Mount St. Mary's Seminary Celebrates 200 Years
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OUR HERITAGE

Reflections by a Professor of Church History
Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, celebrates 200 years of pious formation. When this “Old House” looks back, we see a seminary forged by the great events of history and privileged to contribute to the unfolding of the history of the church in the United States. A bicentennial history takes time to tell.

It started in France. The great tragedy of the French Revolution provided a haven of excellent priest exiles for the American mission. John Dubois, who hailed as our “Founding Father,” was one of these. Young Dubois was bright, a sterling student, and was ordained a priest in 1787, although a year shy of the usual canonical age of 24. The promising young cleric immediately became a curate at the great Church of St. Luke in Paris, which was the largest church in the world. Young Dubois exhibited his thoughtful spirit and strength of character and held to his post through the first two years of the Revolution. Only in 1791 did he depart his post for Virginia. Things were a bit rocky for the next three years. We know he was in Richmond and, it is said, made the acquaintance of the Lees, Randolphs, and Monroes with letters of introduction from Lafayette. By 1794, Father Dubois headed across the Potomac to Frederick, Maryland, where he established the Parish of St. John the Evangelist which he named after his personal patron. Like all priests of that time, Father Dubois rode circuit. He became more and more partial to the northern reaches of Frederick County and considered retiring here when his active days of priesthood came to an end. He thought more and more about purchasing a tract of land in the neighborhood for a church. Some of the locals had offered land down in the valley but Father Dubois was inclined to look up the mountain. By the time he was appointed pastor of the northern Frederick County congregation in 1805, he had settled on the mountain property. He had even brought his old friend from France, Benedict Joseph Plaget, future bishop of Kentucky, to look over the property with him. Plaget concurred — this was the place for the church and a home.

Father Dubois’ next project was also very dear to his heart. He knew that an indigenous clergy was absolutely indispensable if Catholicism was to survive and thrive in the new Republic. So he began to plan for a Latin School, a Petit Séminaire, where future ecclesiastical students could prepare for the major seminary, learning the rudiments of Latin and the Catechism. By 1808 he had gathered a handful of students to begin studies at St. Mary's at the Mountains. They were students from the school over at Pigeon Hills, north of Hanover, Pennsylvania. The eastern part of Adams County was one of the most vibrant parts of the Catholic Church in the country. Its priests of Sacred Heart, Conewago, was the largest in the land. Catholicism then was clearly a rural phenomenon. In fact, Father Dubois loved to call himself and his followers at the Mount “we poor backwoods clowns.”

Roman Catholic settlers had been coming into the territory near Mount St. Mary's since the late 1720s. They had come from the old Catholic counties of southern Maryland, Charles and Saint Mary. They were, in the main, English and agricultural. They were heretics of the Catholic Church, those who had rejected the Reformation and English who had held onto their ancient faith, quietly and discreetly. Cardinal Newman called them a “gena lucrificata.” A people who flee from the light. Many Catholics in this area of northern Frederick County are descendants of these early converts.

It was logical that Father Dubois would affiliate with the Sulpician Fathers in Baltimore. He knew them in Paris and they were the preeminent seminary professors in France. They were the heirs of the great spiritual legacy of Father Jean Jacques Olier, who drew much of his inspiration from Vincent DePaul and Francis de Sales. The classic Sulpician formation put great stress on the cultivation of the interior life. Their Marian devotion was prominent. Dubois’ relationship with his Sulpician confessor in Baltimore was often rocky, especially after he began to attempt to convert students to his mountain college. They broke completely when Dubois began keeping the older students in Emmitsburg rather than sending them down to Baltimore for theology.

For about two decades Baltimore and Emmitsburg were partnered seminaries. They were St. Mary's and we were St. Mary's at the Mountain.

