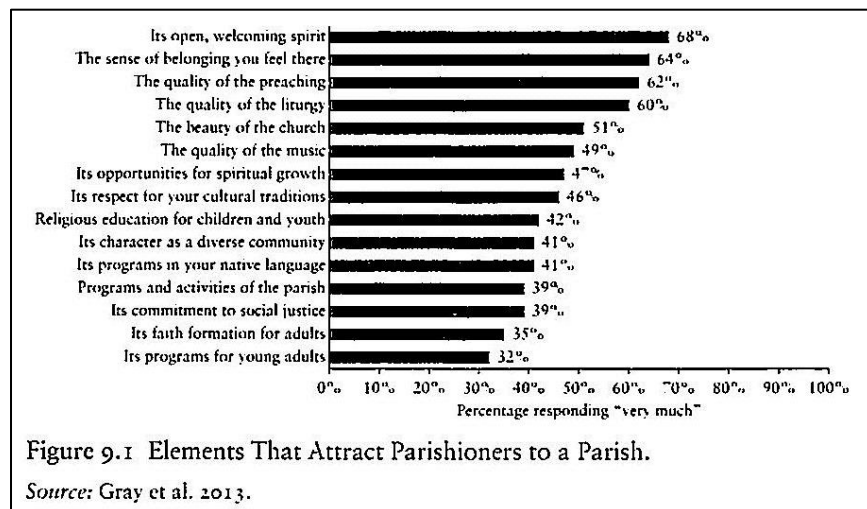
Regarding the former, use of **Communications** media and familiarity with the digital world are considered integral to human formation (nn. 97-100), and awareness of the evangelizing potential of new media is called for in seminary studies (n. 182).

Regarding the latter, the *Ratio* gives special attention to the study of **Homiletics** because of its particular usefulness in multiple areas of ministry (n. 177).

These theological ideals resonate on a practical level in the life of Catholic parishes today.

Research based on the Emerging Models Project commissioned by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and published in [Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century](#) (Oxford University Press, 2017) points to the importance of preaching in parish life. Among the findings ...

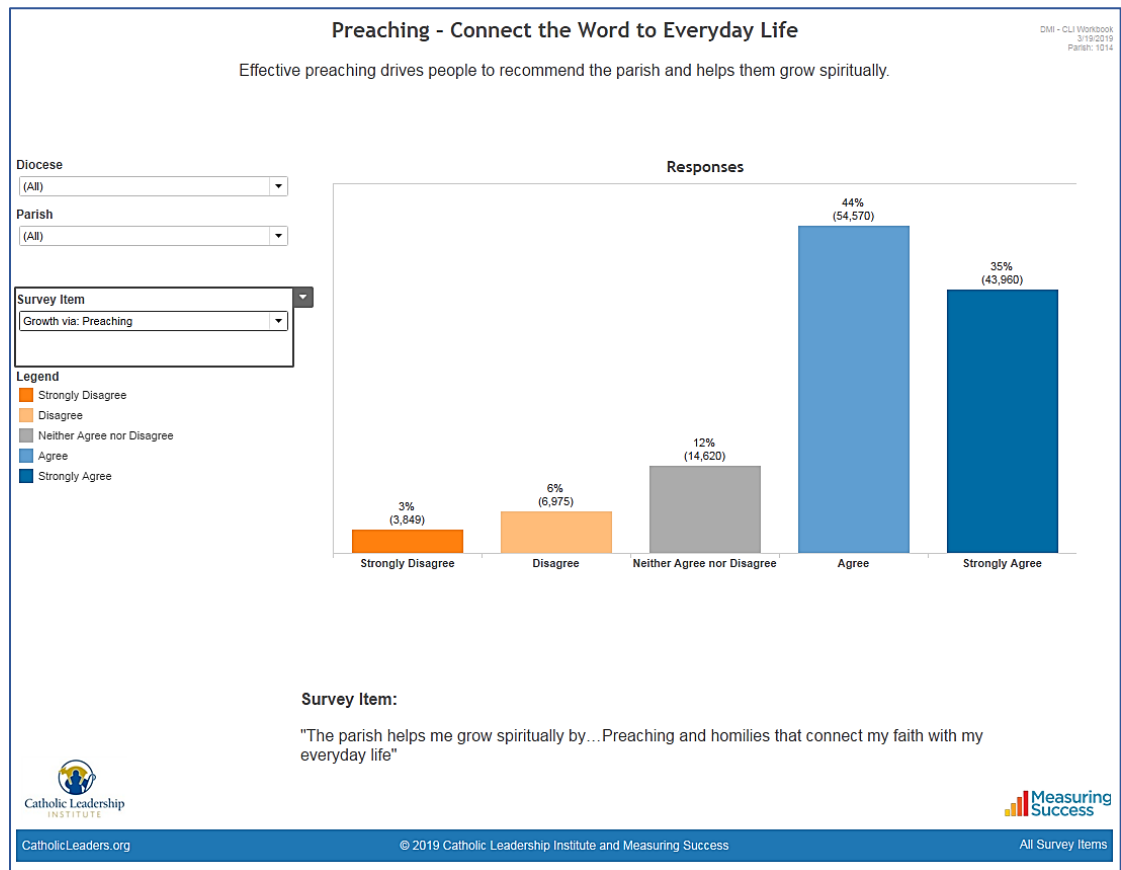
- The quality of the preaching ranks third (behind an open, welcoming spirit and a sense of belonging felt there) among the elements of parish life that in-pew respondents say attracts them “very much” to a parish.



