

## PREFACE

1. The fourth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops is rooted in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*; the Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishop, *Christus Dominus*; and the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, established a normative understanding of the presbyteral office in light of conciliar reforms.
2. The council's Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, set principles for the worldwide renewal of priestly formation, mandating each nation or rite to develop its own program of priestly formation, to be revised and reviewed by competent authority on a regular basis. The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of 1970 laid down guidelines to aid national conferences in developing such programs.
3. In the United States, these documents provided direction for the *Interim Guidelines for Priestly Formation* and the first edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, which was approved by the bishops' conference and the Holy See in 1971. This edition was revised in 1976 and again in 1981.
4. On June 21, 1981, Pope John Paul II mandated an apostolic visitation of all United States seminaries. In 1986, the Congregation for Catholic Education published its observations on freestanding diocesan seminary theologates and, in 1988, on college seminaries. The final phase of the visitation of study centers and houses of formation was concluded in March 1990 with a joint letter from the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.
5. In addition to previous ecclesiastical documents, these Vatican letters establish the parameters for the fourth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*. By providing a detailed commentary on all aspects of seminary formation, the letters contribute an important perspective for examining seminary education and updating the *Program of Priestly Formation*.
6. Shortly after the revision of the *Code of Canon Law* in 1983, a new edition of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* was issued (1985). In the 25 years since the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and

Societies of Apostolic Life also published many other documents bearing on seminary education. The congregations have given direction on the teaching of philosophy (1972), theology (1976), canon law (1975), mutual relations between bishops and religious (1978), liturgical formation (1979), social communications (1986), pastoral care of people on the move (1986), Oriental Churches (1987), social doctrine (1988), Mariology (1988), patristics (1989) and formation in religious institutes (1990). These documents examine particular facets of the seminary formation, providing theoretical and practical norms for priestly education. The Congregation for Catholic Education has also commented on other aspects of formation, notably celibacy (1974) and spiritual formation (1980).<sup>1</sup> The requirements of the *Code of Canon Law*, the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the above documents are normative for all programs of priestly formation.

7. In addition, the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Formation has published documents on spiritual formation (1983), pastoral formation (1985), and the relation between seminary and vocations personnel (1988), which affect this revision. The Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry has contributed documents on preaching (1982), stress (1982), sexuality (1983), general health of priests (1983), ongoing formation (1984), the role of pastor (1987) and morale (1989).

8. Finally, this revision of the *Program of Priestly Formation* is published following the conclusion of the 1990 international Synod of Bishops on "Priestly Formation in the Circumstances of Today" and in light of the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. This event and the exhortation provide worldwide perspective and offer normative direction to meet the challenge of priestly formation in the United States in the third millennium.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. NEW POINTS OF EMPHASIS

9. The *Program of Priestly Formation, Fourth Edition*, builds on previous editions of this document and on the experience of priestly formation in the United States during the past two decades. The international Synod of Bishops on "Priestly Formation in the Circumstances of Today" in 1990 provided an account of the experience of priestly formation worldwide. Garnering the fruits of the synodal discussion, Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* provides significant emphases for this edition.

#### A. IDENTITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

10. The first and most obvious emphasis concerns the priesthood itself. A clear doctrinal understanding of the priesthood is necessary in order to chart the course of a consistent education and to foster a secure priestly identity. "Knowledge of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood is an essential presupposition and at the same time the surest guide and incentive towards the development of pastoral activities in the Church for fostering and discerning vocations to the priesthood and training those called to the ordained ministry."<sup>2</sup> Only such knowledge can provide sure guidelines for diocesan bishops, religious ordinaries, and seminary leadership in the challenging task of priestly formation. This same clarity about priestly identity also offers direction and support for seminarians in the course of formation. From many points of view, clear priestly identity and sound priestly formation are necessary correlates.

11. In order to provide such guidelines, Chapter One of this document sets forth a doctrinal understanding of the ministerial priesthood. Because the identity of the priest is intimately linked to personal faith, this chapter includes a companion statement on the spiritual life of diocesan priests. This new emphasis informs both the education and formation of seminarians in the sections of the document that follow.

12. The uniqueness of the priestly role in the Church calls for specialized programs of learning and formation. Because of the important emphasis placed upon personal and spiritual formation, diocesan seminarians are usually educated in a seminary community whose clear focus is priestly formation. For religious priests, there are special tracks for the training of

priesthood candidates. The primary locus for their spiritual formation is the religious community.

