

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES**  
**BISHOPS AND RECTOR VIRTUAL EVENT**  
**IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY SEMINARY, WINONA, MINNESOTA**  
**APRIL 16, 2021**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of His Holiness. I thank Bishop Quinn, Bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, and Father Robert Horihan, Rector of the Seminary, for their kind invitation to speak to you and for awarding me the 2021 Immaculate Heart of Mary Award. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Community of Formators at the seminary; yours is a challenging but rewarding task and your efforts are vital for the Church today. Let me also thank all the benefactors of the seminary; your generosity makes the ongoing task of forming future priests possible. Finally, let me thank all the seminarians for responding to the Lord's call.

Five years ago, I was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. Within months of my appointment, a new *Ratio Fundamentalis* was promulgated, and it was intended to be a guide for the formation of future priests to meet the demands of the new evangelization. A seminary, especially like Immaculate Heart of Mary, is responsible, for forming future priests who are like uncut diamonds.

The Holy Father spoke of the vocations of seminarians as “uncut diamonds, to be formed both patiently and carefully, respecting the conscience of the individual, so that they may shine among the People of God.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, 3 OCTOBER 2014)

What should these “uncut diamonds” look like? The new *Ratio* says:

“The fundamental idea is that Seminaries should form missionary disciples who are ‘in love’ with the Master, shepherds ‘with the smell of the sheep’, who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence, every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.” (CONGREGATION FOR CLERGY, “THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTLY VOCATION,” 8 DECEMBER 2016, INTRODUCTION, 3).

The model of formation proposed in the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* presupposes the integration of the four dimensions of formation offered in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. This integrated formation prepares the seminarian and priest to make a gift of himself to the Church – to go out of himself and to look to the essential needs of the flock. Pope Francis wants priests not to be mere managers or functionaries of the sacred but to be priests with compassionate hearts.

A recent joint letter from the Congregation for Clergy and the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life states:

“To form priests with this profile – as the Holy Father often has recommended – it is necessary that the initial formation ensure a balanced human maturity, a solid spirituality, and an attentive vigilance toward that worldly spirit which would be fatal for a fruitful exercise of the ministry. This worldly spirit is expressed, for example, under the form of vainglory, of the search for money and power or in legalistic rigidity.” (JOINT LETTER OF THE

CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY AND THE CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, 13 MAY 2017)

The *Ratio* sees this formation taking place in stages: the propaedeutic stage; the discipleship stage; the configuration stage; and the “pastoral stage” or “stage of vocational synthesis.”

The propaedeutic or preparatory stage is necessary in an increasingly secularized world, marked by the reconfiguration of the family and clear cultural shifts which do not support priestly vocations. This period provides a solid foundation for the spiritual life and fundamentals of the Faith.

The discipleship stage corresponds to the period of philosophical studies in a college seminary, like what is offered here at Immaculate Heart of Mary. This stage emphasizes increasing one’s awareness of being a disciple, who “is the one whom the Lord has called to ‘stay with Him’, to follow Him, and to become a missionary of the Gospel.” (cf. *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS*, 61).

In the discipleship stage, the seminarian is rooted in the *sequela Christi* – the following of Christ. A disciple is one who is humble, who listens, and who desires to learn. We remain disciples, “perpetual students”, throughout the course of our lives, no matter our specific vocation. The new *Ratio* says that each day a disciple “learns how to enter into the secrets of the Kingdom, living a deep relationship with Jesus.” (cf. *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS*, 8 DECEMBER 2016, 61)

This perpetual learning requires humility, a willingness to be formed. Authentic human formation at this stage is essential, as grace builds upon nature and perfects it. Character formation, which involves “sincerity of mind, a constant concern for justice, fidelity to one’s promises, refinement in manners, modesty in speech coupled with charity”, should be a centerpiece of formation.

This willingness to be formed and the commitment to learning, not only from the Lord Jesus but also from the wisdom and experience of formators, demands listening. We do not simply listen and study to obtain information about Divine Revelation; rather, we need to come to know God personally. We come to know Him not only through study but also through prayer and commitment to community life, whether within the seminary community or outside of it through pastoral works, which undoubtedly this year have been curtailed due to the pandemic.

The seminarian gradually journeys toward an inner freedom and maturity permitting him to begin the configuration stage, which corresponds to the period of theological studies and concentrates on the “configuration of the seminarian to Christ, Shepherd and Servant, so that, united to Him, he can make his life a gift of self to others.” (cf. *Ratio*, 68)

Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary is committed to helping these young men who have responded courageously to the Lord’s call to acquire this freedom, so that as they continue their journey they can internalize their commitment to the Gospel and deepen their friendship with Christ as they are configured to Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd.

Today, many people use the term “missionary disciple” as a catch-phrase or a slogan. Seminary formators have the urgent task first to form disciples, who later, having fallen deeply in love with Christ, cannot help but share with others the joy of the Gospel, developing each day a missionary impulse. Thus, there is a pressing need to assist young men to properly discern their vocations and to accompany them personally, discovering gifts and weaknesses, obstacles to growth and how to overcome these obstacles, and how to develop an affection for one’s own humanity.

All of these things happen here at Immaculate Heart of Mary and have happened here for decades, generating and forming priests to be men of communion, mission, and dialogue. May God continue to bless your community and its important work. Thank you.