

**Priestly Formation in Collaboration with the Laity**  
**A Vision of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy**

Developed by  
**The National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM)**

**This work provides a National Association for Lay Ministry commentary  
on thirty-two of the principal references to the laity**

in  
***The Gift of the Priestly Vocation***  
*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*  
*The Congregation for the Clergy*

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## Introduction

The 2016 Vatican Congregation for the Clergy's decree, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, calls for bishops' conferences around the world to update their guidelines for seminarian formation to better meet today's pastoral needs. One area the Vatican wants addressed is the need for parishioners and lay pastoral leaders to be included in various ways as participants in the priestly formation process.

NALM, founded in 1976 to promote lay ministry and lay ministry formation, welcomes the opportunity this Vatican promulgation presents. NALM realizes that the US Bishops' committee now responsible for revising the U.S. *Program of Priestly Formation* faces many challenges, difficult decisions, and exhaustive deliberations. Concretizing these more abstract Vatican guidelines will not be easy. However, NALM hopes the Vatican's call for collaboration with the laity, including lay parish ministry leaders, will be fully incorporated in the implementation of these Vatican guidelines. It hopes that the Vatican affirmation of the laity will be woven clearly into the new U.S. *Program for Priestly Formation*. For this reason, NALM believes that if the various national associations of lay ministries in the United States join together, they can offer the U.S. Bishops' committee important suggestions, support and encouragement.

To facilitate common understanding and common purpose, NALM has prepared a study paper presenting thirty-two brief quotations from *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*. Each of these quotes is part of a thread pertaining to the laity, a thread that runs through the whole Vatican document. NALM has added its own exegesis, its own concise lay ministry commentary, to "break open" each quotation as written by the Vatican in its depth.

NALM believes that its study will provide helpful insights to all and open doors for a more extensive study of the Congregation for the Clergy's full document. (A longer NALM research paper is now in preparation that will include the full text of every lay reference in the entire Vatican document.) Furthermore, NALM hopes that its current study will:

- 1) foster discussions with in-depth reflection on the intersections of lay ministry formation and priestly formation;
- 2) engage the attention of many laity who will be encouraged by these new seminarian formation guidelines from the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy;
- 3) inspire laity to personally take time to mail encouraging positive and insightful letters regarding these new guidelines, with assurances of prayerful support, to the USCCB committee charged with this difficult task, given that letters can be more effective than e-mails;
- 4) provide laity and lay ministers important insights into many areas for their personal and ministerial growth;
- 5) help all better appreciate the values in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB's) approved *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministries* and the wisdom in the USCCB's *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*;
- 6) prepare for the reception of the new U.S. *Program for Priestly Formation* when promulgated in the future; and
- 7) open the door for closer collaboration among lay ministry leaders, diocesan vocation directors, seminaries, seminarians, and lay ministry formation directors so as to support their co-responsibility for the life of a parish.

Up to this time, the formation of lay ministers and diocesan seminarians often takes place in separate silos. Such isolation, at times, proves problematic. The Vatican Congregation for the Clergy now encourages a more interactive approach. As seminaries begin incorporating the changes for which the Vatican is calling and as lay ministry programs begin incorporating these new standards, there will be increased opportunities for mutual collaboration. Such mutuality can enrich seminarians and lay students and can deepen their commitment to work together to better serve the faithful.

In a real sense *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* challenges lay ministers, as well as future priests, to accept their respective calls as gifts from Christ: the call to lay ministry and the call to ordination. It expects both to support each other's unique gift of priesthood as they work together with each other in their ministry of serving and calling forth the gifts and charisms of the faithful. The Vatican Congregation for the Clergy chose a title for its document that indirectly expresses fruitful openness to the priesthood of us all.

We lay pastoral ministers, along with our national lay ministry associations, look forward to our own Bishops' new U.S. *Program of Priestly Formation (PPF)*. In the meantime, we have chosen the following thirty-two items from the Vatican's *The Gift of Priestly Formation* for our reflection and for sharing with each other on parish, diocesan, regional and national levels. We do this so that we will better appreciate the new PPF and assure pastors that, as educated and formed co-responsible ministers with them, they can rely on our support under their leadership.

# Thirty-two quotations from the Vatican Decree *Ratio Fundamentalis* (Universal Guidelines) with an additional, brief lay ministry exegesis and commentary

## I. GENERAL NORMS (Sections 1-10)

### C. Responsibilities of the Conference of Bishops (Sections 6-8)

#### #1 (Quotation #1)

**Vatican decree:** That each episcopal conference's *Ratio Nationalis* (National Guidelines) presents "at least a summary description of the particular social, cultural and ecclesial context, in which the future priests will find themselves exercising their ministry." (#7)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can we laity in pastoral ministry learn more about our parish's social, cultural and ecclesial context? This is so significant at this time of such widespread Church criticism and disappointment not only among parishioners, but also among many lay and clerical ministry leaders. Not only must we be aware of religious news that is editorialized and sometimes distorted, but we must seek out what is truly objective and factual. It is important, for example, that we become familiarized with CARA's recent extensive research on ministry in the U.S. Church today: *Catholic Parishes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*; the *Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Series* from Loyola University Press; and also our own national associations' web pages.

