1. INTRODUCTION

During the First Year of Theology the seminarian begins a journey toward the priesthood, which is motivated and sustained by pastoral charity. As he begins this journey, he is committing himself to grow continually in charity in his relationships with everyone he meets along the way. At this stage, it is particularly within the seminary community that practical aspects of pastoral charity will be manifested, fostered, challenged, and refined. Pastoral charity plays a decisive role in all aspects of his life: in his response to people of other cultures, in relationships with new acquaintances, in his attentiveness to how his behaviors affect others (positively or negatively), in his willingness to be self-sacrificing on behalf of community needs, in his willing obedience to demands of the common schedule, and in his growth as a mature person with unpretentious self-assurance.

The First Theologian also begins serious discernment of a vocation to the priesthood involving eventual commitment to a diocese (or comparable entity). He begins to wear clerical attire on campus and in field assignments, which should help him understand his formation as growth in public witness to Christ. Multiple new demands of his first year as a seminarian should also foster increased awareness that he is called to be a good steward of his time, his talent, and his possessions, always in the light of Gospel imperatives.

Called to become a “man of the Church,” the First Theologian’s entire approach to prayer and spirituality should become increasingly interiorized. Personal piety and devotions need to become integrated with the Liturgical Prayer of the community in a balanced way. Since the ministry of Lector usually occurs during this year, he should become increasingly familiar with, and reliant on, the Word of God.

The First Year is a crucial time for discernment of a vocation to celibacy. The First Theologian should examine honestly and thoroughly his capacity and desire for the celibate life, and should be attentive to what his behavior and attitudes tell him about his capacity. He should be honest and forthright with his spiritual director about his struggles, and where there are signs of difficulties in living celibacy in a mature and healthy way, he should take steps to address these problems. He should develop a certain prudent consciousness about behaviors that will foster a healthy celibate vocation, just as he should become aware of, and should avoid, behaviors truly detrimental to this calling. The First Theologian should develop a disciplined spiritual life, consisting in prayer and the sacraments, to support him in being faithful to his commitment to the celibate life.
Depending on past life experience, adjustment to an academic schedule and expectations may be a great challenge for some seminarians. Each First Theologian needs to assess his gifts and challenges and to honestly take appropriate steps to strengthen certain abilities--or lacks--as needed. As a future teacher of faith, the First Theologian should cultivate intellectual and theological curiosity, viewing his studies not as an interruption to his spiritual life, but as an integral part of the vocation to which God calls him at this point. He should regard his studies as truly the “work of God” for him now.

The First Theologian should embrace his pastoral field education placement as an opportunity to communicate the fundamentals of the faith and to learn effective techniques for doing so from experienced teachers in the course of his ministry. He should also grow in the ability to address groups with confidence and to present the faith’s content to those of various ages and differing educational levels. He should develop skills of listening, leadership, and collaboration appropriate to the tasks assigned him and he should become particularly aware of his relational abilities and behaviors in different ministerial circumstances. He should consciously attend to the immense dignity of every human person as created and redeemed by Jesus Christ in whose likeness he should strive to serve in every aspect of ministry.

2. EXPECTATIONS

a. Human Formation

The First Theologian should make a sincere effort to learn about various cultures in order to broaden his thinking and experience. He should recognize that thoughtful consideration of others is necessary in community living and that he has a serious responsibility to know and to live seminary directives in a mature fashion. He should make conscious efforts to foster mature friendships with other seminarians, while avoiding exclusivity, cliquishness, or dependent relationships. He should also avoid excessive independence, as well as any inappropriate singularity drawing unnecessary attention to his person. The First Theologian should demonstrate that he knows how to relate appropriately with all the different kinds of people he encounters in the seminary, college, field education placement, and elsewhere.

He should treat the faculty and all seminary staff with consideration and respect, especially by being punctual regarding schedules (classes, meetings, appointments) and timelines (turning in assignments, forms, etc.). He should develop an increased awareness of how his behaviors can impact others with negative consequences in future priestly ministry. Family relationships will remain important for the First Theologian, but he should also be fostering a capacity to function with a mature interdependence in relation to his family.

The First Theologian should begin cultivating a close relationship with his diocese in view of the possibility of future priestly ministry there. He should spend significant time in his diocese becoming at least somewhat cognizant of its personnel, its structures, and its pastoral needs. Whether or not he is wearing clerical attire, his conduct should be consistent, avoiding any kind of “double standard.” He should be conscious at all times of being and of behaving as a genuine Christian gentleman witnessing to Christ.

