

THE FORMATION OF PRESBYTERS IN THE CHURCHES IN ITALY

THE TRAINING OF PRESBYTERS
IN CHURCHES IN ITALY

GUIDELINES AND
STANDARDS FOR SEMINARS

(4TH EDITION)



DICASTERIUM PRO CLERICIS

Prot. N. 2024 4238

DECRETO

As a result of the promulgation of the *katie FrnJaMOlftH /ffTff'f£///Dn!ZJ' rrrJa/n/zi*, 1st 8 December 2016, in order to respond to the needs that have arisen in the area of the formation of future ptesbiters, the Italian COiferefi2a EpiScO@ale proceeded to draft the *Ral/e Nationalis fr ii!iuli rit 3a' rdetalis and Italia*, taking cc'nto the current social, culttuale and ecclesial context. To this end, the àpisco}nal Conference, accepting the indications of the Magisterium, intends to offer future priests a human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation inspired by a sincere communitarian and missionary thrust c conforming to the(a) r'eculiar needs of the contem_r'of'anean age.

The path of initial formation is divided into four stages: 1. Propaedeutic stage; 2. "l'appa of formation ciel clishpole (discipleship); 3. Stage of configuration to Christ Priest, Servant and Shepherd (configuraÙva); 4. Stage of vocational synthesis.

In addition, the kpiscopal Conference, in its desire to ensure a righteous and thorough fflosophic and theological formation of seinarians, has r_evisaged a more relaxed processing time about /'Oré/O É£f/Ùioi-ii i, in order to fcirri a secure foundation, adequate to the progress of Sacred Scien2e, r'er the intellectual formation of candidates, in view of the presbyterial futWO ITLinisteio.

Therefore, considering above, this Dicastice for the Clergy, having regard to approval of the Italian Episcopal Conference, in accordance canon 242, § 1 CIC, n. 3 of the *Ramo Fiin4aiuertclis Iv titi/iiorl' Xa erJotuàs* of December 8, 2016, and art. 114 § 4 of the Apostoltca *Pr iedicute* Constitution *N.uaiigeàrm* of March 19, 2022,

CONFIRM

and expezlmentum for a three-year period, 1 n xz :0!!! i:~ i ititiitioiis *Xacer4otali's Italia*, and prescribes that it shall be faithfully held in account by all those 'to whom it pertains, having observed tcitte rules of law and notwithstanding any osseiva2on to the contrary.

à\$ àtiCàflO DiCfJStCrO QC£ ú Clergy, Dec. 8, 2024

Lazarus Card. You Heung silt
Prfect

✠ Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Moreira
Arcivescovo titolare di Tiburnia
Segretario

Italian Episcopal Conference

Prot. No. 13/2025

DECREE

The 78^a General Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference, held in Assisi November 13-16, 2023, pursuant to canon 242 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law, approved the document "*The Formation of Priests in the Churches in Italy. Orientations and norms for seminaries*" (fourth edition), which was confirmed by the Holy See with a decree of the Dicastery for the Clergy dated Dec. 8, 2024 Prot. No. 2024 4238.

I hereby decree, in my capacity as President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, in accordance with Articles 16 § 3 and 27 (f) of the Statute and Article 72 of the CEI Regulations,

PROMULGO

the attached document, I decree that this decree with its annex be published in the "Notiziario della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana" and on the institutional website of the CEI (www.chiesacattolica.it), and I decree that the document enter into force on January 9, 2025.

Rome, January 1, 2025

Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God



✠ JOSEPH BATURI
Secretary General



✠ MATTHEW MARY Card. ZUPPI
President

PRESENTATION

"Come after me, I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). At the origin of presbyteral formation lies the Word of God that reaches the one called by asking to be received by him. When this happens, the Word begins to act effectively in the whole person ("I will make you become"), remaining the fundamental formative principle toward a particular configuration to Christ the Lord, in union love, with the mediation of the Church, which recognizes, guards, and accompanies the work of God.

The first question a formator asks today, after the one about the authenticity of vocation, is about the human structure with which candidates present themselves. The extraordinary quantity and variety of lifestyles proposed by social media, the weak education in the moral evaluation of acts, the desuetude to consider the consequences of actions on one's self, the affective-emotional illiteracy and the poverty of ethical-value models with which the culture where they grow up is marked, make formators aware of the importance of careful accompaniment deployed over long periods of time to foster self-knowledge and the attainment of an adequate inner consistency. It is in Seminary that many candidates begin to have fathers watching them, to find themselves for the first time within a strong educational relationship filled with trust, and to begin to gain self-awareness.

The other area to which attention should be paid concerns relational capacity, since the presbyter should be a man of true and fruitful relationships. In tune with the instances that emerged in the narrative phase of the Synodal Way of the Churches in Italy and in the path that involved all the dioceses at the universal level, a greater connection of the candidates' formative path with the daily life of the Christian community is taken into consideration (Cf.: Synthesis Report of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, no. 11).

Therefore, the present document presents a formation *process* to the presbyterate articulated in two basic stages: a first phase of an initiatory nature, dedicated to the building of inner consistency, in a strong educational relationship with the formators, through development of a solid spiritual life, serious application to study and praying, intense community life, and self-knowledge. The second phase is more dedicated to the discovery of the People of God, learning to be in the midst of them and to recognize the charisms raised by the Lord, with a joyful spirit and a spirit of service. It is a time for greater involvement of the Christian community in the formation of candidates for the presbyterate.

The first chapter answers the question of which priest should be formed and for which Church. For this, on the one hand, ongoing formation is taken in some of its elements, considered necessary for today's Italian presbyter, as a paradigm of formation in the seminary; on the other hand, the two dimensions mission and communion are decisively accentuated as the fundamental horizon of such formation. According to this perspective, the *tria munera* of presbyteral ministry are reread, while the main directions to be taken in initial formation are drawn from ongoing formation: the primacy of faith; integral formation, which harmoniously holds together its four fundamental dimensions (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral); formation in discernment to God's action in history, one's own and others'; formation in presbyteral fraternity and communion with the People of God; and formation in unity of life in the exercise of ministry.

In the second chapter, vocation ministry is presented as a commitment of the whole ecclesial community aimed at all vocations, moving on to specify the ways of vocational accompaniment of boys and young men, based on serious spiritual formation. The validity of the Minor Seminary is confirmed, semiresidential communities are presented as new ways of accompaniment, and adult vocations are mentioned. While paths are underway in several dioceses to implement the indications that emerged from the 2018 Synod Youth and to characterize youth ministry as a pastoral for vocations, in our document, following the indications received and in respect of the indications on the protection of minors, the ancient and always new value of common life experiences for adolescents and young people guided by qualified teams has been emphasized as a fruitful evangelical context for experiencing moments of vocational discernment.

Chapter Three presents the four stages of the formation itinerary proposed by the *Ratio fundamentalis*: propaedeutic (one year), discipleship (two years), configurational (four years) and vocational synthesis (one year). The fundamental style of the educational proposal calls for investing in the formative objectives without scanning the timeframe in a rigid and predefined way, favoring the personalization of the itinerary and avoiding the risk that the stages become rigidly flattened to the years provided by theological studies and other automatisms.

Ample space is given to propaedeutics, recognizing its formative value and its valuable function of careful discernment prior to eventual entry into the Seminary. Given the complexity of the formation required in today's social and ecclesial context, a community where the candidates' human and spiritual criticalities have already been addressed prior to entry into the seminary allows for the best possible use of formation time. Hence the importance of prior discernment.

The discipleship stage forms with propaedeutics the stage of building inner consistency; the candidate becomes rooted in the spirituality of the disciple, who follows his Lord wherever he goes. The stage ends with the *Admissio* among the candidates for orders.

The configurational stage aims at conformation to Christ the Servant and Shepherd. After the first three years (one of propaedeutics and two of discipleship) dedicated to the construction of the inner self, the period of gradual insertion into pastoral ministry begins. The first year (or, following the criterion of personalization of the formation itinerary, at another time in the same stage) is entirely devoted to a pastoral, charitable and missionary experience. Considering that the configurational stage lasts four years, a suspension of the academic course may be envisaged during this experience.

The ministries the readerate and acolyte, reread in the light of *Spiritus Domini* (Pope Francis' Motu Proprio of 2021), are more explicitly traced back to their baptismal roots even in the forms of their celebration, to be done together with the laity, with the hope that, by disengaging them from the strict correlation to the curriculum toward the sacra-
ture Holy Orders, a greater ministeriality in the ecclesial community will be fostered. The configurational stage ends with diaconal ordination.

The stage of vocational synthesis accompanies the exit from the seminary and entry into the presbyterate, which occurs presbyteral ordination. A paragraph is devoted to ongoing formation that succeeds initial formation, reaffirming the continuity of a per-course that does not end but continues. Finally, a formation itinerary for adult candidates is proposed here.

Chapter four discusses formation in the Major Seminary. It is pre- sented as unique, integral, communitarian and missionary. It is not exhausted in the learning of new content, nor is it limited to moral or disciplinary behavior but must concern the field of personal motivations and convictions; it is formation conscience. The educational project helps seminarians to lead all aspects of their personality back to Christ, so that they become consciously free for God and others: the seminary is presented as a path of awareness. Personal and community accompaniment and the various types of Seminaries, diocesan, interdiocesan and regional, are discussed. To enable meaningful community life, stable collaboration between dioceses in the most appropriate forms is called for. The personalized path diffe-
rences the formation itinerary according to the progression of formation.

Thus, the four dimensions of formation, integral and integrated: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral, are presented. Two paragraphs deal with the topic of pro-
tection of minors and vulnerable persons: trainers may make use of the publication *Initial Formation in Time of Abuse* in their educational per-
courses. *Subsidy*

for formators to the presbyterate and consecrated life and for young people in formation, edited by the National Service for the Protection of Minors of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

Chapter Five presents the agents of formation. The request that emerged in the Synodal Way to broaden the sharing of the formation work of seminarians by involving the ecclesial community is taken up, and possible forms of collaboration are invited to be creatively thought out with particular regard to the female figure.

With regard to the *Ordo studiorum*, pending an overall reorganization of theological studies for the Churches that are in Italy, reference is made to the Ordinamenti degli studi approved by the Dicastero per la Cultura e l'Educazione for the Theological Faculties or the Theological Institutes (affiliated or attached to them), at which seminarians complete their studies. Meanwhile, the Dicastery for the Clergy confirms this *Ratio nationalis institutionis sacerdotalis ad experimentum* for three years.

It is handed over to seminary trainers and teachers, seminarians and ecclesial communities so that, with God's grace, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and the saints, they may translate it into their own educational contexts with fidelity and creativity.

✠ Stefano Manetti
Bishop of Fiesole
President of the Episcopal Commission for
Clergy and Consecrated Life

INTRODUCTION

After the publication of the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* by the Congregation (now the Dicastery) for the Clergy in 2016, it became necessary to "prepare a new document in which the principles and instances" offered by it are incorporated, "reconciling the peculiarities of the Italian ecclesial context with the model proposed by the universal Church"¹.

To the Congregation for the Clergy, already responsible for the ongoing formation of presbyters, Pope Benedict XVI, with the Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Ministorum Istitutio* of 2013, intended to entrust also the responsibility for initial formation in the Seminary, until then incumbent on the Congregation for Catholic Education, in the conviction that "as early as the Major Seminary it is necessary to prepare the future of permanent formation and to open to it mind and desire of future presbyters, demonstrating its necessity, advantages and spirit, and ensuring the conditions of its realization."² This new responsibility prompted the Dicastery for the Clergy to elaborate the *Ratio fundamentalis*.

The Italian Bishops' Conference responded to the Prefect's letter by presenting at its November 2021 Assembly the program of work for the drafting of the *Ratio nationalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, by the Bishops' Commission for the Clergy and Consecrated Life, beginning with a broad consultation of the formators of Italian seminaries, through a questionnaire also given a section of seminarians, young priests, religious men and women, and diocesan leaders vocational pastoral care, while the National Office for the Pastoral Care of Vocations published the results of a completed survey of seminaries. The material gathered in this initial phase made it possible to present to the following CEI Assembly in May 2022 a hypothesis for the structure of the document, on which numerous bishops intervened, offering valuable contributions that oriented the fundamental approach of the *Ratio*. The other important source of indications for the elaboration of the text was the national meeting of rectors and those responsible for propaedeutical courses held in Siena in the summer of 2022.

On these fundamental moments of listening, the Commission for Clergy and Consecrated Life proceeded to elaborate the text of the *Ratio nationalis*, understood as

¹ Letter from Prefect Card. Beniamino Stella to Card. Gualtiero Bassetti, President of the CEI, May 19, 2021.

² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, March 25, 1992, §71.

updating the previous 2006 CEI document, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*³.

After accepting comments and contributions from the Permanent Episcopal Council and the Regional Bishops' Conferences on a first draft of the document, it was possible to present the final text to the CEI Assembly in November 2023, which approved it with some amendments.

The context in which we worked on the drafting of this document cannot go unnoticed. In fact, we found ourselves adapting our *Ratio nationalis* to the *Ratio fundamentalis* at a time when there are strong demands for rethinking the seminary formation motion and having to say which priest to form for which Church, in the midst of a synodal process that promises major ecclesial renewal.

However, our *Ratio* intends to respond to the formative needs presented in the listening phase, gathering the essential base of more shared content in which are expressed the common orientations and indications that the Bishops offer to the Churches Italy for the formation of their presbyters in this time. It, by combining the adaptation to the *Ratio fundamentalis* with the contributions given by the Bishops and the formators, delimits the perimeter in which we can move creatively and in which we can remain united walking together. The result presented here is not the National Formation Project of our Seminaries, but the document to which to refer in order to compose, on the part of the Dioceses, their own Formation Project, declined according to local characteristics and needs, within the limits that our text establishes. This *Ratio* therefore has a normative and binding character for diocesan, interdiocesan and regional seminaries of diocesan clergy.

Such considerations allow us to understand the importance of having taken on the category of discipleship as the cardinal principle on which the formative objectives of the Seminary are declined. The disciple is one who lives discernment in order to understand what the Lord's will is in daily life, welcoming and living the mission together with the People of God, in order to become capable of traversing the sociocultural and ecclesial changes taking place without going astray.

In fact, the general outline of our *Ratio* takes up the guiding concept of the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, which considers the presbyter as a disciple permanently on a journey in the footsteps of the Master, for whom formation is a process that begins in the seminary and continues throughout life.

³ ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The formation of presbyters in the Italian Church. Orientations and norms for seminaries (third edition)*, Rome 2007.

This is intended to strongly weld initial formation (to the presbyterate) with ongoing formation (in the presbyterate) as two phases of a single and uninterrupted discipleship and missionary process. The ongoing formation of presbyters, therefore, needs to be more coordinated with the initial formation. The hope is that the formation offered in the seminary, on which the Churches in Italy invest many resources, will not be dispersed in a ministerial experience that, if not lived in the perspective of ongoing formation, well indicated in our text, risks being swept away by the storms of ordinary living.

The Synodal Way that our particular Churches have begun asks us to think that, even a text such as this one, even with the authority that it is our duty to accord it, must remain open to future updates that ecclesial experience may re-demand. Under the authority of the individual bishops, who remain ultimately responsible for the formation and journey of each local Church, it is necessary to keep in mind the geographical and cultural diversification that still characterizes the various areas of Italy. For this reason, too, it is required that each seminary draw up a Formation Project that declines in the specific context the indications of the *Ratio nationalis*.

CHAPTER ONE

Forming presbyters in a missionary church

1.1. Fundamentals of presbyteral formation

1. This first chapter presents some elements of presbyteral formation that seem important for the current situation of the Churches that are in Italy. They presuppose, without explicitly taking it up, the more organic vision of the life and ministry of presbyters presented in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in the subsequent magisterium.

It is important to remember that "the vocation to the ministerial priesthood is part of the broader ambit of the baptismal Christian vocation"⁴ and that, "the nature and mission of presbyters is to be understood within the Church, People of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit, to whose service they consecrate their lives."⁵

a. The sacramental root of ordained ministry

2. Ordained ministry is a gift that the Lord gives to his Church and enables the Church itself to continue to exist.

The ordained minister presides over the proclamation and Eucharist (with sacramental ordination) in the Church. In this way, present communion to the Lord Jesus is the presence of his paschal sacrifice, and in this very way the Church is transmitted through time and continues its mission.

That is why ordained ministry is accessed through the sacrament, by which one is grafted into the mystery of Christ who never ceases to communicate himself to his Church: the ministry becomes the real sign of Christ's faithful and actual giving of himself through the Spirit. The rapport between sacrament, pastoral practice and spiritual living is that between promised gift and believing walk, which demands a conscious and grateful resumption of that gift, that it is actualized in the living of the ministry and nourished in the womb of a spiritual life that stands under the light of the ministry.

⁴ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The gift of the priestly vocation. Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, Rome 2016, §12.

⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The gift of priestly vocation*, §30.

The spirituality of the priest is inwardly connoted by his discipleship to Christ and his dedication to the Church, unified by the missionary concern to transmit the Gospel to men.

b. The historical figure of diocesan ministry.

3. The concrete figure of ministry is related to the Church as a mystery of communion and a historical subject. An understanding of the nature of ministry cannot be posited only in relation to the Church as a mystery of communion, because an integral ecclesiology requires considering the historical character of the Church.

The peculiar figure of ministry is determined as dedication to the Church in its quality of historical subject (the Diocese). The renewed ecclesiological consciousness of the local Church (understood as the People of God gathered around the Eucharist, presided over by the bishop) places ordained ministry in relationship to the bishop and presbyterate in service to the holy People of God.

This care of the historical body of the Church is the gift given to every priest, which finds in incardination to the local Church its concrete sign and needs to be brought to the word-gesture in the texture of many pastoral relationships.

1.2. The horizon of presbyteral formation.

4. In this extraordinary change of epoch, what is also happening in the Italian context requires the presbyteral ministry to take on a missionary characterization more and more decisively.

Pope Francis asked this of Christians living in Italy, reiterating God's call to all: to be missionary disciples who are led by the Spirit.

"Let the Italian Church allow herself to be carried by its powerful and for this reason, at times, restless breath. Let it always assume the spirit of its great explorers, who on ships were fond of sailing on the open sea and never afraid of frontiers and storms."⁶

Ecclesial mission arises from the mystery God's initiative that chooses to reveal himself and come to meet us, from the contemplation of his face that makes itself present human history⁷. Every believer, anointed by the Holy Spirit, actively participates in the mission of the Church; "the presbyter, a member of God's holy people, is called to cultivate his missionary dynamism, humbly exercising the pastoral task of leading

⁶ FRANCIS, Address to the members of the Fifth National Convention of the Italian Church, Florence, 10 November 2015.