However, we must humbly accept the fact that we lay ministers are a central part of the U.S. ministry context. For example, CARA's recent research shows that in more and more instances the parish's lay pastoral leaders provide a backbone that supports a parish's vitality and pastoral care. Since lay parish staff out-number priests serving in parishes, our pastors are more and more reliant upon us to work with them in providing pastoral care. How can we better assure seminarians and newly ordained pastors that we, as co-responsible ministers, dedicated to ministry with them, are committed to supporting and collaborating with them in every way possible? How can we provide them with a deeper understanding of our commitment to such significant U.S. Church documents as: USCCB's *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*? And our recently updated and USCCB approved, *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministries*?

Could we not also benefit from a more extensive reflection on these documents and this research? Would not discussions of this material enrich us and our associations on a parochial, diocesan, regional, and national level?

## II. PRIESTLY VOCATIONS (Sections 11-27)

### A. General Principles (Sections 11-15)

#### #2

**Vatican decree:** "The vocation to the ministerial priesthood occurs within the wider realm of the *baptismal vocation* of the Christian." (#12) The pastoral plan for vocations to the "ministerial priesthood," needs to include recognition of the many "ecclesial vocations" in the Church. (#11). "Cooperation should also be promoted with groups, movements and association of the lay faithful within an organic overall pastoral plan." (#13)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** What can we laity in ministry do better to "foster" ecclesial vocations not only to the ordained priesthood, but also to our own lay ministries? We can expect that in some ways our lay ministries will be mentioned by name in the new *U.S. Ratio*. Certainly, our national lay ministry associations, serving a variety of dioceses and parish ministers, will also be recognized for our important work of fostering "ecclesial vocations" and for promoting creative and healthy ministries. How can we become better prepared to promote vocations to the ordained ministerial priesthood? Just as importantly, how can we better promote the various ecclesial vocational calls to lay pastoral ministry in all of its dimensions?

## III. THE FOUNDATIONS OF FORMATION (Sections 28-53)

### B. The Basis and the Purpose of Formation: Priestly Identity (Sections 30-34)

#### #3

**Vatican decree:** That all recognize that "The unity and dignity of the *baptismal vocation* precede any differentiation in ministry." (#31)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** How can we better explain to others that our commitment to lay ministry is our response to our “baptismal vocation”? And that it is also a commitment to helping all discover their baptismal vocation. How can we join Pope Benedict in promoting a sense of “co-responsibility” of all the baptized, in fostering the acceptance of their baptismal call to ministry, and in enriching their service in the Church and in the world?

Of course, such a commitment includes promoting the vocations of those called to serve the people of God: in the ministerial priesthood, in the permanent diaconate, in vowed religious life, and in lay ecclesial ministry. Could we help develop better promotional materials that connect all of these ministries to a deeper understanding of each other as having vocations and to a deeper understanding of baptism itself as the *source* of all vocations?

#4

**Vatican decree:** It is to be recognized “The Second Vatican Council, in fact, states that . . . the ministerial priesthood therefore, is understood both in its own specific nature and in its biblical and theological foundations, as a *service* to the glory of God and to the brothers and sisters in their baptismal priesthood.”<sup>50</sup> (#31)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** How can we as “brothers and sisters in our baptismal priesthood” more strongly promote a sense of *service* in our pastoral ministry? In the ministry of the priests with whom we are co-workers?

How can we better help those we serve to more fully understand and accept their baptismal priesthood? Can we do that in a way that *also* fosters a stronger foundation for the “ministerial” priesthood of the ordained? Can we take some guidance from this Vatican decree? From the USCCB’s *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*?

How can we help all better understand that “working” for the Church is not a “career”? That “working” in the Church is a ministry? That the essence of that ministry is *service* and self-sacrifice? That service is what unites us? And, that it is the service of ministry that keeps calling us spiritually and challenges us to acquire more pastoral competence and skill?

#5

**Vatican decree:** “Consequently, future priests should be educated so that they do not become prey to ‘clericalism’, nor yield to the temptation of modelling their lives on the search for popular consensus.”(#33) . . . “Indeed, every authority is exercised in a spirit of service as ‘*amoris officium*’ and *unpretentious dedication for the good of the flock*.” (#34)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** How can we better assure that our lay pastoral ministry avoids any sense of clericalism and that our lay ministry is always promoting, with our pastors, a spirit of service to all those in our parish and all those served by our parish? How can we promote a spirit of service, sacrifice and prayer that dispels any tendency to foster upward mobility, corporate power, control of others, a for-profit-mentality, etc.? Such as permeates our culture. Can we be more vigilant in protecting our parishes and our parish staffs from being negatively affected by this influence?

