

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ADMISSION AND CONTINUING EVALUATION OF SEMINARIANS

A. CANDIDATES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

506. "The time has come to speak courageously about priestly life as a priceless gift and a splendid and privileged form of Christian living. Educators, and priests in particular, should not be afraid to set forth explicitly and forcefully the priestly vocation as a real possibility for those young people who demonstrate the necessary gifts and talents."¹⁹⁹

507. "The first responsibility for the pastoral work of promoting priestly vocations lies with the bishop, who is called to be the first to exercise this responsibility even though he can and must call upon many others to cooperate with him."²⁰⁰ The same is true of religious ordinaries in regard to religious institutes and societies. Such responsibilities pertain to the promotion of vocations, the supervision of candidates in seminary formation, and, finally, the call to sacred orders. The diocese or religious institute or society is also closely involved in pastoral internships and responsible in a particular way for deacon internships and the summer assignments of seminarians.

The Vocation Director

508. Normally in a diocese or religious institute or society, such duties are delegated in whole or part to a vocation director or others who act in the name of the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary and in harmony with their directives. Duties of vocation directors or teams may differ from diocese to diocese. In all cases, sensitivity on the part of vocation personnel to the recruitment of candidates from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds is important.

509. The vocation director or members of the vocation team may act as the bishop's or religious ordinary's liaison to the seminary. Mutual respect and collaboration should mark the relation of vocation and seminary personnel. Each possesses autonomy; yet cooperation, mutual knowledge, and trust are vital for the good of candidates and the benefit of the Church. Such collaboration is especially important in regard to the recommendation of candidates for admission and their

continuing evaluation. Visitations to the seminary on the part of the bishop, religious ordinary, and vocation personnel should be encouraged. Often it may be helpful for seminary faculty to visit the local dioceses and religious communities they serve.

B. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

510. Given the age and diverse background of many candidates, the admission procedure is crucial, indeed central, to every dimension of priestly formation. In regard to personality and disposition, candidates admitted are very similar to the seminarians who only a few years later will be recommended for sacred orders. In cases in which the admission committee has reservations, caution should be the watchword and the benefit of the doubt given to the Church. It is also important for the admission procedure carefully to weigh the impact the admission of each individual candidate will have on the seminary community.

511. Seminaries should have clear written statements of admission and continuing evaluation policies, which regularly are reviewed and updated. The policies should outline behavioral criteria which place the burden of qualification for admission to the seminary and advancement to the priesthood on candidates.

512. Applicants must give evidence of an overall personal balance, moral character, and proper motivation. This includes the requisite human, moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and psychological qualities for priestly ministry.²⁰¹

513. Students applying to the seminary should undergo a thorough screening process. Personal interviews with the applicants, evaluations from their pastors and teachers, academic records, and standardized test scores are all components of an effective admission program and must be weighed with a judgment of the applicants' motivation. Those who do not fulfill these entrance requirements should not be admitted.

514. Applicants from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds actively should be encouraged. Academic requirements should not be lessened, but necessary adaptations may be made, to enable admission into the regular courses of study. Supplementary assistance should be available when necessary, especially where English is a second language.

515. Theologates should require a bachelor's degree or its equivalent from an accredited institution. Sound education in philosophy will require 24 semester credit hours.²⁰² A minimum of 12 semester credit hours are required in appropriate courses of undergraduate theology. The content of such courses is outlined in paragraphs 170-171.

516. The admission process should include a thorough physical examination in order to ensure that applicants possess the good health necessary for seminary training and priestly ministry.

517. Seminary administrators should consider psychological assessment an integral part of the admission procedures. Due care should be observed in correctly interpreting the results of psychological testing in light of the racial or ethnic background of applicants.

518. Seminaries should draw up guidelines for psychologists and other admission personnel describing objectively those traits and attitudes which give hope of a true vocation as well as those characteristics which indicate that a priestly vocation is not present. Seminaries should ensure that those employed in the psychological evaluation of seminarians are well versed in and supportive of the Church's expectations of candidates for the priesthood, especially in regard to celibacy.