⁷ VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad gentes*, December 7, 1965, §2.

authoritative, teacher of the Word and minister of the sacraments, practicing fruitful spiritual pa- ternity."⁸

a. The ministry of gospel proclamation

5. The mission perspective reminds every presbyter of the primacy of the service of proclaiming the Word of God⁹, in order to continue to pour out the good fragrance of Christ (Cf. 2 Cor. 2:15) and to make its fragrance reach those who do not yet, or no longer, know it.

In this time, too, as in the early days of apostolic preaching, presbyters are sent to proclaim with parousia the "Word of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18), called to become-for those who believe-a criterion of discernment for a fully human life¹⁰; a Word that has the power to bring forth new and free men and women, who must not resign themselves to living in darkness and in the shadow of death (Cf. Lk. 1:79).

The main mode of proclamation for a presbyter, even today, is to point to the Word of God as the lamp that guides the steps of man's journey (Cf. Ps. 119:105), that helps people to distinguish life from death (Cf. Deut. 30:15-20), that which makes life from that which hinders life.

The proclaimed Word must always also be a witnessed Word¹¹, a Word that is embodied in a life transformed by faith and the action of grace. The Gospel reminds us that fraternity lived out as a reflection Jesus' love for us (Cf. Jn. 13:35) is the main witness to be offered to the world.

The presbyter is called to live out his ministry of proclamation as a witness of fraternity and communion with other presbyters, with brothers and sisters in the ec- clesial community, and with the men and women whom the Lord places in his path.

b. The ministry of sanctification

6. So too, the ministry of sanctification¹², through which the baptized experience new life in Christ, must allow itself to be challenged by the need to become more missionary and find new ways to reach people's hearts.

⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §32-33.

⁹ VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, December 7, 1965, §4.

¹⁰ "Whoever follows Christ, the perfect man, also becomes more of a man" (VA- TIKAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, Dec. 7, 1965, §41).

¹¹ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, §41.

¹² Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §5.

The whole believing community, through the anointing of the Spirit, is constituted as a visible sacrament for salvation of the world and participates in the redemptive work of Christ, offering a "*living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*" (Rom 12:1) as a priestly people. Presbyteral ministry should be interpreted as service to the glory of God and to the brethren in their baptismal priesthood¹³.

As Pope Francis has reminded us, "we are not priests for ourselves and our sanctification is closely linked to that of our people, our anointing to theirs: you are anointed for your people."¹⁴ In this ministry, moreover, "we should not have even a moment's rest knowing that still not everyone has received the invitation to the Supper or that others have forgotten it or lost it in the twisted paths of men's lives."¹⁵

The well-lived liturgy is the daily space in which, both the seminarian and the presbyter, together with their communities, can grasp the calls to permanent conversion and draw on the grace that enables the continuation of the process of configuration to Christ the Servant, Shepherd and Bridegroom.

The liturgy, in fact, is a paradigm of Christian life and, in order to be lived effectively and fruitfully, it must fit into a community context open to deep listening to the Gospel and to our brothers and sisters⁽¹⁶⁾. There, a community is born and developed that from listening to the Lord becomes open to fraternal communion, ready to serve the poor, to mission to those who do not know the Lord and to dialogue with anyone the Lord places on our path.

¹³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §31; VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, §10.

¹⁴ FRANCIS, Address to participants at the conference sponsored by the Congregation for the Clergy in occasion of the 50th anniversary of the conciliar decrees *Optatam Totius* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 20 November 2015.

¹⁵ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*. On the liturgical formation of the People of God, June 29, 2022, §5.

¹⁶ "For ministers and for all the baptized, liturgical formation in this its first meaning, is not something we can think of conquering once and for all: since the gift of the mystery celebrated surpasses our capacity for knowledge, this commitment will certainly have to accompany the ongoing formation of each one, with the humility of the little ones, an attitude that opens one to wonder [...]. A final remark about seminaries: in addition to study, they must also offer the possibility of experiencing a celebration that is not only exemplary from the ritual point of view, but authentic, vital, that allows one to experience that true communion with God to which theological knowledge must also tend. Only the action of the Spirit can perfect our knowledge of the mystery of God, which is not a matter of mental understanding but of relationship that touches life. Such experience is fundamental so that once they become ordained ministers, they can accompany communities on the same path of knowledge of the mystery of God, which is a mystery of love" (FRANCIS, *Desire to Desire*, §38-39)

c. Service to communion: synodality, ministeriality and co-responsibility

7. The service of community governance and leadership must also be attracted by a strong missionary spirit and take on the synodal perspective: it requires a style of co-responsibility with the bishop, other presbyters, deacons, consecrated men and women, ministers working in the same ecclesial context, and the whole People of God, sharing and translating into practice the spirituality of community¹⁷.

The presbyter stands before the Church in service to the unity of the body of Christ¹⁸. The traditional function of service to communion exercised by those who have the role of presidency in the community, calls for it to be experienced primarily as the initiation of communal processes in which the presbyter ensures the unity and harmony of the various ministries generated by the Spirit for sanctification and mission. This perspective, for the presbyters, will be greatly favored if it is shared within the presbytery and by the proper enhancement of the Community Participatory Bodies.

Within ecclesial communion, presbyters will be regenerated to that co-responsibility which must become the evangelical style of those called to the service of authority in the Church and which prevents all clericalism.

1.3. The path of presbyteral formation

8. This section will indicate some essential elements of the ongoing formation of clergy from which to draw guidance regarding initial formation in the seminary, thus highlighting the desired link between the two phases of the one formation process.

a. The primacy of faith

9. Like the ancient missionaries, presbyters are invited to set out on a journey marked by the experience of faith.

"Walking" for a presbyter will mean placing his trust in the One who has called him to leave his home, to take his first steps challenged by a Word that has reawakened his heart opening it to hope, feeling himself to be the bearer of a goodness that will become fruitful for many others (Cf. Gen 12:1-4). Such trust is not only required in the first act of the journey, in the moment of the youthful vocation, but also represents the foundation and the reason for every step, which, also for the presbyter, is declined in a twofold perspective: he walks as a disciple, following the Lord in a

¹⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*. At the End of the Great Jubilee of 2000, January 6, 2001, §43-45.

¹⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §16.

path of permanent conversion, and as a missionary, going out to meet the men and women who are the recipients of the proclamation entrusted to him.

Reviving presbyteral life, in the different stages of one's history, will mean, then, continually renewing the personal bond with the Lord, with the One who is the beginning of that vocation whose horizon is fulfillment in the Kingdom and who continually renews the missionary mandate. At the root of all presbyteral spirituality is the relationship with the risen Lord who brands one's existence and conforms it to His (Cf. Jn. 20:27-28; 21:15-19). It is the relationship with Him that guards the presbyter and constitutes the heart of his formation¹⁹.

Even in initial formation, which has its source in vocation, central is the friendship with the Lord to be constantly deepened through listening to the Parola, liturgy and the study of theology. All formation in the seminary finds in the spiritual dimension its unifying and propelling center.

b. An integral formation

10. The presbyter's journey of permanent discipleship requires the complete involvement of his whole person in all dimensions (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral); remaining in the vocational perspective allows him to continue the search for the guiding thread of his personal history at every stage of life and for that center of balance which, continually renewed in his personal relationship with the Lord and in his love for the Church, can guard him against the risk of fragmentation.

Comparing and sharing the search for this unity with the bishop and the brethren of the presbytery becomes the guarantee not to run in vain (Cf. Gal. 2:2).

In initial formation, too, it is necessary to help hold together what a seminarian experiences in the theology classroom with what he or she experiences in the chapel during personal prayer; to grasp what connection exists between what he or she experiences in the Seminary community and what happens to him or her when he or she is in the family or parish; between what he or she reads, writes, listens to when he or she is on *social media* and what he or she experiences when he or she is with friends or with the spiritual father. If this ability to value connections becomes habitual, it will be the best preparation for integral and permanent formation.

c. Forming the man of discernment

11. Recognition of history as the place where God reveals himself, unconditional listening to men and women and sharing their existences, a gaze

¹⁹ Cf. FRANCIS, Opening Address of the 69th General Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference, May 16, 2016.

attentive to the life events of individuals and the community, allow us to enter into the complexity of reality and call for the exercise of discernment.

In the context of the presbytery, paths of ongoing formation will be able to foster listening to and sharing the stories of individual presbyters and communities, in order to re-trace in them the Lord's passages, his calls to conversion, and to grow in amazement at the gifts received, in gratitude from which a new sense of responsibility and readiness to self-giving can flourish. Shared discernment in the presbytery cannot be reduced to a correct analysis of the situation, but must be able to generate futures, open paths, restore enthusiasm for a new orientation, enable new perspectives, renew the joy of ministry and the enthusiasm of following.

This perspective must be initiated from the seminary years, accompanying the maturation of a gaze that keeps the heart attentive to what is being experienced²⁰, recognizing as providential what is happening in everyday life.

Such a reflective posture on reality remains the fundamental attitude of any discernment training process.

d. Forming for communion in the presbytery

12. There is no presbyter except within a presbytery presided over by the *Vescob*. If the theological awareness of the *unum presbyterium*²¹, since the Second Vatican Council, is now acquired by all, there is an urgent need to foster its concrete realization traversing formation paths that make it possible. The relationship between the individual presbyter and the entire presbyterate is still a delicate and urgent issue.

It seems essential that in each diocese there be a service specifically designed for this task, a team of people who can devote themselves carefully both to according to individual presbyters in the different stages of ministry and life and to fostering the bonds of fraternity among them.

It is also necessary to overcome the reduction that leads many presbyters to consider the presbytery a purely formal reference. Starting from listening to those who are part of it, it is necessary to put in place processes of personal and communal conversion that help to recognize the essential communitarian value of the presbytery as a place of fraternity, sharing and support of each person's journey. Such a path, which will be

²⁰ "The first area of discernment is the personal life and consists in integrating one's own history and reality into the spiritual life, so that the vocation to the priesthood does not remain imprisoned in ideal abstractness, nor does it run the risk of being reduced to a simple practical-organizational activity, external to the person's conscience" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §43).

²¹ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §8.

initially laborious, can already draw on excellent insights (both methodological and stylistic) from the ongoing synodal journey in the Churches of Italy.

Community life during the seminary years should also make candidates for the presbyterate experience that the community dimension is essential for evangelical and missionary discipleship; it is not only a formative goal in view of the exercise of the ministry of presidency²², but the necessary condition for an authentic vocational experience. If lived according to the evangelical style and characterized by an atmosphere of welcome, mercy, service and communion, it will gradually introduce one to the experience of the presbytery.

e. Ministry permanent way of training

13. For a presbyter, the exercise ministry, lived in communion with the bishop and the entire presbyterate, is the natural context of his formation.

Continuing formation, to be effective, is called to take on what a presbyter experiences in pastoral service, to help him understand its value and meaning and to reread it in the light of the Gospel, acquired theological skills and matured faith experience.

What the Second Vatican Council affirmed about the formation of the future missionary *ad gentes* also provokes the presbyteral ministry in our context: "He must be ready to take initiatives, constant in bringing them to fruition, persevering in difficulties, patient and strong in enduring loneliness, weariness, and sterility in propria fatigue. He will go out to meet men frankly and with an open heart; he will accept the tasks entrusted to him voluntarily; he will know how to adapt generously to the diversity of peoples' customs and to changing situations."²³

The circularity between pastoral praxis, personal interior experiences, theological study, liturgical and community life must be the privileged method even during the time of initial formation. In the seminary, therefore, it will be important to set up "formative spaces" in which what happens in pastoral internship is made the object reflection, linking it to the study being done in the theological field, to the celebration of the Paschal Mystery taking place in the community, and in constant listening to what this experience provokes in the heart of the individual seminarian. If this formative dynamic is activated in a meaningful way right from the seminary, it will not be difficult for a presbyter to recognize its exigence and value already in the days following his ordination.

²² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §51.

²³ VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Ad gentes*, §25.

CHAPTER TWO

Pastoral care of vocations and accompaniment paths in the di- verse ages

2.1. The pastoral care of vocations

14. "The word 'vocation' has not expired. We took it up again in the last Synod, during all the phases. But its destination remains the People of God, preaching and catechesis, and especially personal encounter, which is the first moment of the proclamation of the Gospel."²⁴

These words remind us that the renewed missionary drive can find in the pastoral of vocations a first and concrete area of realization.

The qualitative leap toward an all-vocational pastoral ministry will therefore be the fruit of the commitment of the entire ecclesial community, through the educational mediation and witness of presbyters, deacons, parents, consecrated persons, catechists, animators, and educators in the faith of children, adolescents, and young people.

While it is true-as affirmed-that the vocational issue belongs to the whole community that generates and accompanies, it is necessary, however, for there to be people who devote themselves to it in a special way, becoming the face of care and service to the person on the part of the whole ecclesial community.

"We need people who put themselves at the service of vocations, people, that is, who are at the service of their brothers and sisters, placing themselves beside each one for a gradual journey of discernment; people who, to this end give indications, in the light of the Word of God read in the situation, so that each one understands what his vocation is and what service he must render."²⁵

²⁴ FRANCIS, Address to participants at the congress of the National Vocation Centers of the Churches. Of Europe, June 6, 2019.

²⁵ G. PUGLISI, Speech the Acireale Regional Conference, 1988 (manuscript).

In this shared commitment, the diocesan Center for the Pastoral Care of Vocations is called to play a role of formation, promotion and coordination²⁶.

2.2. Vocational accompaniment of children, adolescents and young people

15. "Spiritual accompaniment is a process intended to help the person progressively integrate the different dimensions of life in order to follow the Lord Jesus. Three instances are articulated in this process: listening to life, encounter with Jesus and mysterious dialogue between the freedom of God and that of the person. The one who accompanies patiently welcomes, raises the truest questions and recognizes the signs of the Spirit in the response of young people."²⁷

These three instances constitute the effectiveness of accompaniment in all ages according to each age's own declinations.

It remains important to highlight the communal dimension of vocational accompaniment: thanks to the relationship between peers, within a chosen and shared experience, one experiences a "relationship gymnasium," in which the ability to come out of the individualism of the self matures, in order to be open to dialogue, diversity, and forgiveness.

a. Vocational communities and minor seminaries

16. History has handed over to the Church the experience of the minor seminary, a place in which to cultivate the seeds of vocation to priestly ministry already present in the hearts of very young ragazzi. There still remain some diocesan realities in which the minor seminary²⁸ continues its proposal with fruit.

The current change of epoch and the declining adherence to this proposal has led to the emergence alongside it of other experiences of vocational accompaniment of adolescents and young people. These are semi-residential communities in which young people or the

²⁶ The Diocesan Center for the Pastoral Care of Vocations is "an organism of communion and an instrument at the service of the pastoral care of vocations in the local Church. [...] It witnesses to and animates the unity of all vocations, from spouses to consecrated persons, and represents them all. It promotes specific vocational itineraries and coordinates existing vocational pastoral initiatives in the particular Church; it trains vocational animators and takes care that a vocational culture spreads among the People of God; it participates in the elaboration of the diocesan pastoral project and collaborates in particular with family and youth pastoral work" (ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *Vocations to the Ordained Ministry and to Consecrated Life in the Christian Community. Orientations emerging from the work of the 46th General Assembly*, December 27, 1999, §25).

²⁷ SYNODOX OF BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*, October 27, 2018, §97.

²⁸ Concerning the ordering of the minor seminary, see what is indicated in: CONGREGAZIONE PER IL CLERO, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §16-23; CONFERENCE EPISCOPAL ITALIANA, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §35-46.

adolescents live for an extended time accompanied by a team of educators and are characterized by vocational discernment.

The educational proposal, structured in the four dimensions - human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral - is declined in ordinary living, made up of proposals for games, workshops, formation paths, meetings with witnesses, experiences of charity, talks with formers, study, moments of retreat, times of reworking of the lived experience, allows those who adhere to it to gradually integrate faith and life and to question their own experience and history with authenticity and in the light of the Gospel.

Some genuine traits that testify to the path of growth are: the ability to weave relationships with everyone, love for the truth, a spirit of initiative, responsible assumption of one's commitments, reworking of lived experiences, overcoming performance anxieties and complacent attitudes, self-delivery in transparency²⁹, and orientation to a life choice.

The outcome of such a journey may be the decision to begin the journey in the propedeutic year or to continue a vocational discernment.

b. An educational team

17. The proposal of the vocational community, like that of the minor seminary, composes that an educational *team* appointed by the bishop well identified, which may consist of presbyters, consecrated men and women, married couples.

It is good that there is no lack of support from one or more experts in pedagogical and psychological sciences, capable of ensuring competent input: supervision the team, consulting on educational interventions, and proposing training paths for children and educators.

Team are called to be, first and foremost, good witnesses of evangelic life and capable of offering mature accompaniment that is attentive to the needs of each person. Their task is to offer new keys to interpreting experience, opening up questions and spaces for real growth. This requires that the members of such a team cultivate an intense spiritual life, be willing to work together, and receive adequate training also with reference to the requirements of the protection of minors³⁰.

The family of origin remains the protagonist of the educational co-responsibility pact that is built with the educators of the community, maintaining a bond marked dialogue and continuous confrontation with regard to the good of adolescents and young people. Also

²⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §20.

³⁰ NATIONAL SERVICE *FOR* THE PROTECTION OF MINORS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The formazione iniziale in tempo di abusi. Subsidy for formators to the presbyterate and consecrated life and for young people in formation* (edited by: A. CENCINI - S. LASSI), February 2021, 118.

home parishes are important protagonists in the care and accompaniment of the-ments of their young people on the way.

2.3. Youth and vocational ministry

18. " very beginning of the synodal journey, the need to vocationally qualify youth ministry has strongly emerged. In this way, the two indispensable characteristics of a pastoral care destined for the younger generations emerge: it is "youthful," because its recipients are in that singular and unrepeatable age of life that is youth; it is "vocational," because youth is the privileged season of life choices and response to God's call. The "vocationality" of youth ministry should not be understood exclusively, but intensively. God calls at all ages of life-from the womb to old age-but youth is the privileged time of listening, availability and acceptance of God's will."³¹

This passage from the Final Document of Synod 2018 reminds us that youth ministry values the vocation and role of each person: in this sense it can only be vocational. The ability to be passionate about seeking the truth of one's exi- stence, amazement at the beauty of life, and the search for values that support one's steps are characteristics of youth age and foster the proclamation of the Gospel of vocation.

