

2. Formation at SPS

2.0 The Formator

The Formator is a priest appointed to the Seminary faculty to act as leader of the men in his group. He is involved in the life of the students, living among them and sharing aspects of their daily life, formally and informally. It is he who takes chief responsibility for the leadership of the group while encouraging members to exercise responsibility for the various aspects of group life. He gathers the group in prayer, leading the Eucharist, but delegates preparation for these celebrations. He acts as a model for the priestly and Christian life. He supports and encourages the work and life of the group, while enabling the members to develop their own gifts and talents for leadership. He acts as a liaison with the rector and other members of the faculty and the administration.

In short, the roles of the Formator can be summarized as follows:

1. mentor – the Formator is a servant-leader who acts as an enabler, an encourager, and a model for Christian and priestly life through a ministry of presence; he acts for the group as a whole (formation sessions, preaching at group Masses, etc.) and for the members as individuals (monthly meetings, presenting the students for Discernment, etc.);
2. liaison with the rector, other faculty and the administration – this advisory role of the Formator helps to promote the communal life in the Seminary; he acts as an agent of the Seminary, the bishop and the Church.

2.1 The Role of the Human Formation Counsellor

I Introduction

The recommendation that seminaries appoint a human formation counsellor is outlined in the CCCB document *From Pain to Hope* (1992). This person is ordinarily a member of the formation team, responsible for coordinating those aspects of the Seminary program which deal with human growth and development and provides individual counselling to those seminarians who require assistance in these areas. (The term “human formation” is used here in the specific sense in which it is used in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*; that is, as that area of formation which deals with one’s basic physical, psychological and social development. It is understood that human development impacts on the other three areas of formation [intellectual, spiritual and pastoral] outlined in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and that these somewhat arbitrary divisions are simply an attempt to help us understand, develop and integrate the myriad parts of the self which one brings to a vocation of ministry in the Church.)

II Qualifications

The human formation counsellor may be male or female and should possess a knowledge of the constitutive elements of healthy human development as well as the ability to recognize signs of unhealthy development. He or she should be accredited as a professional counsellor and have general knowledge of the field of psychology. He or she must be “a person of faith, open to the mind of the Church and the needs of the people of God and be committed to the essential ministry of the ordained priest.” (*From Pain to Hope*, 80).

III Responsibilities

1. In collaboration with the rector and formation faculty, to oversee those elements of the formation program which deal with and impact upon human development. This task demands the establishment of relationships of mutuality and an atmosphere of trust.
2. To provide personal growth counseling for individual students and to refer them for further help when necessary. Issues of personal growth include such things as insight into the effects of family of origin on one's behaviour, age-related issues, the development of social skills and in particular issues which deal with psychosexual development in the context of a call to celibacy.
3. To provide educational resources in the area of human development for both formation faculty and students.
4. To maintain files on different subjects pertaining to human development for use by both students and faculty.
5. To work with Formators in the area of group dynamics and facilitation and to offer them advice on various ways of promoting human development both on an individual and on a group level.
6. To keep a list of helping agencies and program, which might be helpful to students with specific difficulties.
7. To identify possible presenters in the area of human development who might be called upon when there is a need for input on a particular topic pertinent to the whole Seminary community.
8. To keep abreast of current literature and research on human development.

2.2 The Group System: Formation Groups & Residence Halls

I Introduction

Grouping the seminarians into smaller units on the residence halls and in Formation Groups is one of the main elements of the Seminary community and the Program of Formation. It has its origin in the *Decree on the Training of Priests* from the Second Vatican Council: "In seminaries where the student body is large, uniformity should be maintained in discipline and professional training, but students should be intelligently arranged into smaller groups so that their personal development can be given better attention" (O.T., n. 7). Recent teaching in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* points to the need for the development of community life in the Seminary: "In its deepest identity the Seminary is called to be, in its own way, a *continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus*, listening to his word, proceeding towards the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit for the mission" (n. 60).

For some time, St. Peter's Seminary adopted a system of grouping seminarians within the program of priestly formation. The seminarians are grouped in two ways.