519. In the admission procedure, the life experiences candidates bring to the seminary should be openly and forthrightly discussed. The seminarians' level of insight and motivation to address areas such as interpersonal relations and psychosexual development are important criteria for admission. Seminaries may have to delay admission of some candidates until these personal issues are better identified or resolved.

520. Attention should be given to the family background of all applicants. Those from particularly dysfunctional families require careful evaluation before admission. At times, the seminary may be able to help seminarians through counseling or other programs. Students' willingness to continue to address family and personal issues should be determined prior to admission. However, in those instances when long-term therapeutic intervention may be needed, it should be accomplished before candidates enter a program of priestly formation. If these issues are serious, the candidates' application may have to be refused.

521. In regard to results of psychological testing and other confidential materials, the seminary should observe closely all legal requirements and utilize appropriate release forms.²⁰³ Throughout the admission process, the candidates' rights to privacy should be respected and the careful management of confidential materials observed.

522. A number of candidates at the time of their initial application to the seminary are older than in the past. Many of these applicants have completed college and often some years of work in areas other than theological education or pastoral ministry. Bringing a rich and varied background to the seminary, they represent an asset to the seminary program and to the community. A number have had conversion experiences but lack strong institutional and sacramental consciousness and are uninitiated into Catholic tradition and practice. At times, their own complex backgrounds can bring complicated personal and professional situations. While screening procedures should be sensitive to their situation, they must be no less rigorous, thorough, or comprehensive.

523. Diocesan bishops, religious ordinaries, vocation directors, and seminaries should recognize that additional time will be necessary to prepare candidates without previous seminary formation for entrance into the theologate. A growing number of United States seminarians are not native born and have had prior education in other countries. It is essential that they develop the ability to preach, write adequately, and communicate easily in English.

524. If a person has no previous preparation in a formation program, the pre-theology program will normally extend over a two-year period. In determining how this standard applies in individual cases, the seminary should examine carefully the background of individual candidates. Because seminarians come from a variety of academic, cultural, personal, and spiritual situations and have different abilities, admission to a pre-theology program must be flexibly adapted to the needs of students. Such preparatory programs should take into consideration both the needs of these applicants and the special gifts they bring to the formation process because of their previous education and experience.

525. If applicants have been in a seminary or formation program before, dioceses, religious institutes or societies, and seminaries have a

serious obligation to consult all previous institutions about the past record of candidates. If such records indicate difficulties, the institution should prudently weigh admission, making sure that problems have been overcome and positive growth has taken place. In cases of doubt, caution should be observed.

526. An especially careful investigation must be made before accepting seminary students who have been dismissed or who seek transfer from another seminary. It is required that the consultation take place between the administrations of both seminaries with the necessary documentation about the applicants' previous records being provided. This must be done in every instance. Similar criteria must be applied to applicants who have been in religious formation programs and who are now applying to a diocesan seminary or vice versa.

527. Applicants for the priesthood whose marriages have been annulled should be screened carefully. While these men may have the canonical freedom to pursue the priesthood, it is important to ascertain if and how previous obstacles to a marriage commitment would affect their viability as candidates for the priesthood. While such application should be carefully weighed on a case-by-case basis, the presumption normally is against acceptance.

528. Especially careful screening should also be given to applicants who are recent converts to the Catholic faith. It is advisable that at least two or three years pass between their entry into the Church and their acceptance into a seminary program. A suitable period of time should pass before entrance to the seminary in cases of Catholics in whom a sudden conversion experience seems to precipitate a priestly vocation. Likewise, those who return to the practice of the faith after an extended period should not enter the seminary directly.

C. CONTINUING EVALUATION OF SEMINARIANS

529. Because education and growth are gradual processes, the continuing evaluation of students is necessary. Seminarians profit most from a system of periodic evaluation in which they receive clear and accurate information about their behavior and attitudes so that they can change and correct what is inappropriate and develop in those areas in which they may be weak. Such evaluation is primarily the responsibility of the seminary faculty. The faculty should also involve the seminarians