The pastoral proposal cannot avoid, however, reckoning with the cultural climate by which especially younger people are influenced. Some ambiguous elements of culture, alongside the risks, must be taken into account since they hide op- portunities. They need to be listened to, evangelized and accompanied.

Within a vocationally characterized youth ministry, some specific propo- ses can help young people make those necessary steps that foster life choices:

- Provide listening and guidance spaces in training sites;
- Fostering spaces for cultural exchange and deepening of faith experience;
- Offer experiences of prayer, *lectio divina*, Eucharistic adoration;
- Introduce to the practice of spiritual direction;
- Keep alive the apostolic horizon, to which sequela refers;

³¹ SYNODOX OF BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Youth*, §140.

- support and motivate those who have already made service commitments within the church community or in the volunteer world, helping them to integrate service and personal relationship with Jesus more and more³².

Of these proposals, young people do not remain simply recipients, but can become protagonists, true promoters of the vocational proposal to their peers.

2.4. The witness of the presbyteral vocation

19. The most effective witnesses to the vocation to the presbyterate are undoubtedly the presbyters and seminarians. To the extent that presbyters are able to offer a witness of spirituality, pastoral impetus, joy, friendship and sharing, they will succeed in conveying, more than with words, the charm of a life spent totally apostolic commitment. The joy with which each presbyter lives his ministry will encourage attention to catch the signs of vocation present in the lives of the young people he meets.

Likewise, seminarians, if they live the experience of their particular following with freedom, passion and joy, will become the first and immediate apostles of vocation among their peers. In this perspective, the Seminary can truly be a particularly incisive vocational sign for young people, a laboratory of hope for the future³³.

2.5. Vocational accompaniment of adults

20. In addition to adolescents and young people, specific attention should be given to older persons³⁴, who are also in need of accompaniment and proposals appropriate to their journey of verification to the vocation of priestly ministry.

One of the fundamental elements of discernment is belonging to an ecclesial community that can testify to the authenticity of the person's vocational journey. In the case of people who are not known or disengaged from an ecclesial fabric, before directing them to a more specific discernment path, it will be important to entrust them to a Christian community that can help them mature a more vivid sense of belonging to the local church.

It is very appropriate to check from the beginning that the requirements are in place to recognize the person as mature and balanced and willing to give his or her life for church service.

³² Cf. ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §32.

³³ Cf. PONTIFICIA OPERA PER LE VOCAZIONI ECCLESIASTICHE, *New Vocations for a New Europe (In Verbo tuo...)*. *Final Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life in Europe* (Rome, May 5-10, 1997), December 8, 1997, §29b.

³⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §24.

CHAPTER THREE

The training itinerary

3.1. The stages of formation³⁵

21. The 2016 *Ratio fundamentalis* proposal proceeds by stages of formation, investing in the formative objectives, without scanning the timeframe in a rigid and pre-defined way, favoring the personalization of the itinerary. There is a need to avoid the risk that the stages flatten out rigidly to the years provided by theological studies and other 'automatisms'. The stages envisaged by the *Ratio fundamentalis* are as follows:

- Propaedeutic stage
- Discipleship stage
- Configuring stage
- Stage of vocational synthesis

3.2. The preparatory stage

22. "Subsequent to the intuition about vocation and an initial discernment to be lived beforehand"³⁶ according to careful and qualified paths, the propaedeutic stage possesses its own goals and objectives as a necessary and specific formative path (of

³⁵ "Initial formation can be divided into four major stages: 'propaedeutic stage', 'discipleship stage', 'configurational stage' and 'vocational synthesis stage' [...] Throughout life one is always a 'disciple', with the constant yearning to be 'configured' to Christ, in order to exercise pastoral ministry. It is a matter, in fact, of dimensions constantly present in the journey of every seminarian, on each which greater attention is placed, from time to time, in the course of the formative journey, without ever neglecting the others" (Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §57);

"At the end of each stage it is important to verify that the goals proper to that particular educational period have been achieved" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyterian Vocation*, §58).

³⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §59 note 3; Cf. also JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §62.

diocesan or interdiocesan, regional or interregional character) to be placed before that of the major seminary, from which it is clearly distinct, though not separate.

It is configured as a true community, open to discernment with broad possibilities³⁷, guided by a team of trainers dedicated to it and supported by a formation project consisting of certain indispensable elements.

The propaedeutic stage offers young people in vocation search a sufficiently prolonged time, "ordinarily not less than one year and not more than two,"³⁸ within a meaningful context of fraternal life, to verify and deepen vocational motivations with a view to possible entry into the major seminary.

In order to be able to preserve the character of vocational discernment and to be able to guard greater inner freedom, young men in the propaedeutic stage are not to be considered already seminarians, but "young men in vocational discernment"³⁹.

23. The main objective of this stage is to introduce the young person in vocational discernment⁴⁰ to life according to the Holy Spirit, in a journey of gradual purification of the image of God and the idea of vocation, truth and progressive self-knowledge.

In this time, the need to initiate young people into an experience emerges strongly. of silence and to a slower pace of life that promotes concentration of the heart.

a. Prior cautions

24. For admission to the propaedeutic stage and during it, pay close attention:

- to the human profile of aspirants, highlighting resources as well as limitations and frailties;
- to the faith and ecclesial experience from which they come;
- to their state of physical and mental health to verify that it is compatible with the vocational campaign⁴¹.

b. Required documents

25. - Certificate of Baptism and Confirmation.

³⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ On the need for an accompanying experience with a view to discernment interesting are the considerations reported in SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People*, §161.

⁴⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §60.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, §190.

- Handwritten letter requesting admission to the propaedeutic stage.
- Letter of introduction from the pastor of the parish of residence or a presbyter of reference.
- Medical certificate of good health.
- High diploma and other qualifications.
- Letter of presentation from the Bishop or his delegate (in the case of regional or interdiocesan seminaries).
- Possible report of attendance at other vocation discernment pathways vis-à-vis in other dioceses or communities of consecrated life.
- Certificates of criminal records and pending charges.

c. Configuration of the propaedeutic stage

- Target audience

26. Given the nature and objectives of the propaedeutic stage, it is necessary that all young men who wish to be admitted to the major seminary come to it. It is appropriate that this should also be done for those who have experienced the minor seminary experience for several years or in other vocational communities.

- The environments

27. During the propaedeutic stage, it is appropriate to foster fraternal life within living spaces in which to share the concreteness of daily services and greater relationality among group members. The more familiar and domestic living environment, characterized by the simplicity and essentiality of daily living, allows the young person to emerge more in the truth of self and overcome a certain individualism, favoring caring for the brother and the community living environment⁴².

- Route customization

28. In evaluating the personal path of spiritual and pedagogical accompaniment, take into account the study or work needs of the young people attending the propaedeutic stage and consider possible adaptation with respect to these needs.

⁴² "It is convenient that the propaedeutic phase be lived in a community distinct from that of the Major Seminary and, where possible, also have a specific location. A propaedeutic, therefore, should be established, equipped with its own formators, aiming at a good human and Christian formation, and a serious selection of candidates for the Major Seminary" (*Ibid.*, §60).

- *The Responsible*

29. The propaedeutic community is led by a presbyter in charge, appointed by the bishop or bishops of the afferent dioceses, who lives permanently and daily with the young people, accompanying their journey in an atmosphere trust and listening; he shares with them the days, activities and formative proposals.

It is up to him, in constant dialogue with the Bishop (or his delegate) and the Rector of the Major Seminary, to discern about the reception of young people into the community, the verification of vocational motivations and the decision with respect to the transition into the community of the Major Seminary.

It is also his task to organize the communal life, prepare the formative itineraries, both personal and communal, coordinate the formative proposals and all the activities that attain the formative project.

- *The Spiritual Director*

30. The Spiritual Director-who must be appointed by the bishop and is a different figure from the community leader-accompanies young people in the first steps of life in the Spirit, with regard to their spiritual growth and maturation. He explains to the young people, in the ways and times of his presence in the community, the themes related to discernment and the centrality of the Word of God in the life of the believer. He makes himself available for personal dialogue and, together with other extraordinary confessors, for the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

- *Other male and female trainers*

31. It may be appropriate for the presbyter in charge of the propaedeutic community to be permanently accompanied by a group of formators⁴³ who accompany and support him or her in the educational work. This group expresses the ecclesial nature of the discerning and can be composed of men and women, lay and consecrated, single and married,

⁴³ "It may be opportune to associate with the formative work of the Seminary 'in prudent forms adapted to the various cultural contexts, also lay faithful, men and women, chosen according to their particular charisms and proven skills. Spaces for fruitful collaboration could also be identified for permanent deacons. The activity of these persons, "appropriately coordinated and integrated with the primary educational responsibilities," is bound to enrich formation" (CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Directives on the Preparation of Educators in Seminaries*, Nov. 4, 1993, §20); also in the subsidy *Initial Formation in Time of Abuse* by the National Service for the Protection of Minors of the Italian Bishops' Conference, at para.2 the need for team work with lay and female figures is recalled, echoing, in this sense, §163 of the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, which stresses that "such team work represents a valuable form of synodality."

who, by virtue of their experience and expertise, regularly and organically make specific contributions to the educational journey.

It will be the responsibility of the person in charge, with the consent of the bishop, to whom the ultimate responsibility for discernment remains, to identify such figures and to bring the team together periodically to listen collegially to their opinions and to support a discussion on the youth's journey.

32. In accompanying young people in the propaedeutic stage, the presence of psychologists and psychotherapists is important⁴⁴ for the purpose of self-knowledge, although they cannot be part of the team of trainers to safeguard their professionalism⁴⁵.

d. Basic elements of training in the propaedeutic stage

- Dwelling with the Lord

33. Having arrived at the propaedeutic stage through different avenues, it will be necessary to accompany the young people to make a leap to build an increasingly personal relationship with the Lord such that they will be able to say, "I knew you only by hearsay but now my eyes have seen you (Job 42:5).

The propaedeutic stage is a time devoted to introducing, sustaining and giving robustness to the spiritual life by recovering the fundamental reference to the sacrament of Baptism.

During the time of the propaedeutic stage, young people will be accompanied to nourish their faith through the traditional places of Christian spirituality: in the powerful beauty of the liturgy⁴⁶ they will be able to begin to experience a deeper communion with God; they will learn to savor the importance of Scripture in the life of the believer, prayed through the method of *lectio divina*, which will become the qualifying point of personal prayer; in the celebration of the Eucharist and in a gradual approach to the Liturgy of the Hours they will experience the ecclesial and communal dimension of prayer. Together with this, the propaedeutic stage will be a propitious time for a necessary education in silence and a more rigorous management of time; it will propose the strong time of spiritual exercises and the reading of texts from the Christian spiritual tradition and the Magisterium.

- Dwelling with oneself

⁴⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §192.

⁴⁵ "It is useful for the Head and other formators to be able to count on the collaboration of experts in the psychological sciences, who, however, cannot be part of the team of formators" (CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychological Competence in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, June 29, 2008, §6).

⁴⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, *Desiderio desideravi*, §10.

34. The knowledge of God's authentic face walks inseparably with the scope of one's own face: no following of the Lord is possible without a journey of realistic self-knowledge.

Since vocation is never unrelated to the individual's personal story, it seems necessary to help young people begin to make contact with some central aspects of their lives, accompanying them to the progressive maturation of a capacity to tell their stories.

A look of special importance will have to be reserved for the accompaniment and maturation of the affective and sexual dimension.

- Inhabiting the world

35. Vocation is always for a mission. It is not to be understood as a realization of oneself, but as the readiness to place oneself at the service of the brothers and sisters that the Lord will place on one's path, recognizing that it is in the total gift self that that desire for goodness that each person keeps in his or her heart is realized. This missionary emphasis prevents the processes of human maturation from assuming a selfish and narcissistic centering.

The propaedeutic stage is characterized by arousing young people's interest in and attention to today's mankind, in the awareness that human history, in its complexity, is *locus theologicus* in which God continues to make his voice resound. Therefore, it will be important to provide for the possibility of meaningful involvement in experiences of charity and service, in order for them to experience the social dimension of the Christian proclamation, learning to spend their time and energies on behalf of those in need, listening to the cry of pain that arises from the lives of so many brothers and sisters, and verifying the oblation dimension of the vocational journey.

- Dwelling in the Church

36. The need for embodied discernment leads to the necessity of accompanying young people in clarifying the fundamental elements of the identity of the diocesan presbyter: will be necessary to bring out each person's idea of presbyteral ministry and compare it with what the Church asks of its ministers. This is an opportune time for an initial acquaintance with the diocesan Church and its presbytery.

e. A proposal for intellectual formation

37. The formative offer of the propaedeutic stage also takes the form of a path of intellectual formation. The proposal must remain clearly distinct from the philosophical and theological studies envisaged in the major seminary⁴⁷: this implies that, for young people

⁴⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §59.

present in the community prepare a pathway built around some basic references, which, by way of example, could be⁴⁸:

- An initiation into the reading of biblical texts;
- An introduction to the mystery of Christ and the Church through the study of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church;
- The initiation into the reading of some philosophical and theological texts;
- Guided reading of some literature texts;
- The study of classical languages (for those who did not have the opportunity during the second school cycle).

The way these studies are coordinated will be adapted to the concrete needs of individual communities, according to local tradition and experience.

38. At the end of the propaedeutic stage, the person in charge will draw up an evaluation of the per- course carried out, addressed to the Bishop and the Rector of the Major Seminary, in which will be indicated the presence or absence of the requirements for the continuation of the path in the Major Seminary, the formative objectives achieved during the propa- ductive path and those that it is hoped will be achieved in the discipleship stage, so that the path of young people in vocational discernment can proceed in a continuous and organic way.

3.3. Admission to the major seminary

39. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that "the diocesan bishop shall admit to the major seminary only those who, on the basis of their human and moral, spi- ritual and intellectual gifts, their physical and mental health, and their righteous intention, are deemed suitable to consecrate themselves forever to the sacred ministries."⁴⁹ These requirements are ve- rified during the propaedeutic stage.

40. The experience further specified and identified the following di- scerning criteria for admission:

- *a living experience of faith and a clear perception of the call*: one who enters the seminary must first and foremost be a person who has encountered the Lord in faith, allowing himself to be drawn to him and feeling a vocation to follow him in the apostolic mini- stero;

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, §157; ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §50.

⁴⁹ C.I.C., 241§1.

- a positive *ecclesial experience*, gained in the context of a parish or other significant church setting;
- a *sufficiently healthy*⁵⁰ and well-structured *personality* from the relational point of view: before admitting a young person to the seminary, it is necessary to ascertain, the help of an adequate psychodiagnostic evaluation, that he is free from mental pathologies that would be detrimental to a fruitful seminary journey; moreover, that his relational ability is already promising;
- *apostolic and missionary passion*: only those who have demonstrated interest in pastoral life, love for the poor, and zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel can move toward the presbyterate with good prospects;
- *the orientation to the celibate life*: the affective orientation of total self-giving must be present from the time a young person decides to enter seminary; in the following years he will have the opportunity to verify in depth the consistency and motivations of this charism;
- *sufficient cultural preparation*: a basic condition for embarking on the seminary journey is a secondary diploma, with possible additions in the disciplines required for the study of theology.

41. About specifically vocational discernment, some criteria can be pointed out that can be distinguished into four areas:

- *openness to mystery*: typical attitudes are readiness to search, reliance, hope, gratitude;
- *identity in vocation*: the revealing attitudes are the discovery of the positivity of one's life, the total involvement the person, and oblativeness;
- a vocational project rich in *believing memory*: the essential attitude is reconciliation with one's past at least initiated, the ability to reopen oneself, even in the negative aspects, to the life one wants to give;
- *vocational docibilitas*: "the inner freedom to allow oneself to be guided by a father or sister major, in particular in the strategic stages of the

⁵⁰ For mental health, admission of those suffering from some manifest or latent psychiatric pathology or chronic course of such severity as to interfere significantly with his or her cognitive level and level of functioning in one or more of the principal areas such as work or study, interpersonal relationships or self-care is to be avoided as a rule. Cf. EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS, *Common Guidelines for the Life of Our Seminaries*, Rome 1999, §16-17 for identifying the signs and symptoms of relevant or mild pathologies; EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS, *Common Guidelines for the Life of Our Seminaries*, §18 devoted to promising criteria for growth.

reworking and reappropriation of one's past, especially the more problematic past, and the consequent freedom to learn and know how to change."⁵¹

42. The affective-sexual dimension is an area of primary importance for effectiveness of the presbyteral ministry lived in a perspective of love-charity, self-giving; in the intimate and relational freedom that in celibacy-according to the Latin tradition-finds a context of particular fruitfulness and openness in the relationships with people, women and men, young and old, lay people, families and consecrated women and men, who animate our communities. The current socio-cultural context, along with contradictions and ambiguities, offers particular opportunities for more authentic growth in this area. The freedom with which these issues are addressed today is a good premise so that even in the context of the formation of candidates to the presbyterate there may be fruits of ever greater human, affective, psychic and spiritual maturity⁵².

43. During the discernment and formation process, formators must foster in candidates a relational style that is open to discussion and based on sincerity⁵³. Indeed, it is necessary to stimulate the candidate to a profound self-assessment through confrontation with the other in a path of maturation aimed at achieving an overall balance that allows the candidate to become increasingly aware and conscious of himself, his personality and all the parts that contribute to defining it, including his sexuality and his orientation, so as to integrate them and manage them with sufficient freedom and serenity, consistent with the nature and objectives proper to the pre-church vocation. It is it that inspires the celibate and chaste priest's life and relational style.

44. "In relation to persons with homosexual tendencies who approach the Seminaries, or who discover in the course of formation such a situation, consistent with its Magisterium, the Church, while deeply respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the Seminary and to Holy Orders those who homosexuality, present deeply rooted homosexual tendencies or support the so-called culture

⁵¹ PONTIFICIA OPERA FOR ECCLESIASTIC VOCATIONS, *New Vocations for a New Europe* 17.

⁵² "Identity and ministry, as is well known, require consecration to God with an undivided heart, non-possessive relationships, prudence, the ability to renounce and resist everything that may constitute an occasion for falling, vigilance over body and spirit, inner freedom in interpersonal relationships with men and women, and the ability to relate to the other-from-itself. The presbyter is asked to be, with the help of grace, "the man of communion." Objective deficiency in relationships with the other-from-self negatively affects the exercise of pastoral charity, spousality and paternity required of the presbyter in relation of his conformation to Christ Head, Shepherd and Bridegroom" (ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Presbyters in the Italian Church*, § 53).

