



December 12, 2022

Dear Brothers,

On the Solemnity of the Sacred of Jesus on June 24, 2022, the Vatican promulgated the sixth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation in the United States of America* (PPF6), placing much emphasis on the first and last stages of formation. The promulgation of the PPF6 means significant changes to seminaries. Seminary formation personnel have been networking and exploring steps to implement the required adaptations at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year.

The new PPF6 is diocesan-focused and emphasizes integrating academic, pastoral, human, and spiritual dimensions, as opposed to the previous PPF's focus on academics as the primary dimension in seminary formation. The formation program is divided into four stages: Propaedeutic, Discipleship, Configuration, and Conversion. The stages must occur sequentially and may not overlap. Allow me to summarize each stage.

- **Propaedeutic.** The propaedeutic stage is the introductory year for a seminarian discerning the priesthood. The emphasis is on human and spiritual formation to help him deepen his relationship with God and prepare himself to engage in systematic and rigorous formation. In this stage, he is introduced to the breadth and depth of the Catholic faith, including spiritual direction, spiritual practices, charitable works, and theological reflection. The propaedeutic stage lasts at least one year. It is to have its separate program and space, i.e., outside of the seminary. Relational skills, self-discipline, a trusting relationship with formators, and healthy self-care practices are some of the benchmarks for this stage. The postulancy and novitiate periods in religious life formation are comparable to the propaedeutic stage. See PPF6, no.191.
- **Discipleship.** The discipleship stage lasts for at least two years. In this stage, the seminarian studies philosophy as a prerequisite for theological studies and continues his vocational discernment by nurturing a union with Christ through meditation and contemplation. Some benchmarks for this stage include maturing in self-awareness (e.g., self-acceptance, self-gift), demonstrating appropriate boundaries in interpersonal interactions, exercising freedom with prudence and discretion, and exhibiting growth in accountability and transparency with formators. In both words and deeds, the seminarian is to

cultivate the human virtues of gratitude, humility, chastity, truthfulness, and racial sensitivity. See PPF6, nos. 192-197.

- **Configuration.** In the configuration stage, the seminarian conforms himself to the self-giving of Christ, the Shepherd and Servant. He is to develop his priestly spirituality and put pastoral generosity into practice. Reception of candidacy and conferral of the ministries of lector and acolyte occur during this stage. Some benchmarks for this stage include displaying evidence of affective maturity in taking direction from those in authority. The seminarian is to grow in his sense of interiority and communion, his capacity for unselfish leadership, and balanced exercise, work, and rest habits. He is expected to continue to mature in his relational qualities of solidary, compassion, empathy, and attentive listening. See PPF6, nos. 198-199.
- **Vocational Synthesis** is the transition period from seminary to full-time pastoral ministry and integration into the presbyterate. The seminarian gradually assumes priestly duties in a parish or other pastoral settings outside the formation house. This period lasts about six months to a year following diaconate ordination. Growing in self-confidence, sustaining healthy friendships with priests and others, committing to mentorship relationships, and spending time with people of diverse generations, ethnicities, and viewpoints are some of the benchmarks of this stage. See PPF6, nos. 200-201.

What impact do the changes have on the formation of religious seminarians? For many superiors, myself included, the promulgation of the PPF6, and more specifically, how it will be integrated with the formation ratios of our religious communities, has not been clear. We want to be true to the PPF6 but also respect the process of our own ratios. Therefore, the SCJ Formation Committee is studying the revised PPF and brainstorming ways to implement the PPF6 in a way that complements—rather than replaces—our formation ratio.¹

At its meeting on December 5, 2022, the Formation Committee discussed a proposed draft of the various stages of formation for SCJ candidates, both those entering formation with and without an undergraduate degree. Each stage has its own norms and principles in accordance with our *ratio formationis provincialis* and the PPF6. The committee will reach out to some SCJs for input. A proposal will be presented to the Provincial Council for consideration in the upcoming months.

¹ The Formation Committee is composed of Monica Misey, Mark Mastin, Brian Tompkins, Joseph-Thien Dinh, Rafael Querobin, Zbigniew Morawiec, and Vien V. Nguyen (chairperson)

The council and I look forward to sharing more information about this in the months ahead.

And as always, let us continue to keep our formators and our students in our prayers. Rarely do any of us enter religious life hoping to one day serve as a formation director, but the ministry is one of the most vital ones in our congregation. I am grateful for our brothers who serve on our formation team. I am also grateful to the young men who have chosen to discern their call to religious life with the Priests of the Sacred Heart.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. [unclear]". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial letter.