

## Chapter 7

# Formation at the Level of the Major Seminary

### SECTION 1

#### THE SPECIFIC GOAL AND THE CONTEXT OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE MAJOR SEMINARY

##### **A. The Specific Goal of Vincentian Formation at the Major Seminary Level**

Formation in our Congregation is directed especially toward evangelization, charity, and promotion of justice toward the poor.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the goal of the major seminary is to equip the Vincentian with the spirituality, theological knowledge,<sup>60</sup> apostolic skills, and ministerial identity needed to serve effectively as a priest of the mission. He is to be dedicated to priestly ministry for the benefit of the poor, directly, and in forming others so that they too will actively follow Christ in concern for those who are poor.

##### **B. The Context and Location of Vincentian Formation at the Major Seminary Level**

The institutions which provide theological formation for our students vary from province to province. In some provinces, students receive their formation in a seminary administered by Vincentians. In others, students receive their academic formation at a school of theology or a diocesan seminary, but are guided in their human, spiritual, communal, and apostolic formation at a Vincentian house of formation. In still others, students reside at a diocesan seminary which takes responsibility for the academic formation of Vincentian students, and also a large measure of their human, spiritual, communal, and apostolic formation. The degree to which the Vincentian Axis affects formation in the major seminary varies with these differing scenarios.

---

<sup>59</sup> *Constitutions* 87, 2; 37<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, *Lines of Action* 10; 31, 2.

<sup>60</sup> In some provinces, the major seminary also provides philosophical education. The goals, objectives, and strategies detailed in this chapter do not preclude the possibility of reserving philosophical studies to the major seminary.

This is especially significant where provinces use the resources of the diocesan seminary in forming Vincentian students for the priesthood. There are many similarities between the ministry and life of diocesan priests and that of Vincentian priests, and also many differences. A diocesan priest's identity and apostolic work are normally geographically defined, and meet the sacramental needs of the diocese. By contrast, the identity of a priest who is a religious or a member of a society of apostolic life is rooted in the mission and charism of that particular congregation, which only from time to time coincides with the apostolic circumstances of a diocese requiring parish service.

Hence, diocesan seminaries structure priestly formation to foster a vision, acquisition of skills, and life patterns that look toward diocesan and parish ministry. On the other hand, Vincentian formators of our students for priesthood need to assure that the Vincentian charism, objectives in life, and ministry are adequately addressed. Being attentive to these aspects shall not prejudice a genuine positive regard for the education and formation which Vincentian and diocesan students share in common. But it requires conscious effort on part of formators to orientate our students toward their Vincentian heritage and calling.

## SECTION 2

### THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION AT THE MAJOR SEMINARY LEVEL

#### A. The Vincentian Axis

The objective of Vincentian formation in the major seminary is to enable the student to bring a Vincentian perspective and the experience of Vincentian Life to his study of theology, life in community, and apostolic ministry so that he will be able to live the Vincentian charism at a deeper level. The formation process is expected to be: centered on Christ;<sup>61</sup> shaped by fidelity to the Word of God; fostered by shared life in a Vincentian community; nourished continually by direct contact with the poor;<sup>62</sup> marked by a readiness and growing capacity to assist in the formation of the clergy and laity to lead them to evangelize the poor;<sup>63</sup> and driven by a missionary spirit.<sup>64</sup> To achieve this objective:

---

<sup>61</sup> *Constitutions* 78, 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Constitutions* 78, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Constitutions* 1, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Constitutions* 12, 5; 13; 16; *Statutes* 1.

1. Students will grow in their understanding and living of the five virtues, reflecting on them in prayer, discussing them with formators, and bringing their appreciation of them to communal faith sharing.
2. Students will deepen their knowledge of St. Vincent, his writings, the purpose of our Congregation, the Common Rules, our history, the *Constitutions and Statutes*, other documents of the Congregation, especially more recent ones, and the Provincial Norms, through prayer and by devoting some period of time each week to “Vincentian reading.”
3. Students will increase their knowledge of our Vincentian works and other branches of our Family, especially the Daughters of Charity and Vincentian lay movements.
4. The program will provide regular times of communal reflection on these themes, but especially the Vincentian virtues and vows as students approach their final incorporation into the community.