⁵³ "Moreover, it should be remembered that in a relationship of sincere dialogue and mutual trust, the seminary is obliged to manifest to the formators - to the Bishop, the Rector, the Spiritual Director and other educators - any doubts or difficulties in this area" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §200).

gay. The aforementioned persons are, in fact, in a situation that seriously hinders a proper relationship with men and women."⁵⁴ In the formation process, when reference is made to homosexual tendencies, it is also appropriate not to reduce discernment only to that aspect, but, as with every candidate, to grasp its significance in the global framework of the young man's personality, so that, knowing each other and integrating the proper objectives of the human and presbyteral vocation, it may arrive at an overall harmony. The goal of the formation of the candidate for the priesthood in the affective-sexual sphere is the ability to welcome as a gift, to freely choose and responsibly live chastity in celibacy. In fact, it "is not a merely affective indication, but the synthesis of an attitude that expresses the opposite of possession. Chastity is freedom from possession in all areas of life. Only when a love is chaste is it truly love. Love that wants to possess always eventually becomes dangerous, imprisons, suffocates, makes unhappy. God Himself has loved man with chaste love, leaving him free even to err and turn against Him."⁽⁵⁵⁾ Moreover, "celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom should be understood as a gift to be recognized and verified in freedom, joy, gratuitousness, and humility, before admission to orders or first profession."⁵⁶ This does not only mean controlling one's sexual impulses, but growing in a quality of evangelical relationships that overcomes the forms of possessiveness, that does not allow itself to be sequestered by competition and confrontation with others, and knows how to respectfully guard the boundaries of one's own and others' intimacy. Being aware of this is fundamental and indispensable for realizing the presbyteral impetance or vocation, but one who lives the passion for the Kingdom in celibacy should also become capable of motivating, in the renunciation for it, frustrations, taken the lack of affective and sexual gratification.

45. Maximum attention should be paid to the issue of the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, taking care to ensure that those admission to the Major Semination have not in any way incurred crimes or problematic situations in this area⁵⁷.

46. Regarding the admission of candidates from other diocesan seminaries or formation houses of Institutes of Consecrated Life, the norms of universal and particular law are to be observed. In addition to prior interviews and meetings for direct acquaintance with the subject, the main provisions require: the written and reasoned request of the person concerned with the reasons for abandonment or resignation; the obligation for the receiving seminary to acquire all the elements for evaluation; and the obligation for previous

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, §199.

⁵⁵ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as patron of the Universal Church, December 8, 2020, §7.

⁵⁶ SYNOD of BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Youth*, §100.

⁵⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation* §202.

superiors of the applicant to provide such information; the written and reasoned communication of the possible admission to the person concerned, to the Rector of the seminary of origin, to the Bishop or to his own superior. Normally be very cautious about accepting a seminarian who has been dismissed from another seminary or house of formation. On the other hand, applications of those who, after the age of eighteen, for a second time have been dismissed or have left the Seminary, an Institute of Consecrated Life or a Society of Apostolic Life⁵⁸ cannot be considered.

47. In the case of foreign candidates received for the entire formation process with the intention of incardinating them in an Italian diocese, a time of cultural and ecclesial insertion should be foreseen before their entry into the major seminary, and care should be taken to verify carefully their righteous intention, pastoral aptitude and adequate knowledge and insertion in the Italian context. For a better formative accompaniment and a more fruitful involvement in the community, foreign candidates and candidates from other dioceses are welcomed in numbers proportionate to the size of the community⁵⁹.

48. The insertion of a foreign seminarian in an Italian seminary, in order to benefit from his or her formation for ministry in his or her home diocese, can be enrichment for the life of the seminary, fostering its openness to the universal dimension of ordained ministry, but it is essential to abide by certain rules.

The request should be made by the Bishop *a quo* to the Bishop *ad quem* and should be accompanied by a letter of introduction from the Rector. An agreement must then be signed between the two dioceses, defining the timing, charges and mutual commitments. Prior to the conferral of orders, "letters of resignation"⁶⁰ are to be obtained.

It is most appropriate, where possible, that the first discernment, the propaedeutic stage, at least the first two years of the discipleship stage, and the rite of admission among candidates to the diaconate and presbyterate take place in the seminaries of the Churches of origin. If possible, the liturgy of presbyteral ordination be celebrated in the candidate's home church.

3.4. The itinerary of the major seminary

⁵⁸ Cf. C.I.C., 241§3; CONGREGAZIONE PER L'EDUCAZIONE CATTOLICA, *Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences Concerning the Admission to the Seminary of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families*, March 8, 1996; CONFERENCE EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *General Decree Concerning the Admission to the Seminary of Candidates Who Have Left or Resigned from Other Seminaries or Religious Families*, March 27, 1999 (The text is reproduced in its entirety in the Appendix).

⁵⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §27.

⁶⁰ C.I.C., 1052§2.

49. According to the indications contained in the *Ratio fundamentalis*, having completed the propaedeutic stage, the initial formation itinerary is developed in three further stages:

- Two-year discipleship stage;
- four-year configurator stage;
- Stage of vocational synthesis lasting at least one year.

Between the discipleship stage and the configurator stage is the admission among the candidates to the diaconate and presbyterate; the first year of the configurator stage (or, if the exigencies of personalization of the itinerary require it, another year of the same stage) is characterized as a pastoral, charitable and missionary experience lived outside the seminary; in some cases, admission among the candidates to the diaconate and the presbyterate may also be proposed at the end of this year. During the configurational stage, a gradual insertion into the pastoral reality may be envisaged. At the beginning of the vocation synthesis stage, diaconal ordination is planned. The initial formation itinerary concludes presbyteral ordination, which opens the time of permanent formation.

a. The customization of the itinerary

50. The training itinerary possesses both an objective and a subjective character.

In its objective dimension, the itinerary must keep in mind certain steps that manifest both the value of vocational discernment with a view to priestly ministry and the process of configuration to Christ that each seminarian is called to live. The objective dimension is mainly evident in the definition of the objectives, the formation content and the sequence of the stages of the itinerary.

In its subjective dimension, the itinerary must keep in mind the formative needs which, for each seminarian, may be different. The subjective dimension is evident in the scanning of the time devoted to the different stages in which more personalized tracks are possibly inserted, adapted to the path of the individual candidate in particular circumstances and with reference to specific objectives.

b. The discipleship stage

51. The goal of this stage is to become missionary disciples of the gospel⁶¹.

To foster such rootedness in missionary discipleship, it seems appropriate that an initiatory style be guarded in this stage, helping the seminarian to live a high measure of Christian life, animated by a fruitful confrontation with the Gospel, heard and lived in the community of believers. The formation community, in turn, is called to accompany this stage of the itinerary, supporting and provoking each seminarian in free and joyful adherence to the Lord in order to experience authentic discipleship.

52. The disciple of Jesus is one who, putting himself in the school of the Master, allows himself to be converted to integrate his history and his whole person with the call received in Baptism. The building of a solid inner life, dedication to study and commitment to measure oneself against the community life of the seminary are the focus of the formative work of this stage.

Constant confrontation with the Word through *lectio divina* is an opportunity for awareness of the good received⁶² and the steps taken, to the point of leading the seminarian to recognize the call of Jesus to the gift of one's whole life in pastoral ministry, to become a sign and instrument of the Lord's benevolence and mercy toward one's brothers and sisters.

- *Admission among candidates for orders*

⁶¹ "The disciple is one who is called by the Lord to be with Him (cf. Mk. 3:14), to follow Him and to become a missionary of the Gospel. He learns daily to enter the secrets of the Kingdom of God by living a deep relationship with Jesus. Being with Christ becomes a pedagogical-spiritual journey that transforms existence and makes one a witness of His love in the world. The experience and dynamic of discipleship, which lasts for the whole life and includes all presbyteral formation, pedagogically requires a specific stage, in which all possible energies must be employed to root the semi-nunist in the *following of Christ*, listening to His Word, keeping it in the heart and putting it into practice. This specific time is characterized by the formation of the disciple of Jesus destined to be a pastor, with special attention to the human dimension, in harmony with spiritual growth, helping the seminarian to mature the definitive decision to follow the Lord in the ministerial priesthood, in the acceptance of the evangelical counsels, according to the modalities proper to this stage" (CONGREGAZIONE PER IL CLERO, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §61-62).

⁶² Cf. PONTIFICIA OPERA PER LE VOCAZIONI ECCLESIASTICHE, *New Vocations for a New Europe*, §26c.

53. At the end of the discipleship stage⁽⁶³⁾, it will be possible to admit the seminarian among candidates for Orders when it appears that his or her purpose, supported by the required endowments, has reached sufficient maturity⁶⁴.

c. The configurator stage

54. Formation in the configurational stage focuses on initiating the process of conformation to Christ the Servant and Shepherd⁶⁵. For this, the candidate is accompanied to involve himself in the fabric of the ecclesial fabric of the particular Church, to dedicate himself gradually to its pastoral care by learning to allow himself to be formed by the Christian community itself.

The spiritual dimension that has become central to the formative experience of the discipular stage must now be integrated with the pastoral dimension, which here assumes a role categorizing the formation of candidates for ministry and becomes decisive element in verifying both what is experienced in the seminary community and what is learned in the course of study⁶⁶.

Therefore, more meaningful insertions into the fabric of the ecclesial fabric of the local church and pastoral service, in the relationship with the presbytery, families and other ecclesial figures will need to be envisaged.

⁶³ "At the end of the discipleship stage, the seminarian, having attained an adequate interior freedom and maturity, should have the necessary tools to begin, with serenity and joy, that journey which leads him toward a greater configuration to Christ in the vocation to the ordained ministry" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §67).

⁶⁴ "The rite of admission among candidates to the diaconate and presbyterate publicly manifests the vocational orientation of those who aspire to the diaconate and presbyterate, expresses the acceptance their offer by the particular Church, requires new candidates to apply themselves with renewed commitment in completing their preparation" (ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §111).

⁶⁵ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §68. "The configurational stage is aimed in a special way at the spiritual formation proper to the presbyter, where progressive conformation to Christ becomes an experience that arouses in the life of the disciple the sentiments and behavior proper to the Son of God; at the same time, it introduces the learning of a presbyteral life, animated by desire and sustained by the ability to offer oneself in the pastoral care of the People of God. This stage allows the gradual rooting in the physiognomy of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep, gives his life for them and goes in search of those outside the fold (cf. Jn. 10:14-17)" (*Ibid.*, §69).

⁶⁶ "It requires, in fact, a constant responsibility to live the cardinal virtues, the theological virtues and the evangelical considerations, and to be docile to God's action through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to a purely presbyteral and missionary perspective; as well as a gradual re-reading of one's personal history, according to a coherent profile of pastoral charity, which animates, forms and motivates the life of the presbyter" (*Ibid.*, §69).

- *A year of pastoral, charitable and missionary experience*

55. The first year of the configurational stage or, if it is deemed appropriate in the logic of personalizing the itinerary, another year of the same stage, can be characterized as a year of pastoral, charitable and missionary experience. This choice is supported by the following reasons: after an initial time of spiritual formation and human structuring, experienced during the propaedeutic stage and consolidated in the discipleship stage, young people have the opportunity to confront reality, becoming more aware of it; it educates in responsibility, time management, and collaboration also view of future ministry; it allows additional time to accommodate the candidate in his growth with respect to those more deficient elements that should emerge in it; it allows to annul the automatism according to which to become a presbyter it is sufficient to have finished studies; it gives the configurational stage, from its initiation, a more synodal breath by involving the Christian community in the path of initial formation.

56. The mode of realization of such "*pastoral, charitable and missionary experience*" can be manifold: communal life in a rectory and prolonged commitment in the parish, work experience in lay settings, residential service experience at charitable facilities, *missio ad gentes*⁶⁷ or at Italian communities abroad with the opportunity to learn a foreign language.

The eventual year of pastoral, charitable and missionary experience in objectives, means and conditions be shared with the Bishop and the seminarian destined for the proposal, under the sign of co-responsibility. It is a necessary condition that, in the planning of such an experience, an educational reference be identified for the accompaniment of the seminarian in the context to which he or she will be sent, to maintain contact with the Rector of the Seminary and to implement an appropriate verification at the end of the experience.

Considering that the configurational stage involves a duration of four years, academic suspension may be provided during this experience.

- *The ministries of reader and acolyte*

57. In his Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini* Pope Francis affirms the baptismal root instituted ministries that are essentially distinct from ordained ministry⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *Convention for young lay people (18-35 years old) in experience of formation and missionary service*, May 24, 2023 (The text is reproduced in full in the Appendix). ⁶⁸ "There has been a doctrinal development in recent years that has highlighted how certain ministries instituted by the Church have as their foundation the common condition of baptized persons and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism; they are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry

This new understanding of the two ministries requires a change of perspective and a rethinking in the institution of those who are candidates for the ordained ministry. While it is true, in fact, that the exercise of the ministry of the reader and acolyte helps candidates in the process of being configured to Christ the Shepherd and Servant, it is also true that, at times, ministerial institutions have run the risk of being interpreted as a *cursus honorum* marking the path to priestly ordination.

While ecclesial discernment proceeds on this aspect, it is considered appropriate that even for those who are candidates for ordained ministry, with a view to the institution of readerate and acolyteate, the baptismal root of these ministries be emphasized, and that the Rite of Institution, even for seminarians, normally coincide with that of the other ministers of the diocese, so as to enhance the common understanding of the ministry and its nature of service to the holy People of God.

58. Analogous to exercise of presbyteral ministry, which is a way of formation for the presbyter himself, for seminarians, too, the exercise of institutional ministries is a fruitful context of their formation⁶⁹. It will, in fact, enable them to read what is happening as a call from the Lord to open their hearts by grasping link between life and liturgy, pastoral charity and service at the altar. This is why it is important for formation to take a "mystagogical" perspective.

- *Gradual pastoral insertion*

59. Over the course of the configurational stage⁷⁰, and particularly in the final year, more and more extensive and prolonged times of insertion of seminarians into the life

which is received through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Even a well-established practice in the Latin Church has conferred, in fact, how such lay ministries, being based on the sacrament of Baptism, can be entrusted to all the faithful, who are suitable, whether male or female, according to what is already implicated in canon 230 §2" (FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter in the form of "Motu Proprio" *Spiritus Domini*. On Amending Can. 230§1 of the Code of Canon Law Concerning the Access of Female Persons to the Established Ministry of the Reader and Acolyte, Jan. 10, 2021).

⁶⁹ "In the course of this stage, according to the maturation of each individual candidate and according to the formative opportunity, the ministries of the readerate and the acolyteate will be conferred on seminarians, so that they may be able to exercise them for a suitable period of time and be better prepared for the future services of the Word and the Altar. The readerate offers the seminarian the "challenge" of allowing himself to be transformed by the Word of God, the object of his prayer and study. The conferring of the acolyteate implies a deeper participation in the mystery of Christ who gives himself and is present in the Eucharist, the assembly and his brother. Therefore, united with a suitable spiritual preparation, the two ministries allow for living more intensely what is required in the configurational stage, within, therefore, it is appropriate to offer readers and acolytes concrete ways of exercising the ministries received not only in the liturgical sphere, but also in catechesis, evangelization and service to one's neighbor" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §72).

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, §71.

pastoral ministry of the local Church and participation in synodal journeys. They, in addition to fostering conformation to Christ the Shepherd and growth in pastoral charity, will introduce to an ever-increasing immersion in the spirituality of the diocesan presbyter; they will favor, finally, the connection of the configurational stage with the subsequent vocational synod stage.

- *The diaconal ordination*

60. "The configurational stage is oriented toward the conferral of Holy Orders. At the end of it, or during the next one, if recognized as suitable in the judgment of the Vescove, after listening to the formators, the seminarian will ask for and receive diaconal ordination, by which he will acquire the condition of a cleric, with the related duties and rights, and will be incardinated "either in a particular Church, or in a personal prelature or in an institute of consecrated life or in a society," or in an Association or Ordinary that has the faculty."⁷¹

d. *The vocational synthesis stage*

61. The stage of vocational synthesis accompanies the exit from the seminary and entry into the presbyterate, which takes place with presbyteral ordination. The central formative dimension of this stage is pastoral, lived with a mandate from the Ordinary and an assumption of specific responsibility in a pastoral context⁷².

The ways of declining this stage may be different, respecting the ecclesial context and the formative needs of individuals, but keeping in mind some fundamental references:

- the pastoral insertion of the deacon (or of the one who is about to receive the diaconal Ordination) will have to guard as a priority a formative purpose; for this reason it is appropriate that the bishop, in choosing an appropriate reality, should consult with the formators of the seminary; the parish priest or presbyters

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, §73; "Diaconal ordination introduces candidates into sacramental communion with the Vescove, presbyters and deacons, incardicates them into a particular Church, consecrates them to the service of the Gospel, the altar and the poor. It teaches those who are called to become presbyters to see in the spirit of service the authentic form of Christian authority, in the image of Christ, who came to serve and not to be served (Cf. Jn. 13:1-17)" (ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Presbyters in the Italian Church*, §116).

⁷² "To be included in pastoral life, with a gradual assumption of responsibility, in a spirit of service; to strive for adequate preparation, receiving specific accompaniment with a view to the presbyterate" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §74).

responsible for that pastoral reality are aware of the formative role that is required of them by the Diocese⁷³;

- the reference to formators and the seminary community is useful to facilitate synthetic rereading of one's formation path in view of pre-scholastic ordination;
- the proposal of pastoral insights, favoring the laboratory mode, can be usefully addressed to deacons both by the seminary and by those involved in the permanent formation of the clergy;
- at this stage it is good to highlight the transition to the more typical dynamics of ongoing formation: in the ways, proposals, and references it is good to assume the mode that future presbyters will encounter in their diocesan reality.

- *Presbyteral ordination*

62. Presbyteral ordination represents the formative goal of the initial formation experienced in the seminary⁷⁴ and the transition to ongoing formation. "From presbyteral ordination, the formation process continues within the presbyteral family. It is the proper competence of the bishop, assisted by the collaborators, to introduce the presbyters into the dynamics proper to ongoing formation."⁷⁵

63. The Rector of the Seminary be involved in the choice of the first destination of presbyters, which must be made not on the basis of criteria dictated mainly by pastoral urgencies, but having attention to the good and harmonious growth of the newly ordained and carefully choosing the communities to which to send them and the confreres to whom to entrust them⁷⁶.

