

## Chapter 3

# Formation at the Stage of the Pre-Internal Seminary

### SECTION 1

#### THE GOAL AND THE CONTEXT OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE STAGE OF THE PRE-INTERNAL SEMINARY

##### A. The Goal of Pre-Internal Seminary Formation

The goal of pre-internal seminary formation is to assist the candidate to strengthen his baptismal commitment and more deeply discern his call to Vincentian ministry. In line with the biblical image of the sower and the seed, this stage of formation creates favorable circumstances for the sprouting of the seed of a vocation and caring for it in its tender age, removing elements of a candidate's life which can choke growth.

##### B. The Various Contexts of Pre-Internal Seminary Formation

The ages at which inquirers seek initial formation for a religious vocation vary with the different cultures in which the Congregation of the Mission lives and works. As a result, some provinces maintain initial formal formation programs at the secondary school level in "minor seminaries".<sup>20</sup> In other provinces, inquirers have already completed their secondary education and are ready to pursue undergraduate studies in philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of these varying contexts, pre-internal seminary formation is best divided into two phases: an Orientation Phase and an Associate Phase.

The Orientation Phase provides an introduction to the dimensions of formation and the structures of seminary life. It generally lasts one

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<sup>20</sup> Within this context, inquirers complete their secondary school education as candidates for the Congregation. After completing the minor seminary, they seek admission to the internal seminary. The candidate may pursue his secondary school studies in an institute managed by the Vincentians or he may be sent to an institute managed by others.

<sup>21</sup> Within these provinces, there are also inquirers who have completed university studies and may have begun their professional life. They often need some undergraduate courses in philosophy as a prerequisite for their study of theology after the internal seminary.

year. Its content is largely the same for secondary school and university level candidates. The Associate Phase prepares candidates for making a decision with regard to entering the internal seminary. The content of this phase differs for candidates in secondary school and candidates in university years or beyond. It varies in length depending upon the academic needs of the candidates. Because of their considerable differences, the two phases of the pre-internal seminary will be guided by separate formation directors. The roles of these directors are mostly the same, but directed to two different groups of candidates.

## **SECTION 2**

### **THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE STAGE OF THE PRE-INTERNAL SEMINARY**

#### **A. The Vincentian Axis**

The objectives of the Vincentian Axis of formation in the pre-internal seminary are to: provide the candidates with a foundation for living the process of formation; foster within the candidates a love for Vincent de Paul and an appreciation for Vincentian life; and bring them to a human, spiritual, and academic depth needed to make a mature decision with regard to petitioning for admission to the internal seminary.

1. These objectives will be achieved during the Orientation Phase by the following strategies:
  - Candidates will read a basic account of the life of Saint Vincent de Paul. Formators will offer candidates conferences or classes on how the Congregation today lives in continuity with Vincent's mind and heart, and help them appreciate the apostolic and missionary nature of the Community.
  - Formators, through conferences, classes and/or readings, will present candidates with a basic understanding of the Vincentian virtues, and their value in serving the poor and living in community.
  - Candidates will learn the meaning of the four vows and be introduced to the ways in which they support the life and the mission of the Community.
  - Formators will assist the candidates, through individual interviews and communal formation sessions, in the discernment which they began during the Inquiry Stage.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above, and also the following:
  - Candidates will read at least one biography of the life and works of Saint Vincent during this period. University level associates

will also be introduced to the Conferences of Saint Vincent. Formators will guide them to appreciate our founder's spirituality, especially as it is understood in the candidates' culture and province.

- Each candidate will formulate a personal growth plan, under the guidance of his formator, to include a personal goal for each of the dimensions of his formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, apostolic, and communal. The plan may include ways to pursue personal interests, such as music, art, or other appropriate extracurricular activities, without impinging on his primary commitments.

## B. Human Formation

The objective of human formation during the pre-internal seminary is to help the candidate mature, and grow in integrity and interior freedom so that he may live the Vincentian life. Guidelines vary here with the different age levels of the candidates. For the teenager, this will entail provision of educational materials and guidance on psycho-sexual and social development, including affirming his personal identity, his role in his peer group, and his relationship with authority. For the young adult, this will entail helping the candidate integrate within his vocational calling, deeper dimensions of psycho-sexual development, especially experiences of loneliness, and desire for intimacy, love, and being generative.

### 1. To meet these objectives during the Orientation Phase:

- The candidate will seek a realistic appreciation of his family and socio-cultural background as a foundation for fuller self-acceptance and human growth. Formators will help the candidate explore his personal identity, strengths and weaknesses, and his relational skills.
- Formators will help candidates transition from the familiar setting of their homes and cultures to seminary life. They will help the candidates see the value and purposes of the structures of formation. They will assist the candidates, through group processes and individual counsel, to integrate the values of their own culture, and those of other cultures, within the multi-cultural composition of the group.
- Formators will present conferences or workshops on the multiple dynamics of human self-understanding and growth. These could address psycho-sexual development, human affectivity, self-esteem, fruitful relationships, anger and ways of dealing with it, physical health (including eating habits, sleep, and exercise), and feelings of guilt and appropriate ways of dealing

with them. They may wish to enlist the services of a professional psychologist to make these presentations.

