

**OUT OF THE NEW NORMAL:
JESUS IS CALLING MEN OF COMMUNION**
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The “New Normal”

“If God is taken out of the equation, then the human person has no human dignity, and we can do with the human person whatever we feel should be done to him or to her regardless of him or her being made in the image and likeness of God.¹”

The removal of God has become part of the “new normal” culture. Over the last several years cultural agendas have been gradually eliminating the idea of God as our creator and thus the dignity of the human person has been reduced to more of an object than a person. Two examples would be in the political and entertainment worlds where same sex marriage and women choosing their version of reproductive health has become the new normal. Marriage between a man and a woman as God intended and the sanctity of life are no longer tolerated nor respected. The shift in a cultural agenda without God does not just promote a preferred value system; it creates intolerance to the truth held by the founding fathers of this country, and those who fled other countries to preserve these truths and their religious freedom.

This paper will highlight trends in attitudes and values that are evolving from today’s cultural “new normal” from which Jesus is calling young men into seminary. Knowing that the culture has affected these men whom Jesus calls, a proposal will be made to show how promoting the virtues in seminary formation can help men move away from the “new normal” culture and towards healing and communion with the Trinity through Christ. From this intimate communion, men can be formed in their “fundamental relational dimension of priestly identity,”² i.e. beloved son, beloved brother, chaste spouse, spiritual father, divine physician, and good shepherd, which will lead to the diocesan priest’s mission. Unceasing union and intimacy with

¹ VATICAN CITY, June 5 (CNA/EWTN News) Kerr, David. [Pope challenges US bishops to revive Christian culture](#)

² Pastores Dabo Vobis, 12.

Christ will ignite in the man a natural desire to choose good, i.e. to lead a good life as a man, a virtuous life as a priest, and ultimately a holy life with a burning desire to be a saint. The characteristics of a virtuous life will be outlined and correlated to growth in the priestly identities³ as a baseline measure for a *man of communion*. Benchmarks for measurement in each virtue can serve as a guide for formators to assess candidates' readiness at three time periods in formation.⁴

What is Normal?

Pope Benedict reminds us of what is truly normal in a culture and challenges us to defend it as truth:

Fellow defenders of true marriage choose your words wisely. Don't join the rest of the world in declaring what is true to be merely traditional. We do not call abortion "choice" because it is never a moral choice. It is murder. Two persons of the same gender cannot enter into marriage. It is ontologically impossible. So it's quite silly for us to begin describing marriage as "traditional" vs. "same-sex" because it's drawing a distinction between marriage and something that can never even exist in the first place.⁵

Critical deviations in values and attitudes over the last several decades have changed this country's young emerging adults' dispositions from one of excellence to adequacy, optimism to pessimism, common good to individual advantage, delayed gratification to instant gratification, respect to incivility, Christian God to Amorphous God, knowledge to experience, heroes to celebrities, trust to skepticism, and most importantly truth to tolerance.⁶

It is from this world view that today's youth are being formed, and predictably are developing a confused sense of identity and self-worth. Their experiences and lives are “great

³ Groeschel, B.J., 2006. *The Virtue Driven Life*. Our Sunday Visitor. Huntington, IN

⁴ Entrance into seminary, Candidacy [Theology I], and Pre-Deaconate [Theology III]

⁵ VATICAN CITY, June 5 ([CNA/EWTN News](#)) Kerr, David. [Pope challenges US bishops to revive Christian culture](#)

⁶ Barna, G., 2011. *Futurecast*. Tyndale Publishing. Austin, TX.

barometers of the condition of the adult world that is socializing them, into which they are being inducted.”⁷ Yet it is out of this “new normal” that men are being called by God to discern their vocation.

In a recent research study⁸ on today’s emerging adults (18-27), some alarming results are revealed in regards to the condition of today’s cultural new normal. The researchers describe a world view of extensive moral relativism; a lack of engagement in civic endeavors; an apparent lack of freedom for youth who search desperately to discover meaning in their lives; and a failure of society to provide healthy resources to help them find life’s true meaning. There is also additional evidence of lower levels of empathy in today’s youth. "College kids today are about 40 percent lower in empathy than their counterparts of 20 or 30 years ago, as measured by standard tests of this personality trait."⁹ This decline in the ability to be empathic to others can be correlated with the recent rise of social media. "The ease of having 'friends' online might make people more likely to just tune out when they don't feel like responding to others' problems, a behavior that could carry over offline."¹⁰

In today’s new normal culture the average emerging adult is exposed to three times as much information via the media. In terms of media content, emerging adults have grown up with video games, and a growing body of research is establishing that exposure to violent media numbs people to the pain of others."¹¹

These social scientists boldly outline the contrasting values in their research findings. They link to their discoveries five alarming trends in today’s emerging adults that take them away

⁷ Smith, Christian: 2011. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Oxford University Press. P. 12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Konrath, Sara (2010). [Empathy: College students don't have as much as they used to.](#) Ann Arbor, MI. University of Michigan.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

from certain natural virtues necessary for healthy development in affective maturity that can lead them to live the good life.