3.5. Formative itinerary for adult candidates

a. Vocation in adulthood⁷⁷

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, §75.

⁷⁴ "At the conclusion of the formative cycle of the seminary formators must help the candidate to meekly accept the decision that the bishop pronounces concerning him. Those who receive Holy Orders need a convenient preparation, especially of a spiritual nature. A prayerful spirit, grounded in a relationship with the person of Jesus, and an encounter with exemplary priestly figures should accompany the assiduous meditation on the rites of ordination, which, in prayers and liturgical gestures, summarize and express the profound meaning of the sacrament of Holy Orders in the Church" (*Ibid.*, §77).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, §79.

⁷⁶ Cf. ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §117.

⁷⁷ Adults are considered to be those who start education after the age of forty.

64. Concerning cases of vocations in adulthood, it is incumbent to prepare a careful discernment on the authenticity of intentions and motivations, ascertain that the person is of good reputation (Cf. 1Tim 3:7), collect reliable testimonies that support the candidacy, verify sufficient basic cultural preparation, listen to the community of origin, and request the presentation of the parish priest. If this initial discernment is positive, it will be necessary to ensure an adequate theological course and suitable context that will allow the acquisition of a solid human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation⁷⁸.

Careful consideration must be given to admitting to the seminary those adults who have recently had an experience of conversion or return to the faith, because "confusion can not infrequently arise between the *sequela Christi* and the call to priestly ministry."⁷⁹

In the cases of aspirants to the presbyterate in adulthood, the beginning of the formative path normally involves conclusion of professional activity and possible attendance at university courses. Since the possible interruption of the formative path could place them in serious financial difficulties, their admission must be decided using particular prudence and demanding special guarantees, so that the well-founded hope can be nurtured that, barring exceptional unforeseen circumstances, they will reach the goal of ordination.

65. The adulthood of these aspirants requires special attention in their formative accompaniment. In this regard, the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Vescoves⁸⁰ and the *Ratio fundamentalis*⁸¹ outline two possible orientations: the establishment of a special seminary to take care of the formation of these candidates or the elaboration of an appropriate formation program. On the advisability of following the first orientation the Regional Episcopal Conferences will have to reflect, if necessary.

3.6. The discernment of candidates, ballots and resignation

66. The bishop, in order to proceed with diaconal and presbyteral ordination, must be morally certain of the suitability of the candidates, which must be proven by positive arguments⁸². To this end, it is appropriate for him to know the ordinands personally; moreover

⁷⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §64; EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS, *Lines common for the life of our seminaries*, §31; CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §24.

⁷⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §24.

⁸⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum successores*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, §87.

⁸¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §24.

⁸² Cf. I.C.C., 1052 §1; 1025 §§1-2; 1029.

is obliged to listen to competent persons and cannot deviate from their judgment except by virtue of well-founded reasons⁸³.

The act of discerning the suitability of a candidate is called "scrutiny" ⁸⁴. The bishop performs it by accepting in the first place the summary judgment of the rector⁸⁵ and having recourse to "other means that seem to him useful, according to the circumstances of time and place, such as testimonial letters, publications or other information"⁸⁶. He may be assisted by a special commission admission to ministries and holy orders. It would be convenient for the bishop to manifest his decision in the form of a decree⁸⁷.

67. The Rector is responsible for presenting to the Bishop "the certificate [...] on the qualities required [of the ordinand] in order to receive the Order, namely, his righteous doctrine, genuine piety, good morals, and aptitude for exercising the ministry; and also, after a duly conducted investigation, on his state of health, both physical and mental."⁸⁸

In order to arrive at an objective summary judgment, the rector is required to activate with aspirants and candidates a serious vocational discernment process that highlights their faith experience, signs of call and intentions with respect to the requested Order and verifies their maturity in all dimensions (human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral).

In addition, he has a duty to gather the opinions of his co-workers, faculty members, pastors who have welcomed seminarians in pastoral experiences, and as many others as he deems appropriate; "the input of women whose knowledge of the candidate might also prove useful, integrating the "look" and feminine judgment into the evaluation."⁸⁹

68. Discernment of the suitability of aspirants and candidates must be carried out prior to each stage of the formative itinerary; however, it takes on special significance the eve of admission among candidates for the diaconate and presbyterate and

⁸³ Cf. I.C.C., 127 §2,2°.

⁸⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §204.

⁸⁵ Cf. I.C.C., 1051, 1st.

⁸⁶ C.I.C., 1051, 2ND.

⁸⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §210.

⁸⁸ Cf. C.I.C., 1051, 1st. Discernment, understood here with reference to orders, should be extended to the different stages of the formative itinerary. Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Guidelines on the preparation of educators in seminaries*, §43.

⁸⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §205.

of diaconal ordination⁹⁰; in these two moments it must be conducted with great depth and breadth.

69. "The bishop shall refrain from publishing the date of the diaconal ordination and from allowing preparations for the celebration of the diaconate before he is certain that all the required studies have been duly completed, that is, that the candidate has actually passed all the examinations required by the curriculum of philosophical-theological studies including those of the fifth year."⁹¹

70. The regulations regarding the minimum age for receiving orders⁹², the interstices between ministries and diaconal ordination⁹³ and between diaconal and presbyteral ordination⁹⁴, the studies that must be completed⁹⁵, and the necessity of making spiritual exercises before receiving holy orders⁹⁶ should be carefully observed. Provisions regarding impediments and irregularities in receiving orders⁹⁷ should also be kept in mind.

- Discharge

71. "Should the formation community deem it necessary to discharge a seminarian at any time during the journey, after consultation with the bishop, as a general rule such an act should be put in writing and appropriately preserved, with prudent exposition, at least summary, but in any case sufficiently indicative, of the circumstances that motivated it, as a summary of the discernment made."⁹⁸

3.7. Continuing education

72. Lifelong learning⁹⁹ should be understood as a continuous readiness to leave oneself to be conformed to Christ the Good Shepherd and as conversion to His way of being and

⁹⁰ In fact, only for a canonical cause, even a hidden one, can access to the presbyterate be interdicted to the Deacons assigned to it. Cf. I.C.C., 1030.

⁹¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §206.

⁹² C.I.C., 1031 §§1-2.

⁹³ C.I.C., 1035 §2.

⁹⁴ C.I.C., 1031 §1.

⁹⁵ C.I.C., 1032 §§1-2.

⁹⁶ C.I.C., 1039.

⁹⁷ C.I.C., 1025 §1 (in connection with canons 1041-1042). Detailed and documented indications are found in CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §205-210.

⁹⁸ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §197.

⁹⁹ In CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §80-88, there is an exposition of situations and proposals that challenge ongoing formation. It is a fundamental and very useful text for developing paths of ongoing formation for presbyters in the various ages.

act. The soul and form of ongoing formation is pastoral charity, which represents the essential dimension of the spirituality of the diocesan presbyter. The community dimension remains the element of continuity and permeates the life of the presbyter, who is called to live out his ministry in the presbytery presided over by the bishop, listening to and serving God's holy people.

As stated in the first chapter, ongoing formation constitutes the paradigm of initial formation, which finds its foundation and inspiration in it, so that it becomes clear that these are two articulations of a single formation process that accompanies the life of the called in all its phases, before and after ordination.

and situations in their ministerial life; worksheets for personal work and community discussion on issues affecting the life of the presbyter are available at: EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS AND CONSECRATED LIFE, *Leaven of Fraternity. Subsidy on the Renewal of the Clergy Beginning with Ongoing Formation*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2017.

CHAPTER FOUR

Initial formation in the major seminary

4.1. What is meant by training

73. The term formation indicates a process aimed at an integral and full transformation, however gradual, of the person. It is *formation of conscience*, which abarms the "lifelong journey in which one learns to nurture the same sentiments as Jesus Christ by assuming the criteria of his choices and the intentions of his actions."¹⁰⁰

Formation is characterized by four notes: it is presented as unique, integral, communal and missionary¹⁰¹.

Understood in this way, the formative process is not exhausted in learning new contents, nor does it immediately embrace the field of moral or disciplinary behaviors and attitudes¹⁰²: it is the world of personal motivations and beliefs that is the object of this process. Forming conscience means accompanying the initiation processes in which the person learns to take on those skills that enable him to read within himself the meanings and traces of what is happening around him and to compare it with the proposal of the Gospel. For these reasons, a formation so understood is properly configured as self-formation¹⁰³.

4.2. Goals and attentions of the initial formation of the major seminary

¹⁰⁰ SYNODOX OF BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Youth*, §108.

¹⁰¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, Introduction, §3.

¹⁰² Fundamental to these considerations is the perspective highlighted in CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERO, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §41: "The pastoral care of the faithful requires that the presbyter have solid formation and inner maturity, inasmuch as he cannot merely display a 'mere covering of virtuous garments,' a mere outward and formalistic obedience to abstract principles, but is called to act with great inner freedom. In fact, he is required to internalize, day after day, the Gospel spirit, thanks to a constant and personal relationship of friendship with Christ, to the point of sharing His feelings and attitudes."

¹⁰³ "All formation, even priestly formation, ultimately self-formation" (JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §69).

a. Missionary disciples engaged in pastoral ministry

74. The synthetic category that seems to us to possess a pivotal value on which the formative objectives of the Major Seminary are declined is discipleship, lived out in presbyteral ministry and open to mission¹⁰⁴. The image of the disciple who listens, allows himself to be formed, and accepts the apostolic sending, constitutes the element of harmonization and synthesis of the various dimensions and of the entire formation process.

The disciple is the one who lives fraternity in the name of Jesus, a relationship that for the seminarian and the presbyter is concretized respectively in the community of the seminary or in the communion of the presbytery, which remains open to all the Lord's disciples and to all the men and women whom the mission allows to meet.

The disciple is one who lives discernment¹⁰⁵ to understand what the Lord's will is in personal life and in the life of the world. Discernment enables the connection between reality, history and the Christian life.

The disciple is the one who welcomes and lives the mission in the name of Jesus, together with the holy People of God and in the proper mode of presbyteral ministry.

b. Objectives of initial training

75. The fundamental goal of the major seminary is to form new presbyters who, after the example and *in the person of* Christ the Good Shepherd, will be called to devote themselves with all their strength and throughout their lives to the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God¹⁰⁶.

"The seminarian is called to "come out of himself," to go, in Christ, to the Father and to others, embracing the call to the presbyterate, committing himself to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in order to achieve an inner, serene and creative synthesis of strength and weakness. The educational project helps seminarians to lead all aspects of their personality back to Christ, so that they become consciously free for God and others. Only in Christ crucified and risen, in fact, does this path integration have meaning and fulfillment; in Him all things are recapitulated (cf. Eph. 1:10), so that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28)."⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

This fundamental goal is articulated in multiple particular objectives:

¹⁰⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §39.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, §43.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Decree on priestly formation *Optatam totius*, October 28, 1965, §4 and JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §61.

¹⁰⁷ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §29.

- offer the conditions for an incisive and engaging experience of spiritual life, "in intimate communion and familiarity with the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit"¹⁰⁸ and in full harmony with the Church;
- ensure a structure of community life, which fosters authentic relationships of fraternity and friendship and grows a sense of belonging to the particular Church;
- Assiduously accompany seminarians in their commitment to vocation discernment, oriented toward a definitive choice for diocesan presbyterate in celibacy;
- foster the maturation of balanced and consistent personalities that are bridges and not obstacles people's encounter with God¹⁰⁹;
- help grow in the spirituality of the diocesan presbyter, centered on pastoral charity, lived in the radicality of the evangelical counsels and in dedication to one's particular Church;
- Promote the acquisition of the necessary theological and cultural competence, which ability to discern the signs of the times and foster forms of communication of the Evangelium suited to the men and women of this time;
- introduce them to pastoral ministry, preparing future presbyters to take responsibility for a community and to fit into a dynamic of shared co-responsibility, strengthening their missionary drive;
- Facilitate the harmonious integration of various training aspects.

4.3. Personal and community accompaniment

a. Community life

76. Community life¹¹⁰ in the seminary is propaedeutic to the various forms of fraternal life that the presbyter is called to live and animate; it should enable growth in co-responsibility, fraternal correction and promotion, in sincerity and transparency, in mutual trust, in prayer that opens to deep sharing. È

¹⁰⁸ VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Decree on priestly formation *Optatam totius*, Oct. 28, 1965, §8.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §43.

¹¹⁰ "Community life during the years of initial formation must affect individuals, purifying their intentions and transforming their conduct with a view to progressive conformation to Christ. Daily, formation is accomplished through interpersonal relationships, moments of sharing and confrontation, which contribute to the growth of "that human humus," in which a vocation concretely matures. [...] The experience of community life is a precious and indelible element in formation" (Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §50-51).

good to work on the emotional and relational level as well, fostering empathy and emotional competence.

77. Fraternal relationships, family-style and free of those dynamics more typical of a boarding school, allow knowledge of self and others.

In the seminary, as in the presbytery, it is not taken for granted that common life is an experience of community according to the Gospel and that it manifests the fraternity required by Jesus of his disciples. We need to be vigilant both about functional or formal reductions in common life and about the evasions proposed by the "virtual communities" that are formed through *social me- dia*.

78. The typology of formation communities present in the Churches that are in Italy is basically twofold: diocesan seminaries and interdiocesan or regional seminaries. articulation and organization of community life is very different in the smaller communities than in the larger ones; advantages and limitations are noted in each.

It should be verified that seminary communities turn out to be truly formative, that is, authentic experiences of Church. To overcome the prevailing individualism, in large communities the importance of fraternal life in small groups is recognized. In the event that concrete conditions do not allow for meaningful community life, it is good to favor stable collaboration between dioceses in the most appropriate forms (reception in other seminaries, establishment of interdiocesan or regional seminaries), both for the propeutic stage and for the other stages of formation¹¹¹.

b. Personal accompaniment

79. "Seminarians, in the different stages of their journey, need to be accompanied in a personalized way by those in charge of the educational work, each according to his or her own role and competence. The purpose of personal accompaniment is to carry out vocational discernment and to form the

¹¹¹ "In this context, I would like to point out that one of the most important challenges facing houses of priestly formation today is to be true Christian communities, which implies not only a coherent formation project, but also an adequate number of seminarians and formators to ensure a truly communal experience in all dimensions of formation. This challenge not infrequently requires a commitment to create or consolidate interdiocesan, provincial or regional seminaries. This is a task bishops must take on synodically, particularly at the level of regional or national episcopal conferences, a task to which you are called to collaborate with loyalty and proat- tiveness" (FRANCIS, Address to Participants in the Course Rectors and Formators of Seminaries for Latin America, Nov. 10, 2022).

missionary disciple. In the formation process, it is required that the seminarian get to know himself and let himself be known, relating in a sincere and transparent way with the formators."¹¹²

Personal accompaniment concerns the entire formation team and not only the Spiritual Director.

80. The personalized path must have adequate tools and sufficient degrees of freedom, even with respect to the stages of the journey, differentiating the formation path in the seminary according to the progression of formation. Likewise, it is good to give seminarians space and time for autonomy to promote and verify responsibility and freedom of choices. A personalized path could involve designing per- formation courses in a context other than the Seminary community.

c. Integral and integrated training

81. Integral formation allows itself to be provoked by the "reality principle"; the instance of integral formation first and foremost challenges the formators, as individuals and as a team: it is realized on the condition that they can "dose" the various formative dimensions within the course, from the propaedeutic stage to the stage of vocational synthesis.

Authentic integral and integrated formation leads to activating the desire for self-formation. This presupposes a co-responsibility between seminary formators and individual candidates.

To achieve this goal, the four formative dimensions must be proposed in an integrated and circular dynamic, recognizing and fostering their mutual influence. It will be the constant concern of educators to offer an integral, profoundly unified formative proposal, capable of overcoming the risks of juxtaposition or contraction between the various dimensions and educational interventions. All educators, therefore, are jointly responsible for the multiple aspects of formation each according to the task received.

¹¹² FRANCIS, Address to seminarians, novices and novices from various parts of the world in On the occasion of the Year of Faith, July 6, 2013, §9.

"Having as its end *"docibilitas"* to the Holy Spirit, personal accompaniment represents an indispensable instrument of formation. It is necessary that conversations with formators be regular and frequent; in this way, in docility to the action of the Spirit, the seminarian can progressively be configured to Christ. This accompaniment must integrate all aspects of the human person, educating in listening, dialogue, the true meaning obedience and inner freedom. It is the task of every formator, each one acting at the level that falls within his competence, to help the seminarian to become conscious of his condition, of the talents he has received, and also of his own frailties, making himself more and more available to the action of grace" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyterian Vocation*, §45-46).

Similarly, it will be the living commitment of seminarians to mature a solid synthesis of life that composes in unity spiritual experience and human maturity, vocation discernment and life in community, theological knowledge and pastoral experience. To this end, the hinge to which the different aspects of formation will have to be traced will be the living experience of faith lived in discipleship (understood in its dimensions): it alone makes the vocation to priestly ministry perceptible and motivated and a generous and radical response possible¹¹³.

4.4. The dimensions of training

a. The human dimension of education

82. "The priest's humanity is the normal daily mediation of the saving goods of the Kingdom"¹¹⁴. "Human formation, the foundation of all priestly formation, provides for the integral growth of the person and enables him to forge the totality of his dimensions"¹¹⁵. Therefore, much attention must be paid to the human formation of the future of priests.

Becoming humanly mature is therefore a fundamental goal of presbyteral formation.

83. The traits that indicate human maturity are mainly the following:

- an intelligence that tends to open up to the truth, not to become defensively entrenched in itself or in individual aspects understood unilaterally;
- a will that directs energies toward the proposed goal, does not stiffen in voluntarism, is not divided by compromise, nor dispersed in wishful thinking;

¹¹³ "Each of the formative dimensions is aimed at the "transformation or assimilation" of the heart into the image of that of Christ, of the One who, sent by the Father to fulfill his plan of love, was moved by human needs (cf. Mt 9:36), went to seek the lost sheep (cf. Mt 18:12- 14), even to the point of offering his own life for them (cf. Jn 10:11), coming not to be served but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28). As suggested by the Second Vatican Council, whole educational process in preparation for the ministerial priesthood, in fact, is aimed at disposing seminarians to communicate to the charity of Christ, the good Shepherd" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §89).

¹¹⁴ EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS AND CONSECRATED LIFE, *The Ongoing Formation of Presbyters in our Particular Churches*, May 18, 2000, §23.

¹¹⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §94.

