

---

CHAPTER 13

---

**The Parish Priest as a Formator:  
Bridging the Gap Between the Diocese  
and the Seminary**

*Peter Abumhenre EGBE*

**Preamble**

This project is in honour of Very Rev, Fr. Anselm Jimoh, PhD. A man of honour who has given most of his twenty-five years in the priestly ministry to the work of forming candidates for the priesthood. He is also a priest who has had the opportunity to be involved in parochial work. In addition, he was once a Vocations' Director. It will not be an exaggeration to say that his priestly ministry has been one of bridging the gap between the life of the parish ministry and the seminary formation. It is, therefore, appropriate to salute this hero of faith in the catholic church and propose him to all who are in and those who desire to aspire to this ministry to learn from him through these materials presented in his honour.

**Introduction**

The difference between the life within the Seminary walls and the parish setting can be taken for granted and has in fact in many cases been taken for granted. But the reality of the gap between the two is more existential than imagined. Many seminarians and even priests believe that there is no relationship between the life of the seminary and parish ministry. It is not novel to hear seminarians openly

---

criticizing the regiment of the seminary formation system and the seemingly unpredictable nature of practical life in parish ministry. It is the opinion of this article that there is a problem in this position that holds or argues that it is natural to view life in the seminary and life in the parish as distinct places for pastoral engagement. If the life in the seminary is like a nurturing ground to live the life in the parish, there should be a connection of semblance between the ‘two institutions.’

The problem that one might observe to be responsible for the seeming lacuna between life in the seminary and practical ministry for instance in the parish is the lack of integration. This lack of integration is not just only the difficulty in synchronizing the two separate realities of the seminary system and the parish setting, but also often due to the fact that many seminarians do not allow the life of the seminary exact the right impact on them while in formation. Many see the seminary training in most part as theoretical and sometimes cumbersome, as compared to the practical and day-to-day simple parish life. One of the major issues that could be raised is sometimes the sacrifice inherent in the seminary formation and the enormous freedom and independence of life in the parish. But there is something missing in the whole system.

Fulton Sheen once opined that –

We who have received the Sacrament of Orders call ourselves “priest”. The author does not recall any priest ever having said, “I was ordained a ‘victim’”, nor did he ever say, ‘I am studying to be a victim.’ That seemed almost alien to being a priest. The seminary always told us to be ‘good’ priests; never were we told to be a willing victim. And yet was not Christ, the priest, a victim? Did He not come to die? He did not offer a lamb, a bullock or doves; He never offered anything except himself (see Eph.5:2)<sup>1</sup>

Here we can already understand that the risk of not integrating the life of the seminary and that of the parish potent a great problem for the Church and it is time to address it.

Today, between the seminary and practical parish ministry, for instance, is the belief that – while the seminary is ‘a place of torment and suffering’, the ministry in general including the parish is ‘a place of arrival’. One can make a link between this conception and the civil educational system in our country. One is educated so that he can earn

a living for himself. The seminarian or the candidate for ordination has earned his qualification, so he can think more of how to take care of himself and even make personal investments side-by-side the assignment by the bishop and the two are different. Here no one feels there is a problem; at least by what is obtainable in our time, even authorities seem to be complacent or at best helpless about this monstrous cancer of pastoral decay. What can be done to address this among many problems? There are places where people can now go to school and after training, they seek 'job' in the priesthood. In the name of doing that personal interest in ministries or programmes are often more important than 'official' church assignment. What will be your interpretation of this scenario? There is a need for a true auto-reflection as we get more and more challenged by the realities of our present world order. The true priesthood continues to be a sacrificial offering to God for the transformation of the world.<sup>2</sup>

In the tradition of the Catholic Church, "... all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the mighty acts of him who has called them out of darkness into his admirable light..."<sup>3</sup> However, some are uniquely called and consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Order to particularly share in the ministerial duties of Christ through the instrumentality of the Church.<sup>4</sup> It is the preparation for this particular function of the ordained faithful that is the duty of this paper. It will consider this function and its relevance by way of introduction and look at preparation for such an office of service to God and humanity. The paper will focus on the role of the parish priest as an agent of formation. It is important to state from the onset that vocation to the sacred ministerial priesthood is not a human initiative, but divine election and entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he is like the rest of humanity in everything. "Priests, while being chosen from the midst of humanity and appointed to act on its behalf in what pertains to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (see Heb 5:1), live with the rest of humanity as with brothers and sisters."<sup>6</sup>

Not even angels can one claim to be capable of fulfilling the function(s) of the priest. It is in fact far removed from the ordinary duties of the human agent. It is the work of God established on earth to

---

mediate between the Divine and mortals. In his reflection about the importance of the work of the priest, Alphonsus de Liguori states thus: “The dignity of the priest is estimated from the exalted nature of his offices. Priests are chosen by God to manage on earth all his concerns and interests.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to talk about priestly formation and ministry means to talk about such duty that is completely outside the human agent, society and function, but for all of them. “The priests of the New Testament are, it is true, by their vocation and ordination, set apart in some way within the people of God, but this is not in order that they should be separated from that people or from any person, but that they should be completely consecrated to the task for which God chooses them....”<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the ministry of the priest is a service to humanity. It is the work of God among human beings in the sanctification of the earthly kingdom (the world). Divine as this task is, the human agent is still relevant in the dispensing of the work of the mysteries of God at the human and on a daily basis. These demands require candidates to be properly formed before they are ordained priests. The parish priest has a serious role to play here. To the extent that God himself became man, man has become very important in the economy of salvation. The role of a man here requires rigorous education and such education can only be well grounded if it is rooted in the family the cradle of life and nucleus of society.