Another early player is the most famous, Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, a saint of the church since 1975. How she landed up in Emmitsburg is quite a tale in itself. Shunned by her family and friends for her conversion to Roman Catholicism, she relocated to Baltimore, then the most Catholic city in the nation. She lived adjacent the Sulpician seminary there and conducted a school for little girls. It didn’t work out, as she wrote to her friend Juliana Scott in Philadelphia. “It’s awfully hard to be good in Baltimore.” A more sylvan setting might be a better place to raise her family. A rather ill-started convent seminarian, Samuel Sutherland, and Cooper, of Virginia, came up with the ten thousand dollars to buy the Fleming farm in that remote and hauntingly beautiful valley between Mount St. Mary’s and the new town of Emmitsburg. They arrived in 1809 and in a gesture that set the standard of the storied Mount hospitality, John Dubois gave up his quarters for the extended family of Mother Seton until the Fleming farm was fully rehumbled.

It was Mother Seton and her early collaborators who taught Catechetics after Sunday Mass at the Church on the Hill and Father Dubois who served as Spiritual Father to the young community of Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. Both were very strong personalities; he was known as the “little corporal,” like Napoleon, and they didn’t always get along, but there was a deep mutual respect between them. Mother Seton yearned for the more “high church” liturgies back in Baltimore, and I suspect that Father Dubois wished for a more pliant religious woman! But John Dubois also recognized her depth of spirituality, which had been nourished largely in the evangelical wing of the Episcopal Church by the Reverend John Henry Hobart. It was the Episcopal Church in large part that drew her into the Catholic Church. There is a passion in her writing that surprises us today but, of course, this is a saint who describes herself as “wild Betty.” We’ve some of her love letters as well as prayers in her own script at the Sisters’ archives.

In the decade of the teens, Mother Seton would receive a true “soul-friend” in the person of the Servant of God, Father Simon Gabriel Brute This Jean, frail-looking, ascetic French Enigma priest was anything but frail! He had survived the Reign of Terror in France under a disguise. In 1793, the Terror was at its height in France. He was arrested and sentenced to death. He was to be taken to the guillotine. He had escaped and arrived in Baltimore in 1795. He was allowed to settle in Mount Saint Mary’s and the Sisters of Charity. He began an orphanage. He was ordained a priest and became the confessor and spiritual guide to many of the Sisters. He would be the Servant of God, Father Simon Gabriel Brute This Jean, for almost forty years. He was admired by all for his holiness and his dedication to the care of the poor. He was known for his quiet strength and his ability to inspire others with his faith and devotion. He was a true example of what it means to live a holy life.
after a rather brief tenure in Baltimore.
Brute proved the ideal spiritual director for Mother Seton. She could share the longings of her soul. They formed a deep spiritual friendship. Father Richard Shaw exaggerates a bit in his work "Founding Father" when he claims, "All Brute had to say was even more and Mother Seton would fall into a swoon." He was a great consolation to her as she faced the loss of her two older daughters and as tuberculosis began to ravage her constitution.

James Roosevelt Bayley, late bishop of Newark and eighth archbishop of Baltimore, Mother Seton's nephew, contended that Simon Gabriel Brute and Elizabeth Ann Seton "were both chosen souls upon whom God had bestowed his most precious grace and strengthened one another like St. Benedict and St. Scholastica." Arch-

The Civil War devastated Mount Saint Mary's. Not opposing the southern culture of Maryland, the Mount held slaves. The students and faculty were largely pro-Confederacy. In truth, the American Catholic Church prior to the Civil War was largely a southern institution. In fact the school nearly closed after the War.
The construction of a new chapel had to come to a halt for lack of funds. In 1881 the Mount was on the edge of bankruptcy. Ironically in the same post-Civil War pe-

Men and women religious have aided faculty and administration of the Mount for 70 years. Vincentean Fathers were particularly generous; several served as Rectors, Jesuits, Sulpicians, Canons Regular, Carmelites, Coisters, Fau-

The Mount College also produced bishop alumni: Richard Oliver Grou of Natchez, Kevin Breaux of Harrisburg, and James E. Walsh, MM, of Kongmoon, China, a revered hero of the Cold War.

