

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition



ACCOMPANIMENT IN SEMINARY FORMATION

Scripture Reflection: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Accompaniment is the work of the formative community. “The principal agent of formation is **the Most Holy Trinity**, who shapes every seminarian according to the plan of the Father, both through the presence of Christ in His word, in the sacraments and in the brothers and sisters of the community, and through the many actions of the Holy Spirit” (*Ratio*, no. 125). In his docility to the Holy Spirit and the program of initial formation, “each seminarian is the protagonist of his own formation” (*Ratio*, no. 130). He is ultimately responsible for his ongoing growth in all dimensions of his formation.

Integral formation is successful when it is supported by a trusting atmosphere of personal and communal accompaniment. “The purpose of personal accompaniment is to carry out vocational discernment and to form the missionary disciple” (*Ratio*, no. 44). So too the role of the community is crucial in accompaniment. “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)

Relationships characterized by trust are essential for accompaniment to be successful. “The program of formation should explore and outline the concrete ways in which this trust can be encouraged and safeguarded. Above all, those conditions should be sought and fostered, which can, in some way, create a peaceful climate of **trust and mutual confidence**: fraternity, empathy, understanding, the ability to listen and to share, and especially a coherent witness of life” (*Ratio*, no. 47).

KEY WORDS

Accompaniment

The Most Holy Trinity

Trust & Mutual Confidence

Internal & External Fora

The relationships in the **external forum** are those between a seminarian and his bishop or competent authority, including the rector, vice rector, vocation director, director of seminarians, and other formators (except for the spiritual director). The external forum includes discussions surrounding any observable behavior of the seminarian and the attitudes and motivations related to these behaviors. The Church has a right and responsibility to know the man she is ordaining, and therefore the seminarian has a corresponding responsibility to let himself be known. These discussions generally include, but are not limited to, vocational discernment, and behaviors related to interior freedom, and promises of prayer, obedience, and celibacy.

The primary relationship in the **internal forum** is that between a seminarian and his spiritual director. The purpose of the internal forum is to protect the manifestation of conscience of the seminarian and to provide him the space to share about his interior life with the moral freedom that is necessary for genuine growth and discernment. These discussions generally include, but are not limited to, movements in prayer, vocational discernment, and struggles and growth in interior freedom around the promises of prayer, obedience, and celibacy.

While the manifestation of conscience and sacramental confession are never part of the external forum, over time the seminarian will grow comfortable discussing appropriate interior matters related to his vocation with formators in the external forum. A solid relationship of trust with his formators in both fora will benefit the seminarian as he receives guidance from all formators. These relationships will allow major decisions to be reached following regular discussions throughout the formation process, so that the seminarian will not be surprised by decisions reached by those responsible for his formation, and vice versa.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How are ongoing formation opportunities made available for the internal and external priest formators in your community?
2. What are some external signs that healthy personal accompaniment is occurring between seminarians and formators?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is *required* and what is *recommended* in the PPF?

Care has been taken in the PPF to limit the use of prescriptive and exhortative language to two terms. The use of the word “*must*” is a designation that an action is required.

Authorization from the competent authority is required for an exception from following

the required course of action. The use of the word “*should*” designates that an action is highly recommended, such that a nonarbitrary reason is necessary for the decision not to pursue this course of action.