1. Hall

Currently, the building is divided into two living areas wherein there is suitable accommodation for groups of 18 to 21 seminarians with a lounge with a kitchenette to serve as the hall's common living area. Each hall has a priest assigned as a hall coordinator. While not isolated from other seminarians in the building, the members of a hall are able to interact in ways to foster that personal development called for by the Council and to live as a community of disciples within the larger student body.

2. Formation Group

A further grouping of seminarians makes currently four groups of seminarians which mixed seminarians of different dioceses, year of study and background. These groups of 5 to 9 seminarians form a stable group in which the seminarian will remain a part of during their formation. Members of a Formation Group typically live on the same hall and have a priest assigned to them as a group leader.

While the majority of the formation activities, liturgical celebrations, classes, meals, social and athletic events are coordinated for the entire community, the smaller groups have opportunity for interaction in formation meetings, liturgies, projects of outreach and service, and general day-to-day living.

Each seminarian is expected to be respectful and considerate of the needs of other seminarians in his Formation Group and promote the communal life of the formation group by being present and participating at group meetings, maintaining the cleanliness of the common lounge, residence living space and hallways, and fulfilling any of the community duties assigned to the group in a spirit of charity and attention to the needs of others. Each seminarian is to be reliable in fulfilling his responsibilities in serving his Group and the wider Seminary community.

II The Goals of the Group System

The goals of the group system have developed since its inception. Each in its own way is designed to assist the seminarians in their total formation; that is, spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral.

1. Goal One

to foster and deepen the spirit of community within the Seminary as a whole so as to help seminarians learn to be builders of community

strategies:

1. balancing interdependence with healthy independence (sharing group duties, learning to accept and work with others, integrating new members)
2. learning to make group decisions
3. working for the larger community

2. Goal Two

to develop maturity and responsibility in the candidates

strategies:

1. taking responsibility for things that need to be done within the group
2. developing leadership within the group (focussing on presentations and roles within the group)
3. promoting independent thought (preparation of formation sessions, liturgies, etc.)
4. learning conflict resolution in the group

3. Goal Three

to develop skills for collaboration and qualities of a servant-leader

strategies:

1. leading group meetings
2. taking initiative individually or as a group for the needs of the house and the group
3. leading prayer in various forms
4. being accountable to others

4. Goal Four

to provide a more holistic environment and context for self-evaluation and individual attention needed for formation

strategies:

1. learning to be able to talk about one's own life and journey of faith
2. developing listening skills
3. respecting diversity of opinions
4. growing in acceptance of others
5. honouring confidentiality
6. being able to assist others in their time of need

III The Constitutive Elements of Group Life

Aside from living in the same area of the building, which allows for personal contact on a daily basis, each group is engaged in four particular activities, some on a weekly basis, some less frequently:

1. The monthly Formation Group meeting

Monday nights have been designated as "community night" in the Seminary, for which students accept no outside commitments such as classes, field education assignments, or ministerial pre-practicum. Once each month, the small groups gather for a formation meeting, often led by one of the seminarians, in which a topic of interest related to the life of the Church, priestly life or ministry is discussed. Sometimes groups will invite a guest for a special presentation to lead into the discussion. These discussions deal with all four aspects of priestly formation, spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral. Such meetings provide opportunities for the seminarians to learn how to lead discussions of a group, to engage in fruitful dialogue, to listen to others' points of view, to be tolerant of varying opinions thereby learning from others, and generally to develop in mature human growth. As well on Monday nights there is the possibility of an address by the rector to the community which is followed by a discussion in the small groups.

2. Group duties

Each group assumes responsibilities and duties on behalf of the whole community including such things as house security, liturgical preparation and roles, and clean-up in the refectory. While these duties may vary from year to year according to need, they offer the seminarians opportunities to render service to the wider community as well as to develop a sense of responsibility for carrying out even mundane tasks for others.

3. Hall Business Meetings

Each hall will organize its own business through such meetings as necessary. A group will set its own schedule for these meetings, usually at least twice a semester.