- a corporeality recognized and assumed as the language of the person, at his or her service, not captive to constricting needs, nor used for compensatory purposes;
- proper personal care, attentive to cleanliness and propriety, and sobriety in dress;
- an emotional maturity understood as a progressive journey of evangelization of one's own sensitivity in the service of the Kingdom, for the growth of others and for a fully human witness to the beauty of following¹¹⁶.
- a capacity for free, oblation and sincere relationships with men and women, at symmetrical and asymmetrical lives, characterized acceptance and openness to the other, by passion and discretion, fidelity and perseverance, presence and detachment, ready to renounce logics of power in order to assume the perspective of servanthood¹¹⁷;
- an affectivity that makes the person capable of loving with an undivided heart, integrating sexuality into affectivity and personal identity, according to a personalistic vision;
- a sufficiently consistent identity, nourished by a progressively broader inner freedom, the fruit of healthy relationships, which is embodied in an adequate sense of responsibility with regard to one's own life, the people and the communities entrusted to one's care, in an existence lived as a personal response to God who calls each day, according to the possible pace, in a progressive capacity to reelish inevitable frustrations as a step toward the fullness of one's humanity.

84. To grow these aspects of human maturity, which are intertwined with spiritual maturity, requires a threefold work:

- a knowledge of themselves, extended to all components of the personality, verified in dialogue educators; such knowledge will lead to the awareness that they are neither complete nor self-sufficient, but in need of enrichment and in constant journey;
- a free, constructive, and responsible management of one's own person, as a re-shift to vocation in daily life, such as to configure an effective *sequela Christi*;

¹¹⁶Cf. NATIONAL SERVICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Initial training in time abuse*, §35.

¹¹⁷Cf. *Ibid.*, §33.

- a way of life characterized by the gift of self out of love, service, relationships and daily commitment, within good and constructive relationships aimed at the fulfillment of one's mission.

85. The ordinary context in which the human dimension grows is that of relationships in the formation community, both with the formators and with the brothers and sisters whom the Lord has placed beside us. In a community life interwoven with rich and stimulating relationships, each of the seminarians will be provoked to come to terms with their own gifts and limitations and to welcome the gifts and limitations¹¹⁸ of others with serenity; to live a sense of responsibility and co-responsibility in common life, putting themselves at the service of the common good.

- *Digital world and social networks*¹¹⁹

86. Like everyone seminarians live immersed in the digital environment in which virtual and real are closely intertwined. This requires that they be accompanied to mature the ability to inhabit that environment with awareness and wisdom, recognizing the opportunities and risks.

The magisterial texts that emerged from the Youth Synod and the *Ratio fundamentalis* itself support us in an approach to the digital world that is less concerned than a recent

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, §96.

¹¹⁹ "The digital environment characterizes the contemporary world. Large segments of humanity are immersed in it routinely and continuously. It is no longer just a matter of "using" communication tools, but of living in a largely digitized culture that has profound impacts on the notion of time and space, on the perception of self, others, and the world, on the way of communicating, learning, informing oneself, and relating to others. An approach to reality that tends to privilege images over listening and reading affects the way we learn and the development of a critical sense. It is now clear that the digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily reality of many people, especially the youngest" (SYNODOX OF BISHOPS, *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People*, §21); "Human formation constitutes a necessary element evangelization, since the proclamation of the Gospel passes through person and is mediated by his humanity. "You will be my witnesses [...] to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8); today's reality obliges us to rethink these words of Jesus in a new way, because "the ends of the earth" have expanded, through mass media and social networks. This is "a new 'agora,' a public and open square where people share ideas, information, opinions, and where, moreover, new relationships and forms of community can come to life," a square from which future pastors cannot remain excluded, both for their formative process and for their future ministry. In this, the use of media and the approach to the digital world are an integral part of the development of the personality of the seminarian, since "through modern means of communication, the Priest will be able to make known the life of the Church and help people today to discover the face of Christ, by combining the appropriate and competent use of these instruments, also acquired during the period of formation, with a solid theological preparation and a marked priestly spirituality, nourished by continuous conversation with the Lord" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §97).

past in which these new modes of communication have also entered our realities of formation. Alongside the always necessary prudence for all that needs to be lived and used in a conscious and good way, there is an awareness in these texts that even the digital world is a world to be inhabited and evangelized in appropriate ways.

We find the formative indications provided by the *Ratio fundamentalis* to which we refer⁽¹²⁰⁾ to be very balanced and positive.

- *The contribution of the psycho-pedagogical sciences*

87. Human formation can fruitfully avail itself of the contributions of the psycho-pedagogical sciences, taken within the horizon of Christian anthropology. They should be given adequate space for full and mature human growth. Even the psychological evaluation, provided at the time of admission to the major seminary and repeatable at any time during the course at the indication of the trainers or at the candidate's request, assumes an important role not only in the recognition of any psychopathologies, but above all in awareness with respect to one's strengths, as well as one's limits, frailties and wounds. Assessment becomes a tool for growth and training.

At the end of the assessment or at any time during the course of training, the need and request for psychological accompaniment in the form of psychotherapy may be determined by the candidate.

Any recourse to the humanities, however, requires that seminarians their cordial and convinced cooperation and that two basic conditions are met:

- the free consent of the person concerned before promoting any intervention; in case consent is not given, educators, without blackmail or pressure, should make discernment based on the knowledge they otherwise have;
- the guarantee of the right to intimacy: the appropriate communication to the Bishop, the Rector and the Spiritual Director of the results of the psychodiagnostic counseling or psychological journey shall be made, in written or verbal form, preferably by the candidate himself or, with his written consent, by the counselors. In any case, any information acquired through psychological counseling will be confidential.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, §98-100.

b. The spiritual dimension of formation

88. "Spiritual formation constitutes the heart that unifies and vivifies"¹²¹ the life and formation of future presbyters. Its essential content is the sharing of the experience of the paschal mystery of Christ the Shepherd, under the action of the Holy Spirit. The Seminary propitiates this experience by drawing inspiration from the pedagogy adopted by Jesus with his Apostles: he first of all established a personal relationship with the Twelve, fostered an atmosphere of fraternal life and considered them his friends.

Even today, friendship with Jesus is the decisive element of spiritual formation: it makes seminarians available to welcome the action of the Spirit that shapes and stimulates, in ever new and unpredictable ways, pastoral and missionary commitment. Forming for the presbyterate, in fact, means learning to give a personal response to the fundamental question posed by Jesus to Peter: "Do you love me?" (Jn. 21:15)¹²².

The personal relationship with Jesus Christ is experienced above all through faithful meditation on the Word of God, prayer and active participation in the sacraments, the charisms of pastoral charity in dedication to the particular Church and of self-giving in celibacy, and the web of educational, fraternal, friendship and service relationships¹²³.

89. The traits that indicate the progress of a spiritual journey in the seminary are as follows:

- fidelity in the practice of Spiritual Direction¹²⁴ for a progressive and serene openness of heart;
- the progressive listening to the Word of God in *lectio divina*¹²⁵, in personal meditation, in the study of Sacred Scripture and its sharing in moments of *collatio*, overcoming any moralistic or intellectualistic reduction and opening up to the encounter with the coming Christ;

¹²¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §45.

¹²² Cf. *Ibid.*, §42.

¹²³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §101-102.

¹²⁴ "Spiritual direction is a privileged instrument for the integral growth of the person. The Spiritual Director is to be chosen with full freedom by the seminarians from among the priests designated by the Bishop. Such freedom is truly authentic only when the seminarian opens himself with sincerity, trust and docility. The meeting with the Spiritual Director should not be occasional, but systematic and regular; the quality of spiritual accompaniment, in fact, is important in view of the very effectiveness of the whole formation process" (*Ibid.*, §107).

¹²⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §47; CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §103.

- daily encounter with Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, which unites us to him and to our brothers and sisters; a living experience of the celebration of Liturgical Year, Sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours¹²⁶;
- personal union with Christ that is nurtured in silent and prolonged prayer even outside of organized moments¹²⁷;
- the ability to accommodate in prayer and celebration the people incontinent, to live the missionary dimension of prayer in the awareness of becoming interpreters of humanity's cry for help¹²⁸;
- a progressive ability to inhabit solitude and silence as places of deepening and intimacy of relationship with God and with one's brothers and sisters;
- The progressive readiness for reconciliation and forgiveness in the web of fraternal relationships;
- the desire to guard one's life and conscience in the perfect law, the law of freedom, finding happiness in practicing it (Cf. Jas. 1:25);
- the ability to experience the various situations existence as "calls" of the Sign that renew the invitation to follow;
- the serene self-offering expressed in the choice of celibacy for the Kingdom.

90. The elements useful for developing these traits belong to the ancient spiritual tradition of the Church. Therefore, the indications proposed by the *Ratio fundamentalis*¹²⁹ should be wisely declined in the daily and weekly planning of seminary life.

- *Celibacy and virginity for the sake of the Kingdom*

91. In the logic of total belonging to Christ and participating in his spousal love for the Church, celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom has always been regarded as particularly suited to presbyteral life¹³⁰.

It is a specific grace that the Lord gives to those who are called to the presbyterate for which they will be able to remain in the celibate condition as long as they freely accept it and responsibly guard it. On this path they will gradually discover that they are loved by their Lord of spousal love and belong to Him in a way

¹²⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, *Desiderio desideravi*, §39.

¹²⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §102.

¹²⁸ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, §1.

¹²⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §101-115.

¹³⁰ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §16; JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §29.44; CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §110.

exclusive. They respond to such love by remaining whole in this particular form self-giving, a source of deep joy, inner freedom and extraordinary pastoral fruitfulness (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-12).

It is a vocation love in the same form chosen by Jesus, which allows the heart to be freed from all forms of dependence and possession, disposing it to enter with joyful agility into the desert of inner solitude, in which one learns to dimo- rare in Christ and to live for him, to love one's brothers and sisters unconditionally and passionately, and to establish relationships of friendship as intense as they are free; it must be lived in the evangelical counsel of chastity, training in discipline and making use of human and spiritual means that can form and guard it¹³¹. Such discipline will have to take into account human frailty, engage vigilance, induce a responsible use of the means of social communication, so as to remain immune from concessions and retreats that impoverish and jeopardize the richness of the gift. The celibate choice calls into question the candidates' human personality, which must be healthy and harmonious¹³².

Celibacy lived according to the evangelical spirit is also the condition that makes relationships in the presbytery possible even in daily forms of common life, which should be encouraged and supported¹³³; those same fraternal relationships can in turn become an important support in daily renewing the total gift of self expressed in pastoral charity, which motivates the presbyter's celibate choice.

The enhancement of celibacy does not diminish the esteem and full communion with other church traditions present in Italy that live the uxorato ministry¹³⁴.

- Pastoral charity

92. Central to the spiritual formation of future presbyters is pastoral charity, a gift of the Spirit, an inner principle and virtue to be acquired that characterizes and unifies their

¹³¹ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Optatam totius*, §10; VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §16; PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, June 24, 1967, §§74-78.

¹³² Cf. I.C.C., 247 §1.

¹³³ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §8; C.I.C., 280.

¹³⁴ "The celibacy of clerics, chosen for the kingdom of heaven and so fitting for the priesthood, must be held in the highest esteem everywhere, according to the tradition of the universal Church; so too must the status of clerics united in marriage, sanctioned through the centuries by the practice of the early Church and the Eastern Churches, be held in honor" (CODEX CANONUM ECCLESIAE ORIENTALIS, Oct. 18, 1990, §373).

life and spirituality. The its essential content is "the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, in the image and in sharing with the gift of Christ."¹³⁵.

Let the seminarians, with careful discernment, be exhorted to verify and consolidate their participation in Christ's pastoral solicitude, to make it their main concern, making it the center of convergence of their thoughts and the leaven that transforms their personality. If they allow themselves to be grasped by this "greater love," including through meaningful experiences, they will be able to overcome difficulties, weariness and failures, leave behind all mediocrity and strive for a life of authentic holiness¹³⁶.

To this end, let them endeavor to practice those means that foster self-giving in the way of Christ the Head, Shepherd and Bridegroom of the Church: in particular, to allow themselves to be loved by God, in the desire to respond to him with love, to grow in passion for Christ and familiarity with him, to mature an attitude of gratuitousness, compassion and selfless service for their brothers and sisters, especially for the poorest and neediest.

- *Diocesan spirituality*

93. Love for Christ is not separable from love for the Church His Bride. Obedience to God, conceived as the highest expression of freedom from self, is also, and crucially, embodied in obedience to the Church, in particular to the Pope and to one's Bishop, and is expressed in the sign of joy, which constitutes the evangelical unit of measure of the gift of self¹³⁷. It is essential, therefore, that each candidate develop in his heart a deep *sensus Ecclesiae*, that is, the capacity to "*sentire Ecclesiam, sentire cum Ecclesia, sentire in Ecclesia*."

On this basis must be grafted the precise choice of diocesan spirituality, which is characterized by the assumption of love and service toward one's particular Church as the main interest and fundamental criterion one's spiritual life and ecclesial commitment. It is a spirituality that receives its structure from the threefold vinculum with the bishop, the presbytery and the People of God and from the threefold prophetic, royal and priestly *munus*. Its main tones are communion and incarnation.

- *Evangelical poverty*

94. Engaged fully by Christ in radical discipleship, future presbyters are to be trained in the evangelical use of temporal goods and in "a poor standard of living, in the spirit of self-denial so as to become accustomed to readily renounce even the things for

¹³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §23; Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §13; C.I.C., 245.

¹³⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, November 24, 2013, §76-97.

¹³⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §109.

themselves lawful but unbecoming, and to live progressively conforming themselves to Christ crucified"¹³⁸. Let them, therefore, be educated to live in an essential, austere way, sharing their goods with the poor, and to mature that sense of responsibility which translates into a sober and dignified style. This also takes concrete form in taking on manual tasks in the life of the seminary, in diligent care for the environment and community goods, in checking personal expenses, and above all in experiencing the fatigue of study in the serene awareness of doing one's daily duty. On the formative level, meaningful experiences of sharing with the poor and with situations of marginality are very important. Let them be educated, moreover, to express lively gratitude to the Lord and the Church for that financial support that enables them to devote themselves with evangelical freedom and serene confidence, today to formation and tomorrow to pastoral ministry.

The gift of self lived with evangelical radicality demands of candidates, in addition to detachment from things, also detachment from their dearest affections and especially from themselves, which, in the final analysis, consists in living truthfully and unreservedly the words of the psalmist: "My soul thirsts you [Lord]" (Ps. 63:2). Experience teaches that without real self-denial, any detachment, however generous, is founded not on rock but on sand (Cf. Mt 7:26-27)⁽¹³⁹⁾ and lacks the strength to withstand the trials of life.

c. The Marian dimension of formation

95. The Second Vatican Council speaks of Mary as mother, member and model of the Church¹⁴⁰. As such, the Blessed Virgin should be presented to those preparing for the priesthood, co-evaluating the value that these titles can have for them. As Mother of the Church, to Mary the future priest can confidently turn to her maternal intercession, lovingly invoking her in personal and community prayer, even in the hesychastic form - repetitive and contemplative - of the Holy Rosary. Insofar as Mary is a model of faith and charity, those who are formed for the presbyterate can learn from her to entrust themselves to God wholeheartedly, to trust him and to confide in him. Finally, inasmuch as Mary is an eminent member of the Church, the seminarian can learn at her school to love the Church, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit, and to serve the People of God with fidelity, charity and generous self-giving.

d. The intellectual dimension of education

¹³⁸ VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Optatam totius*, §9.

¹³⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §30.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium*, §53.

96. The long and laborious travail that characterizes intellectual formation¹⁴¹, scandered by everydayness and methodicality, is functional in forming presbyters of mature, joyful and convinced faith, because it is "thought out." In this way, the new presbyters will be able to make themselves companions of the men and women of our time¹⁴², helping each one to bring out the thirst for God and salvation that dwells within him and to give an account of the hope (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15) that he carries in his heart¹⁴³. They will be prepared confront and dialogue in a pluralistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, welcoming its provo- cation to rediscover the essentials of faith, its beauty and liberating power, without fearing to bring to the surface the contradictions present in this historical passage.

- *Application to the study*¹⁴⁴

97. Seminarians will have to be helped educators and teachers to re-motivate their commitment to study in order to devote themselves to it with assiduity, élan and passion, overcoming any anti-intellectualistic prejudices¹⁴⁵. Indeed, the methodological approach to the cry- stian mystery in order to know and explicate, from different angles, its richness, breadth, height and depth, requires a continuous, patient and careful application to study, such as to enable seminarians both to allow themselves to be permeated by the reflection

¹⁴¹ "Intellectual formation is aimed at the attainment, on the part seminarians, of a solid competence in the philosophical and theological fields, as well as a cultural preparation of a gene- ral character, such as to enable them to proclaim in a way that is credible and comprehensible to the man of today, the Gospel message, to place themselves fruitfully in dialogue with the contemporary world and to support, with the light of reason, the truth of the faith, showing its beauty" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §116).

¹⁴² Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, §1.

¹⁴³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §116.

¹⁴⁴ "The in-depth and organic study of philosophy and theology is the most suitable tool with a view to the appropriation of that forma mentis that enables one to face the questions and challenges that arise in the exercise of the ministry, interpreting them from a perspective of faith. On the one , it is necessary not to neglect a solid and adequate quality of intellectual formation; on the other hand, it is necessary to remember that the fulfillment of obligations relating to study cannot be the sole criterion for determining the length of the candidate's formative process for the priesthood, since study, although important, represents only one aspect, albeit not a secondary one, of integral formation with a view to the presbyterate" (*Ibid.*, §118).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §223.

theological that integrates and harmonizes, in a superior synthesis, the cognitive experiences, and also not to feel crushed by a sense of frustration or inadequacy in the face of the challenges of faith and praxis in the present time.

- *Integration of theological knowledge and theological living*

98. A necessary prerequisite for philosophical-theological study to be fruitful in order for the development of mature presbyteral personalities is the full integration of theological knowledge and theological living¹⁴⁶. Of it, the Church Fathers and the great holy theologians are models.

- *The pastoral relevance of intellectual formation*

99. Seminarians, who need to acquire and develop a serious exercise of pastoral intelligence, should be helped by teachers to grasp the pastoral relevance of what they are taught, so that theological thinking and cognitive learning do not seem to be divorced from the life of the Church and society, toward which their future mission is directed¹⁴⁷.