### C. The Journey of Formation as Configuration to Christ (Sections 35-40)

#6

**Vatican decree:** “The priest, therefore, is called . . . to intercede and care for the spiritual life of the faithful entrusted to him . . .” (#40)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** Through national research on the spiritual life of the Church, we recognize that the co-responsibility between priests and lay pastoral ministers is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful. In fact, the grass roots connection many of us lay ministers have with parishioners is a gift we bring to meeting our parish’s spiritual needs.

How can we, as lay ecclesial ministers, develop a healthy support system for priests, lay pastoral ministers and parish clerical staff, that will nurture our spiritual growth and that of our parishioners? Could we for example, encourage more retreat days for communion ministers, parish catechists, RCIA coordinators, school religion teachers? Our pastors often cannot be present for these retreat days (which we plan and conduct with his encouragement). Could our pastors not also coach us and encourage us to preach in these prayer services? (Although preaching is permitted for us in these settings, we are often reluctant, or too shy, to witness to our the faith so formally.)

### E. Means of Formation (Sections 44-53)

## 2. Community Accompaniment (Sections 50-52)

#7

**Vatican decree:** The seminary is to provide such a healthy community environment that it will “benefit future relationships with the Bishop, with the brothers in the priesthood and with the *lay faithful*. . . .” (#51)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** Have we studied the healthy community values that the Vatican decree expects? Can these values and this community dynamic be strengthened in our parish staffs, especially among us and our priests? Are there ways to work more closely, more supportively, with seminarians and seminaries?

#8

**Vatican decree:** In fostering such a healthy community, “it will be good for the seminary community to open itself up to welcoming and engaging with various groups, for instance families, consecrated persons, young people, students, and the poor.” (#52)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** Should we work with nearby seminaries to have special gatherings of seminarians and such groups as youth ministers, religious educators, Catholic school teachers, permanent deacons, those committed to social service, etc.? Such gatherings would encourage an understanding of the co-responsibility of lay and ordained ministers to our parishioners. In fact, could we encourage dioceses, that do not have them, to conduct such annual ministry days, so that those from a variety of ministries may more effectively pray, work, share, and study together?

Should there be a stronger connection between seminaries and lay ministry programs? Should we not invite seminaries to offer seminars, retreat days, or classes for lay pastoral ministers? In fact, would not all benefit, especially parishes, if much of seminarian formation and lay ministry formation were shared when possible? Might some seminarians participate in lay ministry degree courses? Might more seminaries invite lay pastoral ministers to participate in some of their courses?

## IV. INITIAL AND ONGOING FORMATION (Sections 54-88)

### B. The initial formation and its stages (Sections 57-79)

#### a.3. The Stage of Theological Studies (or Configuration) (Sections 68-73)

#9

**Vatican decree:** “During this stage (of Theological Studies) . . . it is fitting for lectors and acolytes to be offered concrete ways of exercising the ministries received, not only in the liturgical environment, but also in catechesis, evangelisation, and in service of their neighbour . . .” (#72)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can we assist when seminarians in our area are receiving the Order of Lector? Or the Order of Acolyte? Could we better understand what that means? How can we help them celebrate that step? How do we invite them to actually exercise that ministry in some way in our parish and to do so in a way that supports our parish’s faithful lectors and servers? How can we as lay ministers foster conversations and creative interactions for seminarians with music ministers, liturgy coordinators, leaders of catechesis, volunteer catechists, youth ministers, pastoral associates, etc.?

#### a.4. The Stage of Pastoral (or Vocational) Synthesis (Sections 74-79)

#10

**Vatican decree:** “The pastoral stage, or vocational synthesis, is the time from leaving the seminary until the subsequent priestly ordination. . . . (#74) Consequently, it is recommended that the Pastor [*parochus*], or *whichever person* is responsible for the pastoral setting that receives the seminarian, should be aware of the *formative task* entrusted to him and should accompany him in his gradual entry to pastoral ministry. (#75) . . . The duration of this stage of formation varies . . .” (#76)

#11

**Vatican decree:** It is expected that the seminarian’s pastoral formation experiences should be enhanced by the whole parish: “. . . the whole parish community should also experience an intense period of preparation.” (#78)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** We, as lay ministers along with some parish members, can expect to be called upon at times to contribute to the pastoral formation of seminarians. In fact, some seminarians might be assigned for a number of months to our parishes, maybe even for a year. In this light, we accept our responsibility to work with our pastor to become engaged in various “formative tasks” that are part of the seminarian’s formation process.

What skills do we need to acquire for such coaching, for such mentoring of seminarians? We welcome U.S bishops’ guidelines on what seminaries and dioceses will provide us and on what we should seek out on our own.