Current members of the American hierarchy from the Mount include Archbishop Harry Flynn of St. Paul and Bishops Paul Coakley of Salina, William Friend of Sheepsport, Michael Jackels of Wichita, William Lori of Bridgeport, and Kevin Breaux of Harrisburg.

affirmed the Mount's firm stand with the magisterium. The subsequent appointment of Dr. Germain Grice to the Harry Flynn Chair of Ethics certainly strengthened that impression.

After the visit of the Bishop John Marshall Com-

hymn is: "St. Mary's Seminary from the 'country cousin' to one of the major forces in American formation is stunning. Perhaps it can be dated from the 1968 Humanae Vitae controversy."
"Gone are the days when the formation conference by the rector or spiritual director was given to the whole house every Wednesday."

Human Formation Goal

Explicit goals are a must. Our handbook spells out what competencies are expected of seminarians at each level of formation. Structure is important. Each candidate must set at least two goals in each of the four pillars of priestly formation, but human formation goals are especially crucial. The examples run from the glaringly obvious to the subtle. Examples include keeping up with current events; handling the demands of being a public person; refining social skills; dealing with unreasonable people; ability to work collaboratively and respectfully with peers, women, minorities, and in multicultural settings; exercising regularly; living a balanced life; etc.

We have found that candidates need help in identifying goals, reminders to stay on task, and accountability for their progress. Goals form an integral component for both admissibility and formal evaluation. Goals are set each fall, revisited after Christmas, and we are now adding these for the summer as well. Experience has taught us that candidates need encouragement to admit and address even the most common of human weaknesses. Systematic and thoughtful goal and good use of peer evaluations, and a graduated list of competencies are very helpful.

Targeting Developmental Goals by Class

Gone are the days when the formation conference by the rector or spiritual director was given to the whole house every Wednesday. While full-house sessions still have a place, class-by-class formation seminars, designed and supervised by the rector, target the "personality" of each class as well as the predictable issues common at various stages of formation. The link between these conferences and the other components of formation is intentional and requires frequent communication (meetings) and an effective feedback loop involving advisors, formation teams, the directors of the other three pillars, vocation directors, and the rector. ATS visits helped us move in this direction, and much work remains.

Providing Counseling

We have learned the importance of a staff counselor/psychologist. In the not-so-distant past, formation issues were considered aspects of spiritual formation, and the confessor or spiritual director was the only counselor. Diocesan counselors and we use it sparingly. Nor are formation advisors trained psychologists. In more recent years, the autobiographies and psychological testing results we receive have made it increasingly clear that not a few seminarians can benefit from the help of trained psychologists. Our experience has shown us that in order to provide effective formation, the candidate must work to heal wounds of any sort (e.g., the father-son or other family-of-origin wounds, depressions, self-esteem issues, intellectualization, etc.) so as to attain effective maturity and a level of well-being and health necessary to be the primary agent of his own formation.

We also have seen students do well in more intensive spiritual direction programs, such as at the Institute for Priestly Formation. While psychological counseling is not a requirement for all, the seminary must employ a qualified counselor if it is to address human formation issues effectively, provide support for the formation advisors, and make the best use of the screenings and testing done during the admission process.

Fostering the Candidate as the Primary Instrument in His Own Formation

Formation is a sustained trusting relationship whereby a candidate is assisted in having insight into his spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and personal life. He is supported and called to accountability as he grows in his conformity to Christ the Shepherd. Structures of accountability and reflection include an array of evaluative teams (summer placements, grade, field education assignments, peer evaluations). We have learned, however, that a good evaluation program is not necessarily a good formation program. From goal setting to self-presentation for ministries or orders, the advisor must live up to that title and not be merely an evaluator or director. Structures to support this relationship include a sort of "hospital chart" which provides a forum for the seminarian to discuss his progress and seek counsel in targeting goals and achieving growth in each of the four pillars. Peer evaluations are done at the end of the pre-theology program and again at the end of second theology. Formation teams meet regularly to solicit input from those assigned as advisors to men in the first three or the last three years of formation. The feedback loop includes the team meeting with the vocation director. Seminarians and vocation directors alike must be intimately involved in the process so there is never a surprise along the way.