## **B. Human Formation**

The objective of human formation in the major seminary is twofold: to foster the student’s understanding of his own gifts and limitations; and enable him to invest his gifts freely for the good of the Congregation and its mission. To accomplish this objective, the student and his formators will employ the following strategies:

1. The student will seek to understand the ways his family life and interaction with friends, teachers, authority figures, and persons whom he himself may have served, have shaped his self-understanding and capacity to build interpersonal relationships.
2. He will grow in openness and honesty, and develop the capacity both to listen carefully and to find value in what others offer, as well as to share his own views humbly but with confidence.
3. He will develop skills of reconciliation in moments of interpersonal struggle, recognizing that differences, misunderstanding, and hurt create barriers within community, but are also opportunities for deeper mutual appreciation and growth. He will free himself from needless reactions based on fear of being known or judged.
4. He will grow in his understanding of the human dynamics which undergird the living of the vows, recognizing that “grace builds on nature,” and that consecrated life takes human fulfillment beyond what nature alone can achieve. To carry out this strategy:

- He will identify his hopes, fears, human traits, and previous experiences (his own, his family's and his friends') which give him concern about making a lifelong decision and commitment.
  - He will evaluate the ways he has dealt with fears and struggles in his vocational journey, renewing his commitment to those ways that have been helpful.
  - He will appreciate the humanity of Jesus (tested as we are), his trust in the Father, and his divinity which strengthened and graced his humanity. He will allow the prospect of lifelong commitment to lead him to grow in trust of, and friendship with, Jesus.
  - In prayer and conversation with formators, he will evaluate the ways he envisions the poor, and his own willingness and capacity to serve and love them, no matter how they present themselves.
  - He will assess his willingness to live and work with others who have views and patterns of working different from his own. He will discuss his feelings in this regard with his formators.
5. The student – through prayer, reading, and conversation with formators – will strive to understand more fully the nature, dynamics, goals, and limits of human sexuality, which is at root “relational energy.” He will explore how celibate life promises true human and sexual fulfillment – not as energy leading to an ecstatic moment of physical sexual expression – but as energy for deepening relationality, generativity, and mutual love. In light of these considerations:
- He will explore insights into human sexuality which contemporary psychology and philosophy offer in helpful books and articles. He will seek to integrate his own experience of his sexuality with the insights and understanding of each of these fields of knowledge.
  - He will understand the teaching of the Church with regard to human sexuality, particularly as that teaching reflects contemporary psychological and philosophical insight.
  - He will speak honestly with formators about his struggles and growth in living chastely. He will see the importance of building open, respectful, and caring human relationships as support for, and the fruit of, chaste sexual integration, enabling him to relate comfortably and effectively with men and women in his life and ministry.
  - He will be able to engage the assistance of professional psychological counseling if, in consultation with his Spiritual Director and/or Formation Director, he judges it would be helpful.

In these cases, clear agreements shall be worked out between the student, counselor, and members of the formation team to safeguard his personal freedom and confidentiality.<sup>65</sup>

- He will embrace *stabilizing factors* to help him live out his commitment faithfully. These include: praying faithfully in intimate union with Christ;<sup>66</sup> living in community with others as “friends who care for one another deeply;”<sup>67</sup> dedicating himself joyfully to the Vincentian apostolic mission; forming habits of personal discipline and asceticism; developing prudence in relationships, conscious of the dangers that certain situations can hold;<sup>68</sup> and living a balanced lifestyle.
  - The student and formators will understand and abide by civil and Church norms about pedophilia.
  - The student and formators will understand and adhere to Church guidelines (promulgated on November 4, 2005) for evaluating and/or assisting students with homosexual tendencies.
6. The vow of poverty facilitates a human and Christian response to material disparity and the human cry for a more just world. By asking us to give our earnings to community and share with one another, and also by asking the Congregation to share its possessions with those who are most in need, the vow frees us to reach out to others in need. In light of these observations:
- Each student will identify ways in which he is overly dependent on material things and seeks comforts which impede his freedom to serve others wholeheartedly.
  - Each student will experience the ways in which the living of his vow of poverty is freeing, and how it gives him and the community the opportunity to experience God’s reign, and enables us to dedicate our thought, creativity, and energy to serving those who are marginalized and poor.
7. Obedience can be seen as an infringement on personal autonomy. A fuller understanding of human dynamics and values, however, underlies the vow of obedience. Religious authority and obedience integrate one’s individual freedom and independence with that of others as all seek life together with a common mission. Hence:
- Each student will bring to prayer and conversation with formators, how his past feelings and attitudes toward parents, previous formators, teachers and other persons in authority, affect his manner of relating with persons in authority today. He will

