

Year II: Priesthood



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Brothers in Holy Cross,

Thank you for being willing to lead a vocational discernment group. While a call to priesthood and religious life in Holy Cross only comes from God, that call is usually nurtured in the context of a relationship. A young man is able to clarify that call and respond to it when they get to know Holy Cross religious, as well as other young men discerning a call to Holy Cross. Therefore, your work in building relationships with them, and helping them get to know one another, is critical to our vocational efforts. The hope of the Office of Vocations is that this resource makes your work a little easier.

How to Use This Resource

This guide is in the form of a 3-year curriculum, with 12 meetings for each year. The first year covers Religious Life, the second year covers Priesthood, and the third year covers Holy Cross. This should allow you some flexibility in case the same young men attend your group for consecutive years. By the same token, you will notice some repetition from year to year, to ensure that certain key topics will be covered for everyone.

This guide can be as flexible as you want it to be. If you don't have much time to prepare for your meetings, you can simply use the meeting outlines verbatim, allowing you to put your time where it is spent best: inviting men to the group, and engaging them once they are there. If you want to modify the content in the outlines, or even add or eliminate meetings, that is fine, too. We understand that you know these young men well enough to know what kind of gatherings will benefit them the most. Hopefully this guide makes it a little easier to get started.

Objectives of Vocation Groups

The goals of vocation groups in a parish or campus are to:

- Promote vocations and create greater visibility for Holy Cross in its institutions.
- Create an entry point to which we may invite men whom we think might be interested in discerning.
- Provide a consistent point of contact for us with men who are already discerning.
- Allow discerning men to come into regular contact with other discerning men.
- Pave the way for more formalized, one-on-one contact with men who may be interested in investigating the seminary.

The Office of Vocations will work with you to make sure our efforts complement each other. We'll refer young men in your area to your group, and you'll refer them to us when it seems they are ready for more formal contact with us.



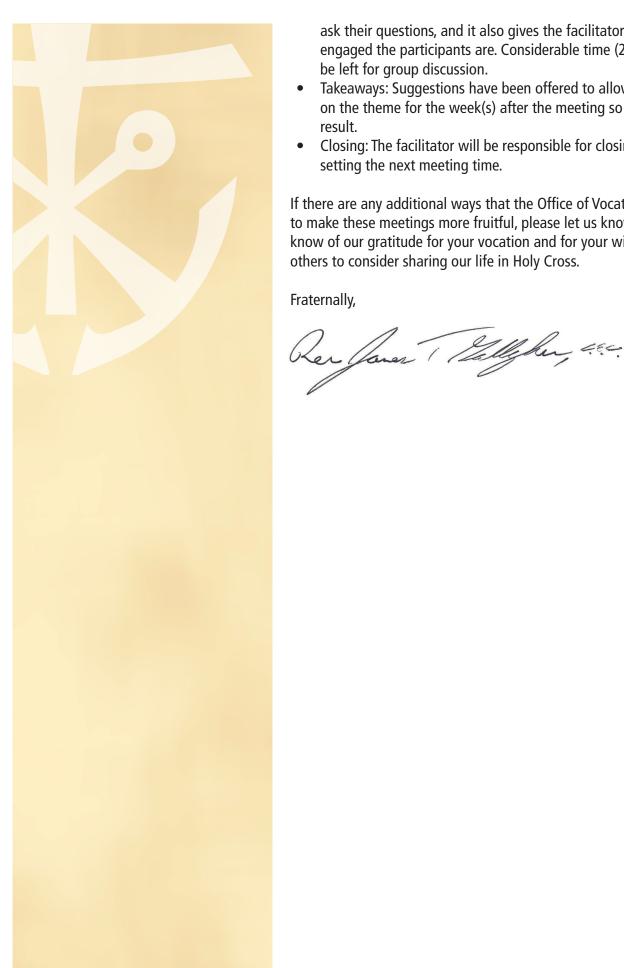
Starting a Group

Inviting young men to participate in a vocation group is the most important, and often most intimidating, part of launching and maintaining a group. While parish bulletins and Mass announcements are important, there is no substitute for personal invitations. We encourage you to call young men whom you think might benefit from this group and extend the invitation personally. (If you are working with minors, you should call their parent or guardian before you contact the minor, and keep them in the loop throughout the process.) If you are able to establish a core group of young men who attend consistently, you might seek their assistance in identifying and inviting new men to join. Don't be afraid to cast the net wide. The worst that can happen is that people tell you "no," but you never know who might need a little nudge in order to finally take steps towards exploring their vocation.

Suggested General Structure of Meetings

As stated earlier, the outline that we've attached is flexible and can be adapted however you think best meets the needs of your group. The outlines that we've written contain the following elements, and they are written under the assumption that each meeting will last about an hour.

- Theme of the Day: A brief summary of the topic for the day; useful for advertising or communicating with the participants in advance.
- Reference: Each of the sessions is based on some outside reading, primarily "Vita Consecrata for Religious Life; Pastores dabo vobis for Priesthood"; and "The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross for Holy Cross." Group facilitators are encouraged to read through these readings ahead of time, although you can certainly facilitate the meeting without them if you wish. You can also make these available to participants ahead of time (as all readings are available online) if you think they would wish to prepare before the meeting. Again, the outlines are designed so that advanced preparation is not required.
- Prayer: It is recommended that each meeting begin with a substantial experience of prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is strongly encouraged.
- Reading: Each meeting then begins with a passage from Scripture. You
 may wish to allow them to have some time to pray with this passage as
 they begin the meeting, or you might even make this passage available
 ahead of time for their personal prayer.
- Reflection on the Theme for the Day: This brief talk will be given by the
 group facilitator. The idea is not to make the meeting into a classroomstyle lecture, but these reflections should provide the background material
 necessary to make discussions more fruitful. This reflection can be read by
 either the facilitator or the participants, or the facilitator could use it as a
 springboard for his own thoughts on the theme of the day.
- Personal Witness: While the background information above is important, participants are usually hungry for an idea of what these topics actually look like when put into practice. The Personal Witness is designed to put a human face on the theme of the day. It is also a great opportunity to bring a guest speaker into the meeting, perhaps a pastor or visiting seminarian.
- Group Discussion: Group discussion is probably the most vital part of the meeting, as it gives participants a chance to offer their thoughts and



ask their questions, and it also gives the facilitator a chance to see how engaged the participants are. Considerable time (25-30 minutes) should be left for group discussion.