The parish priest is just one among many other agents entrusted with discerning and helping candidates for the priesthood. Let us examine some of the agents of vocation to the priesthood and their respective roles in the formation period. The first place the human person encounters formation is in the context of the family. The family here in its purest form will include a couple (male and female), their children eventually. This paper does not nurse any bias against persons or agencies who have their own understanding about the concept of the family, but at the same time, the author is of the opinion that the reference to the family is as defined above.

### **1. The Family**

The family is the domestic church and the seed-bed of vocation to the priesthood. It is impossible to have a healthy church and suitable candidates for the priesthood without a ‘worthy’ family. The priest is at the centre of this experience in the life of the parish community. “A

good laity is scarcely possible without truly holy priests. ... – just as it is impossible to have a blossoming of vocations without Christian families which are the domestic churches<sup>9</sup>. The obligation of education of children is crucial to priestly formation and rests squarely on the family. Education begins in the family. Consequently, formation begins with the family. It is incumbent on every family to bring up children in positive values that form the basis of a good and virtuous life of the human person. “Since **it** is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the greatest obligation of educating their family. ... The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.”<sup>10</sup> Since the family is also a product of society, it required that the social order rises to its responsibility of providing the enabling atmosphere for the right form of education to its citizens.

The task of imparting education belongs primarily to the family, but it requires the help of society as a whole. As well as the rights of parents, and those others to whom the parents entrust some share in their duty to educate, there are certain duties and rights vested in civil society inasmuch as it is its function to provide for the common good in temporal matters.<sup>11</sup>

The function of the priest is the work of the salvation of souls and in fact the salvation of the world at large. It is the mission of Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit to win back creation to God who has made all things good and beautiful. It is a function of the redemption of the world. In the Gospel of St. John, God declared the reason why he sent his son into the world; this was love (cf. Jn.3:16). Just so that the world might be saved, God sent his Son born of a woman (cf. Gal.4:4). It is this work of love that the priest is meant to perpetuate until the Kingdom of God is consummated on earth. “And all these activities, since they flow from the paschal mystery of Christ, will find their consummation in the glorious coming of the same Lord, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God his Father...”<sup>12</sup>

From the foregoing, the presence and role of the priest are crucial in the affairs of the world. It is flowing from here that anything that has to do with preparation for this august role must be nothing

---

below the best of human effort. The formation of a priest in the Catholic tradition occupies a very high echelon in the priority list of the church's activities.

“The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity. The Church's work of formation is a continuation in time of Christ's own work.”<sup>13</sup>

To address such a theme as we have is certainly a task long overdue. The role of the parish priest is critical in the formation of individuals for the priesthood. It is in the same vein, that one needs to consider the parish as an entity is an institution.

## 2. **The Parish**

The parish is a community of people under the care of at least a pastor. In the law of the Church, the parish is not just a spiritual community, it is also a legal institution. “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop.”<sup>14</sup> Such a community usually has its own territory. “As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory”<sup>15</sup>. It also requires a pastor or a priest to administer such portion of the Christian faithful. It is the obligation of those who are responsible to make sure that it is only suitable priests that are given the task of the parish priest who is the pastor of the souls of the people within his territory. It is the function of the diocesan bishop to appoint a priest to pastor the souls of the people within the parish territory. This is very important because of the grave role the parish plays in the nurturing of vocation to the priesthood. *Optatam Totius* expresses this important point in a categorical manner.

The duty of fostering vocations pertains to the whole Christian community, which should exercise it above all by a fully Christian life. The principal contributors to this are the families which, animated by the spirit of

faith and love and by the sense of duty, become a kind of initial seminary, and the parishes in whose rich life the young people take part.<sup>16</sup>

It is important, therefore, to pay particular attention to the good of the family and the parish respectively to guarantee that the vocations that emanate from these institutions truly represent the ideal of the demands of the Gospel.