- Candidates ought to discuss with the Director of Human Formation, the challenges and difficulties they encounter in the area of human growth.
  - Candidates will learn to use free time creatively to develop talents and healthy ways of relaxing and channeling energy. They should participate in sports or other exercise to maintain good health.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above, and also the following:
- Candidates will seek an integrated understanding of the reality of the society in which they live, recognizing its strengths as well as its limits, biases, and prejudices.

## C. Spiritual Formation

The objectives of spiritual formation in the pre-internal seminary are to: introduce the candidate to the spiritual dynamics of the Christian and Vincentian life; provide him with a clearer understanding of the moral doctrine of the Church; and assist him to develop concrete ways of following Christ in prayer and action.

1. To meet these objectives in the Orientation Phase:

- Formators will help candidates, through conferences or classes, understand their baptismal calling and the Vincentian vocation as a way of deepening it.
- Formators will help candidates learn the ways of building an intimate relationship with Jesus through personal and communal prayer, and interior silence.
- Formators will assist the candidate to see his life within the larger designs of God, recognizing the divine hand at work in preparing him for the very ministry of Christ, after the example of Vincent.
- Formators will guide candidates in reading the Word of God prayerfully and reflectively as an integral part of their daily life.
- Each candidate will have a personal Spiritual Director to assist him in his discernment, and in understanding, appreciating, and living the spiritual values of the Congregation. Candidates will be expected to seek the counsel of their Spiritual Director at least once a month.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> During the orientation phase, much of the work of spiritual direction will focus simply on building a trusting relationship with the candidate to enable him to articulate his thoughts and feelings about his spiritual journey.

- Formators will guide candidates to experience the Eucharist as the central moment of each day, and offer conferences or classes on the Eucharist.
  - Formators will instruct candidates so that they can assist competently at the altar during the liturgy of the Eucharist and at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
  - Candidates will participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, finding God's compassion.
  - Candidates will celebrate the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, pray the Rosary and the Novena to Our Lady of Miraculous Medal, and accept Mary as a model of discipleship.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above, and also the following:
- Candidates will follow an order of day which includes Morning and Evening Prayer recited in community, a substantial period of mental prayer, and celebration of the Eucharist. Candidates will read a portion of the Scriptures each day and visit the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament each evening.
  - Candidates will develop the habit of reading spiritual books which treat both the lives of saints and also the themes of a Christian spiritual life. Formators will recommend books which are appropriate to the candidate's age and level of education, and guide him in reading them.
  - Members of the formation team will offer weekly conferences and periodic workshops on Vincentian and spiritual themes such as the five Vincentian virtues, the four vows, the life of Saint Vincent, the early history of the Congregation, and a basic treatment on the Word of God, *lectio divina*, the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

## D. Intellectual Formation

The objective of intellectual formation in the pre-internal seminary is to help the candidate continue his program of study in preparation for Vincentian ministry. At the secondary school level, this includes laying a foundation for the candidate's intellectual growth to deepen his faith and better discern his Vincentian vocation. At the university level, this also includes providing the candidate with the opportunity to obtain an undergraduate diploma in the liberal arts or sciences, with a major or a heavy concentration in philosophy.

1. To achieve this objective in the Orientation Phase:
  - Candidates will be instructed on basic study methods to develop skills in writing, oral communication, and group discussion.

- Formators will assist candidates to appreciate learning as a necessary means for discerning their vocation and for ministering competently in the contemporary world.
  - Formators will assure that the academic program offers adequate instruction in the moral teaching of the Church. They will also lead candidates in discussion of the Church's moral teaching.
  - Candidates will learn to use modern communication techniques (especially internet) constructively to broaden their intellectual awareness, and proclaim Christian and human values to the widest possible audiences. They will avoid disreputable and deviant sites. Formators will guide candidates, through conferences and individual conversations, in finding and evaluating helpful sites and materials.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above, and also the following:
- Candidates will be provided with the opportunity to participate in an accredited educational program either at the secondary school level or university level.
  - Formators will carefully choose the institutions to which they send candidates and assess the adequacy of the program of study offered. They will be attentive to how well studies of religion (at the secondary school level) and theology (at the university level) keep pace with the study of the sciences and philosophy.
  - Formators will assist candidates to integrate their learning in these different areas.
  - Formators should know what remedial resources are available at the schools for the benefit of candidates who come with a deficient academic background or ability. In conjunction with academic deans, formators will provide each candidate with individual academic counseling, so that he may profit from his schooling as fully as possible.
  - Each candidate will have a quiet place for personal study and also a place where he can safely keep his own books, notes and course work.

### **E. Apostolic Formation**

The objectives of apostolic formation in the pre-internal seminary are to inculcate in candidates love for apostolic life in the spirit of St. Vincent, and provide them with supervised experience of service to the poor.

