INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Year of seminary formation has a unique character all its own, for it is a time of transition from the seminary to ministry as a priest. Many of the men have already been ordained deacons and others soon will be so ordained. Approaching the end of their seminary formation, Fourth Year men have passed through the initial stages of formation and cultivated solid habits that will serve them well in priestly life. Many have already served in parishes as deacons and have thus begun their preaching and sacramental ministry. All their experience should help them to value the Fourth Year of seminary life as an especially precious time of imminent preparation for ordination to the priesthood.

The role of the Fourth Year men within the seminary is of great importance, for they are examples to other classes of the maturity which fidelity to seminary formation brings. The fidelity they practice both to the various phases of seminary life and to their ministries in the parishes should at this point of formation be greater than at any earlier stage. Since they are to be sacramentally conformed to the priesthood of Christ, all their words and actions should manifest their own efforts to conform themselves to Christ.

Fourth Year men should take advantage of the time they have to deepen their knowledge of theology, especially with regard to marriage and family life and moral issues. They should begin planning their on-going theological education for the time after ordination, and to this end they should consolidate an adequate library of indispensable reference books.

For those in the M.A. (theology) or S.T.B. dual degree programs, the goal should be completion of all degree requirements, especially the comprehensive exams, before leaving the seminary. Fourth Year men should also focus intensely on perfecting their homiletic skills, keeping in mind what they learned from their summer experience. In their practicum, they should strive to become prayerful celebrants of the sacraments.

As ordained ministers, they should see how all the areas of formation converge in their parish pastoral experience. The parish weekend assignment should be viewed as an opportunity to develop the pastoral skills that will soon be put to good use after ordination to the priesthood. Finally, the Fourth Theologian will continue spiritual direction to deepen his prayer life and his love of the Lord, and he will already be looking for a spiritual director in his home diocese.

EXPECTATIONS

Human Formation

It is expected that the Fourth Year seminarian be fully convinced that he is called to the priesthood and that he is ready and able to accept ordination. By this time, he should understand well the commitment to celibacy and have adopted a way of life that supports it. This means that he understands the importance of establishing limits and guidelines in relating with men, women, and children in ministry and that he knows how to maintain a pastoral and professional relationship. He is also expected to manifest a lifestyle and behavior that is consistent with the poverty of spirit appropriate to the priestly life, especially as this is enunciated by Pope John Paul II.
By the Fourth Year, the seminarian should be able to organize and coordinate his various responsibilities. He is also expected to demonstrate qualities of leadership and to support others who are in leadership positions. He also displays an ability for collaborative ministry and cooperation with the pastor and all those with pastoral responsibilities.

It is expected that the Fourth Year seminarian be a mature man of profound personal integrity and respect for others. He has a realistic knowledge of himself and his strengths and weaknesses and manifests a capacity for friendship and service towards others. It is essential that he possess those human qualities that will allow him to assume the figure of the “Good Shepherd” in his pastoral ministry.

1. Do I have any serious doubts about my fitness or ability to assume the obligations of the ordained priesthood? If so, have I discussed this with my spiritual director, formation advisor, and vocation director? Has anyone expressed serious doubts and, if so, have I honestly dealt with these with my spiritual director and formation advisor?

2. Am I aware of any potentially unhealthy tendencies in my relationships with others in my exercise of the ministry? Are there any signs of singularity or eccentricity in me that would detract from my effectiveness as a priest?

3. How have I shown leadership qualities in my pastoral ministry during the summer and in my deacon assignment? Am I overbearing, possessive, and jealous of my authority? In other words, am I secure in exercising authority?

4. On a practical level, how do I collaborate and cooperate effectively with others? Are there any complaints from co-workers or authorities about my inability to cooperate?

5. Am I on time for meetings, etc.? Do I prepare ahead of time? How capable am I of efficiently organizing my responsibilities in the seminary, in the parish, etc.?

6. Have I honestly assessed my attachment to material goods and commitments to see if they are in harmony with the priestly life and ministry? How am I preparing for rectory life in terms of recognizing the demands of living with others? Do I try to accommodate others?

7. Do I seek out friendships with my peers? Do I intend to seek out priestly fraternity after ordination? Am I a “lone ranger” or do I value the sense of solidarity that exists in the presbyterate?

**Spiritual Formation**

It is expected that the Fourth Year seminarian has developed a strong spirituality and the habit of prayer and that he shows that he is easily able to combine fidelity to the spiritual exercises of the seminary with his personal prayer life and his service to others.

By the Fourth Year, the seminarian is committed to his diocese and manifests obedience to his bishop and those representing him. He also has begun to look for a spiritual director and confessor in his own diocese and has made arrangements to fulfill the requirement of his canonical retreat. He has also begun to think of belonging to a priestly support group.

The Fourth Year seminarian demonstrates a sense of the importance of the ministry of preaching. He fulfills his obligations carefully in this regard by careful preparation and consultation with more experienced preachers.
Knowing the riches that are in Christ and in his Church, the seminarian recognizes and respects the freedom of the faithful with respect to personal devotions and different spiritualities. He is ready to give spiritual guidance to others in accord with their way of life and God’s call to them without forcing his personal devotions or attractions on them. The Fourth Year should be a time when the theologian acquires the basic elements of spiritual direction so that he can offer his services to those who seek him out for direction.