---

<sup>65</sup> See *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 220.

<sup>66</sup> *Constitutions*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> *Common Rules*, VIII, 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Common Rules*, IV, 2, 4.

implement ways of moving beyond those feelings and attitudes which may hinder his relating with authority.

- Each student will also reflect upon the times when he may have exercised some form of authority or leadership, recalling the factors which made those opportunities difficult or easy.
8. Each student will maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and seek a regular physical examination.

### C. Spiritual Formation

The objective of spiritual formation in the major seminary is to deepen the student's relationship with Christ, as he prepares to evangelize the poor in priestly ministry. The following strategies will help achieve this objective:

1. Since Christ, incarnate as the Evangelizer of the Poor, is the light and strength of the Vincentian priestly vocation, students shall have a greater knowledge of, and love for, Christ and his mission.<sup>69</sup>
2. Since communion with the Triune God is the foundation of Christian life and a model of Christian community, students will grow in their appreciation that all life and holiness are gifts of the Father's love, and experience more fully the presence and action of God's Spirit within us.
3. Students will grow in love and confidence toward Mary, who, according to St. Vincent, understood with greater depth than all others the evangelical teachings, and made them a reality in her life.<sup>70</sup>
4. Students will love and serve the Church, the Body of Christ. They will understand how Vincentian ministry becomes fruitful by respecting and working in harmony with Church leadership.
5. Students will participate regularly in the spiritual exercises of the Congregation. These include:
  - daily participation in the Eucharist, as the central moment of the communal living of faith;<sup>71</sup>
  - communal celebration of Lauds and Vespers,<sup>72</sup> mental prayer in common,<sup>73</sup> and daily personal and community prayer;<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Common Rules* X, 2; *Constitutions* 1; 48; 77.

<sup>70</sup> *Constitutions* 49, 1; see *Common Rules* X, 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Common Rules* X, 3; *Constitutions* 45, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Constitutions* 45.

<sup>73</sup> *Statutes* 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Constitutions* 46; 47, 1.

- reading the Word of God, especially the New Testament, and meditating on it, so as not to become “empty preachers of the Word, who do not listen to it from within”;<sup>75</sup>
  - participation in times of deeper spiritual experience: days of recollection, annual retreats, etc.<sup>76</sup>
6. Each student shall have his own Spiritual Director,<sup>77</sup> to whom he shall disclose his conscience humbly and confidently so as to walk more surely in the way of the Lord.<sup>78</sup> A missionary of the Congregation shall be named as Spiritual Director of the major seminary, but students shall remain free to approach any other priest approved for this function.<sup>79</sup>
  7. Each student shall have an ordinary confessor, although he is free to confess to any priest.<sup>80</sup>
  8. Students, with the aid of the formation team, shall develop a spirituality of the vows in the service of the mission, following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor.<sup>81</sup>
  9. Students will serve in the ministries of lector and acolyte to deepen their personal appreciation of the Word of God and the Eucharist.
  10. Students will look forward to Sacred Orders, participating in pre-ordination retreats in order to reflect on their significance and the commitments flowing from them.
  11. Students will seek fuller appreciation of the ways that Jesus, revealed in the Gospels, dealt with the challenges of human relationships, recognizing that he too experienced a full range of human feeling.
  12. Students will allow their study of theology to enter into their prayer life and deepen their relationship with Christ. With the help of their Spiritual Director, they should be challenged by their learning and inquiry to grow in intellectual, spiritual and personal conversion.
  13. Students will bring the poor to prayer, and reflect on how their awareness of the poor, their needs, and the skills necessary to meet them, deepens their awareness of their own need for Christ.