- Takeaways: Suggestions have been offered to allow participants to reflect on the theme for the week(s) after the meeting so that additional fruit may result.
- Closing: The facilitator will be responsible for closing the meeting and setting the next meeting time.

If there are any additional ways that the Office of Vocations can support you to make these meetings more fruitful, please let us know. In the meantime, know of our gratitude for your vocation and for your willingness to invite others to consider sharing our life in Holy Cross.

Fraternally,

Year II Priesthood

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There is only one priesthood: the priesthood of Jesus Christ, in which all ordained priests participate. In order to understand the ministerial priesthood, you need to understand the priesthood of Christ.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Hebrews 7:24-28

(Jesus), because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

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Session One:

The
Priesthood
of Jesus
Christ

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

There is only one priesthood, and that is the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in order to discern a priestly vocation, we have to understand Christ's priesthood. In the Old Testament, priesthood was hereditary; priests were born into the priestly class, and their primary function was to offer sacrifice. But as the priest of the New Covenant, Jesus is a new kind of priest. The passage we just read from the Letter to the Hebrews illustrates how Christ's priesthood was unique and different.

Since there is just one priesthood, Catholic priests simply share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In one sense, all of the baptized share in Christ's priesthood, but ordained priests share in this in a special way. After all, Jesus also singled out the twelve Apostles to share in His priesthood in a special and explicit way. The Apostles then extended this priesthood to other men through the laying on of hands. Bishops today are considered to be the successors of the Apostles, ordained through that same rite of the laying on of hands in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Priests are ordained, also through the laying on of hands, to assist the bishops. The basic elements of the priesthood therefore remain unchanged: we

Reference: Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 11-18



participate in the priesthood of Christ, we serve as priests in response to a call initiated by God, and we are ordained into this priesthood by a bishop laying his hands on us.

Priests are ordained by a sacrament. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is one of three sacraments (the others being Baptism and Confirmation) that imprint a permanent character. We refer to this as "ontological change"; in the sacrament, a man is actually changed permanently. Therefore, being a priest is more about who a man is rather than certain functions that he is allowed to perform. No one is worthy of being a priest, but God's power and mercy makes it possible for ordinary and sinful men like us to minister to the people of God in the Person of Jesus Christ Himself.

Personal Witness

The participants have already received some of the logic underlying the development of the priesthood, so now they will most benefit from a discussion of your lived experience of sharing in the priesthood of Christ.

- Give a basic overview of your life as a priest. What was it that prompted you to enter the seminary?
- Give an overview of some of the duties that you perform, both those that are explicitly priestly and those that a layperson could also perform. Do you see any ways in which these latter duties take on a different meaning because you are a priest?
- What is the most rewarding part of the priesthood for you?
 What is the most challenging part?
- What have been some of the most powerful ministerial encounters you have had as a sacramental minister? What about in less formal encounters?
- What misconceptions do you think many people have about the priesthood?
- What is the best part about being a priest?

For Group Discussion

- What are some of the central duties that you associate with a priest? What examples can you think of in the Gospel where Jesus functions as a priest?
- How have people reacted when you've told them that you are considering the priesthood?
- Much of the public debate about the priesthood centers on the all-male clergy and on priestly celibacy. What is your understanding of these facets of priesthood, especially in light of the priesthood of Jesus Christ?
- What does it mean to you that a man is still a priest even if



- he is unable to perform his priestly duties, perhaps due to advanced age or physical infirmity? What does this say to you about the nature of the ordained priesthood?
- Do you know any priests personally? Have your impressions of the priesthood changed at all as you've gotten to know priests on a human level?

Takeaways

Watch the video Fishers of Men (available on YouTube), and consider which parts of the priesthood are the most attractive to you at this point.



Priesthood isn't just a job, and a priest is more than just someone who performs particular functions. Understanding the spirituality of the priesthood will help you understand who and what a priest truly is.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Prayer is an essential part of a priest's ministry. Without it, his work cannot be Christ's work. As St. Paul says in the First Letter to the Thessalonians, all Christians are called to pray without ceasing. For a priest, this is doubly important, because he is supposed to act "in the person of Christ." This is only possible if all of his daily work flows from a deep relationship with Jesus.

It is important for us to spend some time examining priestly spirituality, because otherwise we might fall into a "functional" understanding of the priesthood (i.e., simply defining a priest by the things he is able to do, such as celebrate Mass or hear confessions). This isn't an adequate understanding of priesthood, because if priests really share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, then their vocation goes much deeper than merely performing a set of tasks. A priest is not just a manager, or a public speaker, or a social worker. St. John Paul II (PDV 26) has summarized the ordained priesthood by saying that a priest cannot give what he does not have; if he doesn't have a deep relationship with Christ, he cannot lead others to a deep relationship with Christ. If he is going to exhort people to center their lives on Christ, his life must offer an example of how to do so.

Essential components of priestly spirituality include the celebration of the sacraments, including daily Mass and regular confession; the daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours in its entirety, whether in common or in private; and personal prayer, with a special emphasis on Lectio Divina. Some people might think that prayer must be easier for a priest than it is for a layperson, but this is not true, especially when the priest is engaged in a busy apostolic life. Maintaining a robust prayer

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Session Two:

Priestly Spirituality

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 24-26



life requires dedication and commitment, making prayer a priority even when we are busy, tired, or experiencing dryness.

Personal Witness

Since many people assume that a disciplined prayer life comes easily for a priest, this talk should help the participants understand what a consistent and disciplined prayer life really looks like. This should inspire them to develop a disciplined prayer life now, knowing that good habits they develop now will serve them well later in life.

- What is your current routine of prayer? What forms of prayer tend to be the most important to your personal prayer life?
- How has your prayer life grown and changed over your years as a Holy Cross religious?
- How does your prayer life relate to your ministry? Is how you minister affected by how you pray? Is how you pray affected by how you minister?
- What is the relationship between prayer and preaching?
 How does your prayer inform your preaching, and how does my preaching affect your prayer?
- How has the Liturgy of the Hours been an important part of your life? What does it mean for you to pray this prayer on behalf of the universal Church?
- What are some of the biggest challenges that you face in your personal prayer life? How do you address those challenges?

For Group Discussion

- How did you learn to pray? What do you think an ideal prayer life might look like for you?
- What kinds of prayer are you currently familiar with? Which forms of prayer are the most important or meaningful in your life right now?
- What obstacles do you currently encounter as you try to maintain a consistent routine of prayer?
- If prayer is essential for every Christian, then why do you think it might be especially important for a priest?
- What does it mean to you that a priest is not a job, but is who a man is? What is wrong with a "functional" understanding of the priesthood?



