

Chapter 4

Formation at the Level of the Internal Seminary

SECTION 1

THE SPECIFIC GOAL AND THE CONTEXT OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE INTERNAL SEMINARY

A. The Specific Goal of Vincentian Formation at the Level of the Internal Seminary

The goal of Vincentian formation in the internal seminary is to provide the seminarian with a firm foundation for living the life of a Vincentian missionary, committed to “following Christ, evangelizing the poor.” This level of formation can be likened to that of a sprouting plant in process of developing deep roots for a stable and fruitful life in the Congregation.

To clarify this goal, it is helpful to compare the internal seminary of a society of apostolic life and a novitiate, properly so-called, of a religious community. St. Vincent did not wish the Congregation or its members to be “religious” (in the canonical sense), or bound by the obligations of monastic life, not even by the obligation to recite the Divine Office in common. For St. Vincent, the spirituality of the Congregation, and life in community – as well as the pronouncing of the vows – were intended **to serve the mission**: “following Christ evangelizing the poor.” Our internal seminary, therefore, provides seminarians with opportunities to experience and reflect upon the interplay of Christ-centeredness, prayer, life together, and dedicated service. They begin to live wholeheartedly the Vincentian way of being “contemplatives in action.”

B. The Context of Vincentian Formation at the Level of the Internal Seminary²³

The program of the internal seminary will be conducted in a house of the Congregation established specifically for this purpose, to focus the seminarians clearly upon its goal and objectives. At the same time,

²³ Among the provinces of the Congregation, candidates seeking entrance to the internal seminary come with varying degrees of education and age levels.

the internal seminary should be near or connected with another house of the Congregation so that the seminarians can meet and work with confreres engaged in ministry for the poor. It should also be located in or near an area of poverty so that the seminarians have the opportunity to experience the poor directly.

Where seminarians are few in number, it would be beneficial for several provinces to develop and support a common, interprovincial, internal seminary program. Visitors, with the consent of their Councils, will decide in which province, and where within that province, the internal seminary will be located.²⁴ They also decide which confreres from the cooperating provinces are best suited to serve as formation personnel.

The internal seminary program will be at least twelve months in duration. This period can be continuous or interrupted. If it is interrupted, the provincial assembly determines the number of continuous months and the time when the internal seminary is inserted into the course of studies.²⁵ Care will be taken to enable the seminarian to achieve the internal seminary's goals and objectives while he attends to other demands (such as study). To allot sufficient time in such cases, the internal seminary may be longer than twelve months.

SECTION 2

THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE INTERNAL SEMINARY LEVEL

A. The Vincentian Axis

The objective of Vincentian formation in the internal seminary is twofold: to provide the seminarian with a broad and detailed understanding of our founder, community, and charism; and to help him develop a disciplined life of prayer and apostolic service. This twofold objective will be fostered by these strategies:

In some provinces, candidates enter the internal seminary immediately after secondary school, having completed the pre-internal seminary. In others, candidates enter after university, but will also have completed the pre-internal seminary. In still others, discerners, who have been carefully screened, prepared, and guided, seek admission to the internal seminary without attending the pre-internal seminary. In all cases, candidates will have begun living the Vincentian values, whether in a pre-internal seminary or in a less formal program of formation.

²⁴ *Statutes* 43.

²⁵ *Constitutions* 83.

1. The seminarian will learn the meaning of Saint Vincent's words, that "Jesus is the Rule of the mission." To do this:
 - He will develop a loving relationship with Jesus as he is presented to us in the Gospels.
 - He will learn from the example of Jesus: his compassion for others, especially the poor; his personal struggles in preaching and manifesting to others God's kingdom of love, justice and peace; his unwavering dedication to his mission, which called for self-denial, even to the cross; and his constant prayer.
2. The seminarian will develop a thorough knowledge of Saint Vincent, the history of the Congregation, and the historical development of the Vincentian Family. To do this:
 - He will read at least two biographies of Saint Vincent, accompanied with a reading of his letters, his conferences, and the *Common Rules*.
 - He will read the history of the Congregation and attend to the ways, from its simple beginning, it has lived out its missionary character. He will also read the biographies of Vincentian saints and beati, seeing in them the unfolding of the Vincentian charism through many centuries.
 - He will study the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation*. He will seek from his formators a clear understanding of the implications of these norms and an appreciation of how they are faithfully lived in his own province and culture.
 - He will study the history of his own province and become familiar with its works, both past and present, and come to know the confreres of the province and their ministries. He will seek from his formators a knowledge of the challenges and the hopes of the province as it moves into the future.
 - He will come to know the Vincentian Family, and reflect upon how Saint Vincent collaborated widely in order to bring the Gospel to the poor. The seminarian will meet Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family to appreciate firsthand their work, and the ways Vincentian missionaries, Daughters, and other members of the Vincentian Family effectively collaborate.
3. The seminarian will learn the significance of the five virtues which Saint Vincent regarded as most important for living an effective life as a missionary:
 - **Simplicity**, "which consists in saying things plainly, as they are in our hearts, without useless elaborations, and in doing everything with our minds set on God alone, without deceit or