How can we, lay ministry leaders, begin now? Could we better prepare ourselves for working with a seminarian in the future by learning more skills for better mentoring, starting with the many parish volunteers for whom we are already responsible? In fact, how can we fruitfully engage seminarians in participation in the varied tasks for which our ministries are responsible? And just as importantly, how can we assist seminarians to understand the theological and pastoral principles guiding us and informing our ministry?

### C. Ongoing Formation (Sections 80-88)

#12

**Vatican decree:** The mentoring described above is so “the faithful should be able to encounter priests who are suitably mature and formed. Indeed, ‘*corresponding to this serious duty is a precise right on the part of the faithful, who positively feel the effects of the good formation and holiness of their priests.*’<sup>116</sup> Ongoing formation must be concrete, that is to say incarnate in priestly reality.” (#82)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** On the one hand, how can we relate to a seminarian or a newly ordained priest more positively? How can we better support and affirm him when he successfully handles a difficult situation? When he exercises good listening skills? When he patiently and skillfully works for a needed consensus? How can we gently inform him when he seems to misunderstand or seems to respond inadequately? Just as importantly how can we invite the seminarian or newly ordained to offer similar feedback to us?

How can we incorporate into lay ministry formation a greater understanding of the priests’ life: i.e. their ministry to the sick and dying often twenty-four hours a day; the spirituality of their presbyterate as a brotherhood of priests; their life of celibacy; and their almost daily reflection on the next homilies they are concerned about preaching?

How can we better inform our priests of our daily struggles to minister effectively in our parishes when on occasion we are interrupted unexpectedly by the additional challenges we face a crisis at home develops and we need to meet the many unanticipated needs of our immediate and extended families?

## V. DIMENSIONS OF FORMATION (Sections: 89-124)

### H. Integrating the Dimensions of Formation (Sections: 89-92)

#13

**Vatican decree:** “By the sacrament of Orders, the seminarian will be called to gather (the People of God) into one and to preside over the People of God, as a leader who supports and promotes the cooperation of all the faithful.” (#90).

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** Certainly, co-responsible leadership that “supports and promotes cooperation” in the spirit of the values presented above, would greatly benefit from the newly ordained, and new pastors, being well trained in such areas of administration as: personnel management, strategic planning, staff leadership, group processes, consensus decision making, fundraising and development, etc.

However, no person can become an expert in all of those fields. Thus, seminaries will be helping newly ordained to be more and more comfortable working in co-operation with lay personnel who have these skills. How will we lay pastoral ministers become better prepared, together with our pastors, to assist seminaries and seminarians in this regard?

Can we assist our pastors by becoming more familiar with our diocese’s financial and personnel policies? Can we learn more about better preparing our own annual personnel review, a review that fully integrates our values, goals, and skills into our parish’s values, goals, and pastoral needs and integrates our ministerial growth into the vision provided by the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministries*?

Can we lay pastoral ministers relate more positively and work more cooperatively with our parish's administrative staff: Such as the secretary? The maintenance person? The financial manager? Can we better honor their skills and expertise?

Can lay pastoral ministers form more vibrant parish leadership teams that maximize service and assure that we avoid clericalism in all its forms?

If our staff or parish community is bi-cultural or multi-cultural, are we lay pastoral ministry leaders striving to better understand each other's cultures and ministries and to become a more tightly knit ministry team of co-workers? How could we better share our gifts and our charisms with each other? How can we communicate a deepened sense of co-responsibility and service for all, especially the marginalized?

## B. The Human Dimension (Sections: 93-100)

### #14

**Vatican decree:** seminarians need:

- 1) to have a "mature capacity for relations with men and women of various ages and social conditions", (#94),
- 2) to be "acquainted with and appreciate women," (#95);
- 3) to understand the ways women have made "positive contributions to (his) integral growth," (#95)
- 4) to honor those particular women "who, by the witness of their lives, give an example of prayer and pastoral service, of a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, of care and tender closeness to their neighbour." (#95)
- 5) to have an "understanding and . . . familiarity with the feminine, so present in parishes and many ecclesial contexts" (#95)
- 6) to grasp the "genius of women" (#95); and finally
- 7) to let "this (feminine) genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church."<sup>146</sup> (#95)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can women, who are lay ecclesial ministers and parishioners, help promote and support this Vatican expectation? Are we prepared to provide our expertise to assist in supporting this expectation?

How can all lay ecclesial ministers in collaboration with our pastors, help foster models of formation and ministry where women and men serve together as partners and co-workers in ministry? This is such a critical area for the Church today. We realize that most of us laity in ecclesial ministry are women.

We are encouraged that by Pope Benedict's address on Tuesday, May 26, 2009, to the pastoral staffs of the parishes in Rome. His talk "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility" calls all the faithful to accept their baptismal call to co-responsibility with each other and with their pastors. This calls all of us, lay women included, to be well formed for our baptismal call to lay pastoral ministry.