1. **MORALLY ADRIFT** – Today’s emerging adults lack a deep meaning to their life in the future. The research states that almost no emerging adult today is able to find deep and lasting meaning to life in the future and as a result they can only live for today and the instant gratification which brings temporary meaning in the moment. As a result the truth is based on their own experience (good or bad) leaving no room for discussion or dialogue. To lead a good life it is important for people to be able to have constructive discussions about moral differences with people who disagree with their own view. This requires being able to take into consideration how different assumptions shape moral beliefs. “Almost no emerging adult today is able to do that.”¹²
2. **CAPTIVE TO CONSUMERISM** - Virtuous ideals and behaviors are lacking for many emerging adults as they tend to focus almost exclusively on materialistic consumption and financial security as their guiding principles. The research indicates that emerging adults lack a natural desire to focus on developing relationships in the community that are loving and lasting; pursuing education in the spiritual truths and values; understanding true contentment and generosity; and eagerness to give of themselves in service for the well-being of other people. To lead a good life it is important for people to understand and hold values in life that go beyond the acquisition of material things driven by mass consumerism.
3. **INTOXICATION’S “FAKE FEELING OF HAPPINESS”** - Developmentally immature emerging adults report frequent if not habitual or addictive use of alcohol and or drugs. The researchers’ cite outcomes of alcohol and drug abuse as leading to many bad consequences

¹² Ibid. p. 9

including but not limited to date rape, alcohol poisoning, drunk driving, and even accidental death. They note that intoxication and binge drinking by young adults is too common and not even recognized by them as a problem. There is a definitive **disconnect** between their awareness of potential consequences for their behaviors and their actions. Emerging adults are convinced that they do not have an alcohol problem because they can stop drinking when they want to. But they do not equate consuming multiple (5 or more) drinks in a short period of time to be a problem, even with adverse consequences. To lead a good life it is important for people to “avoid a lifestyle of routine intoxication.”¹³

4. THE SHADOW SIDE OF SEXUAL LIBERATION - The “new normal” cultural world view destroys the good of sex by exploitation, coercion, or pure self-gratification. In the research studies, the majority of emerging adults have little awareness of the true understanding of the good of sex. (85% of emerging adults willingly touched another person’s private areas or have been touched by another under their clothes; 71% have had oral sex; 73% have had sexual intercourse; and the average age of the first experience of sexual intercourse is 16 years old). A significant number of the emerging adults reported in the study that this sexual freedom has led to real hurt, confusion, grief, anger, and regret, if not severe suffering and long term harm. *They admitted that to protect their sense of personal self (self is sacred) they often deny their regret*¹⁴. Being allowed to “be yourself” is by their definition the ultimate good. To lead a good life sex should always be “treated with immense respect”¹⁵ and it is a matter of empirical fact that it is good for “sexual intimacy to be protected within

¹³ Ibid. p. 9

¹⁴ Ibid. p.152

¹⁵ Ibid. p.10

proper boundaries.”¹⁶ Sex demands “relationships of trust and commitment.” The human good requires taking all consequences of sex seriously. In order to protect their physical, mental, and emotional health in intimate relationships it is important for young people to learn to discern what leads to human flourishing and what causes harm.

5. CIVIC AND POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT - Most emerging adults, with some exceptions, have little investment in or hope for the larger world around them. To lead a good life it is good for “people to care about the larger social, cultural, institutional, and political world around them.”¹⁷ In order to understand oneself as part of a larger civic order that needs to be nourished and regenerated, living the good life requires care for one’s neighbors, fellow citizens, strangers and even enemies. This sense of belonging is important in knowing oneself and one’s place in society and can give meaning to life and hope for the future.

If one would draw a picture of today’s emerging adult and what is considered the new normal baseline from which young men are being called to discern their vocation it may look like the crucified face of Jesus. The face of youth today shows great hardship at so young an age. Their lives are “complex, fraught with difficulty, often scourged with big problems, serious confusions, and misplaced values and devotions.”¹⁸ The causes of their struggles are complex and numerous. There appears to be a lack of elementary reasoning abilities for sorting out basic moral questions; poor decision making regarding sexual encounters has led to serious harm; and lack of education in discovering and actuating the virtues in their lives has left the impression that the good life involves material possessions and mass consumerism with limited vision of what the future can hold. In addition, the increased role of intoxication and addictions among

¹⁶ Ibid. p.10

¹⁷ Ibid. p.10

¹⁸ Ibid. p.229.

emerging adults has created an illusion of happiness and has led to a life of stress, anxiety, boredom, and regret with brief relief. This new normal advocating selfism (self as sacred) has created a world view that includes deep detachment from personal commitment to give of oneself civically, communally, and politically for the interest of others and one's country. Such attitudes of selfism can lead to hopelessness and lack of deep meaning about the future when their self-seeking desires are not met.

Jesus Calls Men Out of the Normal

Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying; Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon, And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.¹⁹

Jesus calls young men today out of their "new normal" culture to discern a vocation to priesthood just as he called his disciples from their culture. He meets them right where they are in their life and invites them, in faith, to have a personal encounter with Him. In this encounter he allows them to choose to follow Him. Simon Peter, in faith chose to follow Jesus. If they choose to follow in faith, hope and love, these young men who are affected by the "new normal" culture can begin to find healing in their seminary formation.

Selfism vs. Self-giving

In the research study cited above, emerging adults admitted that to protect their sense of personal self, denying their regrets over poor choices is more important than to deny "being

¹⁹ Luke 5: 4-11.

yourself.”²⁰ Therefore, the first step in seminary formation is to create a culture in which virtues are cultivated. Creating a virtuous environment in seminary can help change cultural attitudes away from selfism to inherent attitudes of gratitude, self-giving, and living as men of communion. Then healing and growth in the formation of the priestly identities can occur.

Virtues are the qualities of the human personality that can move people away from selfism and towards consistent good behavior and self-giving. The Catechism of the Catholic Church²¹ defines virtue as a “habitual and firm disposition to do the good.” “The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.”²² Living a virtuous life allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give to others the very best of himself without regrets. This is the true definition of “being yourself.”

