

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ADMISSION AND CONTINUING EVALUATION OF SEMINARIANS

#### A. CANDIDATES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

506. "The time has come to speak courageously about priestly life as a priceless gift and a splendid and privileged form of Christian living. Educators, and priests in particular, should not be afraid to set forth explicitly and forcefully the priestly vocation as a real possibility for those young people who demonstrate the necessary gifts and talents."<sup>199</sup>

507. "The first responsibility for the pastoral work of promoting priestly vocations lies with the bishop, who is called to be the first to exercise this responsibility even though he can and must call upon many others to cooperate with him."<sup>200</sup> The same is true of religious ordinaries in regard to religious institutes and societies. Such responsibilities pertain to the promotion of vocations, the supervision of candidates in seminary formation, and, finally, the call to sacred orders. The diocese or religious institute or society is also closely involved in pastoral internships and responsible in a particular way for deacon internships and the summer assignments of seminarians.

#### The Vocation Director

508. Normally in a diocese or religious institute or society, such duties are delegated in whole or part to a vocation director or others who act in the name of the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary and in harmony with their directives. Duties of vocation directors or teams may differ from diocese to diocese. In all cases, sensitivity on the part of vocation personnel to the recruitment of candidates from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds is important.

509. The vocation director or members of the vocation team may act as the bishop's or religious ordinary's liaison to the seminary. Mutual respect and collaboration should mark the relation of vocation and seminary personnel. Each possesses autonomy; yet cooperation, mutual knowledge, and trust are vital for the good of candidates and the benefit of the Church. Such collaboration is especially important in regard to the recommendation of candidates for admission and their

continuing evaluation. Visitations to the seminary on the part of the bishop, religious ordinary, and vocation personnel should be encouraged. Often it may be helpful for seminary faculty to visit the local dioceses and religious communities they serve.

## **B. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

510. Given the age and diverse background of many candidates, the admission procedure is crucial, indeed central, to every dimension of priestly formation. In regard to personality and disposition, candidates admitted are very similar to the seminarians who only a few years later will be recommended for sacred orders. In cases in which the admission committee has reservations, caution should be the watchword and the benefit of the doubt given to the Church. It is also important for the admission procedure carefully to weigh the impact the admission of each individual candidate will have on the seminary community.

511. Seminaries should have clear written statements of admission and continuing evaluation policies, which regularly are reviewed and updated. The policies should outline behavioral criteria which place the burden of qualification for admission to the seminary and advancement to the priesthood on candidates.

512. Applicants must give evidence of an overall personal balance, moral character, and proper motivation. This includes the requisite human, moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and psychological qualities for priestly ministry.<sup>201</sup>

513. Students applying to the seminary should undergo a thorough screening process. Personal interviews with the applicants, evaluations from their pastors and teachers, academic records, and standardized test scores are all components of an effective admission program and must be weighed with a judgment of the applicants' motivation. Those who do not fulfill these entrance requirements should not be admitted.

514. Applicants from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds actively should be encouraged. Academic requirements should not be lessened, but necessary adaptations may be made, to enable admission into the regular courses of study. Supplementary assistance should be available when necessary, especially where English is a second language.

515. Theologates should require a bachelor's degree or its equivalent from an accredited institution. Sound education in philosophy will require 24 semester credit hours.<sup>202</sup> A minimum of 12 semester credit hours are required in appropriate courses of undergraduate theology. The content of such courses is outlined in paragraphs 170-171.

516. The admission process should include a thorough physical examination in order to ensure that applicants possess the good health necessary for seminary training and priestly ministry.

517. Seminary administrators should consider psychological assessment an integral part of the admission procedures. Due care should be observed in correctly interpreting the results of psychological testing in light of the racial or ethnic background of applicants.

518. Seminaries should draw up guidelines for psychologists and other admission personnel describing objectively those traits and attitudes which give hope of a true vocation as well as those characteristics which indicate that a priestly vocation is not present. Seminaries should ensure that those employed in the psychological evaluation of seminarians are well versed in and supportive of the Church's expectations of candidates for the priesthood, especially in regard to celibacy.

519. In the admission procedure, the life experiences candidates bring to the seminary should be openly and forthrightly discussed. The seminarians' level of insight and motivation to address areas such as interpersonal relations and psychosexual development are important criteria for admission. Seminaries may have to delay admission of some candidates until these personal issues are better identified or resolved.

520. Attention should be given to the family background of all applicants. Those from particularly dysfunctional families require careful evaluation before admission. At times, the seminary may be able to help seminarians through counseling or other programs. Students' willingness to continue to address family and personal issues should be determined prior to admission. However, in those instances when long-term therapeutic intervention may be needed, it should be accomplished before candidates enter a program of priestly formation. If these issues are serious, the candidates' application may have to be refused.