We look forward to working with the supportive statements in the new PPF that will reflect this section (#95) of the Vatican's document. In the meantime, we will continue to do all we can, especially by being available to seminarians and newly ordained to share our vocational stories as women, co-responsible for mission of the Church, who are responding to our baptismal call to pastoral ministry. We will also provide the time and space to seminarians and priests to share their vocational stories with us as well.

However, we are also looking for the extra support. We need extra support from seminaries and/or dioceses in working with clergy from certain other countries with cultures that make it hard for these seminarians and priests to be comfortable valuing us as women, especially women in ministry. What additional resources are available for these priests? For us? What can we do to learn more about their cultures, to better relate to them, and to assist them in understanding our culture? In fact, we wonder if cultural immersion programs for such priests could be enriched by the presence of lay ministers?

## C. The Spiritual Dimension (Sections: 101-115)

### #15

**Vatican decree:** "In order for *celibacy* to be a truly free choice, seminarians must be led to understand, by the light of faith, the evangelical power of such a gift.<sup>176</sup> At the same time, they should be able to esteem correctly the values of the married state: *Marriage and celibacy are two states of authentic Christian life. Both are specific expressions of the Christian vocation.*"<sup>177</sup> (#110)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** So much is lacking in modern culture's understanding of celibacy and of marriage. On a personal level, we lay ministers (whether single or married) who are

working closely with pastors, realize we have a significant responsibility in this regard. Could we seek to learn more about celibacy, its spirituality, and the nature of its vows? Could we invite seminarians to join in some of our family events, reach out more actively to them and invite them to visit some of the marriage movements in our dioceses?

On a parish level, could we not invite seminarians to join us in putting on some marriage workshops for our parishioners, workshops that include presentations by well-trained Catholic marriage and family therapists as well as faith-filled married couples who can speak of their spirituality and the nature of their vows? On a diocesan level, or even a seminary level, could we encourage an annual formation day on topics foundational to celibacy, single life, and marriage? Could these days include sharing, reflection, study and socializing for seminarians, permanent deacons and spouses, priests and lay ministers?

## E. The Pastoral Dimension (Sections: 119-124)

#16

### **Vatican decree:**

“In this time (of pastoral formation), the seminarian will begin to see himself as a group leader and to be present as a man of communion. He will do so by listening and careful discernment of situations, as well as *cooperating* with others and encouraging their ‘*ministeriality*’. In a particular way, seminarians must be duly prepared to work together with permanent deacons and with the world of the laity, appreciating their particular contribution.” (#119)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** As mentioned earlier, Pope Benedict XVI asserts more than once that “lay and ordained ministers are called to co-responsibility” in carrying out the mission of the Church. How can we better help seminarians and newly ordained to recognize, as the Vatican does, that our service, as lay ministers, has a true “ministeriality”?

We encourage seminaries to have courses that study a theology of lay ministry and lay ecclesial ministry, utilizing such resources as: the USCCB’s *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* and the USCCB approved *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministries*.

We also trust that their pastoral ministry courses will include extensive conversations and interactions with lay pastoral leaders in a variety of ministry positions. How can we best support these efforts? In some programs live discussions may not be able to be conducted. What audio-video or online resource materials need to be developed to assist in those situations?

#17

**Vatican decree:** “In particular, ‘*when it comes to choosing places and services in which candidates can obtain their pastoral experience, the parish should be given particular importance for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry*’”<sup>199</sup> (#124)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can we, in collaboration with our pastors, make seminaries better aware of our commitment to the specialized pastoral work described above?

We certainly need to make ourselves and our various parish ministries available to seminarians. When they have their field placements in our parishes, they can learn about parish ministry in its many dimensions by: interviewing us, shadowing us, participating in some sessions with us, learning from us, being supervised by us, or attending the meetings of related parish committees or councils.

It seems that here, and in Vatican texts that follow, the seminarian’s pastoral training might benefit from living in a parish for an extended period of time, rather than in a seminary. How can we, with our pastors, provide a seminarian with both a suitable living environment and significant formative pastoral experiences? With what lay ministry experiences do seminarians most need to be familiarized?

#18

**Vatican decree:** “Special attention must *also* be given to preparing seminarians for the particular requirements and methods of pastoral accompaniment for children, young people, the sick,<sup>200</sup> the elderly, the disabled, those who live in situations of isolation or poverty, perhaps by virtue of being migrants,<sup>201</sup> and for prisoners. The fundamental area of *the pastoral care of families* ought to receive special attention”<sup>202</sup> (#124)



***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** How can we best collaborate with our parishes and our diocesan Catholic Charities and Catholic health care to introduce a seminarian, placed in our parish, to the various social needs in the diocese, to various programs addressing those needs, to resources that will be available to him, and to opportunities for working in some of these programs?

Must we not also give special attention to those impacted by addiction and its realities; to those who have been abused in so many different settings in their lives; and to immigrants who live in fear and with much emotional pain? Must we not make it a priority for us in parish ministry to offer care and support to the many in our pews who are personally hurting because of these issues?

