

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition



GROWTH IN HOLINESS IS THE GOAL

Scripture Reflection: Matthew 4:18-22

Formation for the priesthood begins with a focus on the seminarian's relationship with Jesus Christ. After becoming a disciple of Christ at his Baptism, formation allows a man to grow as a disciple who is discerning and preparing for ordained ministry. The gradual development of the future priest has holiness as its goal, to become configured to Christ, Head and Shepherd, Servant and Spouse.

While the 5th edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* spoke of college seminary, pre-theology, and major seminary, the 6th edition, following the *Ratio*, speaks of stages. There are four stages of initial formation: Propaedeutic, Discipleship, Configuration, and Vocational Synthesis.

Since formation is a lifelong journey, it is important to lay a solid foundation for this journey in the **Propaedeutic Stage**, especially in the human and spiritual dimensions. Thus "the Propaedeutic Stage is an indispensable phase of formation with its own specific character" (*Ratio Fundamentalis*, no. 59) This stage allows the seminarian to lay a foundation for a new way of life through prayer, study, fraternity, and appropriate docility to formation.

In the **Discipleship Stage**, which must not last less than two years, there is a systematic and rigorous formation that has at its core the goal of growing in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the life of meditation, contemplation, philosophical study, and the training of one's character in Christian virtue.

KEY WORDS

Propaedeutic Stage

Discipleship Stage

Configuration Stage

Vocational Synthesis Stage

In the **Configuration Stage**, the seminarian models his life on the self-donation of Jesus Christ, Shepherd and Servant, as he prepares more immediately for Holy Orders. "This configuration demands that the seminarian enter profoundly into the contemplation of the person of Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, sent as Shepherd of the People of God. It will make the relationship with Christ more intimate and personal and, at the same time, will lead to an awareness and an assumption of priestly identity" (*Ratio Fundamentalis*, no. 88). Reception of Candidacy, and conferral of the ministries of lector and acolyte occurs during this stage, marking the progressive deepening of this self-configuration to Christ both liturgically and in catechesis, evangelization, and active service to the poor.

The **Vocational Synthesis Stage** is the period of formation between diaconal and priestly ordinations. Since formal seminary formation has been completed, it is intended primarily as a time not of evaluation, but of integration and transition into one's diocese or ecclesiastical entity in which the deacon is preparing to serve. This stage is a gradual realization of the cleric's responsibility for the care of souls while he resides full-time in a pastoral setting.

A more detailed description of each stage of formation will be provided in subsequent bulletins, beginning with the Propaedeutic Stage. It is hoped that these bulletins will serve as guides for bishops, major superiors, seminary rectors, vocation directors, and formators to reflect upon on how the dimensions of formation are lived within their specific seminary, (arch)diocese, and institute of consecrated or apostolic life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What plans are currently in place for the propaedeutic stage within your (arch)diocese, seminary, or religious community?
2. How will the shift from academic language (i.e., college seminary, pre-theology, major seminary) to "stages" impact how you discuss the formation program with one another and with others?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happened to "Pre-Theology?"

Men enter the discipleship stage at varying levels of life, work, and educational experience. In the past, intensive philosophy programs for more mature men have been referred to as "pre-theology programs."

The term pre-theology, with its inference of academic status, is discouraged because it

can obscure the integral nature of formation in the discipleship stage. Nevertheless, these men are a distinctive set of seminarians who come to initial formation with more extensive experiences on many levels and formation programs should take these unique circumstances into account.