Although the seminary does not formally supervise the summer experience, there is plenty of input and feedback to guarantee continuity with the seminary formation program. In so many ways, the formation is only as good as the engagement of the seminarian with the process. We must train them to be instruments of their initial as well as ongoing formation.

"Years ago, diversity meant coming from a Northern or a Southern state. Times have changed."

INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

Reflections by the Academic Dean

Globalization

You and I, diversity meant coming from a Northern or a Southern state. Times have changed. International students now both enrich and challenge our peers with diverse expectations of seminary life, liturgy, classroom participation, recreation, dining preferences, style of dress, attitude toward the faculty, varying abilities to speak English, culture shock, vision of church and lay ministry, and many other areas. Our increasingly multicultural student body raises issues for intellectual formation on a variety of levels: about our periodical and library acquisition policies; our faculty composition; our admission process; our evaluation feedback loops; academic integrity; the relationship of ESL professors to the rest of the faculty; the need for expertise in immigration policies, classroom dynamics, techniques and management, instructional software, and even our way of doing theology. A few of our international seminarians are preparing to return to their country of origin, but most are preparing to serve as priests in the United States.

The faculty must confront a new need to familiarize themselves with the issues and resources which will help these candidates prepare for the priesthood. Dean Hoge's International Press in America (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006) offers many helpful insights. Dialogue with peer seminaries with extensive experience in this area has been fruitful (St. Vincent de Paul in Puyton Beach, Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon, St. John's Camarillo, to mention just three).

Pluriformity

Our current academic culture at the Mount is pluralism beyond the language issue: the study skills needed for M.Div. level theological reading and writing cannot be presumed. Entry level (pre-theology or first theology) students often require remedial work on basic academic skills. Computer skills are unevenly represented (we have a mandatory laptop program), personal study discipline varies greatly, and the ability to understand and sustain a complex argument ranges from excellent to minimal. Early detection of deficiencies is crucial. We now take a tercet: a self-taught sample from every incoming student, which is then evaluated by teams of faculty. Admissions essays, grade reports, and standardized testing do not tell the whole story.

Identified weaknesses are addressed right from the start. We have found it beneficial to run workshops in study skills, and are blessed with a full-time Learning Services staff which works with both students and the faculty who teach them. Audio and visual learning skills, time management, academic integrity, note taking, and exam preparation must be targeted, not merely writing and reading skills. Students with learning disabilities are not the only ones who need support and accommodations.

Integration

The Mount has a long tradition of excellent spiritual formation, and men who have or who strongly desire an intense Eucharistic and Marian spirituality are at
The challenge academically is to help them incorporate cultural critique with a thorough understanding of the 'signs of the times.'

A New Generation
There is an academic generational identity among seminarians that relates to the prominence in their lives of the examples of both Pope John Paul II and (now) Pope Benedict XVI. Students resonate with the fascination of Pope Benedict with the early church fathers and with his close reading of the Gospel text for the sake of a personal encounter with the Lord as espoused in Jesus of Nazareth. The challenge is to help them appreciate these emphases while engaging in the study of current authors and biblical methods.

Students cast themselves as politically and socially conservative, seeing in the late Pope John Paul II a call to raise a counter-cultural, even evangelical voice to an increasingly secular world. The challenge academically is to help them incorporate cultural critique with a thorough understanding of the "signs of the times." Students need encouragement especially in the areas of social justice to counter trends with the light of church teaching, not with the blogs and political party rhetoric with which many have been bombarded and some have actively espoused. International students not infrequently need coursework, even at the undergraduate level, in U.S. history and culture. Native-born students likewise need prompting to keep up with the social, political, and cultural realities that shape the national and local environments in which they will serve.

An Expanded Academic Program
Pre-theology has emerged as the dominant intellectual background, replacing college seminar experience as the most common identifier in the class of first theology. The seminary is, for many, a six-year experience that requires a multi-tiered set of programs on all four levels of formation. In the early years, courses must be explicit and frequent in the philosophy classroom. We cannot expect novices to intuit the usefulness of philosophy and classical languages for their vocation. A three-credit formation seminar was added to the first semester precisely to help these newest members of the community. The theological curriculum likewise must be explicitly developmental so that students see how to integrate the disciplines they are studying each year with the spiritual and pastoral formation they are receiving that same year.