As we lay pastoral ministers engage more in spiritual and pastoral care, some of us will need extra training so to be of more assistance to the Church in its care for parishioners, who in a variety of settings, have been sexually abused or have been wrestling with family chemical dependency issues.

#19

***Vatican decree:*** “These service experiences must be guided by priests, consecrated persons *or lay people* who are truly expert and prudent. They (these mentors) should assign a specific duty to each seminarian and train him in how to undertake it concretely. They should be present, if possible, while the seminarian is engaged in his task, so that they are able to advise and support him appropriately and assist him in assessing the service he has carried out.” (#124)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** This item from the Vatican decree contains very new challenges to us. Could an experienced DRE, for example, be asked: 1) to teach a seminarian the basic skills needed to successfully catechize a third-grade class? 2) to observe his teaching a lesson or two? 3) to critique his performance? 4) support his growth? and 5) deepen his understanding not only of catechesis but a parish’s overall religious education program? Could an accomplished parish leader of youth ministry do the same for a seminarian conducting a Sunday evening youth ministry meeting?

It is obvious to us that the Vatican sees ***formation in ministry as an art***, an art that needs to embody the theoretical, the experiential, the coaching, and the supervision that comes from a ***skilled ministry mentor***. So often one of these components is lacking, resulting in future limitations. What will we do as lay ministers to prepare to meet this future expectation by preparing ourselves to become better and more accomplished mentors in our fields of ministry?

## VI. THE AGENTS OF FORMATION (Sections: 125-152)

#20

***Vatican decree:*** That some of the agents of formation may be *lay men or women*, provided they are properly qualified and embody appropriate values and spirituality: “In the formation of those whom Christ calls and in vocational discernment, the primacy of the working of the Holy Spirit calls for a reciprocal listening and cooperation between members of the ecclesial community, priests, (permanent) deacons, consecrated persons and laity.” (#125)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** We will do all we can to support laity who may be hired, part time or full time, to work as part of a seminary faculty. How can we offer extra support to each other in the parishes where we, in our lay pastoral ministry capacity, have become “agents of formation” for the seminarians we are mentoring?

## G. The Family, the Parish and Other Ecclesial Communities (as agents of formation) (Sections: 148-149)

#21

***Vatican decree:*** That family, the parish of origin, the parish to which the seminarian belongs, as well as other ecclesial communities “contribute significantly to sustaining and nourishing the vocation of those called to the priesthood. This is as true during the period of formation as it is during the life of the priest.”<sup>235</sup> (#148)

***A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:*** It is comforting and challenging to us as lay pastoral ministry leaders to know that we will be expected at times to be “agents of formation” in one or more ways for one or more seminarians. It is very challenging to realize the significance of our ongoing support for our pastors and the priests with whom we minister. How can we, as lay pastoral ministers, best prepare ourselves and our parishioners for these important responsibilities?

## H. Those in Consecrated Life and the Laity in Formation (Sections: 150-151)

#22

**Vatican decree:** “Seminarians should be formed in a proper appreciation of the various *charisms* to be found in the diocesan community. The priest, in fact, is called to foster a diversity of charisms within the Church”. (#150)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can we provide a better witness to helping others discern/discover their gifts, their charisms? How will we work with our clergy to create a parish atmosphere and a parish process, that promotes and celebrates the charisms, the gifts, and the talents that our parishioners have? Would we not better accept and respond to our own charisms in such an atmosphere?

#23

**Vatican decree:** “The presence of women in the seminary journey of formation has its own formative significance. They can be found as specialists, on the teaching staff, within the apostolate, within families, and in service to the community.” (#151)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How will we, as women in ministry, support seminaries as they move to include more women, with various types of expertise, along the seminarian’s “seminary journey”? Are there some women we know that we ought to recommend?

## I. Ongoing Formation for All Agents of Formation (Sections: 152)

#24

**Vatican decree:** “While carrying out the mission, the formator has an opportunity for growth . . . . The seminary can become a school that prepares those who will be responsible for ongoing formation.” (#152)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How will this seminary formation unfold when it focuses on parish pastoral field placements as well as on the lay pastoral ministry leaders who, with the pastor, are co-responsible for the parish?

## VII. THE ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES (Sections: 153-187)

#25

**Vatican decree:** Each bishop conference’s “*Ratio Nationalis*” must contain an overall presentation of the subjects to be covered in intellectual formation at each stage of formation. It must briefly indicate:

- the objectives of each discipline,
- its place within the context of the entire course of studies,
- the syllabus, as well as
- the arrangement of years and semesters, including the number of credits for each course.” (#154)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** We trust that this daunting task will be faithful to the many currents of thought called for in this Vatican decree, especially in the areas of ecclesiology, sacramental theology, spiritual theology, canon law, pastoral theology, and supervised pastoral ministry praxis. When the U.S. Bishops’ new *Program of Priestly Formation* is completed it will provide some helpful guidance for us all. How can we, as lay pastoral ministers, better plan our time to study and update ourselves about these important subjects?