---

<sup>75</sup> *Common Rules X, 8; Constitutions 85, 3.*

<sup>76</sup> *Constitutions 47, 2.*

<sup>77</sup> *Common Rules X, 11; Statutes 19.*

<sup>78</sup> See *Optatam Totius*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 239, 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Common Rules X, 6; Constitutions 45, 2; see Statutes 50; Codex Iuris Canonici*, 246, 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Conferences, Correspondence, Documents XII, 366.*

## D. Intellectual Formation

The objective of intellectual formation in the major seminary is to provide the student with a depth and breadth of theological understanding to lead God's people in the threefold ministry of ordained priesthood: teaching, shepherding, and presiding in liturgical prayer. The following strategies will help meet this objective:

1. In all of his theological studies, the student will give special attention to the Church's doctrinal tradition for advancing God's reign of justice and peace in the twenty-first century. He will recognize that the poor, no less than the Church as a whole, deserve an empowering theological understanding of the Catholic tradition in order to live their calling in Christ fruitfully and joyfully.
2. To follow Christ, who is the "Rule of the Mission," the student will be attentive to the study of Christology as a way of building a richer interpersonal relationship with the Lord. It will help him embrace Jesus as a model for responding to the Father's call to bring about a world of inclusive love and justice, which are the foundations of a true and lasting peace. It will enable the student to find light and support for welcoming and supporting the poor as he encounters them in service.
3. The student will devote himself to study of the Word of God. He will allow that Word to deepen his appreciation of the presence and action of God, through Christ and in his Spirit, as God unfolds his mercy and establishes his justice in the world throughout history. He will study homiletics to acquire the skill of preaching the Good News meaningfully.
4. The student will study liturgy in general, and Eucharistic liturgy in particular. He will develop a prayerful style of presiding, paying careful attention to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the rubrics for celebrating the Eucharist.
5. The student will attend carefully to the Church's teaching with regard to social justice. He will seek to discover ways of facilitating social justice nationally and globally, and comprehend systemic change as a way to create a more just society and a means of empowering the poor.
6. To help his commitment to the vows, the student will seek a fuller theological understanding of consecrated life, and its origins and development in the Church.

## E. Apostolic Formation

The importance of apostolic ministry in the major seminary is two-fold. First, it expresses the purpose of the Congregation and the life which the students seek to develop. Secondly, the experience of the struggles of the poor, the challenges of ministering to them, and the gifts of sharing faith and life with them, become the lens for further theological investigation and understanding. Therefore:

1. Vincentian students should engage in some form of apostolic ministry among the poor on a weekly basis.
2. The ministry will be carefully supervised to enable the student to appreciate the values and the limits of this labor, and to develop the discipline and skills to serve wisely and fruitfully.
3. The objectives and amount of time dedicated to this ministry will be planned and agreed upon through a discussion involving the student, the supervisor, and the formator in charge of apostolic formation.
4. The person in charge of apostolic formation will conduct theological reflection involving all the Vincentian students so that each can discuss his experience of ministry in community. The sessions will promote attentiveness to the spiritual depth of the apostolic experience, its Vincentian character, and how the Word of God and contemporary theology both enlighten and are challenged by the experience.
5. Apostolic formation will take advantage of the summer period when the students are not in formal study. During this period, students will be assigned to another community house where they can be engaged in useful apostolic activity.<sup>82</sup> The Director of Apostolic Formation will contact the local superior who will guide the student in his participation in the life of the local community. The Director of Apostolic Formation will also work with a confrere who will supervise the student in his apostolic ministry, and together articulate the objectives of the summer apostolic program. The local superior and the confrere supervisor will write an evaluation of the student's performance during this summer program and send it to the Director of Apostolic Formation within a month after the student has completed it.
6. Apostolic formation may be enhanced by an internship year apart from the major seminary. The Director of Apostolic Formation

---

<sup>82</sup> Where the summer period is three months in duration, the students may be assigned to this local community for eight to ten weeks. When it is shorter, the formation team will determine what length of time is possible for this assignment.

will work out the details of the program and communicate with a local superior and apostolic supervisor in the same ways as he does with the summer apostolic program. The internship year will include a mid-year and final evaluation of the student. The Director of Apostolic Formation should visit the hosting local community once each semester.