"Computer-assisted learning and assessments raise new challenges for academic integrity even as they open new avenues for collaborative learning, research, and feedback."

Laptop Culture
Enhanced and instant communication is a cultural given already operative before, during, and after class. Classroom management programs, online resources, instant feedback, note sharing, video and audio enhancements—all these challenges and enhance our intellectual formation. Computer-assisted learning and assessments open new avenues for collaborative learning, research, and feedback. We have seen that this culture serves most students and faculty very well, while it leaves others on the margins. As one of our faculty observed, the transition is from "learning to use computers" to "using computers to learn." The use of technology cannot be equated with effective pedagogy, but there is a cultural expectation in the academy and the study body for computer-assisted learning.

The Mount is in regular contact with our sending dioceses to make sure that in this area no student is left behind, and our well-staffed Department of Information Technology works so that no facility will be left behind either. We will have online courses in place in the next academic year and are collaborating with the NCEA project for seminary online collaboration.

Seminary Academic Offerings Cannot Remain Static
Academic and degree programs must grow for the seminary to remain robust. The Mount offers familiar M.A./M.Div. programs (ATS and Middle States accredited). Recent enhancements were pastoral: a certificate program in Hispanic Ministry and a summer immersion program in Querétaro, Mexico. Another was ecclesial: we now offer the S.T.B. degree by affiliation with the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. This enhances our already very friendly relationship with the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, and allows our graduates greater ease in applying there (or to other ecclesiastical faculties in Rome) for the S.T.L. Still another was in philosophy; we now offer an M.A. in Philosophical Studies to qualified students who complete our two-year pre-theology program. General faculty and peer institutional collaboration, enrollment increases, rewarding and stimulating student academic achievement, and proximity to our sending dioceses are among the many fruits of each of these expanded programs. In the future, we hope to add another M.A. concentration in Pastoral Theology.

PASTORAL FORMATION
Reflections by the Director of the Pastoral Field Education Program
Recognizing Personal Experiences
The seminary receives men who bring a varied set of personal experiences of ministry and understandings of fatherhood. Not a few of those entering into ministry formation are converts, or some may refer to themselves as "reverts," i.e., baptized Catholics who did not have a strong practice of the faith until a recent conversion experience. Some may have had a strong campus ministry experience or a retreat or pilgrimage experience as the catalyst for their vocational decision. Some have tried religious life, been formed by a charismatic prayer experience or the National Evangelization Team, FOCUS missionary experiences, or service learning experiences with the Missionaries of Charity or lay volunteer groups. Experiences of priests and parish range from military background and the cultural definition and expectation of fatherhood influence the starting point for men to think of themselves as servant leaders.

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Generational Differences
As the newly ordained priests in the 1960s experienced a desire to bring about change and renewal, thereby heightening the generational gaps within priestly formation, so too the seminarians of the third millennium seek renewal of the church's traditions. In both generations, the identity, charisma, and personality of priestly ministry were defined by role for renewal. Seminarians who work with supervisors of different generations must build bridges not only with the people, but also with the presbyterate. Seminarians experience polarization between factions as well as pressure from various sources to take sides. Pastoral formation in servant leadership and collaboration help candidates deal with this tension in a healthy way.

Integration
Pastoral formation is formation in integration. As seminarians seek to understand their identity in terms of spiritual fatherhood, they must integrate their leadership training and pastoral experiences with the other aspects of seminary formation. This is brought out in PPF 241. "Clearly, pastoral formation can only connect with the other three pillars of priestly formation, in itself it provides a goal that integrates the other dimensions (emphasis
mine). Human formation enables priests to be bridges to communicate Jesus Christ, a pastoral function. Spiritual formation enables priests to persevere in and give depth to their ministry. Intellectual formation provides criteria and content to ensure that pastoral efforts are directed correctly, properly, and effectively.