Takeaways

Incorporate one hour of the Liturgy of the Hours into your daily routine for the next week. Try to pray the same hour at the same time every day. At the end of the week, take some time to evaluate how it went, what fruits you received, and whether it should become an ongoing part of your prayer life.



All Christians are supposed to be people of virtue, but certain virtues are particularly important for a priest. Cultivating these virtues now will greatly benefit anyone as they pursue their vocation.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: 1 Timothy 3: 1-10

This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Therefore, a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of the church of God? He should not be a recent convert, so that he may not become conceited and thus incur the devil's punishment. He must also have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, the devil's trap. Similarly, deacons must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Moreover, they should be tested first; then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

All Christians should hold themselves to a high standard of moral conduct, but for a priest this is especially true. Notice how, in the passage we read from St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy, Paul does talk about all of the skills a man must have in order to be a good bishop. Instead, he lists several virtues that make a man a good bishop. It is not surprising that a solid, virtuous life is essential to a fruitful priesthood. After all, priests are supposed to set an example for their flock to follow. Their lives should be models that demonstrate that holiness is possible even in today's complicated world. The faithful should be able to expect that their priests should provide an example that they can imitate in their own lives. Additionally, priests who do not practice virtue can cause great scandal. Because of the public nature of their lives, their sins can do great damage to the faithful, who can easily be turned away from the Church when they witness priestly misconduct. In today's era of instantaneous information, priestly behavior that is illegal

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Session
Three:

Priestly Virtue

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 27-30



or highly unethical becomes news quickly and contributes to a cynical and derogatory image of the Church, which makes evangelization much more difficult. On a more positive note, the public nature of the priesthood makes it possible for the example of one good priest to have an effect on a large number of people.

Priestly virtue is rooted in a spirit of obedience. In fact, all priests (whether diocesan or religious) take a vow of obedience. (Diocesan priests take a vow of obedience to their local bishop. Religious priests vow obedience to their legitimate superior.) Priests must be obedient to the Church. Since they are always public representatives of the Church, people who hear a priest talk assume that what he is saying is true to the Church. Therefore, their obedience is undertaken with a spirit of community. By seeing themselves as part of a community (whether a local presbyterate or a religious community) rather than as a lone individual, they learn to value the good of the community over their own personal good.

Priestly obedience has a pastoral character to it. A priest should be willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of his flock, and this should keep him from getting swept up in earthly ambitions or ideals. This spirit of obedience, when lived joyfully, should call a priest to embrace a life of virtue – self-sacrifice, hard work, moral uprightness. Ultimately the work a priest does is really performed by Christ, but a virtuous life can make a priest a much more effective instrument of God's grace.

Personal Witness

This session is all about priests being called to a high standard of holiness, even though we are weak and sinful just like all human beings. This is clearly a difficult task, but your talk should help them understand how it is possible for an ordinary man to strive for holiness in the way that the Church desires.

- How has been a priest called you to a greater standard of holiness and personal conduct?
- When you started to become a public person recognized on campus or in your neighborhood – did that change the way you acted in public?
- What are some examples of personal holiness among your fellow priests or religious that have inspired you (perhaps to imitate specific behaviors)? What are some similar examples that have inspired you from lay men and women?
- Have you been personally impacted by priests who have engaged in misconduct of any kind? How did that affect how you live your own priesthood?
- How do you relax and have fun? How have you developed



- wholesome relationships where you can relax and be yourself, rather than always being "on"?
- How can a priest tell when there is too great a disconnect between his public life and his private life? What pitfalls does a priest need to avoid in order to keep from slipping into a "double life"?

For Group Discussion

- Think of a priest who has been a positive influence on you, and a good model of priesthood. What kind of behavior have you observed in him in his public persona (i.e., preaching, presiding, teaching, etc.) that has made him effective? What characteristics have impressed you in less formal interactions with him?
- In the wake of the priestly sex abuse scandals, many people imply that the priesthood is not a healthy way of life. How has the public attitude towards priests impacted your own view of the priesthood, and your own vocational discernment?
- All Christians are called to strive for holiness. What are some unique challenges that a priest might face relative to a layperson as they strive for holiness? What are some ways in which his identity as a priest might be an aid to his growth in holiness?

Takeaways

Read a novel about the life of a good and virtuous priest, such as "Death Comes to the Archbishop" or "Diary of a Country Priest." Reflect on how a man's priesthood can bring out qualities of great virtue.



The priesthood is a call from God. Therefore, like Christians called to any vocation, those called to the priesthood need to learn to listen to the Lord so that they may respond to this call.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of John 15: 14-16

You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

It is important to remember that the priesthood is a vocation. As we see in the passage we just read from the Gospel of John, the whole reason a man becomes a priest is not because he chose to, but rather because he was chosen by God. The world might view priesthood as a career, or a lifestyle choice, but it is far more than that. A man discerns a call to the priesthood in a much different way than he chooses a career. This demands that he know something about the process of discerning a vocation.

Every Christian has a vocation, and each vocation is a way that a particular person is called to serve the Church. Therefore, every Christian has the obligation to discern their vocation. For most people, this vocation is to marriage and family life. For others, their vocation is to a committed single life. And God calls some to serve Him as priests and religious. All of the things that are part of the life of a priest – obedience, celibacy, etc. – are part of the vocation. God does not call someone to the priesthood without calling him to all of these aspects.

Discerning a vocation does not happen in an instant. It is a process that begins with a strong prayer life and a deep relationship with the Lord. If a young man starts to sense that he might be called to the priesthood, there are several steps he can take to further his discernment. He should first and foremost intensify his prayer life. He may also consider talking to a priest or finding a spiritual director. He may find it helpful

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Session Four:

The
Vocation
to the
Priesthood

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 35-37



to speak with other young men discerning a priestly vocation. He would also benefit from becoming more involved in his parish or campus ministry, especially in ways that make him a visible representative of the Church. These things will deepen his relationship with the Lord and clarify his sense of a call.

If the call persists, then at some point the young man will need to enter a seminary. Discernment does not end once he enters, and there is a certain level of discernment that can only be done in a seminary. The formation process, which lasts for several years, will give him ample opportunity to confirm whether or not this is truly his vocation. Consistent prayer and strong self-knowledge will help a man determine if and when he is called to enter a seminary to discern his vocation further.

Personal Witness

This talk should give the participants a real example of what it looks like to discern a vocation. Therefore, your vocation story will be the centerpiece of this talk.