2.3 Use of Psychology in the Formation of Candidates

I Rational

Psychological assessments help the diocesan or eparchial bishop, the major superior, and the seminary rector gain a greater understanding of developmental, psychological, and other personal factors at work in the life of an applicant and of how these may strengthen or hinder an authentic vocational discernment.

Psychological assessment by professional clinicians provides critical information that otherwise might not be obtained in the course of admissions interviews.⁵

This policy regarding psychological evaluation is intended to provide some guidelines for candidates, for those involved in the work of priestly formation at St. Peter's Seminary as well as diocesan personnel involved in formation. It recognizes the contribution of a balanced use of psychology and makes its use part of the overall process of formation in a way that safeguards some significant values in the process of vocational discernment, e.g., a broader awareness of psychological movements of a candidate for ordination and a greater exercise of personal freedom by the candidate.

This policy is expressed with the awareness that two sets of rights and responsibilities must be held in balance: on the one hand, the right to privacy and confidentiality and, on the other hand, the responsibility of the seminary to ensure that candidates for the priesthood are psychologically suitable for future ministry.

1. Church's Role in Discernment

Each Christian vocation comes from God and is God's gift. However, it is never bestowed outside of or independently of the Church. Instead, it always comes about in the Church and through the Church [...], a luminous and living reflection of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.”⁶

The Church, “begetter and formator of vocations”⁷ has the duty of discerning a vocation and the suitability of candidates for the priestly ministry. In fact, “the interior call of the Spirit needs to be recognized as the authentic call of the bishop.”⁸

Since the person's proper bishop and the seminary rector have the responsibility of making the judgement concerning the admission of an applicant to the seminary and of assessing the psychological suitability of a candidate for priesthood, this policy will be used to assist them in their responsibility. Ultimately, the honest and respectful collaboration of the candidate, the rector and the formation staff, the psychologist(s), and the bishop will ensure that this responsibility will be fulfilled most effectively.

⁵ USCCB p.6

⁶ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [*Pastores dabo vobis*](#) (25 March 1992), n. 35b-c: AAS 84 (1992), 714.

2. Rights of the Individual

This policy acknowledges the provisions of canon 223 whereby the exercise of rights within the context of seminary formation must always take into consideration the common good of the Church, the rights, and responsibilities of others, as well as an individual's obligations to others. The canon also notes that Church authority can regulate the exercise of rights in view of the common good. The formation faculty has a significant responsibility of making a thorough assessment of applicants before they are accepted into the seminary and as they proceed through the various stages toward ordination to the priesthood.

This careful discernment is important from the perspective of the seminary, for a screening of candidates will help the seminary personnel to assist the candidate to reach a deeper and more objective level of self-knowledge. At the same time, it ensures that the seminary personnel do not have to spend a disproportionate amount of time and attention in dealing with issues of personal maturity.

3. Protection of Values

This entire process of psychological evaluation attempts to protect the values of the candidates as well as those of the Church.

In carrying out this process of psychological evaluation, all involved will respect the individual's right to privacy, confidentiality, and active participation in psychological evaluation. Each time, to ensure the protection of the person's rights, the applicant or the candidate will be invited to sign the following steps of consent:

- a consent to agree to psychological testing: This form shall include a summary of the purposes of the testing, the nature of the tests, and how the results will be used.
- a consent to agree to the release of information received from the psychological testing: This consent shall identify the contents of the report, the persons to whom the information will be released or to whom access will be provided, and the method of release of information.

II Times of Psychological Testing

Following the direction of this *Program of Priestly Formation*, St. Peter's Seminary has established this present policy which considers the use of psychological evaluation when an applicant is assessed in terms of his suitability for admission to the seminary and when a seminarian is assisted in terms of his ongoing formation.

1. At Admission to Formation

Right from the moment when the candidate presents himself for admission to the seminary, the formator needs to be able accurately to comprehend his personality; potentialities; dispositions; and the types of any psychological wounds, evaluating their nature and intensity.