Know What You Are Doing

Students and supervisors alike are anxious for "hands on" experience, but must devote time and attention to lead the exclusion in the Rite of Ordination: "know what you are doing." Congregations, state and national conferences, and individual bishops or groups offer a wide array of pastoral statements. Giving the seminarian an opportunity to study the best of these texts prior to the apostolic activity can help enrich the most difficult experience while also preparing him a hermeneutic to process these experiences within the church's framework. Effective pastoral education combines supervised personal experience, official pastoral teaching, and directed theological reflection.

Working with Laily

The formation of future priests is truly a collaborative effort. Not only must seminarians apprentice under experienced priests and deacons, but also they must be interns with lay men and women skilled in the apostolate. Pastoral formation models collaboration in liturgical, catechetical, and outreach ministries as well as specialized ministries such as social justice, finances, plant management, human resources, and personnel matters. The interaction of seminarians with these lay supervisors is itself pastorally formative.

PRE-THEOLOGY

Reflections by the Director of the Pre-Theology Program

Our Beginnings

Only 10 years after the foundation of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, without any real plans to do so, our founder, Father John Dubois, began an early "pre-theology" program. A young Irish immigrant and construction worker applied for entry into Mount St. Mary's. Father Dubois rejected him as unsuitable due to his rough manners and lack of formal education. Not one easily denied, this future seminarian went to work for Mother Seton and her sisters as a day laborer. The young man's earnestness impressed the future saint and she made intercession for him with the rector. Unable to say "no" to Mother Seton, Father Dubois struck a deal with the man that allowed him to work as a gardener and overseer of the college's workers (including, sadly, slaves owned by the college) in return for room, board, and tutoring. If he could master the Latin and other subjects necessary for entry into theology, then he would be admitted formally.

This program was not long lived. In fact, it did not last past its first student. Of course, the young man in question was none other Archbishop John Hughes of New York. As Father Dubois' successor in New York, he was the first to wear the pallium for that archdiocese and laid the groundwork for St. Patrick's Cathedral.

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Many things have changed at the Mount from the time of DuBois and Hughes, but the need for some men to enter a pre-theology program to prepare to enter into theology is not one of them. Today, more than ever, such programs are necessary and, thus, required by the Program for Priestly Formation.

Our Program Today

Currently 42 men are in the pre-theology program at Mount St. Mary's. Some, like Hughes, come from the building industry, but most are white-collar workers with extensive professional education and often much experience. Many have military backgrounds.Others come from another country and English is their second language. Often quite accomplished in other ways, these men lack the necessary formation and education for entry into the theology.

One insight that the Mount has had in its modern pre-theology program is the need for some type of introductory class for the first-year men in pre-theology. This class, called a "formation seminar," is offered in the first semester as a three-credit pass/fail course. We have found it necessary to train men to be the primary instrument of their own formation, as well as how to take advantage of spiritual direction, formation advising, retreats, and many other components of the seminary offerings.

Divided equally between the four major areas of formation, the course is taught by the formation staff with the director of pre-theology overseeing the process. The rector, vice-rector, academic dean, spiritual director, pastoral field education director, as well as various faculty take at least one session. The stated goals for the seminar include:

1. To study the church's vision of priestly formation as presented in Duns Scotus Duns Scoti and The Program of Priestly Formation as implemented at Mount St. Mary's Seminary.
2. To focus on the various theological and philosophical issues associated with the four major areas of priestly formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.
3. To study and discuss the life and work of the formation of virtues, especially in the areas of charity, temperance, and obedience.
4. To discuss the philosophically and theologically sound view of masculinity and the proper spiritual manliness for men.
5. To introduce the students and faculty and formation staff to each other and to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion on the various aspects of priestly formation.
6. To provide the first year pre-theology class an opportunity to serve the poor as a class and to reflect upon the experience.
7. To study and reflect upon the role a solid philosophical course of study must play in the intellectual formation of priests.

Texts for the course include seminary handbooks, Duns Scotus Duns Scoti, Fides et Ratio, and John Eldridge's Wild at Heart.