‘The ultimate goal of the virtuous life is to become like God.’²³

To become like God! Is that not what priestly formation is about: forming men in priestly identities to become “*in persona Christi Capitis*”²⁴? Therefore, if this is the true goal of seminary formation how do we measure a man’s character development as part of his priestly formation?

Living a Virtuous Life

Human (natural) virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They

²⁰ Smith, Christian: 2011. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Oxford University Press. P. 153.

²¹ CCC 1803

²² Ibid.

²³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, 1:PG 44, 1200D)” CCC 1803

²⁴ CCC1548 In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis*.

make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life.²⁵ Dietrich von Hildebrand states that virtue is the quality of someone's character.²⁶ He argues that virtue is present even when it is not functioning and exists in the very core of the person. Virtues must therefore be realized to be functioning in a person's life.

Hildebrand's argument presumes that the person has a cohesive sense of self in order to realize these virtues. Therefore, if we think of love as self-gift, to what extent can people give themselves in love when they don't have a cohesive self to begin with? As psychiatrist and Thomistic philosophy professor Rudolf Allers wrote in *Forming Character in Adolescents*, "One cannot give away what one has not got; a person not feeling sure of being or having a true self cannot but recoil from any situation which would imply such a giving away of the self. A person, furthermore, who has just begun to get hold, so to say, of his self and is still not certain of his possession, cannot be expected to make a gift of this self, because he feels that nothing would be left to him, and that he would fall back into the state bordering on nothingness from which he has just recently, after long and painful struggles, emerged."²⁷

One of the characteristics of today's new normal culture is substantial difficulty in the formation of a healthy and cohesive sense of self. If a person has a fragmented sense of self, too strong a focus on virtue maybe unfruitful and therefore the person ought not be in seminary. The theory and practice of virtue remain valid and true, but something additional is needed and ought to be taken care of outside seminary formation.²⁸

²⁵ CCC1834; 1804

²⁶ Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *Christian Ethics*. New York: McKay, 1953.

²⁷ Allers, Rudolf, 1940. *Forming Character in Adolescents*. Roman Catholic Books. P. 119.

²⁸ Kolodziejczak, Greg. 2013.

Natural virtues are typically handed on by the environment, especially the home environment so that those observing them as normal can eagerly embrace them. Given that man is wounded by sin, it takes human effort, and a cohesive sense of self to embrace the virtues. Today's cultural "new normal" has the tendency to relativize virtues, therefore the development of virtues throughout life requires intentional perseverance, education, and *mentoring* by older wiser adults (in seminary this role falls to formators, spiritual directors, psychologists, faculty and the rector), so that human effort can then be purified and elevated by divine grace.

Perseverance and repeated efforts of practice of the good builds moral character and helps men develop patterns of good behavior so they can become disposed to live a virtuous life and become men of communion.²⁹ Formators and those assisting in the formation of seminarians need to help men realize that the virtues they already have present in their character can become actualized through daily healthy choices of good behaviors.

While all virtues call us to do good, the infusion of supernatural grace elevates the natural virtues into moral virtues relying on God's grace to maintain them. Natural virtues lead men to live a good life in this world while the supernatural virtues' goal is to strengthen the natural virtues to help men please God and enter into eternal communion with His Divine love. The supernatural virtues allow the Father to "refashion hearts into living images of the Heart of His Beloved Son."³⁰ Virtues therefore are part of the mysterious reality of what makes a human being human, and with the infusion of supernatural grace give him a desire to be a saint.³¹

Jesus of Nazareth who was fully human "discloses the human potential for virtue and goodness" and gives us a measurable benchmark for growth in character development in priestly

²⁹ CCC1804

³⁰ Schlesselmann, G.J., 2012. *The Seminary Rector: Forming Priests in Nazareth*. Omaha, NE p. 16

³¹ Groeschel, B.J., 2006. *The Virtue Driven Life*. Our Sunday Visitor. Huntington, IN

formation. When Jesus was asked by one of the scribes which is the greatest commandment, He replied:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all you soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. When the scribe understood this saying Jesus commented to him: You are not far from the Kingdom of God.³²

THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AND CANDIDATES APPLYING TO SEMINARY

The Theological Virtues of faith, hope and love need be evident for a candidate to enter into seminary formation. According to the PPF, for candidates applying to seminary:

1. *“There need be evidence that they should **commit themselves wholeheartedly** to carrying out that discernment.”³³*

“Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself.”³⁴

By faith *“man freely commits his entire self to God.”*³⁵ Is the candidate clearly able to articulate his faith in Church teaching and is he willing to commit himself to living out that truth in obedience to his formators?

2. *“Evidence that **God brought them to the seminary** to discern whether or not they are really called to priesthood.”³⁶*

The candidates’ motivation for applying to seminary ought to contain the virtue of hope. Hope must remain strong and be consistent with his capacity to freely and entirely commit to his discernment.³⁷ They need enough self-knowledge to understand the commitment they are

³² Mark 12:28-34

³³ PPF p. 22

³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, 2010. *The Virtues*. Our Sunday Visitor Inc. Huntington, IN. p. 9

³⁵ *Dei Verbum*, dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican II document.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 22

³⁷ PPF p. 22

making and the sacrifices that may be required for love of God. It is important therefore, that candidates applying for seminary display evidence of the virtues of faith, hope and love.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AND FORMATION IN THE PRIESTLY IDENTITIES

FAITH

How does living a virtuous life help men to grow in the priestly identities? In faith, the hope of God's love that we are created in His image and are his adopted children gives birth to the first and foundational priestly identity: *Beloved Sonship*.