artifice.”²⁶ The seminarian will appreciate that this virtue is necessary for an open and effective life in community and in collaborative ministry.

- **Humility**, which frees us from self-sufficiency, and establishes in us an attitude of openness to God and to the poor, and so enables us to be evangelized by them.²⁷ The seminarian will learn to appreciate that humility does not entail denial of one’s gifts and talents, but rather requires one to recognize, acknowledge, and invest them.
 - **Meekness**, which leads us, after the example of Christ, to be gracious to those around us, especially the lowly, as well as to those who offend us, treating them with affability and understanding.²⁸ The seminarian will develop habits of listening to others carefully before responding, and seek to understand the needs of others before reacting.
 - **Mortification**, which enables us to live in a state of continual conversion. True Christian mortification enables us to overcome those attachments that hinder our freedom to follow Christ and to face up to the difficulties that are inherent in a missionary apostolate.²⁹ The seminarian will grow in willingness to deny his own preference – to “die to himself” – precisely to develop his deeper and more authentic self in light of the Gospel.
 - **Zeal**, which expresses the missionary character of the community and shows itself in our readiness to take on the works that the Congregation asks of us in the service of evangelization.³⁰ The seminarian will pay prayerful attention to the zeal which motivated Christ throughout his public ministry.
4. The seminarian will learn the nature of the four vows as they are pronounced in the Congregation. He will strive to appreciate that:
- **Stability** entails fidelity to God, who calls us to commit ourselves to follow Christ by evangelizing the poor in the Vincentian community for our whole lives.³¹ The seminarian will appreciate the possibility, power, and gift of the surrender of the whole of his life to this work of love.
 - **Celibate Chastity** leads us to open our hearts more to God and neighbor without discrimination.³² The seminarian will grow

²⁶ *Common Rules* II, 4.

²⁷ *Common Rules* II, 6-7.

²⁸ *Common Rules* II, 6.

²⁹ *Common Rules* II, 8-10.

³⁰ *Common Rules* II, 11.

³¹ *Constitutions* 28; 39.

³² *Common Rules* IV, 1; *Constitutions* 29; 30.

to appreciate this vow as a means of “loving others in the freedom of being children of God.” He will see that the vow does not stifle true intimacy or generativity, but enables him to deepen those profound desires through fraternal love and apostolic fruitfulness.

- **Poverty** identifies us with Christ and frees us to share the life of the poor and employ all we have in their service. It asks us to regard our materials goods as their patrimony.³³ The seminarian will come to understand that this vow fosters freedom to love and care for those in need, and work with them to create more just social systems so that they acquire their rightful share of this world’s goods.
 - **Obedience** identifies us with Christ who did the will of the Father, and frees us to respond to his call, and to the direction of our superiors in the Church and Congregation.³⁴ The seminarian will appreciate that it is the Constitutions of the Congregation that govern our life and ministry together.
5. The seminarian will come to understand the meaning and value of “good purposes.” He will see in them an opportunity to declare, at the end of the time of the internal seminary, his intention to make a lifetime commitment to the life and mission of the Congregation in the relatively near future.

B. Human Formation

The objective of human formation in the internal seminary is to enable the seminarian to develop integral self-knowledge and a balanced life-style to support a productive, Vincentian vocation. This objective will require the seminarian to engage in the following strategies:

1. He will speak with formators openly and regularly about his sense of himself, his strengths and struggles.
2. He will reflect upon the ways his human gifts can be developed and serve a Vincentian vocation, as well as the ways his limits may challenge his growth as a Vincentian.
3. He will develop discipline, personal responsibility, collaboration, personal initiative, and the ability to listen to and learn from others in seeking to become a wholesome human being and Vincentian.

³³ *Common Rules* III, 1; *Constitutions* 12, 3°; 31.

³⁴ *Common Rules* V, 1; *Constitutions* 36-38.