We have discovered from our course reviews that the students found most helpful the overview of each area of formation offered by the priest in charge of that pillar. In addition, the discussion of friendship, the role of philosophy, and correct and incorrect views of masculinity were found to be very useful.

Going Forward

As we enter our third cenntennial, the Mount has come to recognize the need to be very forthright and intentional about priestly formation for pre-theologians. Dealing with men who are at least in their mid-twenties, we must be willing to transparently share the ideas and ideals of formation with those whom we are privileged to help form. Not only does this approach aid them in their difficult transition from "the world" to the seminary, it also helps lay a solid foundation for future growth and formation.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Reflections by the Director of the Spiritual Formation Program

It never fails that at the beginning of the school year new seminarians especially look forward to their first meetings with their spiritual directors. The spiritual director can sense this genuine desire almost immediately from the first meeting with his director to the man before him wants to talk with someone he can trust. Apparently today one person listening carefully to another—without interruptions—must be such a rarity that it is not uncommon for a director to check his watch during the meeting, not because he has somewhere else to go, but because he is hoping to make the hour last as long as possible.

So great is the desire to have someone listen to them that with new seminarians the first few meetings for spiritual direction may not be particularly "spiritual" at all; rather, they are simply human: one person listening intensively to another.

Priests serving as spiritual directors meet regularly to share insights from their ministry. It is essential that the spiritual director always keep in mind the verse from the Book of Ecclesiasticus: "Do not answer before you have heard. Do not interrupt a speaker in the midst of this his words" (Ecclesiasticus or Sirach 11:8). For if there is anything that can spoil an initial meeting for spiritual direction it is a director who too soon attempts to "direct" before he has actually heard. Thus spiritual direction is always first the art of listening. Indeed it is listening with a contemplative spirit, alert to key words and feelings expressed by the director, that will help the spiritual director identify possible doorways into the heart of the matter. For that is what spiritual direction is all about: the seminarian's relationship with God, that "secret core and sanctuary of a man" where he is "alone with God" (Gaudium et Spes, 16).

Trust Borne of Prayer

Given the rigorous demands of the formation
Humility

To spend a good deal of time working with seminarians as they grow and discover God's will is to be humbled. Clearly the Lord himself is the ultimate spiritual director for these future priests. Today, with a large number of men who come from many different backgrounds and cultures, and who are invested with immutable life experiences and personal issues, the spiritual director can only hope to be, at best, a very poor instrument of God's grace. Through his own prayer and work with seminarians, how can he help but be reminded constantly of his mere instrumentality in the work of directing seminarians?

As the spiritual director grows in awareness of how God is working in his own life, he is better able to point to how God is working in his director's life; that is, the truth that "He is not weak in you, but powerful in you" (2 Cor 13). Such understanding greatly encourages the seminarian who quite frankly yearns for some "evidence" that the Lord is in fact guiding him and approves of him. Thus the seminarian is able to grasp the truth that he does indeed have a relationship with the Lord, and one that is growing all the time. For as stated in the Program of Priestly Formation (3rd ed.), the "basic principle of spiritual formation" is "to live in intimate and unceasing union with God, the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit." (PPE, 107)

If the spiritual director takes his responsibility seriously, he will appreciate just how difficult it can be for the seminarian to talk about himself, his relationship with God, his vocation, family, and a host of other issues.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Reflections by the Rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary

For two hundred years, Mount St. Mary's Seminary has been privileged to serve the church by forming her future priests. The Mount has always specialized in the formation of "parish priests." This is our "brand." We have never specialized in scholars, though our graduates are scholarly. We have never specialized in contemplatives, though, hopefully, our men have deep prayer lives. Rather, every aspect of our spiritual, academic, pastoral and human formation program is geared toward the formation of parish priests to serve the church in the United States in the 21st century. Our goal is to form future priests who "think with the church," love the church, and love the Lord as true disciples.

While it is true that the seminarians we form today are much more "conservative" than 10 or 20 years ago, we would prefer to work on tempering a man's zeal rather than instilling in him the faith.

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