The virtue of *faith* is fundamental to receiving the identity of beloved son. "Do we believe in a God who has created us in his own image and likeness and who has destined us for eternity, an eternity with him or without him? Who breathed into us an immortal soul which gives us *identity* and personhood, and can hold the very life of God imparted to us in the comparable gift called sanctifying grace? ...Without faith there is no meaning, no drive, no reason"³⁸ to life. No meaning, no drive, no reason to life? Is that not the sentiments described by the majority of young emerging adults from the new normal culture? Vocation directors need to assess that a candidate applying to seminary can articulate meaning in his life with Christ, prove his drive is for Christ and his fellow man, and be able to demonstrate right reason in choosing to enter seminary formation as part of his discernment to priesthood.

Faith requires a renunciation of arrogance, as well as self-critical and judgmental thoughts. "This journey towards humility, towards spiritual childhood is essential" according to Pope Benedict.³⁹ The renunciation of an attitude of arrogance in which one knows better, allows

³⁸ Dolan, T., (2000). *Priests for the Third Millennium*. Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, IN. p.21-22.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 20.

the “soul to grow and the sensitivity of the heart to grow towards God.”⁴⁰ The human heart must be continually stretched to receive the love of the Father as his beloved son. As the human heart is stretched into a deeper intimacy with Christ in the identity of beloved son the virtue of faith will continue to burn. As a man identifies with being a beloved son of the Father, he will find comfort in his own sexuality and will come to better understand his own sexual expression as a man within the overall community. This acceptance of himself and witness to others will form him into being a beloved brother by his community. The more his heart is stretched in intimacy with the Trinity and Mary, the deeper his own spiritual reality will become, thus helping him to integrate his human sexuality to be drawn to Christ. This desire to be alone with Christ will help lessen his own fear of loneliness.

Given that formators need to support and encourage men who are accepted into seminary formation in their faith, to help them sustain that faith, formators ought to know each man personally, spend quality time with him individually and in group settings, and witness his ability to live out the virtues of faith, hope and love in his daily choices and interactions.

CHARITY

Christ’s gift of himself to his Church, the fruit of his love, is described in terms of that unique gift of self-made by the Bridegroom to the Bride...The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church...In virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community...In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ’s spousal love toward the Church, his Bride. Therefore, the priest’s life ought to radiate this spousal character which demands that he be a witness to Christ’s spousal love.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 20

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 43; PDV 22

St. John also speaks of *charity* in relation to the priestly identity of *Chaste Spouse*. He refers to charity as “eros” (human love), which is a symbol of spousal union of the soul with God.⁴² As a fruit of this powerful spousal union, St. John is convinced that the experience of eros will guide the soul to grow more effectively than the ruthless struggle against the passions.

The new normal culture promotes a selfism that increases the struggle with the passions. This grasping to satisfy self, discourages self-giving and bearing good fruit that is required in any spousal relationship. Selfism is different than the self-love Jesus commanded. Loving self is the ability to love the Holy Spirit who dwells in us which allows us to give that love to our neighbor. Love of self knows that we are loved as beloved sons and daughters. Without this knowledge or experience of love we live in a world of self, seeking worldly love but never quite finding it. Psychiatrists and psychologists agree that most people who seek counseling feel unlovable and are unable to love and respect themselves, let alone their neighbor or spouse.

Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography can help seminarians and formators move from a character of selfism to true character of self-love. Franklin was steadfast in cultivating his own character development. He studied his own disposition (knew himself) and made note of his good qualities and the tendencies to evil that he possessed. He developed a plan of formation to root out faults and cultivate virtues.⁴³ Each week Franklin would work on a particular fault and would note it in his journal so that he could record the increase of the fault or the decrease of it at the end of the week. Simultaneously, he would choose to associate with those who were wise and virtuous (good mentors) and he would engage in academic study of the desired virtue. By

⁴² Ibid. p. 18

⁴³ Garesche, Edward, SJ. (2003) *The Catholic Book of Character and Success*. Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, NH. p. 14.

cultivating good habits and securing a favorable environment, he demonstrated how a man can mold his own character.

HOPE

The virtue of hope makes a man capable of living a life of charity as a *Spiritual Father*; a hope that transcends daily life so that he does not expect success in his earthly days but looks forward to the revelation of God himself in eternity. It is only in this extension of the soul, in this self-transcendence, that his life becomes great and that he is able to bear fruit despite the effort and disappointments of everyday life, and that we can be kind to others without expecting any reward.⁴⁴

“Hope is the gift that keeps us going when we think Jesus is asleep, and let us thank God for the great gift of hope.”⁴⁵ These words were spoken by Michael, a seminarian who entered seminary with great hope that he was called by Christ to be His priest. He was called the “model seminarian.” While in seminary during spring break, Michael and his family were in a severe car accident. Michael was injured and his spine was irreparably damaged causing him to be paralyzed from the neck down for the remainder of his life. Even though Michael’s dream of becoming a priest appeared impossible, Michael has continued to live in hope despite this discouragement and in turn his hope has born good fruit in others.

How can formation encourage hope in seminarians? Research has shown that the environment can influence character and personality development as well as give hope for meaning in one’s life. Promoting an environment of beauty in the seminary culture can help

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

⁴⁵ Dolan, Archbishop Timothy. (2000) *Priests for the Third Millennium*. Our Sunday Visitor Inc. Huntington, IN. p. 30.

seminarians learn to distinguish between true beauty and the illusion of beauty. A culture of beauty can help transform men's distorted thoughts about creation to right ordered reasoning of a loving Creator of beauty. It can give hope to men that they too can with God's grace and mercy overcome the temptations of the world and be saints.