Intellectual training is not limited to the academic aspect, but has as its objective the sapiential reading of history and the ability to compare and dialogue with any person.

e. *The pastoral dimension of formation*¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §117; "In order for intellectual formation to be pastorally effective, it must be integrated into a spiritual journey marked by personal experience of God, in such a way as to go beyond a purely notionalistic science and arrive at that intelligence of the heart which knows how to 'see' first and is then able to communicate the mystery of God to the brethren" (JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §51).

¹⁴⁷ "The setting of the study of the Liturgy in seminaries must also account for the extraordinary capacity that celebration has in itself to offer an organic vision of theological knowledge. Every discipline of theology, each according to its own perspective, must show its intimate connection with the Liturgy, by virtue of which the unity of priestly formation is revealed and realized (Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, §16). A liturgical-wisdom approach to theological formation in seminaries would certainly also have positive effects in pastoral action. There is no aspect of ecclesial life that does not find its culmination and source in it." (FRANCIS, *Desire Desirevi*, §37).

¹⁴⁸ "Since the purpose of the seminary is to prepare seminarians to be shepherds in the image of Christ, priestly formation must be permeated by a pastoral spirit, making capable of feeling that same compassion, generosity love for all, especially the poor, and impetus for the cause of the Kingdom, which characterized the public ministry of the Son of God, and which can be summarized in pastoral charity" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §119).

100. "The entire formation of candidates for the priesthood is intended to dispose them in a more particular way to communicate to the charity of Christ, the good Shepherd."¹⁴⁹ It follows that pastoral formation constitutes the goal and figure of all priestly formation and "all formation must be imbued with a pastoral spirit"¹⁵⁰.

It is about educating to a way of being that unifies and directs the whole personality: the style of the pastor, called to identify with Christ the Shepherd and to make his love for the flock his own, even to the point of giving his life. The seminary's pastoral pedagogy will therefore take charge of "a real initiation into the pastor's sensitivity, into considerable and mature assumption of his responsibilities, into the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and means of solution, always on the basis of limpid motivations of faith and according to the theological demands of pastoral ministry itself."¹⁵¹ The privileged instruments of such pedagogy are, addition to spiritual formation, community life, the study of pastoral theology, and pastoral internship experiences lived personally or together with the seminary community.

- *The presbyter man discernment and accompaniment*¹⁵²

101. On the art and practice of personal and pastoral discernment there is an extensive treatment in the magisterium of Pope Francis,¹⁵³ who points to it as the ordinary modality for any pastoral intervention, starting from a careful listening to how reality is

¹⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §57.

¹⁵⁰ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §119.

¹⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §58.

¹⁵² "The call to be Pastors of the People of God demands a formation that makes future priests experts in the art of pastoral discernment, that is, capable of deep listening to real situations and good judgment in choices and decisions. Implementing pastoral discernment requires putting at the center the Gospel style listening, which frees the pastor from the temptation of abstractness, protagonism, excessive self-confidence and that coldness, which would make him "an accountant of the spirit" instead of "a good Samaritan." Those who listen to God and their brothers and sisters know that it is the Spirit who leads the Church to the whole truth (cf. Jn. 16:13), and that it, in keeping with the mystery of the Incarnation, slowly germinates in the real life man and in the signs of history" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §120); "Priestly formation is a journey of transformation, which renews the heart and mind of the person, so that he or she may 'discern the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect to him' (Rom. 12:2). Progressive inner growth in the formative journey, in fact, must tend primarily to make the future presbyter a "man of discernment," capable of interpreting the reality of human life in the light of the Spirit, and thus choosing, deciding and acting according to the divine will" (*Ibid.*, §43).

¹⁵³ Cf. FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, March 19, 2016, §§291-312; FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*. On the call to holiness in the contemporary world, March 19, 2018, §§158-175.

manifest in people's concrete experience, remembering that it is always higher to the idea¹⁵⁴.

Discernment is the first step in a process of evangelization because it leads to listening, understanding, and choosing the best way to act in the logic of the Gospel. Discernment is followed by the accompaniment of processes¹⁵⁵, the art capable of finding ways for the gradual and effective growth of individuals and the christian community¹⁵⁶.

102. Specific attention in pastoral training should be paid to preparing future presbyters for the proper management of the administrative aspects of governing a parish, as well as responsibilities in the custody and enhancement of historical and artistic heritage, as well as knowledge of the economic support system for the Church.

- *The pastoral internship*

103. Pastoral formation is then implemented through a real internship¹⁵⁷, which must be:

- consistent and continuous, that is, such that seminarians can measure their responsibility in some particular area;

¹⁵⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, §231.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, §§169-175.

¹⁵⁶ "Thus, the Pastor learns to step out of his own preconstituted certainties and will not think of his own mini- stereo as a series of things to be done or norms to be applied, but will make his own life the "place" of a welcoming listening to God and to his brothers and sisters. In attentive, respectful and unprejudiced listening, the pastor will become capable of a non-superficial and non-judgmental reading of the lives of others, entering into the hearts of people and the contexts of life that distinguish them, especially the internal and external obstacles that sometimes make their actions problematic. He will be able to interpret with wisdom and understanding the conditioning of all kinds, in which people move, learning to propose viable spiritual and pastoral choices, attentive to the lives of the faithful and the surrounding socio-cultural environment. The gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks out, accompanies and guides his sheep, will introduce him to a serene, prudent and compassionate vision; he will carry out his ministry in a style of serene welcome and vigilant accompaniment of all situations, even the most complex ones, moving the beauty and demands of Gospel truth, without lapsing into legalistic and rigorous obsessions. In this way, he will know how to propose paths of faith through small steps, which can be better appreciated and welcomed. He will thus become a sign of mercy and compassion, testifying to the maternal face of the Church which, without renouncing the demands of evangelical truth, avoids turning them into boulders, preferring to lead with compassion and include everyone" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §120).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, §124.

- confined to set times during the year, during vacation periods and during summer;
- gradual, that is, rhythmic on the various stages of the formative itinerary; in the configurational stage one should think of a significant increase in internship activities related especially to the exercise of ministries outside the liturgical-celebratory context;
- differentiated in the choice of activities and experiences, including, in addition to priority service in parishes, the possibility of engagement in places of charity;
- verified with both the leaders of the different pastoral areas and the educators of the seminary.

It is appropriate for such an experience to be designed primarily for the benefit of the candidate's formation rather than to support the difficulties of parishes or other pastoral centers.

- *Community pastoral activities*

104. In addition to the personal pastoral internship, it is appropriate for seminaries to promote some community pastoral activities throughout the year, such as, for example, a "youth mission" in parishes, a "school of prayer," various initiatives for vocational animation.

The management of the seminary's websites or *social* profiles, as well as the printed periodicals, the means of communication of some activities aimed especially at young people, can also be managed together by groups of seminarians who are assigned annually.

Such activities offer seminarians the chance to give their peers an exemplary witness of faith, but also the opportunity to practice pastoral co-responsibility, training themselves to work together, both in the planning stage and in the implementation and verification of the project.

- *Mission availability*

105. Belonging to a particular Church through incardination, far from enclosing presbyters in a narrow and particularistic mentality, opens them to the needs of all people, of all Churches and of whole world, since each particular Church makes present the one Church of Christ¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §10 and C.I.C., 257.

Candidates for the presbyterate should therefore be challenged to have a missionary heart and mentality, to broaden the horizons of their apostolic commitment, and to be available for mission.

There is a missionariness of the heart, which is manifested in the full willingness to "toil" for the Gospel (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:10) and to prioritize encounters with those who do not believe or practice; there is a missionariness within the diocese and parishes, which requires responsibility to itinerancy and inter-parish mobility; is a missionariness *ad gentes*, which is expressed in service as *fidei donum* priests and in cooperation among the Churches.

4.5. Protection of children and vulnerable people

106. "The time we are living in the Church calls for a certain courageous revision of our formative practices at presbyteral ordination as well as at religious consecration."¹⁵⁹

With this awareness, the Italian Church, particularly through the work of the Service for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, has launched a path of investigation, care and accompaniment that, along with the reception and protection of victims, proposes itineraries and training aids¹⁶⁰ that involve all components of the People of God so that a sense of co-responsibility and care for minors and vulnerable people grows.

The issue of abuse, in fact, cannot be addressed solely on the legal level "delegating the matter to the jurist and focusing all attention on the verification criminal responsibility and possible sanction. Obviously, this cannot be missed, but the attention goes first to happened before, to the cause, to the individual context and

¹⁵⁹ "In particular, the socio-cultural challenges of the current anthropological context and the scourge of sexual, power and conscience abuse within the Church itself urgently require us to rethink above all the areas of human formation (relational in general, and affective-sexual particular) and ministerial identity, within an integral conception of formation" (SERVIZIO NAZIONALE PER LA TUTELA DEI MINORI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *La formazione iniziale in time of abuse*. §3).

¹⁶⁰ In addition to the grant already cited see also: SERVIZIO NAZIONALE PER LA TUTELA DEI MINORI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Le ferite degli abusi*, Rome 2020; ID., *Buone prassi di prevenzione e tutela dei minori in parrocchia*, Rome 2020.

social, community and ecclesial, to formation, both initial and ongoing, if it is to stop happening."¹⁶¹.

107. As far as candidates for ordained ministry are concerned, "a review and re-examination particularly in two directions prove to be of particular use: that of processes and that of educational-formational content, of the 'what' and the 'how,' and in perspective of a dynamic of integration between spiritual and anthropological elements"¹⁶².

In this regard, it may be useful for seminary formators to develop pathways of stable collaboration with those at the diocesan level or at the regional level who have been entrusted with this service, so that suitable formation itineraries can be proposed for those preparing for ordained ministry¹⁶³.

Such training is necessary to foster the necessary reforms that the Church is positing in order to grow a culture of care and dismantle the culture of abuse that, unfortunately, has long been ignored¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶¹ NATIONAL SERVICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Initial training in time abuse*, 13.

¹⁶² "In particular, the socio-cultural challenges of the current anthropological context and the scourge of sexual, power and conscience abuse within the Church itself urgently ask us to rethink especially the areas of human formation (relational in general, and affective-sexual particular) and ministerial identity, within an integral conception of formation" SERVIZIO NAZIONALE PER LA TUTELA DEI MINORI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Presentation*, 3).

¹⁶³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §202.

¹⁶⁴ "As you know, we are strongly committed to implementing the reforms necessary to give impetus, from the root, to a culture based on pastoral care so that the culture of abuse cannot find space to develop, much less perpetuate itself. This is not an easy task and, in the short term, requires the commitment of everyone" (FRANCIS, Letter of the Holy Father Francis to priests on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé d'Ars, Aug. 4, 2019).

CHAPTER FIVE

Training agents and the training project

108. "The principal agent of priestly formation is the Most Holy Trinity, which shapes each seminarian according to the Father's plan, whether through the presence of Christ in his word, sacraments and brothers in the community, or through the multifaceted action of the Holy Spirit"¹⁶⁵.

The Spirit acts in those called by making the fascination of vocation shine in their eyes, communicating to their hearts the necessary gifts of grace, shaping their personalities in depth. He, moreover, makes himself present in them through the action of the Church, which is "the community subject that has the grace and responsibility of accompanying those whom the Lord calls to become his ministers in the priesthood."¹⁶⁶ The Church ensures the discernment and formation of candidates through the specific service persons and communities that contribute, each for its part, to the common goal.

5.1. The Bishop

109. "Christ's first representative in priestly formation is the bishop"¹⁶⁷. Since it is his grave task to "give continuity to the charism and presbyteral ministry, associating new forces with it by the laying on of hands,"¹⁶⁸ he has the ultimate responsibility for the discernment and formation of the candidates he deems . Therefore, he must visit the seminary, get to know the seminarians personally and accompany their journey, take care of the connection of the seminary community with the pre-chancery and the particular Church, and help the seminarians to acquire and increase a profound ecclesial sensitivity¹⁶⁹. Given the complexity and delicacy of the formative task, ordinarily the bishop shares his primary responsibility with suitable and properly trained presbyters, who act in close union with him, in accordance with the

¹⁶⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §125.

¹⁶⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §65.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, §41.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. I.C.C., 259 §2.

his directives, and represent him in the seminary community¹⁷⁰. He may also associate with them permanent deacons and lay faithful, men and women, especially in those areas in which they have special expertise.

Where the seminary takes on an interdiocesan or regional dimension, this responsibility is exercised by an episcopal commission that ensures mutual agreement on the formative methodology to be adopted and trust toward seminary leaders as the necessary prerequisites for successful educational activity¹⁷¹.

5.2. The presbytery

110. "The clergy of the particular Church should be in communion and deep harmony with the diocesan bishop, sharing his solicitude for the formation of candidates through prayer, sincere affection, support and visits to the seminary. Every pre-sbyter must be aware of his or her own formative responsibility towards the seminarians; in a special way, parish priests and, in general, every priest who welcomes seminarians for pastoral internship, should cooperate generously with the community seminary formators, through a frank and concrete dialogue. The practical ways, by which the collaboration of presbyters with the Seminary is implemented may vary according to the different stages of the formation process."¹⁷²

5.3. The seminarians

111. Seminarians themselves are irreplaceable protagonists of their formation: indeed, the action of formators remains ineffective if they do not take charge of their lives and make their own the stimuli offered to them. In this sense, it can be said that all formation is ultimately self-formation¹⁷³.

Those entering the seminary are first and foremost called to confront themselves for confirmation that the Lord is calling them to live out their baptismal grace in the specific form of priestly ministry. Verifying the Lord's call requires that they place themselves at the feet of the Master, to be with him, attend him, know him and continually become missionary disciples in life with others, testing themselves.

¹⁷⁰ "The bishop should take diligent care not to exercise his authority in such a way as to effectively exhaust the rector and other formators in discerning the vocation of the candidates and their appropriate preparation; rather, with those in charge of the seminary, the bishop should maintain frequent personal contacts, as a sign of trust, in order to animate them in their work and to ensure that a spirit of full harmony, communion and collaboration reigns among them" (CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §128).

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, §128.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, §129.

¹⁷³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §69; Cf. C.I.C., 239 §3 according to which it is appropriate seminarians themselves to be involved in the conduct of the seminary.

Self-knowledge, which life in the seminary fosters, confronts them with the gifts with which God has benefited them, but also with their own limitations, wounds, and poverty; they must be accompanied to recognize the truth of themselves and to look at it without turbidity, discovering that they are loved by God and the Church. That is why it is important for seminarians to stand before God, themselves and others exactly as they are, without masks, in a daily exercise of authenticity.

By faith, they will be able to present themselves before the Church and the bishop not concerned about being perfect, but animated by the desire to be formed by the Lord, by his people, by the same ministry lived, to continue to grow in love.

This perspective requires that seminarians called to true responsibility about their journey and the life choices that this journey proposes. Responsibility always challenges personal freedom and calls for confrontation with a conscience enlightened by the Gospel. It is good to give seminarians space and time for autonomy to promote and verify the responsibility and freedom of their choices.

5.4. The seminary's community of trainers

112. Formators are called to interpret and implement the Seminary's Formation Project, adapting it to each seminarian's journey and innervating it in the diocesan, interdiocesan or regional ecclesial context. In fact, it is mainly they who set tone for seminary life and ensure its formative effectiveness¹⁷⁴. In addition to the skills required by their educational service, it is very important that they be witnesses of presbyteral communion. It is therefore necessary that among the formators a profound synergy be established, under the guidance of the Rector, which guarantees the interrelation of the task of each one with that of the others¹⁷⁵; for this reason it is appropriate that the formators live permanently in the Seminary and dedicate themselves to this service as a priority.

¹⁷⁴ "Without prejudice to the distinction between the internal and external forum, to the appropriate freedom of choice of confessors, and to the prudence and discretion that accord with the ministry of the Spiritual Director, the presbyteral community of educators feels itself united in the responsibility of educating candidates for the priesthood. To it, always with reference to the authoritative summary evaluation of the Bishop and the Rector, is primarily the task promoting and verifying the suitability of the candidates with regard to spiritual, human and intellectual endowments, especially with reference to the spirit of prayer, profound assimilation of the doctrine of the faith, the capacity for authentic fraternity and the charism of celibacy" (JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §66).

¹⁷⁵ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Directives on the Preparation of Educators in Seminaries*, §11; "Seminarians and young people in formation should be able to learn more from your life than from your words; to be able to learn docility from your obedience, industriousness from your dedication, generosity with the poor from your sobriety and availability, fatherhood from your chaste and non-possessive affection. We are consecrated to serve the People of God, to care for the wounds of

Where circumstances require it, in order to foster integration between the formative dimensions, one of the trainers may be assigned to coordinate one of the dimensions (human, intellectual, and pastoral)¹⁷⁶.

- Seminary Rector: "The Rector is a presbyter distinguished by prudence, wisdom and balance, highly competent, who coordinates educational action in the government of the Seminary. With fraternal charity, he will establish with other educators a profound and loyal collaboration; he is the legal representative of the Seminary, both in ecclesiastical and civil matters. The Rector, in communion with the formator in charge of each stage and with the Spiritual Director, shall endeavor to offer the means necessary for vocational discernment and maturation."¹⁷⁷
- Vice-rectors and animators: it is good for the Rector to be assisted by one or more assistants, also called animators or Vice-rectors. They are co-responsible with him for related to the external forum, assist him in the care of certain aspects of seminary life, to which they are specifically deputed, and deputize for him in case of absence. For this reason it is appropriate that they be chosen from among trained presbyters with some ministerial experience. They are particularly responsible for: mediating the educational proposal in the concrete situation, accompanying the seminarians in the personalization of the formative project; promoting in the seminarians the growth of the capacity for relationships, service and a sense of community.
- The Spiritual Director: "The Bishop will take care to choose competent and experienced presbyters for spiritual direction, which is one of the privileged means of accompanying each seminarian in the discernment of his vocation. The Director, or spiritual father, must be a true teacher of interior life and prayer, who helps the seminarian to accept the divine call and to mature a free and generous response. On him "rests the responsibility for the spiritual journey of the seminarians in the internal forum and for the conduct and coordination of the various pious exercises and liturgical life of the seminary." In seminaries where there is more than one spiritual director, one of them will be the "coordinator of the spiritual dimension." He or she moderates the liturgical life; coordinates the activity of the other Spiritual Directors and of any external confessors; predisposes the program of annual spiritual exercises and monthly retreats, thus

all, beginning with the poorest" (FRANCIS, Address to the members of the editorial board of the theological magazine "La Scuola Cattolica," June 17, 2022); ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Pre-Sbyters in the Italian Church*, §68.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERUS, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §137.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, §134.

such as the celebrations of the liturgical year, and, together with the Rector, fosters the ongoing formation of spiritual directors."¹⁷⁸.