4. He will understand the positive dimensions of human sexuality and the need for intimacy and generativity, including his own affectivity and ways of expressing it chastely in a celibate lifestyle. He will learn the meaning and purpose of sexual intercourse, and with the help of his formators, deal with his sexual feelings maturely. He will discuss with his formators his own sexual identity.
5. He will evaluate his feelings toward, and ways of relating to, authority figures. He will respect them, listen to them with openness and trust, while expressing his own views humbly but sincerely.
6. He will evaluate his desire for, or dependence upon, material things, including electronic devices, television, and new clothing, to grow in the ability to live simply.
7. He will take care of his physical health. He will maintain a balanced diet, get physical exercise on a regular basis, and get proper sleep.

C. Spiritual Formation

The objective of spiritual formation in the internal seminary is to provide the seminarian with a deepened spiritual foundation to live the Vincentian vocation consistently and joyfully. The seminarian will embrace the following strategies to achieve this objective:

1. He will attend to Christ's attitudes toward, and ministry to, the poor and those whom Jesus formed as his coworkers. He should learn from the example of Jesus to relate his prayer to action and his ministry to prayer.
2. He will reflect upon and study a portion of the Word of God daily, especially the Gospels, so that he is energized for life in the Community and for service according to its mission. The formators will teach the seminarian the practice of *lectio divina* as a way of opening his mind and heart to God.
3. He will appreciate the flow of the liturgical year and the ways that the different seasons manifest the mystery of Christ and his redemptive love.
4. He will adopt the Vincentian practice of daily mental prayer, together with the local community, for at least a half-hour. Formators will teach him the nature and practice of the different types of mental prayer (discursive, affective, and prayer of simple regard). They should assist him through his times of light and darkness so that he appreciates that God is present and active even when he seems removed and distant.

5. He will grow in ability to find in spirituality and prayer a source of nourishment for apostolic life. He will bring his experience of the poor and their struggles, and his ministry, to prayer.
6. He will join with the local community in celebrating Lauds and Vespers.
7. He will participate daily in the celebration of the Eucharist. He will grow in appreciation of the Eucharistic as nourishment for his life among the poor, in community, and in the world.
8. He will appreciate the role of Mary in her historical life with Jesus and in the Church today. Formators will help him understand the importance of devotion to Mary (and similarly to all the saints, particularly Vincentian saints), and to distinguish exaggerated from genuine Christian devotion. They will help him learn to pray the Rosary in contemplating God's gracious love, manifest in the mysteries of Christ, and assist him to celebrate Marian and Vincentian feasts with understanding and missionary insight.
9. He will meet with a personal Spiritual Director at least once a month to process each of these strategies and advance in the spiritual objectives of the internal seminary program.
10. He will participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an opportunity to be strengthened by the Lord's healing love, especially where he senses himself to be struggling with his weaknesses.
11. He will appreciate the Church and its leadership. He will see that the Vincentian vocation is a calling to work with the Church and its leadership harmoniously.
12. He will develop the habit of regular spiritual reading to find support and inspiration for deepening his Christian life and his Vincentian vocation.
13. He will take part in retreats, days of recollection, and other periods of intensive spiritual development to hear God's call more deeply and review his progress in achieving these spiritual objectives.

D. Intellectual Formation

The objective of intellectual formation in the internal seminary is to provide the seminarian with a knowledge of the historical, spiritual, and doctrinal resources which form the bases of contemporary Vincentian spirituality and life. The following strategies will help the seminarian meet this objective:

1. He will learn some of the basic principles of contemporary biblical interpretation, and be introduced to reputable Catholic commentaries on Scripture to assist him in understanding what he reads and studies.
2. He will consult books on the history of the Church and of the society in which Saint Vincent labored, to better understand the Congregation in previous ages. He will read contemporary commentaries on the life of St. Vincent and the history of the Congregation as found in periodicals such as *Vincentiana*.
3. He will read the documents of the Church, particularly the most recent papal encyclicals, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the pastoral letters of the local bishops. Together with his formators, he will process the ways these readings apply to the life of the Congregation and its mission.
4. He will read Catholic periodicals to learn the ways in which people of faith address issues of the day. He should take note of articles which address questions of social justice and the needs of the poor.
5. He may give effort to learning a second language, at least by grasping a basic vocabulary and the fundamentals of grammar that he can build upon later.