Demands of the seminary schedule may be intense, so the First Theologian needs to realize his time is not his own but is given to God through service to His people. Thus, growth in effective time management is a necessary priority. He should recognize the need to relax, to exercise regularly, to foster healthy fraternity, and to balance well the time needed for prayer, study, and recreation.
Limitations of seminary accommodations may automatically impose a certain restraint on possessions, so the First Theologian should use this circumstance to assess his attitudes towards material goods and personal belongings.

He should strive to maintain good health so that his service to the Church will not be compromised, and to this end he should develop a healthy diet and a realistic program of physical exercise, hobbies, sports activities, etc. He should also learn polite and appropriate behavior regarding acceptable, common social skills (such as dining, mature conversation, listening, courtesy, etc.). Skills and habits that might foster self-confidence in future priestly ministry should be cultivated.

1. How can I foster wholesome human friendships (with both men and women) that might be beneficial to the common good and transcend mere personal “neediness”?
2. How might I genuinely honor and respect my living relatives, communicating with them regularly without inordinate dependence?
3. How do I intend to foster positive internal attitudes and external behaviors regarding seminary directives, schedules, and activities?
4. Am I familiar with my diocese; how can I become more acquainted with it?
5. How might I foster a habit of neatness and simplicity in clothing, particularly when not in clerical attire?
6. How might I grow in conducting myself with adequate public propriety as is required of those who are “public” persons in the Church?
7. How am I addressing (or might I address) possible personally destructive behaviors?
8. Do I have, and to what extent am I able to maintain successfully, a regular but flexible daily/weekly schedule? If not, why not? How might I adjust my behavior accordingly?
9. How might I grow in appreciation of and care for my possessions without being overly concerned about them and other material things?
10. Am I open to people of other cultures?
11. Do I make an effort to contribute to the life of the community? Do I have a house job? Do I see myself as a “team player” or am I more of a loner?
12. Do I strike a balance between solitude and socializing?
13. Do I take care of my health? Do I get sufficient exercise and do I watch my diet? Do I achieve a balance between work and recreation?

b. Spiritual Formation

Fidelity to the seminary liturgical schedule should be a priority for each First Theologian, enhancing his self-discipline as well as fostering a spirit of generous love for God and others. His personal spirituality should involve the integration of community prayer and personal prayer and devotions. The First Theologian should devote quality time to personal prayer and to sound spiritual reading. He should regularly read and reflect on Sacred Scripture, particularly as the primary source for lectio divina. He should consistently receive the Sacrament of Penance and should practice wholesome, daily examination of conscience. Spiritual difficulties ought to be discussed openly and honestly with his Spiritual Director.
The First Theologian should expunge sexual imagery and vulgarity from his language and should avoid any intimation of flirtation or seductive behavior. Simultaneously, he should be developing a positive, healthy understanding and acceptance of his own sexuality. He has to come to terms with how he as a celibate should handle his needs for intimacy. He should realize that certain types of literature, movies, videos, and Internet sites are simply not acceptable. In relating to collegians and the other people he encounters from day to day, the seminarian should be learning to set and to respect proper boundaries in keeping with the different kinds of relationships he develops.

The First Theologian manifests an obedient spirit in a docile attitude toward those in authority and toward the seminary rule. A collaborative attitude is a good indication of one’s capacity for obedience.

1. In the development of my spiritual life, am I integrating community prayer with my personal prayer and devotions in an appropriate, balanced way?
2. To what extent might I engage in communal prayer only matter-of-factly or grudgingly and/or out of obligation? If so, why?
3. How might I personally grow in the virtue of humility?
4. How has my own personal spirituality begun to take shape? What are the elements in my spirituality?
5. In what way(s) am I developing an ability to relate to others (men and women) as a mature person who is committed to celibacy? Do I demonstrate affective maturity in my relationships with others?
6. Am I making a sincere effort to understand celibacy from a theological, spiritual, personal, and psychological viewpoint, and to discern, through spiritual direction and prayer, whether God has given this gift to me?
7. Am I making an effort to see the connection between my theology studies, my field education placement, and my spiritual life?
8. How am I growing in appreciation and love of the Word of God, and what practical steps am I taking to proclaim the Scriptures in a more convincing manner?
9. Do I actively participate in the liturgy and contribute my personal talents, as in the music program?
10. What evidence can I give that I live a life of obedience and simplicity? Are there aspects of my life that I must change in order to live them more authentically?

c. Intellectual Formation

It is expected that the First Theologian will either possess or will acquire the ability to read, write, and speak English at the level demanded of the ordination program curriculum. He should learn to make good use of the assistance available from his professors and from the staff of the Library, the Writing Center and Learning Services, and the Information Technology help desk. He is expected to use the library regularly, and to be informed of the world about him through regular use of newspapers, news magazines, and on-line and televised news services. He should acquire proficiency with Microsoft Word, the electronic reserve system, the campus computer network, and the tools of computer-assisted research. At the same time, he should be developing a personal library of fundamental
resources in the theological disciplines. He should acquire the skills necessary to proclaim Scripture effectively in public with a view to institution in the ministry of Lector.