Seminaries have a responsibility to have good art prominently displayed that can lift the seminarian's soul to God. Images of Jesus and the saints in the role of the priestly identities of beloved son; chaste spouse; spiritual father; divine physician and good shepherd could be displayed to express the priestly story of development which a seminarian can aspire to in hope. In addition, local pilgrimages could be arranged to various sites of beauty (parks, museums, hikes, theater). Entertainment, books, movies, art, and pilgrimages can help remold the mind and heart to the image and likeness of God.

Reinforcing and affirming acts of virtue in the seminarian can also lead to the integration of true beauty and it can be a powerful way to guide these emerging adults to an attitude of gratitude and true freedom of expression. The natural beauty of creation can affectively move their hearts so that experientially they understand true love and peace. Finally, it is the duty and responsibility of Spiritual Fathers who are older and wiser adults to model, teach, advise, exemplify, question, and challenge these young emerging adults in love.

A man of communion formed in the priestly identities of beloved son, chaste spouse and spiritual father ought to desire to be virtuous and holy in order to please God and direct all things to the service and glory of God. Therefore, an argument can be made for the theological virtues to be evident in candidates who apply for seminary formation and essential for those who commit to candidacy as stated in the promises to the Bishop.

THE CARDINAL VIRTUES AND FORMATION IN THE PRIESTLY IDENTITIES

Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance surround all the other human virtues and when elevated by grace they become the moral virtues and guiding principles of priestly identities of Chaste Spouse, Spiritual Father, Spiritual Physician and Good Shepherd. Through living these virtues a seminarian will come to know who he is and how he should act in keeping with his relationship, identity and mission as a diocesan priest.

PRUDENCE

“Prudence is “right reason in action” according to St. Thomas Aquinas and it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we can apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.”⁴⁶

As a human virtue prudence helps people to organize their lives, acts of intellect, attitudes and actions in order to accomplish the objectives of a contented life in this world. Grace elevates this virtue supernaturally to assist in organizing desires, resources, activities and behaviors with the goal of being joyful in this life and happy in the eternal life.⁴⁷ Prudence helps a priest maintain a balanced approach to life and helps him keep priorities right ordered.

Prudence is an essential virtue for a priest in his identity of Chaste Spouse. It enables the priest to know the good in a given situation and the path for achieving that good. Christ’s bride the Church looks to her spouse the priest, to be wise, holy and prudent. People seek priests for wise counsel in their life’s decisions. A priest formed in the identity of Chaste Spouse lives Christ’s own spousal love for the Church and can in the roll of Chaste Spouse love his bride the Church back to Christ.

⁴⁶ CCC1806.

⁴⁷ Groeschel, B.J., 2006. *The Virtue Driven Life*. Our Sunday Visitor. Huntington, IN

In a survey of seminarian assessments conducted by Archbishop Dolan years ago, he noted that he rarely reads or hears criticisms about doctrinal orthodoxy, devotion to prayer, homiletic ability, or obedience, but often a lack of prudence is sited.

Archbishop Dolan gives two examples of a lack of prudence in the newly ordained. A vocation director lamented the story of two young priests who left the priesthood soon after ordination: “how could they think their priesthood could survive when they went out six nights a week and did not roll in until after midnight? How could they think their celibacy would survive when they kept exclusive company with attractive women? I worry that some of our young priests are overly confident, almost cocky and do not realize the delicacy of their own vocation. Why are they not more vigilant?”⁴⁸ Vigilance and prudence are synonymous.

The second example of a lack of prudence involves not keeping goals clear and in focus which gives life order and meaning. A newly ordained associate asked his pastor which day he would have off, Christmas Eve or Christmas day. The pastor was stunned and asked the priest what he meant. The young priest noted that “I certainly have the right to be with my family on Christmas, so I would expect to be free either Christmas Eve or Day.”⁴⁹ The hope is that any priest would relish being with his bride the Church on Christmas. Imagine a husband in a marriage choosing to go home to his own family leaving his wife and children during the holidays.

Observing seminarians in different settings and with different populations can prepare formators how to teach and correct them to be more prudent, keeping in mind that the best instruction is to be a witness to them in your own prudent actions and words.

⁴⁸ Dolan, Archbishop Timothy. (2000) *Priests for the Third Millennium*. Our Sunday Visitor Inc. Huntington, IN. p122.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 123

JUSTICE

“Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationship the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor.”⁵⁰

All our social relationships are called to be free, total, faithful and a fruitful gift of self.

These qualities are essential for the priestly identity of Spiritual Fatherhood. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that “Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of Eucharist.”⁵¹ Keeping this in mind we can understand how anything less than a “free, total, faithful and fruitful gift of self is an act of contraception.”⁵²

In today’s culture many injustices in the world stem from the “contraception of the gift of self—a withholding of the gift of our self to God or a preventing of His gift from being received in our heart.”⁵³ Many injustices are a withholding of the gift of our self to our neighbor. The priestly identity of Spiritual Fatherhood requires laying down one’s life for one’s neighbor; a total gift of self. In order to receive the love of Father, healing the fear of spousal self-giving and fatherly commitment may be at the heart of human formation.