521. In regard to results of psychological testing and other confidential materials, the seminary should observe closely all legal requirements and utilize appropriate release forms.<sup>203</sup> Throughout the admission process, the candidates' rights to privacy should be respected and the careful management of confidential materials observed.

522. A number of candidates at the time of their initial application to the seminary are older than in the past. Many of these applicants have completed college and often some years of work in areas other than theological education or pastoral ministry. Bringing a rich and varied background to the seminary, they represent an asset to the seminary program and to the community. A number have had conversion experiences but lack strong institutional and sacramental consciousness and are uninitiated into Catholic tradition and practice. At times, their own complex backgrounds can bring complicated personal and professional situations. While screening procedures should be sensitive to their situation, they must be no less rigorous, thorough, or comprehensive.

523. Diocesan bishops, religious ordinaries, vocation directors, and seminaries should recognize that additional time will be necessary to prepare candidates without previous seminary formation for entrance into the theologate. A growing number of United States seminarians are not native born and have had prior education in other countries. It is essential that they develop the ability to preach, write adequately, and communicate easily in English.

524. If a person has no previous preparation in a formation program, the pre-theology program will normally extend over a two-year period. In determining how this standard applies in individual cases, the seminary should examine carefully the background of individual candidates. Because seminarians come from a variety of academic, cultural, personal, and spiritual situations and have different abilities, admission to a pre-theology program must be flexibly adapted to the needs of students. Such preparatory programs should take into consideration both the needs of these applicants and the special gifts they bring to the formation process because of their previous education and experience.

525. If applicants have been in a seminary or formation program before, dioceses, religious institutes or societies, and seminaries have a

serious obligation to consult all previous institutions about the past record of candidates. If such records indicate difficulties, the institution should prudently weigh admission, making sure that problems have been overcome and positive growth has taken place. In cases of doubt, caution should be observed.

526. An especially careful investigation must be made before accepting seminary students who have been dismissed or who seek transfer from another seminary. It is required that the consultation take place between the administrations of both seminaries with the necessary documentation about the applicants' previous records being provided. This must be done in every instance. Similar criteria must be applied to applicants who have been in religious formation programs and who are now applying to a diocesan seminary or vice versa.

527. Applicants for the priesthood whose marriages have been annulled should be screened carefully. While these men may have the canonical freedom to pursue the priesthood, it is important to ascertain if and how previous obstacles to a marriage commitment would affect their viability as candidates for the priesthood. While such application should be carefully weighed on a case-by-case basis, the presumption normally is against acceptance.

528. Especially careful screening should also be given to applicants who are recent converts to the Catholic faith. It is advisable that at least two or three years pass between their entry into the Church and their acceptance into a seminary program. A suitable period of time should pass before entrance to the seminary in cases of Catholics in whom a sudden conversion experience seems to precipitate a priestly vocation. Likewise, those who return to the practice of the faith after an extended period should not enter the seminary directly.

### **C. CONTINUING EVALUATION OF SEMINARIANS**

529. Because education and growth are gradual processes, the continuing evaluation of students is necessary. Seminarians profit most from a system of periodic evaluation in which they receive clear and accurate information about their behavior and attitudes so that they can change and correct what is inappropriate and develop in those areas in which they may be weak. Such evaluation is primarily the responsibility of the seminary faculty. The faculty should also involve the seminarians

themselves, their various supervisors, and, either directly or indirectly, religious and lay co-workers and those to whom the students have ministered.

530. The substance of the periodic review by the faculty should be communicated to each student in a constructive way. The seminary should have a written statement of the criteria used in evaluating students, proposing their continuance in the seminary, and recommending their promotion to the priesthood. Personality testing and counseling may be employed if warranted.

531. The attitude with which evaluation is approached is vital to its effectiveness. Both faculty and students should approach the process in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence, relating to each other in healthy, positive ways.

532. Student self-evaluation can be a valuable instrument. Students should begin such evaluations with a candid examination of themselves in terms of concrete behaviors, indicating their professional and academic competence, strengths and weaknesses, and areas of needed growth in spiritual and moral practice. It is the responsibility of the seminarian to show positive qualities that recommend his continuance. This evaluation is done best in cooperation with a faculty adviser.

533. The advantages of peer evaluation may be explored. Cooperation in peer appraisal affords a genuine opportunity for mutual responsibility. Seminarians should be reminded of their shared responsibility toward each other and toward the common good of the Church.

534. The seminary should require an evaluation of seminarians' summer activities from the appropriate supervisor. This report should evaluate their pastoral activities and their fidelity to spiritual exercises.