- Share your vocation story with the group.
- What were your plans before you sensed a vocation to priesthood?
- When did you first experience this call, and what did that call look like?
- How did you go about discerning that call, and how did you realize you had reached the point when you needed to take a formal step by entering the seminary?
- What experiences did you have in the seminary that confirmed your call to the priesthood?
- What advice do you have for young men discerning a vocation to the priesthood?

For Group Discussion

- Think of a layperson you know whose life and work truly seem to be a vocation rather than just a job. Why do they give you this impression? What inspires you from their example?
- All Christian vocations are a means of serving the Church, so all discernment should begin with a deep love of the Church and desire to serve her. Why do you love the Catholic Church?
- When did you first begin to think that you might be called to the priesthood? When is this call the strongest? When is it the weakest? How has this call affected your prayer life?
- Have you received any external confirmation whether from conversations with family and friends, or from encounters in ministry – that have reinforced this sense of call?
- What aspects of the priesthood do you find most appealing?



 What aspects of the priesthood do you find most intimidating?

Takeaways

For the next week, keep a log of your prayer time, both how long you prayed and how you used that time. Review it at the end of the week, either by yourself or with a priest or trusted friend. Is your current prayer routine sufficient to move forward in your relationship with Christ and in your vocational discernment? If not, make one or two concrete changes and try to put them into practice.



One of the most important things a priest does is to act in the person of Christ in order to make possible sacramental encounters between Christ and the faithful.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Acts of the Apostles 3:2-6

And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, (rise and) walk."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

One of the most visible roles that priests have is that of a sacramental minister. Most sacramental ministry is reserved to those in Holy Orders. Bishops alone are able to administer the Sacraments of Holy Orders and (in most cases) Confirmation. Priests are able to celebrate the Eucharist, hear Confessions, and perform the Anointing of the Sick. Deacons are able to baptize and receive wedding vows. It is in his role as a sacramental minister that the priest most acutely acts in persona Christi (in the person of Christ). For instance, when the priest says the Words of Institution while confecting the Eucharist, it is really Jesus saying "This is my Body ... This is my Blood..." through the priest. In this way, Bishops (and, by extension, priests) are carrying on the work that we see St. Peter performing in the passage we read from Acts of the Apostles, where the only thing he had to offer to people was an encounter with Christ. As sacramental ministers, that is exactly what we offer to the faithful.

The change to a man that occurs in the Sacrament of Holy Orders uniquely configures him to be a sacramental minister. This is not because he is "better" or holier than a layperson; in fact, it is a heresy (the Donatist heresy) to believe that the effectiveness of a sacrament depends on the holiness of the priest, as if a priest's sins could invalidate the sacraments he performs. Instead, this aspect of priesthood is a sign of

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Session Five:

The Priest as Minister of the Sacraments

Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests (Pope Benedict XVI, June 16, 2009)



God's love for His people, as He chooses some men from among them so that the sacraments are available to all. St. John Vianney once said, "O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host." So administering the sacraments is a huge privilege for a priest, but also a huge responsibility. Even though a priest may perform many functions that aren't exclusively priestly – administration, teaching, working with the sick or the poor – the sacraments, and particularly the Eucharist, will always be a central part of his identity.

Personal Witness

This talk will focus on your experience as a sacramental minister.

- What has the experience of presiding at Mass been like for you? What impact has it had on your faith, your understanding of the priesthood, and your understanding of the Eucharist?
- What has the experience of hearing Confessions been like for you? What impact has it had on your understanding of sin, grace and human nature?
- What are some particularly meaningful experiences you have had in administering the other sacraments?
- Have there been particular instances when you've witnessed a sacramental encounter being particularly profound for someone? How has this made you feel as the minister of that sacrament?
- How do you avoid the sacraments becoming repetitive? How do you avoid the temptation to go on "auto-pilot" when presiding at Mass or hearing confession?

For Group Discussion

- What do you think makes a priest an effective presider?
- According to "Presbyterorum Ordinis," "while it is true that God can accomplish the work of salvation through unworthy ministers, God nevertheless, ordinarily prefers to manifest his greatness through those who are more docile to the promptings and direction of the Holy Spirit, so much so that they can say of the apostolate, thanks to their own intimate union with Christ and holiness of life: 'it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20)." How and why do you think that personal holiness is important for a priest?
- When you think about yourself presiding at Mass, how does it make you feel? What parts of it excite you? In what ways does it intimidate you or give you pause?



- Think of a particularly meaningful experience you have had in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Did the priest do anything to contribute to the significance of that sacrament? What qualities or behaviors do you appreciate in a confessor?
- If you've ever had an experience of a priest ministering to you or someone you love who is ill, what qualities did you most (or least) appreciate in him during this ministry?
- When you think about yourself hearing confessions, or ministering to the sick and the dying, how does it make you feel? What parts of it excite you? In what ways does it intimidate you or give you pause?
- When you think of the need for the new evangelization of our culture, what role do you think the sacraments have to play?

Takeaways

Discern if you might be called to participate in a ministry that can enhance your engagement with the sacramental life of the Church. This could include serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, being a sponsor for RCIA or Confirmation, or helping young people prepare for First Communion or their first Confession.



Begin with Prayer....

The priest is called to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles in proclaiming the Gospel. Preaching is one of the most important ways he accomplishes this task.

Pooding: 1 C

Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:16-18a

If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Preaching has been a central task for the priest since the times of the Apostles. In the reading we just read from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, he speaks of preaching as his "obligation" as an Apostle. The Church continues to emphasize how important preaching is to the life of the Church, especially the Sunday homily.

In an age when people are increasingly uncatechized, Sunday Mass is the primary encounter that most people have with the Church, and the Sunday homily is the primary means by which Catholics learn their faith. This isn't the ideal situation, of course, and we are supposed to lead people more deeply into the life of the Church. However, this means that Sunday Mass is our best opportunity to draw the faithful in and break open the Gospel for them so that they might understand its relevance and importance in their daily lives.

This presents many challenges, for several reasons. First of all, God doesn't necessarily call the best public speakers to the priesthood. Preaching comes more naturally for some than for others, and so training and preparation are crucial. With the busy schedule that most priests maintain, finding sufficient time to prepare throughout the week can be a challenge. However, the Church has repeatedly emphasized that all priests should make homily preparation a high priority.