Nor must it be forgotten that there is a possible tendency of some candidates to minimize or deny their own weaknesses. Such candidates do not speak to the formators about some of their serious difficulties, as they fear they will not be understood or accepted. Thus, they nurture barely realistic expectations with respect to their own future. On the other hand, there are candidates who tend to emphasize their own difficulties, considering them insurmountable obstacles on their vocational journey.⁷

This psychological evaluation involves a combination of tests which will isolate, insofar as this is possible, any serious psychological problems that an applicant might have. The report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Child Sexual Abuse, *From Pain to Hope*, noted that “most bishops ask that those responsible for formation be assisted in the formation process by accredited experts on the team, to obtain a detailed assessment of each candidate. The result of the psychological tests, recorded in a report given to the candidate and, with his permission, forwarded to the rector of the seminary, are an important and indispensable part of his admission file” (Recommendation 26).

a) Specialists Used

Therefore, in the process of admission, the applicant’s bishop is invited to engage a registered psychologist to provide the services outlined in “Tests to be Used”.

i) Southdown Institute Candidate Assessment

Southdown Institute provides Candidate Assessment for persons considering entry into priesthood or religious life. Southdown’s assessment service assists vocation and formation directors, as well as the leadership of dioceses and religious congregations, to learn about their candidates’ ability to minister, to live in community, and to relate meaningfully with others. These assessments have also been an effective tool for formators as they assist the candidates in their development throughout the formation process.

ii) Consulting psychologist supplied by St. Peter’s Seminary

The psychologist will provide a written report to the rector and to the applicant’s bishop as outlined on the applicant’s Consent Form. The bishop and vocation directors are encouraged to review the report with the candidate and the consulting psychologist

iii) Specialists from other dioceses

The psychological services may be performed by the registered psychologist selected by the applicant’s bishop or his delegate, in consultation with the seminary. Alternatively, these services may be arranged by the seminary at the bishop’s request. If the psychological evaluation takes place in another diocese, the applicant’s bishop/bishop’s delegate should forward the report to the Rector of St. Peter’s Seminary. It is expected that clarification on any issues that arise from this report may be sought from the psychologist by the applicant’s bishop or the seminary rector.

b) Tests to be Used

The non-invasive psychological testing should focus on screening for psychopathology with a subordinate role being given to testing for the development of normal dispositional traits.

- The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory- 2 [MMPI-2: including the Restructured Clinical (RC) Scales and the Personality Psychopathology (PSY-5) Scales]

⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood, 2008, p 6

In addition, the other tests currently used by the seminary's consulting psychologist are:

- Dimensional Assessment of Personality Pathology (Livesley & Jackson)⁸
- NEO Personality Inventory-3 (Costa & McRae)⁹
- The Alcohol Use Identification Test¹⁰
- Drug Abuse Screening Test¹¹

c) Elements of the Report

i) *For the Bishop and Diocesan Vocation Director*

So that the bishop has a clear understanding of the man he is accepting into formation the psychologist should explore the applicant's background and mental status.

To assess the applicant's suitability the applicant's bishop, needs a definitive opinion on:¹²

- Inability to be formed (blocks to growth and conversion); rigidity or inflexibility that precludes openness to guidance and influence
- Psychopathology that cannot be managed easily with medication and that would disrupt or preclude healthy ministry
- Areas of serious emotional vulnerability, given the demands of the priest's responsibilities, celibacy, and life as a public figure and man of communion
- Personality traits and disorders inconsistent with or compromising healthy ministry
- Pervasive developmental disorders that may lead to behaviours incompatible with the human formation traits and characteristics of healthy, priestly relationships and ministry
- Relations with self or others that are so damaged or shame-based that the person cannot relate or assume healthy leadership
- Significant troubles with addictive disorders or habits
- Activity or inclination toward sexual activity with a minor or other traits that might indicate the person could be a harm to minors
- Psycho-sexual disorders
- History of psychopathic deviance, criminality, and unethical, illegal, and unconscionable behaviour
- Multiple physical and medical concerns that significantly impair the ability of the candidate to function responsibly
- Intellectual limitations that would hinder either higher academic studies or the navigation of the complexities of leadership in parish life
- Severe learning disorders and intellectual disability compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity

Specific Testing for Formation

⁸ Livesley, WJ, Jackson, DN (2009). Port Huron, MI: SIGMA Assessment Systems.