1. To achieve this objective in the Orientation Phase:
  - Formators will help the candidate understand that the primary means of witnessing to Christ is to acquire the disposition and sentiments of Christ.
  - Formators will present general information to candidates regarding the apostolic dimension of Christian life and the mission of the Congregation. In particular, they will describe the apostolic activities the confreres do in the province.
  - Formators will provide candidates with experiences of those who are poor and the conditions of their lives, having them visit and serve the poor in the vicinity of the seminary.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above, and also the following:
  - Candidates will be given opportunities to visit diverse sites where confreres of the province and members of the Vincentian Family engage in their apostolic mission.
  - Each candidate will engage in apostolic service to the poor for several hours each week. An apostolic supervisor will guide the candidate in his efforts and offer him periodic opportunities to share his reflections on his experiences, at times putting them into the context of Scriptural accounts.

## F. Community Formation

The objective of communal formation in the pre-internal seminary is to initiate the candidates into community life, providing them with the experience of living together as brothers in faith, supporting one another in the task of discerning their vocation.

1. The following strategies will help achieve this objective during the Orientation Phase:
  - The candidate will come to understand, through presentations on the nature and goals of the Congregation, that community is fundamental to the Vincentian life.
  - With formators' assistance, candidates will seek to obtain qualities which foster healthy relationships and life in community: trust, respect for others, openness, sincerity, good manners, compassion, kindness, flexibility, transparency, truthfulness in word and action, and a concern for justice.
  - Candidates will be encouraged to form friendships within the community. At the same time, they will be counseled to avoid exclusiveness in their relationships, which can become divisive and detrimental to Christian brotherhood.

- Candidates will take care of the physical environment of the community, keeping its resources in good condition and using them moderately so they are also available for others.
  - Formators will assist candidates to appreciate diversity, and to interact creatively and constructively with their companions from other cultures and ethnic groups to build community.
  - Formators will arrange for candidates programs of common prayer, study, manual labor, recreation, and apostolic ministry to foster communal and fraternal life.
  - Formators will arrange programs to help group dynamics among the candidates, such as working in small groups to find support in dealing with struggles as they transition into community living (possibly as part of weekly house meetings or monthly days of recollection), or workshops with a psychologist who can offer them tools for better communal living.
2. The Associate Phase will continue to employ the strategies listed above and also following:
- Each candidate will meet at least once a month with the Formation Director to discuss his personal growth in his life in community.
  - Formators will implement a communal rule of life, appropriate to age of the group, to regulate the day to day living of the members of the community, and articulate the values that lie behind community practices.
  - Formators will explain the role of authority and obedience in community from human and Christian perspectives, including those which arise from our being a society of apostolic life.

### **SECTION 3**

#### **PROFILE OF CANDIDATES COMPLETING EACH PHASE OF PRE-INTERNAL SEMINARY FORMATION**

##### **A. Profile of the Candidate Completing the Orientation Phase of the Pre-Internal Seminary**

At the completion of the Orientation Phase, for his advancement, the candidate will manifest:

1. Basic understanding of the life of Saint Vincent and the Vincentian charism, and desire to learn more about the Congregation and grow in its life. He will speak of his discernment openly with his formators.

2. Promptitude and regularity in meeting the demands of the seminary schedule, especially with regard to common prayer, common recreation, conferences, and classes.
3. Discipline in study, to be shown by having completed the courses of study with passing grades and having developed effective study habits.
4. Ability to live in community harmoniously, with genuine respect for his formators and peers, especially those who are of different cultures. He will also manifest a grateful and generous spirit toward the community, contributing time and effort in keeping the house and environment clean and in good order.
5. Willingness to give himself in ministry to those who are poor through his apostolic service.
6. Ability to learn from others, especially his formators.

## **B. Profile of the Candidate upon Completing the Entire Pre-Internal Seminary Program**

At the conclusion of the Associate Phase, the candidate will have met the pre-requisites for entering the internal seminary. These include having shown:

1. Genuine appreciation of ways of relating to Christ as friend, guide, and saving Lord.
2. Basic appreciation of Saint Vincent's life, spiritual journey and motivation, and mission.
3. A disciplined embrace of the life of prayer in the Congregation, especially by faithful participation in Morning and Evening Prayer, daily mental prayer, daily Eucharist, and devotion to Mary.
4. Ability to live a morally upright life supportive of others who seek Christ, and affective maturity which indicates a capacity to live celibate chastity.
5. A trusting relationship with his formators, especially his Formation Director and Spiritual Director.
6. Satisfactory growth in self-knowledge and comfort with his gifts and limitations. He will have shown the capacity to grow in overcoming his limitations, with a sense of humility.
7. Successful completion of his academic program, whether it be at the secondary school or university level.
8. Successful completion of an appropriate level of religious or theological study.

9. Ability to live and work generously and joyfully in community, in harmony with like-minded peers and also those whose temperaments or cultures differ from his own.
10. Desire to build upon his apostolic experience, especially by coming to know the poor and their needs more fully and by seeking ways of serving them more effectively.
11. Adequate physical health. He will be expected to complete a physical examination and have a doctor's report sent to the Admission Team or the Formation Director of the internal seminary, testifying to his physical health and his ability to do the work of the Congregation.
12. Emotional and psychological health. He is expected to complete a psychological examination and have a psychologist's report sent to the Admission Team or Formation Director of the internal seminary testifying to his emotional health and ability to do the work of the Congregation.