

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CONTINUING FORMATION OF PRIESTS

549. " 'I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you' (2 *Tm* 1:6). The words of St. Paul to Timothy can appropriately be applied to the ongoing formation to which all priests are called by virtue of the 'gift of God' which they have received at their ordination."<sup>207</sup> "One can speak of a vocation 'within' the priesthood. The fact is that God continues to call and send forth, revealing his saving plan in the historical development of the priest's life and the life of the Church and of society. It is in this perspective that the meaning of ongoing formation emerges. Permanent formation is necessary in order to discern and follow this constant call or will of God."<sup>208</sup>

550. In light of the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*<sup>209</sup> and the directives of the *Code of Canon Law*,<sup>210</sup> dioceses and religious institutes or societies in collaboration with seminaries and study centers are called to provide the means for priests to grow personally, spiritually, and professionally. Priests themselves are also responsible agents for their own growth and formation after ordination.<sup>211</sup>

#### A. THE ROLE OF THE SEMINARY

551. The seminary seeks to provide the education, formation, and skills necessary for priests to begin pastoral ministry. It does not provide all the education, formation, and skills that priests will require during the exercise of their ministry.

552. The seminary should teach seminarians that their formation and development is a lifelong process of conversion and does not end with ordination.<sup>212</sup> It is equally important that seminarians know that, as priests, they have a right to expect assistance in their continuing formation and also have a duty to the Church and to themselves to pursue the various available avenues of lifelong formation.

553. A proper introduction to the spiritual life should make it apparent that all priests need continual nourishment throughout their priestly ministry. A habit of personal prayer should be fostered with the understanding that it is of primary importance in the life and ministry of priests.

554. The academic program should emphasize the obligation to cultivate intellectual capacities and remain aware of developments in theology. Pastoral theology and field education should take care that seminarians become attentive to continually changing pastoral needs, which will require the acquisition of new skills and the deepening of others.

555. The encouragement of a holistic approach toward physical and psychological well-being while in the seminary should lead to the maintenance of healthy lifestyles that will enhance the spirituality of priests and enable them better to serve the people.

556. The seminary should encourage students possessing the requisite abilities to attain their academic potential by utilizing M.A. and S.T.L. programs. Such students should be recommended to their respective ordinaries as potential candidates for advanced degrees.

## **B. THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESE OR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE OR SOCIETY**

557. Effective communication between the diocesan bishops and religious ordinaries and the seminary is essential. The diocese or religious institute or society should be aware of the specific formation and education offered by each seminary. It also should be aware of the talents and needs of each ordinand.<sup>213</sup>

558. The period immediately after ordination is of great importance for the entire ministry of priests. It is a time when priests should be introduced to and integrated into the presbyterate of the diocese or assisted in the development of their priestly role within the religious institute or society.

559. Each diocese or religious institute or society should take special care that a program exists to assist newly ordained priests in this transition. The first assignment should provide a challenging work situation and a healthy living environment. The pastor/superior should maintain effective communication with the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary as well as with the newly ordained. The newly ordained should be provided opportunities to reflect with peers and with a mentor. This program should be attentive to the human, spiritual, and intellectual needs of priests.<sup>214</sup>

560. The diocese or religious institute or society should provide adequate resources for continuing priestly formation.<sup>215</sup> Each diocese or religious institute or society should have programs or provide access to programs

which can assist priests throughout their ministry in the vital and complex task of continuing formation.<sup>216</sup>

561. Personnel directors and vicars for priests should have adequate time, training, and finances to enable them to know the priests, their needs, and their experiences and to be familiar with appropriate programs and other means of support.

562. Clear policies should be enunciated so that the priests will be aware of the expectations of the diocese or religious institute or society as well as of the programs and resources available.

563. Continuing education and formation programs should address the needs of individual priests and assist in the development of a spirit of priestly fraternity.

564. Spiritual development is a lifelong process. Each priest should be encouraged to have a personal spiritual director. The diocese or religious institute or society should encourage priests and others to obtain or deepen skills in spiritual direction so that there will be sufficient resources in the future.<sup>217</sup>

565. An annual retreat represents an important moment in priests' lives and is of benefit for their own spiritual well-being as well as for the welfare of the presbyterate of which they are members. For this reason, annual retreats should be planned and executed with care and thoughtfulness.

566. Rapid developments in our society and culture have a great impact on pastoral life. Priests must be able to apply theological principles to a changing culture. Because circumstances vary greatly, a wide variety of approaches to continuing theological education should be utilized.

567. For some, graduate studies in the sacred sciences should be encouraged for the appropriate development of their own talents and for the sake of the future of theology as a church discipline.

568. For all, the diocese or religious institute or society should provide opportunities to participate in courses, workshops, and conferences which will develop priests' theological and pastoral competence. These courses, workshops, and conferences should explicitly respect the pastoral experience of priests and offer them the opportunity to compare their experiences and convictions with those of experts.

569. Although the seminary provides an introduction to pastoral skills through the pastoral theology and field-education components of the program, areas remain in which priests will need further training and education. Additional training in preaching, evangelization, leadership in public prayer, administration, and counseling should be fostered. Some priests should be encouraged to obtain certification through various chaplaincy programs. Where this is not possible, continued training through workshops and conferences should be provided.

570. The study of languages, especially Spanish, is valuable and in some regions a necessity. Beyond language studies, introduction to the cultures of ethnic and racial groups served by the diocese or religious community is of great importance.

571. A recent phenomenon has been the development of sabbaticals for priests. The growth of these programs should be encouraged. Such programs include some or all of the above areas in varying degrees. In addition they provide priests with much needed rest from their labors and enable them to return refreshed to their ministry.

572. Another area that should not be neglected is the provision for the maintenance of the physical and psychological health of priests. The diocese and the religious institute or society should be solicitous of the physical and psychological needs of the Church's ministers. Regular physical examinations should be encouraged if not mandated. Access to confidential counseling and other psychological services should be available.

## CONCLUSION

573. The priests of the next century will undoubtedly face new challenges, but they will not do so alone. From a common baptismal origin, the faithful join them in a community of faith, love, and commitment. In sacramental communion, priests serve amid a worldwide body of bishops and priests. This program of priestly formation speaks of the ministerial priesthood with great confidence. With fervent faith, it exhorts those studying for the priesthood to "cast all your cares upon the Lord, for he cares for you."<sup>218</sup> Trusting in the power of the Spirit, priests live within the world knowing that the "Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving, and wise."<sup>219</sup> "God promises the Church not just any sort of shepherds, but shepherds 'after his own heart.' And God's 'heart' has revealed itself to us fully in the heart of Christ the good shepherd."<sup>220</sup>