Another challenge in preaching is that, even though it is the primary place where many Catholics learn their faith, the

Year II: Priesthood

Session Six:

The Priest as Preacher of the Word

Preaching the Mystery of Faith (USCCB, January 2013)



primary purpose of preaching is not catechesis, or a classroom lecture. And even though many parishioners (or potential parishioners) judge the quality of the liturgy on the quality of the preaching (and may even use this to decide where or if they will attend Sunday Mass in the future), the primary purpose of the homily is not to entertain or to offer practical advice. Instead, the homily is supposed to be a proclamation of the Gospel. The task of the preacher is to break open the Gospel so that people can have a deeper understanding of it and apply it to their everyday lives. Therefore, the preacher is challenged to make the homily engaging and relevant, and to include some elements of teaching, while never losing sight of his central focus: breaking open the Gospels so that people know Christ better and may enter into a deeper relationship with him. This is a demanding but very rewarding responsibility for the priest.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on your role as a preacher, so that participants have an idea of what it is like to prepare and give a homily week after week.

- How would you describe the central purpose of the Sunday homily? How would you describe the priest's main responsibility as preacher of the Sunday homily?
- What do you think makes for an effective Sunday homily?
 What are some pitfalls that you recognize with some Sunday homilies?
- What do you consider to be ideal preparation for a Sunday homily? Where do your ideas come from? How would you describe the relationship between personal prayer and preaching? Has preaching affected your own spiritual life?
- What do you enjoy most/least about being a preacher?
 How has your experience of preaching differed in different
 settings (parish, university, etc.)? How do you keep
 developing and growing as a preacher?
- Have you found that preaching has established or strengthened relationships between you and the people to whom you minister? Do you think that effective preaching has any relationship to effectiveness in other aspects of ministry?
- How do you construct a homily that contains solid doctrine and catechesis, while at the same time being engaging, accessible to people and relevant to their lives? What are some different tools or tactics that you employ to make the Word accessible to people?
- What are the biggest challenges you recognize to the effective proclamation of the Word (and the ability of people to hear this proclamation)?



For Group Discussion

- Have you ever heard a homily that deeply impacted your faith? Describe the experience.
- Think about the most effective and least effective homilies that you've heard recently. What do you think are some of the characteristics of an effective homily?
- Where does preaching fit into the overall project of the "new evangelization"? How can preaching be a means of reaching people who are uncatechized or have fallen away from the faith? What opportunities do emerging social media offer in this regard?
- The U.S. Bishops have said that "Proclaiming the Gospel is a ministry deriving from the Sacrament of Orders and is exercised by the authority of Christ." If all priests aren't great speakers, and if the best speakers aren't always priests, why do you think that the Sunday Mass homily is reserved to priests?
- When you think about the possibility of one day preaching at Sunday Mass, how does that make you feel? What are some qualities that you possess that might make you an effective preacher? What are some things that you will need to work on in order to become an effective preacher?

Takeaways

By talking to friends or searching the internet, find a website or podcast of Catholic preaching (for instance, wordonfire.org) that speaks to you. Make a point of listening to this preaching on a regular basis.



Another critical responsibility of the priest is to be a pastor of his flock, in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of John 21:15-17

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Session Seven:

Year II:

Priesthood

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

The Priest as Shepherd of the Flock

Every priest is called to be a shepherd. This is where the word "pastor" comes from. As we saw in the passage from the Gospel of John that we just read, Jesus asks Peter to demonstrate his love for Him by tending His sheep, and that is what Peter spent the rest of his life doing. Like everything a priest does, his role as a shepherd originates in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, who called Himself the Good Shepherd. When we tend the flock entrusted to us, we are simply continuing the work that Jesus began during His earthly ministry. Our sheep are really His sheep.

There are many different ways for a priest to perform his role as a shepherd. Many priests do it in a parish setting, but every priest is called to act as a pastor even if they do not have the title of Pastor. Priests who teach, serve in university or high school ministry, or work in hospital chaplaincy are all called to be a shepherd to whatever flock is entrusted to their care. We are supposed to see each individual person as someone who has been entrusted to our care by Christ.

This is certainly a demanding role, especially since the Gospels tell us that the responsibility of a shepherd is to lay down his life for his sheep. He keeps them from harm and guides them to green pastures. It is in this spirit that the priest sacrifices

Chrism Mass Homily (Pope Francis, March 28, 2013)



himself to guide his flock to Jesus. Pope Francis famously preached that a shepherd should be so closely tied to his flock that he should have "the smell of the sheep." That's why when we speak of priestly ministry, we don't just speak of technical skills, like preaching or administration. We also expect priests to be effective listeners, to exhibit sensitivity in delicate situations, and to be patient, loving and attentive to everyone. It is no coincidence that we usually refer to these types of "softer" skills as "pastoral" skills.

Personal Witness

Whether or not you have ever had the title of Pastor, this talk should help the participants understand how being a shepherd is a part of any ministry a priest might have. Therefore, the talk should highlight the relationship you have had with people you have served in ministry, and what it has meant for you to shepherd them.

- What are some ways that you act as a "shepherd of the flock" in your current ministry?
- The Church has said that "Since priests participate in the authority of Christ they differ notably from the faithful," but that this is not to be understood in a way that implies domination. What do you think is unique about the way a pastor is called to serve his flock (as compared to the way that all Christians are called to serve one another)?
- How have the authority and leadership that you exercise been a blessing? How have they been a challenge? What kind of preparation and training were needed to get you ready to exercise this leadership?
- What are some of the greatest pastoral needs that you see among the people you serve in your ministry? Why do you think these needs are so pressing, and how do you see your role in serving these needs?
- A lot of your time is spent doing activities that don't instantly look pastoral (i.e., meetings, social events, administration, etc.). Ideally, how do these enhance your ability to be an effective shepherd?
- What are some examples of ways that your flock has inspired you in your faith and your priesthood?

For Group Discussion

- What are some examples of Jesus acting as a shepherd in the Gospels?
- What are some experiences that you have had of "shepherding" people so far in your life? How did you feel in this role? What sacrifices did this require? What gratification did you receive from it?



- What are some times when you feel like you have been effectively "shepherded" by a priest? Describe the experience. What was it about the priest's actions or attitude that made this encounter so important?
- How would you describe the role of the priest as "pastor of the flock"? How do you think this could be exercised in different ministerial settings (parish, school, direct service to the poor, etc.)?
- Why do the faithful need a shepherd? What qualities do you think make a priest an effective pastor? Why?
- Pope Francis has said that a good shepherd needs to live with "the smell of his sheep." What does this mean to you? Have you seen examples of priests who live this out in an inspiring way?

Takeaways

Spend some prayer time identifying people that you may be called to "shepherd": family members, co-workers, classmates, friends. How might you be called to give of yourself to guide them closer to Christ? Identify one or two relationships that might lend themselves to this, and put some effort into living these relationships in an intentionally Christian way.