E. Apostolic Formation

The objectives of apostolic formation in the internal seminary are to provide the seminarian with experiences of ministry to the poor, and help him understand the ways in which apostolic ministry and spirituality interrelate and feed one another. The following strategies will help him meet these objectives:

1. He will participate in supervised ministry on behalf of the poor for approximately six hours each week, to include some immediate contact with poor persons.
2. He will be guided regularly by the person in charge of apostolic formation in the process of apostolic reflection, to include questions such as: "Where do I experience God in this situation?" "What is God asking?" The seminarian will focus on his experience in ministry and the struggles and needs of the persons he meets.
3. He will develop qualities necessary to serve the poor well: Christ-like evangelical charity; confidence in the Lord's presence; patience in walking with others who desire more than one can reasonably

provide; readiness to listen and to dialogue with others who do not share the same convictions; and self-giving.

4. He will study ways of serving the poor by reading and discussing with his formators, books or articles on the causes of poverty. He will become knowledgeable about the theory and practice of systemic change.
5. He will become acquainted with the ways in which the confreres of his own province – and those of other provinces – minister to the poor. In this way he will learn from confreres who manifest wisdom and zeal in fulfilling their Vincentian calling in ministry.
6. He will become aware of, and open to, missions “*ad gentes*” as a possible way he may be called to serve as a Vincentian in his own life.

F. Community Formation

The objective of the communal formation in the internal seminary is to foster among the seminarians, true Christian fraternity: an ability to live and work harmoniously with persons who have a similar vocation but also a variety of gifts and different personalities. The following strategies should be implemented to achieve this objective:

1. The seminarian will appreciate his fellow seminarians, formators, and other confreres with whom he may live as members of one family in the Lord. He will learn from those who are different in convictions and/or temperament, listening attentively, and sharing his own views humbly but forthrightly. He will appreciate that shared differences can be a source of creativity accomplishing more together than the sum of what individuals could accomplish alone.
2. The seminarian will recognize that tension and conflicts are inevitable in community, and will be guided so that he can face these situations with mutual forgiveness.
3. The seminarian will participate faithfully in scheduled prayer and liturgy. He will be on time for meals, and share himself actively at community meetings and common recreation.
4. The seminarian will respect the prayer and work of others by maintaining an atmosphere of silence. He will respect the legitimate privacy of others and maintain confidentiality when he is asked to do so or when circumstances require it.
5. The seminarian will participate in formulating the House Plan, learning to embrace simplicity and growing to live as the poor, holding everything in common.

6. The seminarian will learn to use the resources of the community with moderation, recognizing that they are not his personal property but are goods which ought to be available to all.
7. The seminarian will feel free to share his opinion and express his personal needs, and he will respect the response and/or guidance he may then receive.
8. The seminarian will be present at community celebrations when confreres from different houses of the province gather, and at domestic and provincial assemblies. In this way, he will come to know the confreres better, and prepare to commit himself to the province when he pronounces "good purposes."
9. The seminarian will share responsibility for the well-being of the local community, serving the needs of others, especially of those who may suffer physical disability due to sickness or age. He will help clean the house and show respect for community property, including learning the proper ways of operating the different appliances before he uses them.
10. The seminarian will be instructed in creating a budget, and learn the basic processes of financial management. He will come to understand the financial state of the house or province, and begin to acquire the basic skills needed to serve as local or provincial treasurer in the future.

SECTION 3

PROFILE OF THE SEMINARIAN COMPLETING THE STAGE OF INTERNAL SEMINARY FORMATION

At the time of completing the internal seminary, the seminarian will be expected to have acquired the following personal characteristics and patterns of life:

1. He will have come to appreciate the meaning of Saint Vincent's words: "Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission," and have developed a personal relationship with Christ.
2. He will have manifested consistency in participating in communal mental prayer and liturgy.
3. He will, through his way of relating to the Lord in prayer, have shown to members of the community and to those he serves apostolically that he can live the celibate life happily and fruitfully.
4. He will have manifested commitment to a simple lifestyle through his respect for the goods of the community and moderation in seeking to meet his own material needs.

5. He will have manifested openness to formators and a continued willingness to learn from them.
6. He will have engaged in community discussion and shown the potential to participate productively in communal decision-making.
7. He will have exhibited comfort in relating to those who are poor and treated them with respect.
8. He will have a basic understanding of, and a desire for, priesthood or brotherhood as it is lived in the Vincentian community.
9. He will have the intellectual ability to engage in the theological education necessary for effective priestly ministry or the theological/professional education necessary for effective ministry as a brother.
10. He will have manifested a commitment to pursuing a life in accord with the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation*.