In seminary formation a seminarian can have an attitude of having to be right all the time thus withholding the gift of empathy or understanding. This attitude can cause division among brothers and even isolation on the part of the seminarian if he is closed to opening his own heart

⁵⁰ CCC1807

⁴⁸ Johnston, JV. *The Need for a New Witness*, 5/24/12. St. Louis Prayer Breakfast

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007) n. 76.

to listening to varying opinions. Opinions are not absolute truths and most likely change over time. A contraceptive mentality of the mind and heart can halt the opportunity for dialogue and listening. “Being right” all the time can cut off the fruit of conversion individually and communally. Spiritual Fatherhood bears fruit in the conversion of others and their growth in holiness. The priestly identity of spiritual father requires faithfulness and justice to all and prayer is essential to living out this call.

Formators can help seminarians assess their own virtue of justice and ability to be a spiritual father by having them ask themselves these questions: How often do I cut corners in my work; sidestep my duties; cheat others of what I owe them even in small things (including my Bishop and people of the diocese who pay for my education in seminary)? How often do I spend time in virtual reality rather than developing personal relationships? If this is the case then the virtue of justice is not deeply rooted in one’s character and “no one can keep his self-respect unless he is first just towards others.”⁵⁴

FORTITUDE

“Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause.”⁵⁵

A sign of a culture’s decline is the “absence of admiration for people of courage.”⁵⁶ Since many countries’ current world view is one of individualism, the natural virtue of courage has been reduced to “selfism”. In other terms, why would one want to risk losing his own life for

⁵⁴ Garesche, Edward, SJ. (2003) *The Catholic Book of Character and Success*. Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, NH. p. 14.

⁵⁵ CCC 1808

⁵⁶ Groeschel, B.J., 2006. *The Virtue Driven Life*. Our Sunday Visitor. Huntington, IN p.68.

another when it would mean giving up that which is more important; i.e. personal fulfillment or pleasures.

In contrast to the culture's self-centered goal of courage, which can be described as bravado or foolhardiness, courage as a Christian virtue enables a person to confront danger and endure difficulty to achieve the ultimate goal of salvation or help others achieve the same goal. Fortitude by this definition is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit empowers a person to suffer with those who suffer, and to mourn with those who mourn, and to pick up one's cross and carry it. Is this not congruent with the identity of Spiritual Physician?

The spiritual physician must live Christ's own healing mission of love to his bride the Church. The spiritual physician requires the virtue of fortitude in order to provide good counsel; just absolution in the sacrament of penance; speaking the truth in love through daily preaching; providing wise spiritual direction; administering the sacrament of the sick and being merciful in daily encounters with all whom he meets. The spiritual physician receives the supernatural grace of the virtue of fortitude in his ability to hold the sins of others confidential. The supernatural virtue can also elevate the spiritual physician's ability to be compassionate and forgiving even when confronted with unthinkable depravities through sin.

TEMPERANCE

“Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion.”⁵⁷

The virtue of temperance “ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires

⁵⁷ CCC1809

within the limits of what is honorable.” In other words, the virtue of temperance, along with all the virtues, forms the priestly identity of Good Shepherd by allowing the priest to live Christ’s servant-love; i.e. by continually seeking to serve others rather than demanding to be served by them.

The priestly identity of Good Shepherd is part of a call to priesthood, “not a career; a redefinition of self, not just a new ministry, a way of life, not a job; a state of being, not just a function; a permanent lifelong commitment, not a temporary style of service; an identity, not just a role.”⁵⁸

Temperance is a guide to know how to use the attractive things of life in a way that contributes to one’s natural goals while keeping the priest faithful to their identity of Good Shepherd. Morally, this virtue directs men to understand that all pleasurable things in life must be directed towards his salvation and the salvation of others.

Formators can determine if a seminarian is being formed in the priestly identity of good shepherd, by assessing if he is happy in life. In other words, is he manifesting heartfelt joy in his life? Unhappiness can lead to intemperance and suffering. In many cases an attempt to relieve this suffering can lead to unhealthy behaviors that can become compulsive and even addictive.

To the degree that a seminarian embraces his commitment to celibacy in seminary “is critical to how happy he will be as a priest” according to a recent psychological study on *Why Priests are Happy* by Stephen Rossetti.⁵⁹ If he is unhappy as a chaste seminarian he will surely be unhappy as a celibate and chaste priest and unable to fulfill his priestly identity of Good Shepherd.

⁵⁸ Dolan, Archbishop Timothy. (2000) *Priests for the Third Millennium*. Our Sunday Visitor Inc. Huntington, IN. p. 228.

⁵⁹ Rossetti, S.J., 2011. *Why Priests are Happy: A Study of the Psychological & Spiritual Health of Priests*. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN. p.105.

IN CONCLUSION: THE CALL TO COMMUNION

A man of communion is someone “who makes a gift of himself and is able to receive the gift of others.”⁶⁰ This character development can only be achieved through “the love of God and service to others,”⁶¹ He must be more than a man of example; by continually living out of the love of Christ he will be a man reoriented and conformed to Christ.

Ordination to priesthood is not about the development of one’s own powers and gifts, it is a sacrament which means: “I give what I myself cannot give; I do something that is not my work; I am on a mission and have become the bearer of that which another has committed to my charge.”⁶² Therefore, no one can declare himself a priest for a community by his own “fiat.” This gift of priesthood can only be received from the sacrament by “entering into the mission that makes me the messenger and instrument of another.”⁶³ This disposition of selflessness is essential to the “priestly ministry that can lead to authentic human affective maturity and fulfillment.”⁶⁴

Bodily comfort and material security can take humanity only so far. The human spirit of man can only be satisfied by the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us and the Spirit who is love and abides in us. Now more than ever men who enter seminary formation must be taught and witnessed to by formators and spiritual directors so they too can become the light of Christ that will bear truth to the darkness in this world.

Who can better understand today’s culture of darkness than those emerging adults who have been called by God out of the darkness of society into the light. For this reason, it is the

⁶⁰United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, **Program for Priestly Formation** (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006), 115.