The First Theologian will make every effort to pursue studies with a view to grasping a general fund of basic knowledge, to developing skills in logical thinking, and to increasing his ability to express his learning precisely and intelligibly. He should be growing in understanding the meaning of theology and in developing a habitus of ongoing pursuit of learning in sacred sciences, integrated with his overall formation, particularly with his spiritual life and pastoral experiences. His intellectual goals should include the importance of being a hearer, proclaimer, and teacher of the Word of God. This year he must decide if he will enter one of the dual degree programs: the S.T.B. or the M.A. (theology) program and if so, in which area of concentration. M.A.P.S candidates should be working on the completion of the qualifying paper or any other outstanding degree requirements. In First Theology, students are introduced to theological reflection for the first time to lay a foundation for life long reflection on the relationship between pastoral practice and theological issues.

1. What might be (or what, in fact, are) my primary academic challenges and goals for the next year (two years...three years...)?

2. How might I deal honestly and constructively with any possible learning disabilities or notable lacks in my academic background?

3. How might I develop a sense of intellectual curiosity and sound skills in critical thinking?

4. How might I apply myself more efficaciously to my ongoing intellectual formation insofar as possible (for example, by allotting sufficient time for reading, writing, and study, and by balancing this with my spiritual life and with other activities)?

5. How might I integrate my learning with genuine virtue in my pastoral ministries? (e.g.: To what extent am I learning to treat all persons of whatever intellectual capacity/status with respect and charity in whatever circumstances I encounter them?)

6. To what extent am I faithful in completing assigned reading and other academic responsibilities on time?

7. Have I kept my formation advisor apprised of my academic progress?

8. Have I made use of the library, technology, professors’ office hours, the Writing Center, Learning Services, study groups, etc.?

9. Will I enter the M.A. (Theology) degree program? If so which concentration? Or will I enter the S.T.B. degree program? If a M.A.P.S candidate, am I working on studying for the comprehensive examinations, the completion of qualifying paper or any other outstanding degree requirements?

10. Do I understand the concept and value of theological reflection?

d. Pastoral Formation

The First Theologian will conscientiously and thoroughly prepare for his pastoral field experience, recognizing the great responsibility he shares in communicating the faith to others. He should also learn to accept constructive criticism graciously and humbly from his supervisors, aware that their
knowledge can help him grow in a variety of ways beneficial for future priestly ministry. He will refrain from any kind of “clerical” attitude that reflects arrogance or superiority or a sense of “entitlement” as a seminarian. He should make every effort to present his lessons in concepts and vocabulary accessible to the specific stage of development and to the realistic human circumstances of those whom he is called to serve in his field assignment. In all circumstances, even if--or especially if--he is well versed or experienced in his present task, the seminarian should strive to create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation with all, witnessing to Christ both zealously and compassionately for the good of others.

The First Theologian will make every effort to get to know the staff with whom he works, as well as all those of whatever age or status to whom he is sent in a ministerial capacity. Insofar as possible, those engaged in teaching assignments should become aware of the family background, the values and the various influences which may affect a student’s ability to learn. The seminarian should develop a sensitive and prudent manner of presenting moral teaching, aware that this may directly impact students in the circumstances of their home life. He will work respectfully and collaboratively with all professional staff and support personnel--including women, persons of various ethnic/religious backgrounds, and those with disabilities--in whatever capacity he may be called upon to interact with them.

1. In light of pastoral experience in the past, especially in the area of teaching, what do I hope to learn this year in my placement?

2. How might I better integrate other aspects of formation in my field education experience? Have I integrated theological reflection into my pastoral formation?

3. What pastoral skills and qualities do I need to acquire in order to be more effective pastorally, especially in the field education assignment I have this year? Are there attitudes or behaviors that I need to adjust or correct?

4. Do I need to learn certain cultures and languages, like Spanish, for my future ministry?

5. Am I collaborative in my pastoral placement? Do I prefer doing things on my own?