

# PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition



## A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES

*Scripture Reflection: Acts 4:32-35*

Priestly formation occurs in the context of **community life**, whether a seminary or a house of formation. It is “a continuation in the Church of the **apostolic community** gathered about Jesus” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 60) in which men called to share in a unique way in the priesthood of Christ relive today the formation offered to the Twelve by the Lord.

The seminary’s life in community mirrors **ecclesial communion**, which itself is rooted in the Blessed Trinity. This ecclesiology of communion lived out in seminary community is “decisive for understanding the identity of the priest, his essential dignity, and his vocation and mission among the People of God and in the world” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 12). Viewed in this way, the seminary community is the essential formational matrix for those preparing for ordained ministry, which itself “has a radical ‘communitarian form’ and can only be carried out as a ‘collective work’” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 17). The seminary community, then, is committed to fostering the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation of future priests.

The essential work of the seminary takes place in the context of community. Personal growth and character development should progress together harmoniously within a deepening spiritual life. Community life can help overcome difficulties caused by excessive individualism. “Formation comes about every day through interpersonal relationships, moments of exchange and discussion which result in the development of that ‘fertile soil,’ in which a vocation matures concretely” (*Ratio*, no. 50). The seminary is a school of human virtue and of growth in honesty, integrity, intellectual rigor, hard work, and

## KEY WORDS

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Community Life

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Apostolic Community

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Ecclesial Communion

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Carefully Cultivated

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tolerance, where the common good is built with solidarity and discipline—all leavened by humor and healthy enjoyment.

The seminary is also a place in which spiritual growth and community life compliment each other, where seminarians are formed into men of prayer, imbued with those virtues that only grace can bring, that is, faith, hope, and charity. “In fact, fraternity is fostered through spiritual growth, which requires a constant effort to overcome various forms of individualism. A fraternal relationship ‘cannot just be left to chance, to fortuitous circumstances,’ but is rather a conscious choice and an ongoing challenge” (*Ratio*, no. 52). The seminary helps the seminarians develop the relationship and dialogue skills necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships as priests.

Seminary programs of formation have two focal points: (1) the seminary community and its public life as an environment for growth and development that includes many kinds of relationships, and (2) individual seminarians as they strive to interiorize the values of the spiritual life and integrate the lessons of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. The interplay between individual and community, founded on Christ, lies at the heart of formation.

Each stage of formation will shape community life in a particular way. Still, at every stage, community is formative in similar ways. The give-and-take among those who share the priesthood as a common vocation sets the right context for formation. Such interaction provides mutual support, promotes tolerance and fraternal correction, and gives an opportunity for the development of leadership and talent among seminarians. It also can motivate seminarians to develop a sense of self-sacrifice and a spirit of collaboration. The seminarians and the community of formators form the heart of the seminary community, and this reality needs **careful cultivation** so that the distinctive aims of seminary formation can be achieved.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does the seminary prepare seminarians for the communal aspects of pastoral life, especially related to priestly fraternity and engagement in one’s local presbyterate?
2. How do the rector and priest formators give witness to a healthy community of priests?

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How often should the seminary handbook be reviewed?

Each seminary must have a handbook based on the *Program of Priestly Formation*, and approved by the diocesan bishop or major superior, in which the expectations of the seminary formation program are clearly stated. These expectations specify all dimensions of the formation program and

include a Rule of Life as mandated by the Code of Canon Law. The handbook forms the basis of the annual evaluation of the seminarians and is regularly reviewed and updated. The handbook should be explained clearly to the seminary community each year; and preparing for this annual event is a good opportunity for review.