⁹ Costa, R.R., McCrae, P.T. (2010). Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

¹⁰ Babor, TF, de la Fuente, JR, Saunders, J & Grant, M. (1992). Geneva: World Health Organization

¹¹ Sperry, L. (2003). Sex, Priestly Ministry and the Church. Collegeville, Liturgical Press

¹² As outlined in USCCB: Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in Seminary Admissions

- Rossetti and Myers (A copy of the interview format of Rossetti and Myers is available from the Rector on request)
- Sperry (2003) The psychologist should comment in his report on whether the applicant's psychosexual development contained any of the risk factors identified by Sperry (2003)
 - confusion about sexual orientation.
 - childish interests and behaviours.
 - lack of peer relationships.
 - extremes of sexual expression.
 - history of childhood sexual abuse.
 - deviance and personality style/disorder with passive, dependent or narcissistic traits.

ii) *For the Rector and Seminary Formation Team*

With the permission of the candidate, members of the formation team look to recommendations in the psychological report that support affective growth and maturity.

2. In Subsequent Formation

During the period of formation, recourse to experts in the psychological sciences can respond to the needs born of any crises; but it can also be useful in supporting the candidate on his journey towards a more sure possession of the moral virtues. It can furnish the candidate with a deeper knowledge of his personality, and can contribute to overcoming, or rendering less rigid, his psychic resistances to what his formation is proposing. (citation needed cf. Guidelines, par 9)

In keeping with the developmental approach which characterizes the seminary's program of formation, ongoing growth in emotional intelligence is encouraged. Various helps to formation from psychological specialists are made available throughout formation.

III Roles and Responsibilities

Can. 232 - The Church has the duty and the proper and exclusive right to form those who are designated for sacred ministries.

1. Bishop and Vocation Directors

Can 241 – A diocesan bishop is to admit to a major seminary only those who are judged qualified to dedicate themselves permanently to the sacred ministries: he is to consider their human, moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities, their physical and psychic health, and their correct intention.

A full in-depth psychological evaluation is a crucial tool for the bishop and the vocation director to understand the man they are receiving as an applicant. Typically, the reports are reviewed in person by the psychologist, candidate, and their bishop (or vocation director).

2. Seminarian

a) Admission

The applicant should understand admission to the seminary and participation in the formation program is not a right that belongs to the applicant or candidate; their bishop and seminary rector have the final discretion in this regard.

b) Formation

While discernment is primarily a function of the whole Church and entrusted to the local bishop in particular, the seminarian is seen as the primary agent of his own formation. As such he is responsible to bring any concerns or recommendations for his psychological report to his formator, spiritual director, and human formation counsellor when appropriate.

3. Consulting Psychologist

The professional chosen for the evaluation of an applicant would be able to demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of Catholic tradition and ecclesiastical culture; be familiar with the criteria for inclusion and exclusion to initial seminary formation; and evidence a respect for a vocation to the Catholic priesthood. It is critical, for example, that the psychological professional's evaluation of the applicant for the seminary adequately reflects the Catholic understanding of the human person as a¹³

- *transcendent being, created in the image of God;*
- *who is a unity of body and soul, rational, real, and relational;*
- *whose flourishing will be realized in a life of committed self-giving through the priesthood;*
- *whose happiness cannot be reduced to the mere satisfaction of needs.*

4. Rector

The rector, as mandated by the applicant's bishop, has the ultimate authority to admit candidates into the seminary and to assess whether an individual should continue in the formation program. The teaching and legislation of the Church have entrusted the seminary faculty with the responsibility of assessing the suitability of a candidate for admission to the seminary.

The rector is accountable to safeguard the confidentiality of the psychological reports. Psychological reports are used only in the initial admission process by the admission committee. The reports are then filed securely and do not become part of the seminarian's file.

5. Formation Team

The recommendations can be used with the candidate's permission with specific members of the formation team.

¹³ As outlined in USCCB: Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in Seminary Admissions