## D. Theological Studies (Sections: 165-175)

#26

**Vatican decree:** special expectations are presented for: (Moral Theology)

Moral Theology is to include the study of *spiritual theology*: “This must include the study of the *theology* and *spirituality*

- of the priesthood,
- of consecrated life, through the practice of the evangelical counsels, and
- of the laity.” (#169)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** We believe that the U.S. Bishops committee will call on some of the very gifted lay professors with expertise in the theology of laity, lay ministry, and lay spirituality. Should we be inviting more of these theological experts to update us and our lay ministry associations?

## #27

**Vatican decree:** special expectations are presented for: (Canon Law)

“... the spirit and the study of Canon Law should be promoted, in such a way that priests may come to understand that the remedy for many difficult situations or ‘wounds’ can be found within the Law of the Church, especially concerning the pastoral care of the family.” (#174).

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** Many of us who are lay pastoral associates and RCIA coordinators are now assisting pastors with marriage preparation and annulment applications. We can use all of the pastoral support we receive. Can we expect that seminarians and lay-ministers-in-formation will be better prepared to work with us in this important area of pastoral care?

## E. “Ministerial” subjects (disciplines) (Sections: 176-184)

### #28

**Vatican decree:** Special expectations are presented for: (Homily)

“Special attention is to be given to the homily,<sup>267</sup> since it is “*the touchstone for judging a pastor’s closeness and ability to communicate to his people.*”<sup>268</sup> . . . a preacher has to contemplate the Word, but he also has to contemplate his people [...] He needs to be able to link the message of a biblical text to a human situation, to an experience which cries out for the light of God’s Word.”<sup>269</sup> (#177).

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** Do we as lay pastoral ministers offer the support that might be helpful to our pastors as they seek to prepare homilies that touch the heart of our parishes? For example, could we better familiarize them with our insights into our parish’s current pastoral needs? Do we provide them with an opportunity to share their reflections with us and test out their ideas? After their homilies are preached, do we offer them helpful and supportive feedback? Do we do our part to reinforce the points of their homilies in our pastoral ministry, especially with our catechists and teachers who may not be members of our parish? Are we faithful to adding important applications and insights that are needed in various parish settings, so that we lay ministers truly are “co-preachers,” *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*?

### #29

**Vatican decree:** (Reconciliation-spiritual direction) Seminarians should receive special training in celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, training that relates to:

-“pastoral care of the faithful,  
-formation in the discernment of spirits, and  
-spiritual direction . . .” (#178)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** How can we, with our pastors, better address the thirst for spirituality that is so strong in our parishes? Perhaps, seminarians with this training in spiritual direction will be able to guide our parishes to a deeper spirituality. Perhaps, they will also be more committed to providing for the ongoing spiritual growth of us lay pastoral ministers and also the dedicated laity on our parish staffs.

### #30

**Vatican decree:** (Parish administration) Furthermore, seminarians “must receive careful training in

-the administration of goods, . . .  
-the essential elements of civil law, . . .  
-the duties to be carried out by pastors . . .  
-the need to engage the services of lay people.” (#180)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective:** We are especially concerned that pastors are properly formed for their serious personnel oversight responsibilities in the recruitment, review, promotion, and dismissal. Certainly, seminarians and newly ordained priests need to be taught best personnel practices for Church ministry and familiarized with their diocese’s personnel policies and their diocesan personnel office.

As already mentioned above, Pope Benedict addressed the pastoral staffs of the parishes in Rome. His talk “Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility” calls all the faithful to accept their baptismal call to co-responsibility with each other and with their pastors. Thus, he calls all of us, lay pastoral ministers included, to be well-formed even in the practical dimensions of parish life. For

this reason, we lay pastoral ministers need to become well-versed in our diocese's and our parish's administrative and personnel processes and procedures so as to work cooperatively with their implementation. What is the best way for us to grow in this understanding? Be supportive of this process?

How can we join seminaries in helping seminarians feel comfortable with seeking assistance from dedicated laity: with expertise in civic and financial matters? with an understanding of the legal and accounting procedures applicable to non-profits? and with a deep understanding of the Church's commitment to Jesus and to self-sacrificing service?

## VIII. Criteria and Norms (Sections: 188-210)

### D. The Protection of Minors and the Accompaniment of Victims (Section: 202)

#31

**Vatican decree** : “Specific lessons, seminars or courses on the *protection of minors* are to be included in the programs of initial and ongoing formation. Adequate information must be provided in an appropriate fashion, which also gives attention to areas dealing with possible exploitation and violence, such as, for example, the trafficking of minors, child labour, and the sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults.”(#202)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective**: This is a significant responsibility and one that we as lay ministers, along with our pastors, take very seriously. In this regard, we lay parish ministers look forward to all of the guidance that will be given to us by the new *U.S. Ratio* not only regarding the promotion of safe environments, but also regarding ministering to the many parishioners who are suffering from abuse, abuse often experienced in family, educational, athletic, work or civic settings, as well as in some Church settings.