One element of preparing for priesthood is human formation, since in order to be formed in the image of Christ the High Priest, you must first conform to the image of Christ the Man.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Seminary formation is designed to form you in the image of Christ. The ultimate goal is to form you into the image of Christ the High Priest, but before you can do that, you must be formed into the image of Christ the Man. You must learn to develop all of those human virtues that Jesus exhibited on this earth in order to act effectively "in the person of Christ" as a priest. Our reading from First Corinthians gives an insight into these qualities; since God is love, we must be loving in all things.

Seminary formation is broken down into four "pillars," and the first of these that we'll discuss is called human formation. It is the process by which we develop those qualities that will make us more loving, dependable and Christ-like. This does not mean that formation is supposed to change you into a person who in no way resembles the man you are today. Each priest remains a unique individual with his own peculiar gifts, talents and flaws. Formation, therefore, is designed to form you into the man that God created you to be, maximizing your strengths and virtues and managing your flaws and sinfulness.

Human formation is a broad term that encompasses many areas, including the following:

- Self-knowledge
- Strength to handle stress and many pastoral responsibilities
 - Balance of lifestyle

Year II: Priesthood

Session Eight:

Preparing for Priesthood
- Human
Formation

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 43-44



- o Honesty and integrity
- Compassion and empathy
- Good judgment
- Psychosexual maturity, and the ability to live healthy celibacy
- Healthy boundaries
- Interpersonal relationship skills

These are qualities that every person needs to develop, but they are especially important for a priest. The seminary formation program gives men tools to grow in these areas, and seminarians are also evaluated on these qualities. As with all the pillars, our human formation is never complete. It is every priest's responsibility to keep growing throughout their lives.

Personal Witness

This talk should give the participants a personal experience of how a priest has worked on human formation and noticed growth in this area. Therefore you should share your experiences of working on the qualities and skills demanded by human formation, whether in seminary or beyond.

- Describe how you have grown in human formation qualities such as the following:
 - Self-knowledge
 - ° Responsibility and dependability
 - ° Stress management
 - ° Multitasking
 - Balanced lifestyle
 - Compassion and empathy
 - Psychosexual maturity
 - Relationship skills
- What tools have helped you grow in these areas?
- How have these skills aided you in your pastoral ministry?
- What are the consequences of any of these skills being underdeveloped in a priest? What are the biggest challenges that a priest today faces in managing these qualities?
- How do you make sure that you are constantly growing in each of these areas? In what way has the community been a support as you try to manage these areas?

For Group Discussion

- What are some human qualities that you expect in a good priest? Why are these qualities so important?
- Think of a priest who has had a positive impact on your faith. What are some of the qualities that made him such a



positive influence? Pay special attention to the qualities that are subtle, personal characteristics (i.e., having to do more with his personality and day-to-day behavior rather than his intelligence or pastoral skill). How have some of these subtle qualities had a positive impact on the rest of his ministry?

- What are some of the consequences of a priest who has poor social skills? Poor time management? Poor knowledge of appropriate boundaries? An unkind temperament?
- How do you try to maintain a balanced lifestyle right now?
 What challenges do you face? Do you think these challenges would be different if you were a priest?
- How do you think that a seminary might be a good setting to grow in these qualities, relative to other settings (i.e., a college dorm, living alone in an apartment)?

Takeaways

Write a list of the most positive aspects of your personality, as well as any aspects of your personality in which you recognize a need to grow. Prayerfully reflect on how the positive characteristics could be beneficial in any ministerial role you might take on in the Church. Reflect on how any negative characteristics might hinder your effectiveness in ministry.



Another important part of preparing for the priesthood is spiritual formation. In order to facilitate encounters with Christ for others, he first must have a deep relationship with Christ.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 6: 5-8

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans do, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Since a solid prayer life and deep relationship with Christ are essential for a priest, the seminary should be a place where a man grows spiritually. Last time we discussed that seminary formation is based on the four pillars of formation. Spiritual formation is one of those pillars, and so the seminary has a disciplined structure of common prayer and private prayer. Common prayer is an important facet of the seminary, particularly for religious. This includes the following elements:

- Daily Mass: Seminarians get in the habit of going to Mass every day. They also learn to serve in liturgical roles— Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, altar servers, Masters of Ceremonies, sacristans, cantors—as well as learning how to plan liturgies.
- Liturgy of the Hours: This is the universal prayer of the Church, which all priests, brothers and nuns pray daily. This is not part of their personal prayer; they pray this on behalf of the universal Church.
- Devotions: Seminarians often participate in common devotions, such as the Rosary or the Stations of the Cross.
- Seminarians are also expected to maintain a vibrant personal prayer life, and they have several resources available to help them develop their prayer life:
 - Spiritual direction
 - House Retreats and days of reflection

Year II: Priesthood

Session Nine:

Preparing for Priesthood
- Spiritual Formation

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 45-50



° Instruction in methods of prayer

But as helpful as all of these tools are, none of them can automatically strengthen a man's relationship with the Lord. It is up to the seminarian to take advantage of these tools so that prayer becomes central to his life, something he does out of a desire to be close to the Lord rather than merely out of a sense of obligation. Prayer is as difficult for a seminarian as it is for anyone, but it is essential if he desires to be a holy priest and a zealous disciple.

Personal Witness

This talk should give the participants an idea of what the spiritual formation process looks like and how it bears fruit in someone's life. Describe the process by which you engaged spiritual formation, both in the seminary and beyond.

- Describe what your prayer life looked like before you entered the seminary.
- How did you adjust to the increased demands for common and private prayer when you entered the seminary?
- Was common prayer a new experience for you? If so, what did you enjoy about it, and how did it enhance your relationship with Christ?
- How did your personal prayer life change when you entered the seminary? How did the various resources available to you in seminary formation (spiritual direction, retreats, a community of brothers who prayed) affect your prayer life?
- How has your prayer life grown and developed since ordination? What forms of prayer are important in your personal prayer life? What challenges have you faced in maintaining a solid prayer life, and how have you dealt with those challenges?
- How has your prayer life sustained you in your ministry? How has your ministry affected your prayer life?

For Group Discussion

- How did you learn to pray when you were a child? How did you learn new ways to expand your prayer life as you got older? Were there any people or resources that helped you, or did you have to figure it out on your own?
- What are the main challenges you face in maintaining or expanding your prayer life? What goals have you established for your prayer life, and how are you working on them? In what areas could you use some outside help in working on these goals?
- Have you had any experience with common prayer? Does this seem appealing to you? Why?



