

Come Follow Me: A Seminarian's Journey

Installment 6 – Four Dimensions of Formation

1. An Overview

- When people hear that a man goes to seminary for 6-8 years, they may think, “That’s a long time to go to school!” But seminary is more than just school. It is a process of *formation*. He is being formed in the image of Jesus Christ, the High Priest.
- This process of formation is often described in terms of the 4 *dimensions* of formation: intellectual, human, spiritual, and pastoral.

2. Intellectual Formation

- We have already seen a lot of what goes into intellectual formation. He earns a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and a master’s degree in theology.
- The seminarian takes classes, does lots of reading, writes papers, and takes tests. He learns the academic things that a priest needs to know.
- While getting good grades is important, it is not the only thing the Church looks for in a man preparing for priesthood.

3. Human Formation

- The seminarian must also grow as a person, as a healthy man. He may need to improve in various areas of physical, mental, and emotional health.
- A seminarian may work on things like eating habits, exercise, getting enough rest, growth in virtue (charity, patience, humility, chastity, etc.), communication skills, and leadership.
- The seminarian learns responsibility through his “house job.” He serves the community in some capacity (mailman, barber, kitchen help, librarian, sacristan, student government, etc.)
- The seminarian has a “formation advisor,” a priest who helps him improve and make goals in this area.

4. Spiritual Formation

- The seminarian must also grow and develop in the spiritual life. He must be a man of deep prayer, having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- He goes to confession regularly, prays the Liturgy of the Hours, attends daily Mass, prays the rosary, and spends time in mental prayer. He learns more about the spiritual life through spiritual reading (books about prayer or books on the saints).
- The seminarian has a “spiritual director” who can hear his confession and talk about his prayer life. He meets with his formation advisor and spiritual director on a monthly basis. They are two different priests assigned to him or chosen by the seminarian.

5. Pastoral Formation

- Finally, the seminarian is formed in the extremely practical areas of priestly life and ministry. Each year, he has a pastoral assignment during the school year (near the seminary) and usually a summer parish assignment in his home diocese.
- The seminarian may be assigned to a parish to learn directly from a parish priest. He may do hospital ministry, prison ministry, or teach in a Catholic school.
- Again, this is about gaining very practical experiences: how to celebrate and prepare people for the sacraments, preach, work with parish staff, respond to various emergency situations, run the parish, lead a finance council meeting, etc.

(Next Week – Installment 7 – A Seminarian's Prayer Life)*

**Next week will be the “last” installment on seminary... at least for now.*