### E. The Scrutinies (Sections: 188-210)

#32

**Vatican decree**: As the assessment (scrutiny) process of the seminarian takes place in his formation journey, it is expected in some instances that: “A report to be sought from those (priests, men and women) to whom the candidate was sent for his pastoral service; it may also be useful to have the *contribution of women* who know the candidate, thus including *female assessment* and insight.”(#205)

**A lay ecclesial ministry perspective**: We look forward to the guiding principles the new *U.S. Ratio* will provide specifically for any lay pastoral ministers who will be asked to guide or supervise even a small part of a seminarian's ministry formation, particularly in regard to women professors, mentors, and supervisors.

## Conclusion

Readers of the above will benefit from reading the whole 112 page document, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*. The full document can be found in British English online at the Vatican's website for the Congregation of the Clergy. An English printed edition may be purchased through Amazon. (Amazon purchases it from the Blackwell publishing company in England.) An annotated version may possibly soon become available on NALM's website

For those who want to get a better sense of the lay ministry threads in the Vatican congregation's decree, there is a twenty-five page summary being edited by NALM's Ministry Formation Task Force that will include every reference to the laity found in the Vatican's new guidelines. The research paper is entitled, "Lay Ministry Threads Woven into the Vatican's *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*." This research paper is being reviewed by several national experts and should be available by April, 2019.

In the meantime, keep posted with the NALM website for relevant discussion guides, announcements, updates and any online conversations that focus on "Priestly Formation in Collaboration with the Laity—A Vision of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy."

Please let NALM know what types of materials would make it easier for you to make presentations about your lay ministry, especially to your parish leadership, to others in lay ecclesial ministries different than your own, to interested seminarians, to lay ministry formation programs, and/or to seminaries. Also let NALM know what materials would make it easier for you to better understand the vision for priesthood in this recent Vatican document so that you can more actively support it.

In the meantime, lay ministers and national ministry associations need to take this interim period as a time to study and learn from these Vatican materials so as to be prepared for the publication of the U.S. Bishops' new *Ratio*.

Finally, let us all keep the U.S. Bishops' committee in our prayers as they work on the new U.S. *Ratio*, the new *Program of Priestly Formation* for the United States with all of its cultural and ethnic complexities. Handwritten or typed notes with your assurances of prayers and your helpful insights can be sent to:

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.  
c/o Reverend Ralph O'Donnell  
Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations  
United States Catholic Conference  
3211 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NE  
Washington, D.C. 20197-1194  
Or <http://www.usccb.org/about/contact-us.cfm>

***After you have sent your handwritten note to Cardinal Tobin as indicated above . . .***

Please also. . . .

Complete the survey that follows.

Forward it to your national lay ministry association(s).

Follow the helpful directions and address noted at the bottom of the survey.

Your national lay ministry associations want to support you.

They need your guidance and input.

Thanks!!!!

### Survey of Reader's Reflections on

### "Priestly Formation in Collaboration with the Laity—A Vision of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy."

[Online Version of Survey](https://www.nalm.org/page/priestformation) (Web address: <https://www.nalm.org/page/priestformation>)

NB: Please print as clearly as possible

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
My Name \_\_\_\_\_ My area of lay ministry \_\_\_\_\_  
(Optional and confidential)  
My email address \_\_\_\_\_ My diocese \_\_\_\_\_  
(Optional and confidential)  
The national ministry association(s) with which I am associated (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) The aspect of this Vatican document that is most surprising to me:
  
- 2) An aspect of this Vatican document that touches me, speaks to me very deeply:
  
- 3) The most important insight this Vatican document offers to my seeing new ministry possibilities in the future:
  
- 4) An area of personal growth in ministry to which this Vatican document challenges me:
  
- 5) The support materials (e.g. articles, handouts, books, audio-visuals, etc.) I would most likely need if I were:
  - To be interviewed by a seminarian/lay ministry student about myself and my ministry?
  
  - To be shadowed by a seminarian/lay ministry student in my work?
  
  - To be asked to work with, coach and supervise a seminarian/lay ministry student learning about my ministry?
  
  - To be invited to give a presentation on my ministry to a group of seminarians or lay students?
  
  - Other . . .
  
- 6) A new expectation I now have of NALM or my national ministry association:
  
- 7) An expectation I have for the U.S. Bishops' committee as it writes its U.S. guidelines for priestly formation.

(Please print any further thoughts on the back of this form.)

PLEASE . . . send the above form to your national lay ministry association(s)

**-scan** your completed form (front and back) and email to [NALM@NALM.org](mailto:NALM@NALM.org). NALM will then forward it to your lay ministry association(s).

**-send** it by regular mail to NALM, P.O. Box 256785, Chicago, IL 60625. NALM will then forward it to your association.