## **B. EDUCATIONAL AND FORMATIONAL PREPARATION**

### **1. Pre-Theology Formation**

13. American culture has an impact on many phases of the Church's life in the United States and on the training of candidates for the priesthood.<sup>3</sup> Often, highly motivated candidates enter the seminary at different levels of religious, academic, and personal preparedness. Diverse issues — facility in language, training in philosophy and the liberal arts, a grounding in Catholic tradition and religious education, matters of personal and spiritual maturity — must be addressed before candidates are ready to begin theological studies and appropriate an authentic priestly identity.<sup>4</sup>

14. To address this situation, the *Program of Priestly Formation, Fourth Edition*, devotes a new section to pre-theology programs, which not only offer academic preparation but also provide an intense introduction to the spiritual life. As the sections on the high school and college seminary indicate, the contemporary situation continues to underscore the importance of formation on those levels.

### **2. Formation for Celibacy and Permanent Commitment**

15. The social climate in the United States often can hinder individual capacity for lifelong commitment and undermine the social support system on which it depends. This has a direct bearing on the permanent commitment asked of priests in the sacrament of orders.

16. Combined with a widespread tolerance of sexual behavior contrary to Catholic teaching, the above factors create an atmosphere that renders the celibate commitment less intelligible and its practice more difficult.<sup>5</sup>

17. Therefore extensive attention is given in this edition to the preparation of seminarians for celibate living. First, there is a substantive reflection on the meaning of celibacy in Chapter One: "Foundations of Priestly Formation," Article Two: "Spiritual Life of Diocesan Priests." Second, there is a more detailed treatment of practical perspectives on celibate living in the sections on spiritual formation and community life. Finally, the sections on admissions and evaluations treat the topic in greater detail.

## II. THEMATIC INTEGRATION

18. This revision tries to integrate into all sections of the document four significant topics in priestly formation, some of which were considered separately in earlier editions of the *Program of Priestly Formation*. This integration reflects a desire to introduce these subjects into all phases of priestly formation, because each represents a value central to the life of the Church in the United States and the future ministry of priests.

### A. CHANGING ETHNIC AND RACIAL FABRIC OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

19. The life and mission of the Catholic Church in the United States are increasingly enriched by growing numbers of Hispanic Americans, Pacific Asian Americans, Americans of African heritage, Native Americans, and others. Candidates for the ministerial priesthood are called to serve a multiracial, multiethnic Church. Immigration will only increase the challenge. This changing face of the Catholic Church in the United States should have a significant effect on seminary formation. In order to secure its proper place in priestly formation, this topic is woven into every phase of this new edition.

### B. PEACE, JUSTICE, AND RESPECT FOR LIFE

20. The statements of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on peace, on the economy, and on the integrity of human life from conception to death have focused attention on the significance of peace, justice, and respect for life in our society. In a world that seeks to privatize religious commitment, seminary education should appropriately emphasize the social dimension of the Gospel, its concern for human life, for justice in the marketplace, and for peace in the world. This edition seeks to integrate these emphases into all dimensions of preparation for the priesthood. A major resource in meeting this essential challenge is the *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, from the Congregation for Catholic Education.

### C. ECUMENISM AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

21. Ecumenism now represents an important dimension of priestly formation that should be integrated into all phases of seminary education. Since the Vatican Council, seminaries have educated men for the priesthood in a spirit of informed ecumenical and interfaith cooperation. The theme of ecumenism and interfaith cooperation is one whose roots must

lie in the vision of faith of each of the churches and religions involved with attention to the basic theological issues they must confront together. The concerns of justice, peace, and the integrity of human life join together all churches and all religions.

#### **D. COLLABORATION**

22. All baptized persons are called to collaborate in Christ's mission. The distinctive quality of the laity is its "secular character," its unique capacity to witness to "the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God" beyond the Church. The ministerial priesthood attests to "the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer."<sup>6</sup> According to duty, talent, and hierarchical responsibility, priests and laity collaborate together in all dimensions of the Church's life and mission.<sup>7</sup> Priestly formation should model this collaborative spirit. Future priests should be trained to work effectively in the collaborative situations that are characteristic of ministry in today's Church. The theme of collaboration also should be integrated into all phases of seminary education.

### **III. DISTINCTIVE PREPARATION OF RELIGIOUS FOR PRIESTHOOD**

23. The Second Vatican Council enjoined upon religious institutes and societies the task of renewal according to the charism of their founder.<sup>8</sup> The successful outcome of such efforts has had an influence on the special way religious men experience the ministerial priesthood and how that one priesthood of Jesus Christ is understood and lived in religious life. A new article on priesthood in the context of religious life has become part of Chapter One: "Foundations of Priestly Formation." That article articulates the diverse, yet authentic, ways in which religious priests live and discern the one priesthood of Jesus Christ according to the Church's doctrinal understanding of the presbyteral office.

#### **IV. A NEW FORMAT**

24. This edition also introduces a new format for the *Program of Priestly Formation*. While retaining in large measure the content of the third edition, the document has been rearranged and, where possible, shortened for greater clarity, precision, and practicality.

25. In addition to sections that describe the goals and programs of each phase of seminary training, sections have been added on *norms* that spell out those elements that should be part of every program of priestly formation.