## **F. Community Formation**

The objective of communal formation in the major seminary is to foster among students, formators, and other confreres who may live in the community, bonds of shared missionary purpose, fraternal love, and a sense of belonging to one another and to the wider Vincentian Congregation. It will be a time when students come to a deeper possession of their Vincentian identity as they move to the pronouncement of vows, and ordination as deacons and priests. For these reasons, they will attend to the following:

1. They will reflect upon, and periodically share together, the norms of the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation*, circular letters of the Superior General, documents promulgated by the most recent General Assembly, and articles published in *Vincentiana*, as they advance toward pronouncing vows.
2. Students will participate in provincial events, such as convocations and assemblies, to develop a sense of belonging to a wider community, and learn from and contribute to, the ongoing life of the province.
3. Students will reflect upon the ways the four vows make common life possible. They will allow the vows to lead them to care for the community, its resources, members and projects.
4. Students will understand religious authority and obedience as a way of fostering unity among the members of the community, enabling them to take responsibility for the well-being of one another, as well as enabling each to offer his gifts to the community.
5. Students will offer their own thoughts, desires, and difficulties to one another and to the superior in the process of making decisions regarding community life.
6. Students will develop the art of careful listening and a willingness to surrender some of their own preferences and independence for the good of the whole community.
7. Students will respect and care for the material goods given for use of the community, and be attentive to living simply (yet in reasonable comfort), avoiding tendencies toward consumerism or luxury.

8. Students will participate in formulating the annual budget for the local community, and be given the opportunity to review an account of that community's monthly income and expenditures, so that they learn about managing finances and prepare for future service as treasurers of their local community.
9. Special care for community formation will be taken where students live in a house of studies or a diocesan seminary. Such situations can weaken the developing sense of Vincentian identity. In this light:
  - Members of the community should reside in close proximity to promote interaction and sharing.
  - The community should establish times of shared prayer, periodic shared Eucharist, community meetings, faith sharing, and shared recreation.
  - It will be helpful for students and formators to spend some restful vacation time together. It can also be helpful for students to spend time at other community houses when not engaged in study.
  - If students from several provinces are studying together, it will be important that they experience the life and the members of their home province during this formation period.

### SECTION 3

#### **PROFILE OF THE STUDENT COMPLETING HIS FORMATION AT THE MAJOR SEMINARY LEVEL**

At the conclusion of the major seminary, the confrere should be ready for priestly ministry in the Vincentian community, and consistently manifest the following characteristics:

1. He will be able to preach meaningfully to people of different age groups, and unfold Sacred Scripture in a way which touches his hearers' minds and hearts, leading them to a fuller Christian commitment.
2. He will be able to lead the people of Christ prayerfully in liturgical worship.
3. He will be able to articulate the teaching of the Church faithfully and meaningfully in apostolic settings.
4. He will manifest steadfast discipline in participating in the prayer life of the Vincentian community.
5. He will be consistent in participating in the life and the decision-making of the community, offering his views when appropriate, and acting with responsible and generous obedience.

6. He will relate comfortably with men and women of all ages, manifesting concern for their efforts to follow Christ. He will understand and respect appropriate boundaries in all of these relationships.
7. He will manifest dedication to lifting up the lives of those who are poor.
8. He will have acquired a sense of “being a missionary,” with openness and readiness to go wherever he is sent. In accord with the guidelines of the *Ratio Missionum*,<sup>83</sup> he will have the desire and the ability to listen to, and to discern carefully, the invitation to move beyond homeland wherever the needs of the poor may call him.
9. He will have acquired appreciation of formation ministry, not only by having participated in it, but also by understanding the teaching of the Magisterium and the Congregation with respect to formation.

---

<sup>83</sup> See in particular, section 3.3.3.1.