- Has your experience with ministry or service work impacted your prayer life at all? How have you brought positive experiences and difficult experiences to prayer?
- What do you think a priest's life should look like? If all Christians need to maintain a healthy prayer life, what might make this even more important for a priest?

Takeaways

Take a look at your current prayer routine, and think of one concrete step you would like to take to make your prayer life deeper or more consistent.



A priest must have a firm grasp on theology and be engaged in the intellectual life of the Church in order to present the faith in a clear and coherent way that can withstand the challenges of the secular culture.

Year II:

Priesthood

Session Ten:

Preparing for Priesthood - Intellectual Formation

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 51-56

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Acts of Apostles 6: 8-10

Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

In order to function effectively as a priest, a seminarian must learn about every aspect of the faith. Especially in today's world, which is increasingly secular, someone must have a solid intellectual understanding of their faith in order to present it effectively to the culture. While intellectual understanding is not all that there is to faith, a good understanding of doctrine and dogma will help us to speak about the faith confidently and persuasively, much like Stephen did in the passage we just read from the Acts of the Apostles.

The intellectual component of seminary formation prepares a seminarian to do many things a priest is expected to do, such as catechize, defend/explain the faith to the secular culture, and assist people in applying their faith to complex situations. In order to do these things, a priest must have a solid intellectual grounding that underlies their apostolic zeal and pastoral charity.

The seminary's academic program attempts to give them this grounding. Intellectual formation in the seminary begins with undergraduate study in Philosophy, followed by graduate study in Theology. In Theology, seminarians study a variety of disciplines:

- Scripture
- Church history
- Moral theology (including Catholic social teaching, sexual ethics, medical ethics)



- Systematic Theology, which is an ordered study of Christian thought and belief (including Christology, Theology of Priesthood, Ecclesiology, Sacramental Theology)
- Liturgy (including Liturgical Theology, Preaching, Liturgical Celebration)
- ° Canon Law
- Field Education (theological reflection on pastoral ministry)

Even though this seems like a lot, any priest knows that he always has much more to learn. Intellectual formation is not just for the seminary. It is an ongoing responsibility for every priest.

Personal Witness

This talk should help the participants understand how the study of theology helps a priest to be a better pastoral minister and a holier man. Therefore, this talk should include a description of your own intellectual formation in the seminary, including the fruits that this study has born in your life as a professed religious.

- Describe your experience of theology studies. What knowledge of theology had you had before the seminary?
 What parts of theology were most difficult for you?
- Fr. Moreau said that "the mind will not be educated at the expense of the heart." Ideally, how can graduate theology studies nurture both mind and heart at the same time?
- Were there any areas of theology that were exciting for you, or which impacted your faith? How did you learn to make connections between theology and your relationship with Christ?
- How have you used things you have learned in theology in the exercise of your pastoral ministry? Illustrate with an example or two of how your intellectual formation benefited you in ministry.
- How do you keep growing intellectually now? What kinds of reading or other activities are important to your ongoing intellectual formation?
- Most observers regard our culture as relatively uncatechized, lacking even basic knowledge of the faith. How has your study of theology prepared you to participate in the new evangelization?

For Group Discussion

 Describe your own religious education (whether in Catholic schools, CCD programs, etc.). What were some of the positive elements of this catechesis? What were some of the



- gaps not addressed?
- In what areas do you feel you lack adequate knowledge of the faith? What do you think you could do to address these areas?
- Have you ever been in a position in which you had to defend the faith, either in a formal (i.e., classroom) setting, or in less formal conversation? Describe the situation. How comfortable did you feel in this role? How can situations like these turn into pastoral opportunities?
- Why do you think a solid knowledge of the faith is important for a priest? How should a sound intellectual formation impact his ministry?
- What practices have you (or would you like to) put into place in order to learn more about the faith? What resources would you recommend to keep up with current events pertaining to the faith?

Takeaways

Identify one area of theology about which you would like to learn more. Buy a good book on this subject, and commit to reading a few pages of this book each day.



In order to be effective in leading people to Christ in a variety of circumstances, a priest must learn skills to be effective in a variety of ministries.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of John 13: 12-16

So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

PDV 57. The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character. The Council's decree Optatam Totius states so clearly when speaking of major seminaries; "The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. Hence, they should be trained for the ministry of the word so that they may gain an ever-increasing understanding of the revealed word of God, making it their own by meditation and giving it expression in their speech and in their lives. They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification so that by prayer and the celebration of the sacred liturgical functions they may carry on the work of salvation through the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. They should be trained to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity, Christ who 'did not come to have service done to him but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many ', and that they may win over many by becoming the servants of all."

Year II: Priesthood

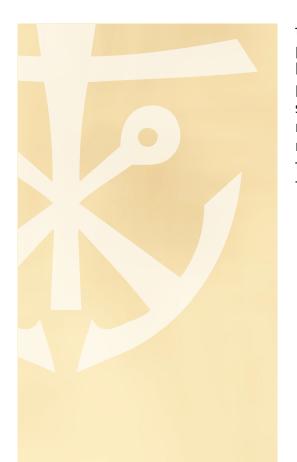
Session Eleven:

Preparing for Priesthood - Pastoral Formation

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 57-79

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

So far we've discussed human formation, spiritual formation and intellectual formation as components of the curriculum at



the seminary. The last of the four pillars of formation is called pastoral formation. We all know that priests are expected to be skilled in a wide variety of ministries, and so the seminary prepares men for these ministries as much as possible. Most seminarians already have some experience in ministry, and most of them are attracted to seminary life because they really enjoy ministry. Every pastoral minister needs specialized training, though, and this typically includes areas such as the following:

- Liturgical preparation: formal instruction in presiding, preaching, sacramental ministry
- ° Field education: supervised ministry placements; in Holy Cross these include parish programs, campus ministry programs, hospital chaplaincy and direct service to the poor, among other things.
- Additional pastoral skills: in Holy Cross's formation program, this includes courses in areas such as pastoral counseling and pastoral administration.
- Specialized training: clinical pastoral education for hospital chaplaincy, Spanish-language immersion, etc., and other specialized opportunities may be available during the summers for Holy Cross seminarians.

The pastoral component of formation should include adequate supervision so that the seminarian has structure and guidance to help him develop his skills. In Holy Cross, seminarians are given certain opportunities to preside and preach at public liturgies, usually in the context of the Liturgy of the Hours. Field education includes a formal supervisory relationship, as well as a course every semester dedicated to theological reflection on pastoral placements, so that seminarians learn to integrate their ministry with the rest of their spiritual life, never allowing it to become just a job. Ordained priests are encouraged to take advantage of continuing education opportunities to continue to develop their pastoral skills. Being confident and competent in ministry makes us better instruments of God's grace and allows us to be more effective evangelists.