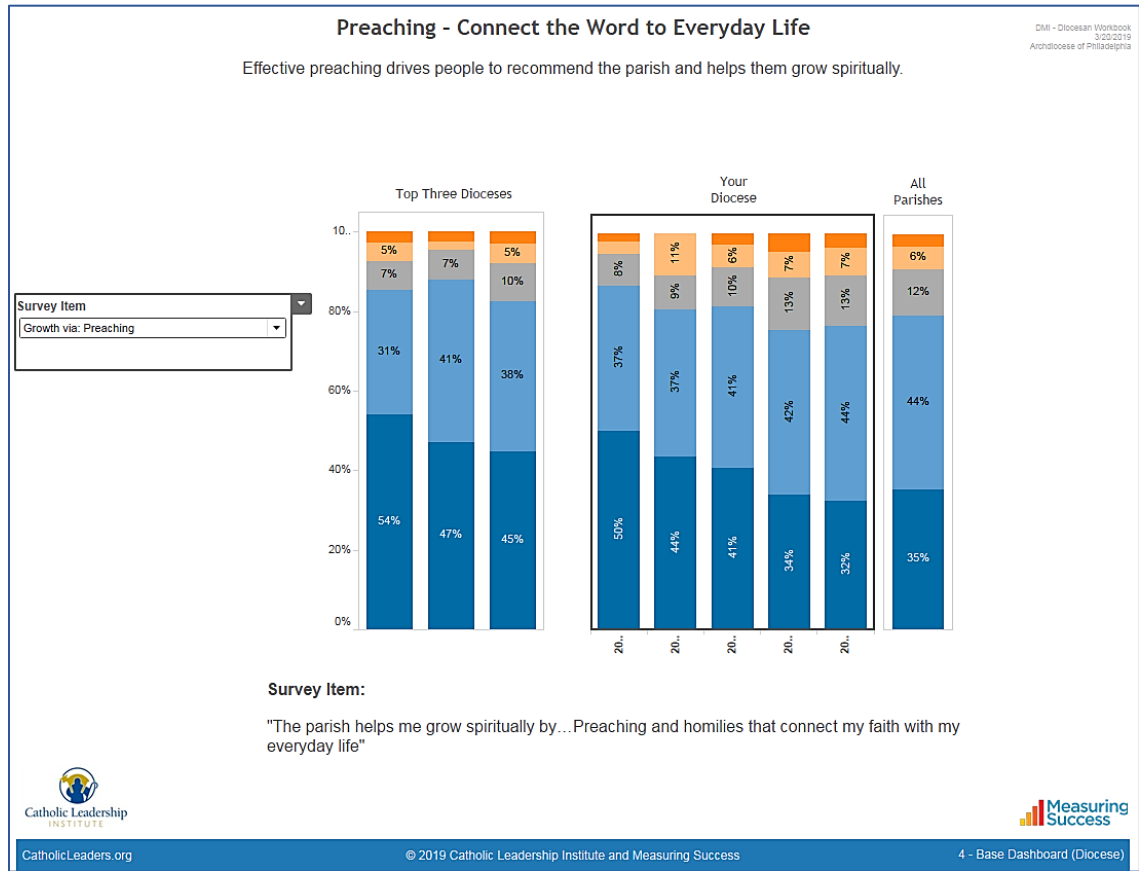
- “The help that people get from hearing homilies weekly” ranks fourth among the reasons parishioners gave for attending Mass regularly (63 percent), after the importance of receiving Communion (81 percent), the meaning they find at Mass (77 percent), and the sense of belonging they experience (72 percent).

More recent and ongoing research of parishioners throughout North America, conducted at the Catholic Leadership Institute by way of [“The Disciple Maker Index,”](#) notes that effective preaching is among the top drivers in people’s estimation of their spiritual growth as Catholics and in their recommendation of a parish to others.

- Yet only 35% of all parishioners surveyed strongly agree that “the parish helps me grow spiritually by preaching and homilies that connect my faith with my everyday life.”



- And in the archdiocese with the greatest number of respondents (i.e., Philadelphia), the percentage of parishioners who strongly agree that their parish offers effective preaching has been decreasing each year of the survey, from 50% in 2015 to 32% in 2019.



The evident importance of effective preaching in the lives of parishioners, as well as the low trends of those who say they experience this, leads to the conclusion that formation in Communications and Homiletics will serve a critical role in the future of the Church at the parish level. The Seminary’s programs in this realm strive to respond to this research in positive and proactive ways, based on the foundational principles espoused by the Church.

The sections of this Handbook offer details about the programs by which Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary excels at forming future ministers in the Church in terms of their ability to communicate the beauty, truth, and goodness of the Catholic faith for the benefit of the lay faithful in the Church.