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² J. Cardinal Ratzinger, 1996. *Called to Communion*. Ignatius Press, SFO, CA. p. 115.

⁶³ Ibid. p.115.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.115

hope of this psychologist and author that Rectors of all seminaries will be encouraged to hire staff psychologists (who themselves live virtuous lives) to help those in formation become foster parents to seminarians, as Joseph and Mary did with Jesus in Nazareth. What a sacred mission it is for Rectors, Spiritual Directors, formators, faculty, and Psychologists to be commissioned by God to form the future *men of communion*.

BENCHMARKS FOR A MAN OF COMMUNION

THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Is a man ready to be accepted into seminary formation?

(Is his true desire to be moving away from the world (culture) and towards God?)

VIRTUE OF FAITH—*“man freely commits his entire self to God.”*

Entrance Criteria 1: “There need be evidence that they should commit themselves wholeheartedly to carrying out that discernment.”⁶⁵(PPF)

Measurement for the virtue of Faith

1. Commitment to prayer (daily holy hour)
2. Willingness to have an undivided heart (live chastity of the heart – free from worlds distractions) measured by their willingness to keep their commitment to discern their priestly vocation without engaging in external relationships that lead to emotional or physical bonding.
3. Be open and able to freely receive direction and formation through obedience to authority.

VIRTUE OF HOPE – *“desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.*

Entrance Criteria 2: “Evidence that God brought them to the seminary to discern whether or not they are really called to priesthood.”⁶⁶ (PPF)

Measurement for the virtue of Hope

1. Disposition of the heart by an attitude of receptivity;
 - a. Is it an attitude of *compliance* (choosing acts based on external rewards or punishments –to live in a state of compliance is exhausting and incongruent with one’s own inner meanings),
 - b. Is it an attitude of *identification* (choosing acts based on specific expectations within a relationship – a lack of freedom to be true to one’s own internal beliefs)
 - c. Is it an attitude of *integration* (internal choices based on a personal value system – living an integrated life is energizing since it is in harmony with one’s own internal values and deepest convictions).
2. Are they willing to rely on God’s grace?
 - a. To trust that God is in control of their lives through their formators so that they can overcome unhealthy compulsive behaviors that they recognize in themselves as they come to a deeper knowledge of themselves through their intellectual, human, pastoral and spiritual pillars of formation?

⁶⁵ PPF p. 22

⁶⁶ PPF p. 22

VIRTUE OF CHARITY – *“love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”*⁶⁷

Entrance Criteria 3: “And a growing sense of confirmation of that call.”⁶⁸ (PPF)

Measurement for the virtue of Love

1. Does the seminarian embrace the identity of beloved son and brother as the core foundation for all the priestly identities?
 - a. A beloved son has trust, confidence and a deep peace that he can depend upon those who care for him because he trusts completely in the Heavenly Father that he is loved for who he is. A beloved brother learns how to choose friends, remain loyal and steadfast with a friend in difficulty. These foundational identities especially that of beloved son are deeply rooted in the identity of Jesus as the Beloved Son of the Father.
 - i. “It is the Father who reveals to us who we really are; so we must be fathered into our true identity, which means being fathered by God.”⁶⁹
 - ii. Once the identity of beloved son is received he can become a loyal brother to others making a deliberate commitment to go beyond the normal likes and dislikes that are prompted by clashing personalities and attitudes.
 - iii. In addition, a beloved brother can communicate with his peers in clarity and charity. He understands that opinions are not absolute truths and can change over time thus letting go of his need to be “right” in every discussion or argument. These skills must be taught, practiced and measured in growth by formation.

CARDINAL VIRTUES

Is a man ready to take Candidacy (Theology I)

Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance surround all the other human virtues and when elevated by grace they become the moral virtues.

VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE - *human virtue prudence helps people to organize their lives and actions in order to accomplish the objectives of a contented life in this world.*

1. Is there orderliness in his life?
 - a. *Physically* – living and hygiene orderliness; good “physical health”⁷⁰
 - b. *Humanly* – overall time management and being able to set proper boundaries with self and others; “A balanced lifestyle and balance in making judgments”⁷¹ “good “mental health.”⁷²

⁶⁷ CCC1822

⁶⁸ PPF p. 22

⁶⁹ Schlesselmann, G.J., 2012. *The Seminary Rector: Forming Priests in Nazareth*. Omaha, NE p. 25

⁷⁰ PPF p.91

⁷¹ PPF p.91

- c. *Intellectually*- procrastination disproportions.
- d. *Pastorally* – effectiveness of use of time, a filial receptivity of joy and obedience to the Pastor in charge.
- e. *Spiritually*-prayer life is the first priority in his life.

VIRTUE OF JUSTICE – *justice demands honesty and fairness in relationship with others.*

The natural virtue of religion, calls us to honor God and observe the natural law while maintaining certain standards of good behavior.

1. Honesty and fairness in his relationships with self, others and God.
 - a. *Physically (socially)* –do they have healthy long lasting friendships and do those relationships bring them closer to God or away from God
 - b. *Humanly*- do they have insight and take responsibility for their actions and are they open and honest in the evaluation process/vocation director.
 - c. *Intellectually* – have they integrated knowledge wisely and are they honest in their dedication to studies, do they share the intellectual gifts they have been given with their brothers.
 - d. *Pastorally* –are they open to receive constructive feedback in their apostolics and apply that feedback with openness and joy; are they open to others opinions (if they disagree) without judging the person.
 - e. *Spiritually*-are they open and honest with God through spiritual direction (aware).

VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE – *Fortitude enables a person to confront danger and endure difficulty to achieve the ultimate goal of salvation or help others achieve the same goal.*

Fortitude by this definition is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit empowers a person to suffer with those who suffer, and to mourn with those who mourn, and to pick up one's cross and carry it.

1. Is the man willing to suffer with and for the kingdom of God? This means pushing against fear by picking up one's cross and following Christ.
 - a. *Physically* – self-mastery of body by pushing against the fear of poor body image. Removing all obstacles in one's life that may take him from this goal e.g. food; smoking; over-exercise; overemphasis on sports; inappropriate relationships.
 - b. *Humanly* - are they integrated interiorly and externally affectively and effectively; in other words can they push against the fear of loneliness and not give into temptations.
 - c. *Intellectually* –can they distinguish between the worlds' notion of courage (bravado) and the supernatural virtue of fortitude and be a witness of fortitude if called?
 - d. *Pastorally*- do they have the capacity to push against the fear of not getting what they want (selfish needs i.e. time, social media, etc) and be empathic to the needs and sufferings of others by responding to them in a timely manner.
 - e. *Spiritually*-are they rooted in a balanced life of prayer; Can they push against their own rigidity by having the courage and fortitude to die to self in areas to which they

may be inordinately attached such as liturgical practices; aesthetic practices – always seek permission of spiritual director.

VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE - *is a guide to help us use the attractive things of life in a way that contributes to our natural goals in life. It also involves taking care of our own legitimate needs and maintaining balance in one's life. Morally, this virtue directs us to understand that all pleasurable things in life must be directed toward our salvation and the salvation of others.*

1. A good assessment of this virtue is to determine the happiness in the seminarians' life.

Physically; humanly; pastorally; intellectually and spiritually –

- a. Are they free of or nearly free of any unhealthy compulsive or addictive behavior?
- b. Can they commit to a life of chastity and live it out in seminary on a daily basis?
- c. Do they have “self-mastery and self-discipline?”⁷³

The PPF requires chaste living three years before ordination.

VIRTUES AND PRIESTLY IDENTITIES **Is a man ready for Ordination to Transitional Deacon**

An authentic benchmark for the transitional Deacon is for him to understand that *Faith which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love.* By the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit the Lord descends upon the ordained Deacon to give him His heart that is the “Sacred Heart of Jesus” so he too can become united in the “priesthood as the love of the Heart of Jesus.”⁷⁴ Love is possible when we are able to practice it knowing (self-knowledge) we are created in the image of God as beloved children of the Father. The Deacon candidate ought to interiorly through his own prayer life and witness have integrated the belief that love is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim. This awareness gives him and his bride the church, the courage needed to keep promoting a culture of life while continuing to live and work in the current culture of death.

The Deacon candidate ought to understand responsible freedom. Responsible freedom

⁷³ PPF p.91

⁷⁴ Schlesselmann, G.J., 2012. *The Seminary Rector: Forming Priests in Nazareth*. Omaha, NE p. 16

is not just spontaneity of movement and physical response but it is his ability to recognize the implications of all his decisions. It is a willingness to carry the consequences of all his choices. It requires an accountability that understands his sexuality as a personal gift and responsibility?⁷⁵ When self-awareness and responsible freedom converge creativity occurs and new life can begin.

The Deacon candidate ought to have a disposition of interior silence. Living a virtuous life can help form a man to desire silence both exteriorly and interiorly even in the midst of the daily distractions of life. Exterior silence preserves the purpose of interior silence since interior silence prepares a man to receive and remain in communion with God. Silence ordered toward communion with God is essential for a priest to live a joyful and happy life.

As the deacon candidate's life grows in intimacy with the Trinity and Mary all the virtues will be ignited so that he can lead a virtuous life as a priest, and ultimately become a saint. From this intimate communion, the priestly identities which have been stirring in the deacon candidate's heart will lead him to his mission as a diocesan priest.

TRANSITIONAL DEACONATE BENCHMARKS:

1. Does the seminarian preparing for transitional deacon have self-knowledge and self-awareness?
2. Does the seminarian preparing for transitional Deacon have a disposition of interior silence?
3. Interiorly through his own prayer life and witness has he integrated the belief that love is the light – and in the end, the only light?
4. Does the deacon candidate understand responsible freedom?
 - a. Responsible freedom is not just spontaneity of movement and physical response but responsibility is his ability to recognize the implications of all his decisions. It is a willingness to carry the consequences of all his choices.
 - b. In addition, does he understand his sexuality as a personal gift and responsibility?⁷⁶
5. When self-awareness and responsible freedom converge creativity occurs. Creativity becomes generative if it is from our inner being as a human person. Does the Deacon Candidate have the ability to participate in making new life? (Pastoral assignments).

⁷⁵ Pastores Dabo Vobis, 43-44; 87

⁷⁶ Ibid.

6. Does the deacon candidate's life embrace all the theological virtues and does he have a "spiritual disposition" to practice and live all the natural virtues and have all doubts removed concerning Church teaching?⁷⁷
7. Does the deacon candidate have a deepening capacity for intimacy and the confidence to appropriately self-disclose in the gift of mutual sharing, first with the Lord then friends?
8. Does he have the ability to relate (connect physically, emotionally and spiritually) and the "skills for leadership and collaboration with women and men?"⁷⁸
9. The transitional deacon's evident integration of the priestly identities of beloved son, brother, spouse, and father can be clear measurable benchmarks for advancing to ordination.

⁷⁷ PPF 274. p.89

⁷⁸ PPF p.91

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