1. In my final year of seminary, am I able without great effort to be faithful to my communal exercises and my personal prayer life, or do I regularly excuse myself from one or the other?
2. Does my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours and to personal prayer continue when I am away from the seminary on vacations or exercising my ministry in the parish?
3. Have I made any concrete efforts to inquire from others who might be a good spiritual director or confessor? Do I have an alternate plan if I cannot find either in my diocese?
4. Am I open to serving as a spiritual director after ordination, and am I taking steps to prepare myself for this ministry?
5. Have I made an honest evaluation of my own piety to see if it is in conformity with the mind of the Church and the contemporary needs of the Church?
6. Do I make an honest effort to respect and value the diversity of spiritualities and devotions among the faithful? Do I have a tendency to want to impose a particular spirituality or pious practices on the faithful?
7. Do I experience joy and fulfillment in the celibate life? Have I experienced difficulties that I still need to resolve before my ordination to the priesthood? Am I open and honest with my spiritual director?
8. In my pastoral assignments, have I demonstrated that I am an obedient person and a “team player”?

Intellectual Formation

In the final academic year, the student should aim at bringing synthesis to his intellectual formation. He should conduct an honest self-assessment of his theological readiness, and take appropriate steps to address areas of deficiency. Fourth Year classes treat central issues, so the seminarian must strongly resist the temptation to so emphasize his role as deacon as to neglect his role as student. In applying himself to the curriculum, he should note that this is the year in which nearly all his sacramental theory, law, and practice is treated (Marriage, Eucharist, Anointing, Reconciliation, priesthood practicum). Study of Pauline literature, the most extensive New Testament writings, becomes the capstone of the Scripture study. Students should be particularly attentive to ecumenism this year. Fourth Year men should strive to be prepared for ministry to marriage and family by the combination of pastoral counseling, medical and sexual ethics, and the marriage and family courses. If not taking an elective for one of the dual degree programs, ordination program candidates should give serious consideration to electing to take those courses aimed particularly at Fourth Year men (spiritual direction, parish administration). M.A. (theology) and S.T.B. candidates should be working on the comprehensive examinations and at the completion of any other outstanding degree requirements.
Fourth Year men should manifest a fidelity to study, a habit of theological reflection and reading, interest in contemporary national, international, and church related current events. They should be attentive to how their theological training is reflected in their teaching and preaching as deacons. Deacons should welcome positive and critical feedback on their preaching. They should be attentive in their weekend assignments to learn how parish priests address ongoing theological education, what periodicals and books they are reading, and what workshops and other opportunities for ongoing education are available. They should take care to develop their own collection of theological resources, both in print and on line, for future ministry.

Fourth Year men from dioceses where there is a pastoral need for Spanish language proficiency should take the necessary steps to become proficient in Spanish if they have not already done so. Study of U.S. Church history should help increase his awareness of and interest in understanding the multiple cultures to which he will address the Gospel in his priestly ministry.

1. Am I preparing for S.T.B. or M.A.(theology) comprehensives? If an M.A. (theology) candidate, have I successfully completed all three research projects for my concentration?

2. Have I done any outside theological reading not directly related to my courses?

3. Is there some area of theology that I need to strengthen before leaving the seminary? Have I acquired proficiency in Spanish or other languages needed for ministry?

4. Have I assembled a library of resources that will be useful to me in the parish ministry?

5. Have I acquired the habit of doing regular theological reading not related to my courses, and do I have a plan to continue my theological education after ordination?

**Pastoral Formation**

The Fourth Year seminarian who is a deacon should take advantage of opportunities to preach in his deacon assignment and in the seminary. He should manifest an ability to preach to different kinds of congregations and to show appreciation of multiple aspects of life.

He should show himself able to carry out all functions of pastoral ministry with the patience, humility and kindness of Christ. In the parish setting, he should demonstrate leadership within the context of a willingness to implement the pastoral vision and policies of the pastor and other parish leaders. In the seminary setting, he should strengthen unity and build up the community.

The Fourth Year seminarian is expected to avoid singularity and eccentricities of behavior in his personal and pastoral activities. He also is willing and able to operate within the customs of the local church and to foster its unity. Finally, he demonstrates the ability to be realistic about accomplishing his ideals and projects, taking into account the actual situation of the parish and the people.

The Fourth Year seminarian should be characterized by a missionary and ecumenical spirit. As a priest, he should have a sense of his universal mission to preach the Gospel to all and to regard himself as sent to all who live within his parish. He should have a profound respect for other Christian and religious traditions, and he should be ready to collaborate with all for the building up of a just society.
1. Have I had a made a serious attempt to develop my preaching skills? Do I make any serious effort to understand the issues that hold people’s attention today? Am I at ease in discussing a range of topics and questions in my personal contact with people?

2. Do I find myself getting upset when people do not agree with me or do not understand my point of view? Am I able to maintain respect and calm when I disagree with others?

3. Do I make an effort to distinguish between what is a matter of law and what is a matter of my personal preference when it comes to the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments? Am I biding my time in the seminary in relationship to my own agenda? Once I am out of the seminary, will I have regard for the customs of the local church and the sensibilities of others?

4. Do I have the intention of adopting what I know others will consider an eccentric lifestyle or liturgical style once I am free from the constraints of seminary life without thought of the impact of this on my priestly ministry? Is it my intention to conform to the customs of my diocese with regard to clerical dress?

5. Do I willingly and effectively cooperate with the pastor in my present assignment and do I see this as a modus vivendi for the future? Do I recognize, respect, and further the leadership roles of other members of the pastoral team in the parish (e.g. DRE, Music Director)?

6. Am I realistic in my expectations when it comes to implementing my ideas? Have I honestly examined my own ideals to see how they conform to the Church’s life and mission?

7. Do I keep in mind that I am a missionary sent to bring the Gospel to all people within the parish to which I am assigned? Am I eager to undertake the New Evangelization?

8. Do I appreciate that the priest is supposed to be a source of unity and not of division? Do I strive to promote unity and peace and charity?