

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition



PRIVILEGED SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Scripture Reflection: John 20:19-23

Spiritual directors must be chosen freely from a list prepared by the coordinator of spiritual formation. They should have proper training and adequate credentials for the work. These priests must be approved by the rector and appointed by the competent authority. In the case of seminarians for an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life, the formation director or competent authority offers guidance on an appropriate spiritual director for the seminarians under his care.

Spiritual direction is not an optional possibility but a seminary requirement. Seminarians must meet regularly with a priest spiritual director, **normally bi-weekly (every other week)** and of a sufficient duration to allow adequate opportunity to assist the seminarian in ongoing vocational discernment, proximate preparation for the reception of ministries and Holy Orders, and formation for celibacy. Seminarians should confide their personal history, personal relationships, prayer experiences, their cultivation of virtues, their temptations, and other significant topics to their spiritual director. If, for serious reason, there is a change of director, the new director should give attention to continuity in the seminarian's spiritual development.

The spiritual director should foster an integration of spiritual formation, human formation, and character development consistent with priestly formation. The spiritual director assists the seminarian in acquiring the skills of spiritual discernment and plays a key role in helping the seminarian discern whether he is called to priesthood or to another vocation in the Church. Those priests who engage in spiritual direction for seminarians must understand and support

KEY WORDS

Spiritual Directors

Bi-Weekly Meetings

Internal Forum

Manifestation of Conscience

the full formation program. They also need to be integrated into the priestly community of the seminary. The spiritual directors are thus aware that they are part of the whole seminary program and community.

Care is to be taken to ensure that issues of human formation that properly belong to the external forum are not limited to the spiritual direction relationship for their resolution. Likewise, the spiritual director should be prepared to encourage that a seminarian bring to the external forum characteristics within him which would preclude the freedom to be advanced or ordained. Disclosures that a seminarian makes during spiritual direction belong to the **internal forum**. Consequently, the spiritual director is held to the strictest confidentiality regarding the **manifestation of conscience**. He may neither reveal it nor use it. Although the civil legal requirements might vary from state to state, the only possible exception to this standard of confidentiality would be the case of grave, immediate, or mortal danger involving the directee or another person. If what is revealed in spiritual direction coincides with the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (*ad ordinem absolutionis*)—that is, the exchange takes place not only in the nonsacramental internal forum but also in the sacramental internal forum—then the absolute canonical strictures of the seal of confession hold, and no information may be revealed or used.

In the context of seminarian evaluation, although the rector may never ask a spiritual director about the content of a seminarian's conversation, he can expect a spiritual director to confirm that a seminarian sees him bi-weekly. The spiritual director must notify the rector if the director decides to discontinue spiritual direction with any seminarian or if the seminarian discontinues direction with him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. While respecting the confidential nature of the internal forum, how can spiritual directors work with formators in the external forum regarding particular seminarians?
2. How are confessors for the seminarians selected and formed to assist the seminary's coordinator of spiritual formation?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if a seminarian lacks readiness for spiritual direction?

Because spiritual direction in a seminary differs from spiritual direction more generally experienced, the seminary must explain to seminarians its purpose and process. This should include a recognition that seminary spiritual direction is concerned not only with the personal

spiritual growth but also with preparation for service in the Church as a priest. Therefore, certain benchmarks of spiritual development must be met. A lack of openness to and transparency in spiritual direction should prompt a seminarian to seriously consider withdrawing from formation.