- The Bursar and the Council for Economic Affairs¹⁷⁹: for administrative affairs, the Rector is to be assisted by the Bursar and the Council for Economic Affairs or at least two counselors, reporting, in accordance with the Law, to the competent diocesan supervisory bodies or, in the case of interdiocesan or regional seminaries, to the Supervisory Commission provided for in the statutes of each institution.

It is important that all seminary trainers take care of their permanent formation for educational service either through shared moments within the team or by participating in specific courses dedicated to them.

5.5. Synodal accompaniment of initial formation

113. The Synodal Way of the Churches in Italy calls for broadening the sharing of the formation responsibility of candidates for ordained ministry by involving, in relation to the different territorial realities, the various components of the ecclesial community: families, consecrated men and women, parish communities and lay aggregations. The community of formators is invited to think creatively and boldly about the form of collaboration possible to enhance every useful contribution to the formation mission.

In particular consider significant contribution that female charisma and sensitivity can make to the formation of seminarians¹⁸⁰.

114. Alongside the community of trainers, who have the primary responsibility training, there are other figures who collaborate in various capacities and according to different competencies in the one educational work.

5.6. Teachers

115. The contribution of teachers has great significance in the development of the presbyteral personality¹⁸¹. Their task of teaching must be considered an authentic ecclesial ministry. Indeed philosophical-theological teaching deeply affects the mentality and sensibility of seminarians and constitutes the nourishment of their spiritual life and pastoral outlook; therefore, it must be coordinated with the

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, §136.

¹⁷⁹ "The Bursar, in dealing with administrative matters, plays a true educational role within the seminary community. Let him be aware of the impact that living environments can have on the seminarian in formation and of the value represented by an honest and evangelical use material goods, with a view to education of seminarians in the spirit of priestly poverty" (*Ibid.*, §138).

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, §151.

¹⁸¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §67.

global formation. Therefore, as true educators, "let them seek to guide seminarians toward that unity of knowledge which finds its fulfillment in Christ the way, the truth and the life."¹⁸² Let them study stable forms of collaboration between academic authorities, professors of theological faculties and seminary educators¹⁸³.

5.7. Specialists

116. "Various specialists may be called upon to offer their contribution, for example, in the medical, pedagogical, artistic, ecological, administrative fields and in the use of the media. In the formation process to the presbyterate, presence and contribution of specialists in certain disciplines proves useful because of their professional qualities and because of the support they can offer when particular situations require it. In selecting specialists, in addition to their human qualities and specific expertise, their profile as believers should be taken into account."¹⁸⁴

5.8. Experts in psychological science

117. As part of the human formation of seminarians, the intervention of experts in psychological sciences is useful. Such intervention is not aimed directly at the discernment of vocation, which is the task of the seminary formators, but at the identification and growth of those aspects of the self, of one's way of feeling, thinking, and behaving that will enable the candidate to welcome vocation in fullness and freedom. To the extent that they are requested, they can collaborate with the educational team in the planning and verification of community educational interventions, illustrate to the community or to specific groups pedagogical themes of particular relevance, especially in the relational and affective-sexual amity.

5.9. The role of pastors and pastoral leaders

118. Let parish priests and other leaders who assist seminary educators in the pastoral apprenticeship of seminarians remember that they are entrusted with subjects still impregnated in the initial phase of formation. Let them therefore not overload them with activities, but help them to enter into the ordinary life of the communities taking care above all to condition their own pastoral experience and to offer them a limpid presbyteral witness¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸² CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §142

¹⁸³ Cf. ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church*, §72.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Presbyteral Vocation*, §145-146.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, §124.

5.10. The Training Project

119. The articulation and complexity of formation for the presbyterate require that each seminary have its own Formation Project approved by the diocesan bishop or, if it is an interdiocesan or regional seminary, by the bishops concerned¹⁸⁶.

It must concretely determine the overall educational dynamic, specify the roles and tasks of the subjects involved in formation, the educational dimensions with the final objectives and tools, the itinerary marked by stages with the intermediate objectives, the specific interventions and their coordination, and the criteria for discernment. In this way, the different elements can be declined in a unified way and in a dynamic perspective, and all the subjects involved will be facilitated to understand their part, the orderly cooperation, the effective convergence of contributions¹⁸⁷.

The Formation Project must also graft the general orientations contained in this document into the concreteness of each Seminary, enhancing its traditions and customs.

It is convenient for the Formative Project to be introduced with a period of experimentation and for it to be updated periodically. It will be the task of the educators to grasp the needs of the community as they gradually emerge and respond to them with appropriate adjustments.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §61; EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS, *Lines common for the life of our seminaries*, §32-38.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR THE CLERUS, *Common Guidelines for the Life of our Seminaries*, §32.

APPENDIX I

General decree admission to seminary Of candidates from other seminaries or religious families (March 27, 1999)

In compliance with Instruction No. 157/96, issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education March 8, 1996, and by virtue of the special mandate for the issuance of a "General Decree" given to the Episcopal Conferences by the same Congregation, the Episcopal Commission for Juridical Problems, upon the mandate of the Presidency of the C.E.I., after consultation with the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy, had prepared a text of the "General Decree" containing provisions for the admission to the seminary of candidates who had left or resigned from other seminaries, Institutes of Consecrated Life or Societies of Apostolic Life.

The text was approved by the Permanent Episcopal Council at its March 16-19, 1998 session. Subsequently, submitted to the consideration of the XLIV General Assembly (Rome, May 18-22, 1998), although it received the substantial approval of the bishops, it did not receive a favorable vote with the prescribed majority. As a result, on the basis of the observations and suggestions that emerged from the discussion in the Assembly, certain changes were made that improved the text, enabling application by the subsequent XLV General Assembly in Collevalenza (November 9-12, 1998).

WHEREAS.

* admission to the seminary of alumni who have left or resigned from another seminary or from houses of formation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life requires specific attention and adequate vocational discernment especially because of current social cultural and ecclesial conditions;

* the responsibility for admission primarily involves the receiving diocesan bishop, but requires the loyal cooperation of the student's own bishop who is released

or resigned, or of the leaders of the institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life of origin;

* current regulations require adequate explication to make them suitable for the peculiarities of the cases found;

VIEWED

* No. 39 of the *Ratio institutionis sacerdotalis* of the Congregation for Catholic Education of March 19, 1985;

* No. 87 of the normative document of the C.E.I. The Formation of Priests in the Italian Church of May 15, 1980; the Instruction of the Congregation Catholic Education to the Bishops' Conferences about the admission to the seminary of candidates providing from other seminaries or religious families of March 8, 1996; nn. 7 and 8 of the Circular Letter about the Scrutiny of the Suitability of Candidates from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to Diocesan Bishops and Other Ordinaries Who Have the Power to Admit to Holy Orders of November 10, 1997; the Pope's Message to the Major Penitentiary Card. Baum of March 20, 1998 (No. 5); can. 241 of the Code of Canon Law;

IN STRENGTH

of the special mandate granted by the Holy See in Instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education dated March 8, 1996, Prot. No. 157196;

IN ACCORDANCE

Of can. 455, 91 of the Code of Canon Law.

DELIBERATION

Art. 1

For the admission to Italian major seminaries of pupils, including foreigners, who have left or resigned from another seminary or from houses of formation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the following provisions are to be observed:

1. - A student who has voluntarily left or resigned from a seminary or a house of formation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life must pre-submit a written and reasoned request to the diocesan bishop of the seminary to be admitted, through the rector of that seminary; in the case of

interdiocesan or regional seminaries, the application is submitted to the bishop of the diocese in which the candidate intends to be incardinated. In this application, the applicant shall set forth the reasons for his abandonment or resignation and shall also declare that his spiritual director, explicitly questioned and requested, has not discouraged him from persisting in his intention to enter holy orders.

2. - If Rector, upon receipt of the application, requests on behalf of the Bishop - who has the grave obligation to investigate about the causes of the abandonment or resignation - a written statement from the Rector of the Seminary or the person in charge of formation of the institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life of origin, in which the candidate's curriculum must be described; in particular, the causes that led to the abandonment or resignation of the candidate must be fully and truthfully indicated.

3. - If Rector acquires direct knowledge of the person concerned through interviews and meetings prolonged in time, through which he also verifies the content of the information received; he also requests the reasoned opinion of the candidate's pastor, or of a priest who actually knows him and has followed his ecclesial journey. As a rule, the rector also has interviews with the rector or the person in charge of formation of the institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life of origin.

4. - For a better evaluation of the case, especially if reasons inherent in the personality structure are indicated (e.g., presence of hereditary defects, problems concerned with affective, human maturity, psychic and sexual abnormalities, repeated recourse to psychological analysis or therapy, ideological and doctrinal divergences, etc.), it is advisable to seek the advice of an expert witness for the examination and evaluation of documentation and for possible further verification on the subject.

5. - It is appropriate to require an adequate trial period of the candidate under the guidance of a priest, chosen by the rector in consultation with the bishop, to ascertain the subject's readiness for dialogue and ability to accommodate the observations received. Of this experience the priest in charge shall submit a written report. During the probationary period, the candidate must also be followed by a Spiritual Director, approved by the Bishop.

6. - Before a decision is reached, the Bishop disposed to receive the petitioner shall inform the proper Bishop of the petitioner and request his opinion. If the applicant is a student who has left or discharged from a house of formation of an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, the Bishop disposed to receive shall inform the major superior of the institute or society and request his opinion. If a candidate accepted into an institute of life is presented diaconal or presbyteral ordination

consecrated or in a society of apostolic life against the advice of the bishop, the latter must not promote to ordination (cf. can. 1052, 3 3).

7. - Admission is decided by the Bishop, in agreement with the Rector of the Seminary, who ordinarily asks the opinion of the other educators about the elements that emerged from the preliminary investigation. The decision admission, drawn up in writing by the Rector or - in his absence - by a priest delegated by the Bishop and duly motivated, is co-municated to the person concerned, to the Rector of the Seminary of origin, to the applicant's own Bishop or to the Major Superior of the Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life. The current provisions regarding the documentation to be acquired and kept in the personal file of candidates for Holy Orders remain in effect (cf. can. 241, §§ 1-2 and Annex No. I of the above-mentioned Circular Letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments).

8. - If secrecy, to which the confessor and spiritual director are bound, does not exempt them from the very serious obligation to dissuade, with all energy, from continuing toward the priesthood those candidates who are not in possession of the necessary virtues, especially the chastity indispensable celibate commitment, or who lack the necessary psychological equilibrium or do not manifest sufficient maturity of judgment.

9. - If the candidate's application is not granted, the decision is communicated to the candidate in writing and is not subject to appeal.

10. - Applications cannot be considered from co-residents who, after the age of 18, for a second time have left the Seminary or the Institute, or have been dismissed from it.

11. - Rectors of seminaries and those in charge of formation houses of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are obliged in good conscience to provide the requested information, sticking to the data in their possession.

12. - Without prejudice in any case to the respect of the internal forum, requests for information and information released about candidates are covered by due confidentiality consistent with the right to good reputation and the protection personal intimacy (cf. can. 220) without, however, entitling those responsible to conceal or disguise the true state of affairs with regard to what may be communicated in the external forum.

Art. 2

The discipline established by these norms is also applied, with appropriate adjustments, for admission to Minor Seminaries.

Art. 3

The present dispositions, binding on diocesan, interdiocesan and regional seminaries, are communicated to the major superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in order to foster, on a delicate matter of common interest, a uniform discipline in the discernment of candidates for ordained ministry, bearing in mind also the peculiarities proper to the presbyteral ministry to be exercised in the particular Churches with respect to that carried out in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

APPENDIX II

Lay Youth Convention (18-35 years old)

In missionary service training experience

H.E. Msgr. _____

Bishop of the Diocese of _____

and H.E. Msgr. _____

Bishop of the Diocese of _____ in the State of _____

united in the bond of ecclesial communion, in conformity with the principles and criteria proposed by the Magisterium of the Church, in accordance with canons 211, 225 and 784 of the Code of Canon Law, hereby establish a relationship of cooperation and exchange between their respective Churches, through the sending in experience of formation and missionary service of the young

First name _____ last name _____

born in _____ on _____

tax code _____ e-mail _____

with Italian citizenship ☐

married ☐ with _____ born _____ on _____

NO ☐ tax code _____

with children YES ☐ name _____ born _____

on _____ NO ☐ tax code _____

The **Referral Body** of the person sent _____,

The Envoy **Submission Entity** is: ☐ Diocesan Mission Center

☐ FOCSIV

Art. 1

MISSIONARY SERVICE

The sending bishop, having seen the letter of the receiving bishop (**Attachment 2**), having seen the request of the submitting agency (**Attachment 3**), and having ascertained the responsibility of the interested party (**Attachment 4**), sends him/her to the sister church mentioned above. The experience of formation and missionary service will mature in the envoy the duty and the right to commit himself/herself so that the divine proclamation salvation may be implemented in the place of mission (cf. cann. 211 and 225)

The envoy has arranged to acquire the appropriate missionary training at the United Center for Missionary Training (Missio Foundation - CUM section), as shown in the documentation attached to the pre-sent *Convention* (**Annex 5**).

The Bishop of the receiving Church, in accordance with what has been agreed upon with the Bishop of the sending Church, recognizes to the envoy the missionary service in detail agreed upon with the Referring Body (**allegated 1**) and remains guarantor of the spiritual and material life of the envoy during the period of stay in his or her diocese.

This *Convention* is drawn up in five copies, destined respectively for the Curia of the Church of origin, the Curia of the Church of destination, the envoy, his or her Referral Body, and the National Office for Missionary Cooperation among Churches.

Art. 2

MODE OF SERVICE

The envoy commits himself or herself to carry out the service entrusted to him or her in accordance with what has been agreed upon by the Bishop who gave him or her the mandate and by the relevant Organization with the Bishop who welcomes him or her, and to maintain ties with the Church of origin, to which he or she offers the fruits of his or her peculiar experience.

The envoy also makes himself or herself available for any other services, related to the agreed upon service, other than those indicated above as will be agreed upon between the receiving Bishop and his or her Referral Body.

Art. 3

ACCOMPANIMENT

The diocese and the community of origin of the envoy commit themselves to so- stend the missionary initiative spiritually and materially with op- portant initiatives; to nurture constant relationships; to educate the faithful to pray and to make gestures of solidarity toward the missionary initiative and toward those engaged in missionary activity, especially through the Diocesan Mission Center.

The Referral Body accompanies the in- viate with special care, promoting solidarity and support initiatives toward his or her service that enable him or her to continue feel an expression a community.

With regard to the project in which the envoy is placed, the Re- fermenting Body periodically checks its progress by cooperating in the supe- ration of any difficulties that may arise.

With regard to the envoy's training experience, the Referral Body provides the young missionary with a "Tutor," qualified through a specific Course offered by the United Center for Missionary Training (Missio Foundation - CUM section).

The Tutor's task is to provide the envoy with specific training; to accompany him/her throughout the experience through frequent contacts and verifications; and finally, he/she will accompany the return and the reworking of the lived experience.

The Bishop of the sending Church follows with special solicitude the in- viate, with whom he remains in periodic contact either personally or through the director of the Diocesan Mission Center, and keeps him/her in- formed on the life of his/her Church and country.

The Referring Body, within the Missionary Cooperation project in which the youth envoy is placed, appoints an on-site "Ac- companion" (**Annex 1**).

The Accompanist is responsible for welcoming the envoy upon arrival in the mission country, helping him/her both to understand the social reality,

cultural and ecclesial environment in which it fits, both to find the most appropriate ways to carry out the service entrusted to it.

Art. 4

DURATION OF SERVICE

The envoy shall serve for one continuous year from the date fixed in this *Convention*.

The experience of formation and missionary service regulated by this *Convention* is not repeatable in this form. This does not exclude, later, the possibility of further experiences of Missionary Cooperation between Churches, regulated by other Convention modalities provided by the Italian Bishops' Conference itself.

Art. 5

COVERAGE OF EXPENSES

The envoy carries out his mandate free of charge.

The referring body provides for the costs of entry visa
In the country of mission.

The Reference Body shall provide for the expenses for the round-trip travel at the beginning and end of the service, noting that the Italian Bishops' Conference, upon presentation of the documentation proving the travel expenses, shall provide the Reference Body with the corresponding contribution to cover the cost of the travel ticket.

The Referring Entity shall provide the envoy with room and board on the mission, during the term of this Agreement. In the presence of special needs, upon agreement with the Tutor and Accompany, it also provides for any unbudgeted expenses without specific financial coverage.

Any costs of the Tutor and Companion service are borne by the Referring Body.

Art. 6

HEALTH INSURANCE

Should the envoy incur on his or her own account costs for illness at places of service, as well as expenses in regard to any hospitalization for

surgical operations or for medical treatment or out-of-hospital ambulatory services, the envoy may avail himself or herself of the treatment provided for in the health insurance policy stipulated by the CEI through and according to the instructions of the National Office for Missionary Cooperation among the Churches.

Art. 7

RETURN TO THE DIOCESE OF ORIGIN

The envoy returns to the home diocese at the expiration of this *Convention*.

The envoy is reintegrated into his or her home church, alert to grasp and understand new things, willing to share the richness of lived experience.

The sending bishop and the director of the Diocesan Mission Center, considering the uniqueness of the envoy's service to another church, welcome his or her return to the diocese as an opportunity for ecclesial and spiritual enrichment and appropriately value his or her experiences.

Art. 8

EARLY RETURN

The Bishop of the sending Church, after hearing the Bishop of the receiving Church, for just cause, may recall the envoy, terminating this *Convention* in anticipo.

The Bishop of the receiving Church, after hearing the Bishop of sending Church, for just cause, may request the early termination of the pre-hearing *Convention*.

This *Convention* shall run _____ to _____

The bishop of the sending church _____

Place Date _____

The bishop of the welcoming church _____

Place Date _____

The Tutor appointed by the Referring Body is:

Qualification Code _____

The envoy _____

☐ *I declare that I have received the information about the processing of my personal data*

Location Date _____

Attachments:

Statement from the person in charge of the **referral body with**: submission of the envoy

Indication of the agreed service in the mission with appointment of the "Accompanion."

Letter from the Bishop accepting.

Institution's request for submission

Envoy's statement

Documentation of participation in the missionary training course at CUM.

Copy of social security number, ID, privacy form for Health Insurance.