535. The diocesan bishop or religious ordinary expects the objective and critical judgment of the seminary rector and faculty in coming to his decision to call seminarians to orders. A recommendation to the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary should reflect a clear consensus of those who have been involved with the seminarians' training and formation. Self-evaluation and peer evaluation may complement but never substitute for this judgment. Those responsible should regard the matter of evaluation as their most important task. In all evaluative

processes, they should keep clearly in mind the goal of seminary formation, namely ordination to the priesthood for a ministry to the people of God.

536. The evaluative process culminates in a yearly written statement to the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary, which provides a clear estimation of the students' human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral progress, based on his behaviors, attitudes, academic performance, and pastoral reports. The evaluation also should include an estimation of his capacity to lead a chaste, celibate life. Each year when a report is given to the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary, the full vote of the faculty should be supplied; that is, the number of affirmative and negative votes. If there are abstentions, they should be explained.

537. The evaluation should state whether or not the candidates possess sufficient intelligence, personal maturity, interpersonal skills, common sense, moral character, and aptitude for ministry to continue in the seminary program and finally to be ordained to the priesthood. Furthermore, there should be accountability in the external forum for seminarians' participation in spiritual exercises of the seminary and their growth as men of faith. Seminarians should be accountable for simplicity of life, stewardship of resources, and mature respect for church authority. Within the parameters of the external forum, habits of prayer and personal piety are also areas of accountability.

538. Seminarians who lack the positive qualities for continuing in the seminary should not nourish false hopes and illusions with resultant damage either to themselves, to fellow seminarians, or to the Church. If seminarians do not have the qualities that will allow them to work as priests in a harmonious and effective way, it is only just to individual seminarians and to the Church to communicate this to them as early as possible and in a constructive manner. In cooperation with the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary, they should be advised to leave the seminary.

539. In cases where a negative evaluation seems to indicate the termination of seminary studies or a refusal of recommendation for ordination, a fair hearing should be given to students' assessments of themselves and to those who can speak on their behalf.

540. In cases of doubt about the readiness of some students for advancement to orders or about their progress in achieving maturity, consideration can be given by the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary to a period of probation away from the seminary. The time period involved should be specified, not open-ended. Likewise, appropriate supervision is necessary so that a leave of absence or deferral of orders can bring about needed growth and provide the information on which to base a judgment. In such situations, the burden of proof of readiness for orders rests with the seminarian, and doubt is resolved in favor of the Church.

541. Houses of formation should maintain appropriate collaborative relationships with the administration and faculty of union-model theologates and other study centers in order to aid the evaluation of their candidates.

#### **D. THE CALL TO ORDERS**

542. It is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary to make the final judgment on a student's fitness for admission to candidacy, institution in the ministries, and promotion to sacred orders.

543. In accordance with the norms of the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the ordinary will look for these qualities in candidates for sacred orders.

544. Candidates should possess a sense of the ministerial priesthood that is ecclesial — a vocation in the Church — as manifested by:

- Fidelity to the Word of God and to the teaching of the magisterium, combined with a deep love for the Church;
- Commitment to a life of personal prayer and the ability to assist others in their spiritual growth;
- Abiding love for the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance;
- Acceptance of a lifelong commitment to chaste celibacy, obedience, and simplicity of life;
- Sensitivity to the ecumenical dimension of the Church's mission;



- An apostolic heart and zeal for service as manifested by:
  - Ability to work in a multicultural setting with people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds;
  - Commitment to justice, peace, and human life as well as to the universal mission of the Church;
  - Pastoral skill and sensitivity in proclaiming God's Word and leading divine worship.

545. Candidates should show evidence of having interiorized their seminary formation. Growth in self-awareness and sound personal identity are the hallmarks of a healthy personality, which establishes a secure basis for the spiritual life. Such growth may be demonstrated by:

- Sound prudential judgment;
- Capacity for courageous and decisive leadership;
- Ability to establish and maintain wholesome friendships and to deal with intimacy;
- Ability to work in a collaborative, professional manner with men and women, foregoing personal preference in the interests of cooperative effort for the common good.<sup>204</sup>

546. With regard to the rite of admission to candidacy and the institution in the ministries of reader and acolyte, the directives of the apostolic letters *Ad Pascendum* and *Ministeria Quaedam*, the *Code of Canon Law*, the rites of installation, and the *Ratio Fundamentalis* are to be followed, as well as the more specific directives of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

547. Seminarians must be at least 20 years of age and have begun their theological studies before applying for the rite of admission to candidacy to sacred orders.<sup>205</sup>

548. Although the ministries are to be received by candidates for the priesthood, they are no longer seen as steps toward ordination. No one is to be instituted in the ministries of reader or acolyte without a period of preparation in all aspects of the respective ministry. The interval between the ministry of acolyte and diaconate is to be observed.<sup>206</sup>