Personal Witness

Since most of the participants probably already have experience in ministry (and enthusiasm for it, as well), this talk should get them excited about what pastoral ministry might look like at the next level. This talk should focus on your history of pastoral ministry as a Holy Cross religious so that they might learn about the challenges and joys of priestly ministry.

 Describe the types of service work that you enjoyed doing before entering the seminary.



- What types of ministry placements did you have in the seminary? Which of these were the furthest outside your comfort zone? How did you acquire the skills to complete these placements successfully?
- When you entered full-time ministry, what aspects of your assignment did you feel most prepared for? Least prepared?
- What are some of the ministries you have performed since ordination? What are some of the duties performed by the average parish priest (or priest-professor, dorm rector, campus minister, etc.) that most people are unaware of, or would be surprised to learn about?
- What aspects of your full-time ministry have been the most joyful and life-giving for you? What areas do you find most challenging?
- How do you continue to develop and improve your pastoral skills?
- What do you look forward to most as you look toward the future?

For Group Discussion

- Based on your experience of ministry so far, what attracts you most to ministry in the Church?
- Describe an experience in ministry that you found extremely joyful or life-giving. Describe a time when you recognized that you had some unexpected gifts for ministry.
- How has prayer been a part of your ministerial experiences?
 How have you come to know Christ better through service to others?
- What attracts you most to priestly ministry? What aspects do you find the most intimidating?
- What skills do you think a priest needs to learn to make him an effective pastoral minister? What personality traits should he develop in order to be effective?

Takeaways

Think about an experience of ministry that made you excited and joyful. In your journal, write about what made this experience so meaningful, and what you learned about yourself in the process.



Because so much preparation is needed for a man to be formed into a holy and effective priest, the Church provides seminaries, structured environments where candidates for priesthood can grow in all the pillars of formation.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 18:19-20

Amen, I say to you, if two agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

PDV 60. In its deepest identity the seminary is called 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 for the mission ... The seminary is, in itself, an original experience of the Church's life... The various members of the seminary community, gathered by the Spirit into a single brotherhood, cooperate, each according to his own gift in the growth of all in faith and charity so that they may prepare suitably for the priesthood and so prolong in the Church and in history the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. The human point of view, the major seminary should strive to become "a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy"... It is essential for the formation of candidates for the priesthood and the pastoral ministry, which by its very nature is ecclesial, that the seminary should be experienced not as something external and superficial, or simply a place in which to live and study, but in an interior and profound way. It should be experienced as a community, a specifically ecclesial community, a community that relives the experience of the group of Twelve who were united to Jesus.

Year II: Priesthood

Session Twelve:

The Seminary

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

For the last several sessions, we have talked about various elements of the "formation process," which is the Church's term for the process of preparing a man for the priesthood. We've talked about human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation and their importance in forming effective and healthy priests. After hearing all of this, you may be

Pastores dabo vobis, paragraphs 60-62



wondering exactly what formation looks like, and what instruction in those four pillars looks like.

Formation takes place in a seminary. The Church, in her wisdom, insists that formation take place in the context of a community. Part of formation involves living among other men seeking to follow the Lord more closely. As Jesus states in the passage from Matthew we just read, He is present among us in a special way when two or more are gathered in His name. Therefore, a Christian community offers the potential for a lot more growth in the four pillars than a seminarian could achieve on his own.

All seminaries are preparing priests for the same mission: priestly service to the Catholic Church. Therefore, all seminaries are governed by the same basic operating principles. The basis for seminary formation is a document called "Pastores Dabo Vobis," written by Pope St. John Paul II in 1992. This is where the "pillars of formation" we've discussed in previous sessions originated. In the United States, the ideas of "Pastores Dabo Vobis" have been translated by the USCCB into a document called "The Program of Priestly Formation." If you want to know what a seminary looks like, this is the document to read, as it outlines the Church's expectations for seminaries.

Within the requirements of the PPF, different seminaries may prepare their seminarians in slightly different ways, depending on their particular circumstances. Since Holy Cross is a religious congregation with a specific charism, our formation programs add some additional elements to the requirements of the PPF, such as:

- Formation for community life, in order to prepare men for the type of community life they will be expected to live as Holy Cross religious;
- Exposure to the international apostolates of Holy Cross.

But what Holy Cross formation has in common with all seminary formation is that we prepare men holistically for service to the Church, forming men who have a solid intellectual understanding of their faith, a solid prayer life, well-developed pastoral skills, and the maturity and interpersonal skills that will allow them to be effective and happy priests. The intent of this talk is not to bore you with all the details of why seminaries look like they do. Instead, we want you to know that there is an internal logic behind every aspect of what you'll see in a seminary. This logic reflects the mind of the Church, which has painstakingly thought through every component of what is needed to form a man into a healthy and holy priest.



Personal Witness

Since the participants have been introduced to the pillars of formation in previous sessions, this talk will give them a flavor for seminary life as a whole. Therefore the talk should focus on your own experience of the seminary.

- How did you know when the time was right to enter the seminary?
- Did you visit the seminary before you made your decision?
 What was your visit like? How was the seminary different than you expected? What was your impression of the other seminarians?
- What were the biggest adjustments for you when you entered seminary formation? What were the best parts of the adjustment? What parts were the hardest to get used to?
- Describe some of the following routines that you experienced during your time in the seminary:
 - Prayer and liturgy
 - ° Ministry placements
 - The formation program
 - Community life
 - Relationships with other seminarians
- What are some misconceptions that you think people have about the seminary?
- What advice do you give to young men who are considering applying to a seminary?

For Group Discussion

- Have you ever been to a seminary before? Or have you ever known seminarians personally? What impression have these experiences left you with regarding the seminary?
- What parts of seminary life seem the most appealing to you? Are there any parts that you find intimidating?
- What do you think the biggest changes might be in your life if you entered a seminary? Is there anything you think you would miss about your current life?
- How would your family and friends react if you entered the seminary?
- How do you think you would know if the seminary is the right next step for you? Once you know that, how do you think you would recognize when would be the right time to enter?



Takeaways

Take a virtual tour of a seminary. (For Holy Cross seminaries, you can find a virtual tour at http://vocation.nd.edu/what-the-seminary-is-like/virtual-tour/.)