### **3. The Role of the Parish Priest in the formation of candidates to the priesthood**

The life of the parish is built around the priest. "It is therefore of fundamental importance for the parish to have a priest as its pastor and the title of pastor is specifically reserved to the priest."<sup>17</sup> The parish priest very often acts as a bridge between the diocese and the seminary in the process of discernment of a vocation to the priesthood. The evaluation of the parish priest as it relates to the pastoral activities of the seminarians do have great importance on the process of the discernment of the candidates to the priesthood. The function of the parish priest is to act as a bridge between the somewhat activism in the parish and the seminary. The position of this paper about this is that the relevance of the parish priest is before, during and after the seminary formation of the candidate to the priesthood. He prepares the candidate to choose the vocation to the priesthood. He guides him by mentoring through his training with practical experiences. He tutors him to take on pastoral assignment while in the seminary and as a young priest. He continues to provide him with practical life experiences as he even prepares to assume the role of the pastor himself. In the process of monitoring the seminarian, the parish priest should be careful to ensure that the seminarian does not become hesitant.

Having laid a background of relevance; the next thing is to address the practical importance of the role of the parish priest as a bridge between the Parish and the Seminary in the formation of candidates to the priesthood. Without any doubt, the role of the parish priest cuts across all that the seminary does. In fact, it can be argued that the parish provides a platform first of all for the harvesting of

---

candidates for formation in the seminary. Secondly, the parish provides the opportunity of *practicum* to the seminarian while he is still in training for the priesthood. Finally, he ends up most of the time in the parish or any other institution primarily as a pastor of souls. Hence, the parish is critical for the concrete realization in practice of all the theoretical principles and guidelines which the seminarian would have learnt in the process of his wholistic formation. “Formation involves an educational process that is both gradual and progressive, one that is not carried out ‘in fragments’ or in isolated segments.”<sup>18</sup> These include human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. “Inasmuch as it is an educating community, the seminary and its entire life - in all its different expressions - is committed to the formation, the human, the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of future priests.”<sup>19</sup> Care should, however, be taken not to divorce training in the seminary from practical discipleship which pastoral experience provides and this is most auspicious in the parish setting.

It is the duty of a parish priest who is also called a pastor to take care of the parish community. Such a task, however, demands a lot of care and practical commitment. It is important, therefore, to make sure that whoever takes this role understands and faithfully carries out his duty according to the required decorum by learning and morals.

The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor (*pastor*) of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the co-operation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the gravity of the matter stated in the reference above, apart from the fact that he has to be an ordained<sup>21</sup> minister a pastor “is to be outstanding in sound doctrine and integrity of morals and endowed with zeal for souls and other virtues; he is also to possess those qualities which are required by universal or particular law to care for the parish in question...”<sup>22</sup>

This is because of the gravity of the work of the priest; the pastor ought to be exemplary in the requisite virtues of the priesthood so as to be able to positively influence young parishioners and attract them to the Seminary for training as priests. Consequently, local ordinaries are to make sure those who are responsible for the souls of the faithful are carefully selected for such assignment to guaranty the welfare of the formation of the parish from where candidates are selected for training to be priests. “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 into pastoral ministry.”<sup>23</sup> This citation according to the ratio makes specific reference to the diaconal period, but our setting already engages in this task even before the diaconate ordination. It is, therefore, the function of the priest to discern, recommend and get involved in the formation of the candidate to the priesthood.

#### **4. The Seminarian**

The Seminarian is usually a male member of the faithful (who ought to be baptized and confirmed), who feels called and presents himself or is presented for training as a priest to be a priest. It is important to indicate some are presented and by parents or guardians. In the case of minors, as they are not matured to make such a decision, they depend on others to be presented. This applies in the case of minors who wish or are made to begin early in life their journey in the training to the priesthood in the minor seminary. This underscores the role of the pastor in the whole process of discerning vocation and eventual training for the priesthood that can occur at any time in life. “This vocation arises in various circumstances and at different stages of human life: in adolescence, in adulthood, and, as the constant experience of the church never fails to show, also in childhood.”<sup>24</sup> In the process of formation, the seminarian is a ‘mystery to himself’<sup>25</sup>. “Seminarians need to be accompanied in a personal way in the various stages of their journey by those entrusted with the work of formation, each according to his proper role and competence. The purpose of accompaniment is to carry out vocational discernment and form the missionary disciple.”<sup>26</sup>

---

Accompaniment helps to make the journey of formation to be a shared responsibility.

Furthermore, one needs to point out more about the personal responsibility of the seminarian himself. Receiving or perceiving the call of God to ministry, the seminarian has a responsibility to present himself free and sincere to the church for formation. It is the mind of the church that those to be trained as priests take responsibility for their choice and thus submit themselves for formation.

Each seminarian is the protagonist of his own formation...and is called to a journey of ongoing growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas, taking into account of his own personal and family background. Seminarians are likewise responsible for establishing and maintaining a climate of formation that is consistent with the values of the Gospels<sup>27</sup>

It will be impossible to have a fruitful training process without the free self-giving of the seminarian to the formation in response to God who calls.

The history of every priestly vocation, as indeed of every Christian vocation, is the history of an inexpressible dialogue between God and human beings, between the love of God who calls and the freedom of individuals who respond lovingly to him. These two indivisible aspects of vocation, God's gratuitous gift and the responsible freedom of human beings, are reflected in a splendid and very effective way in the brief words with which the evangelist Mark presents the calling of the Twelve: Jesus "went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him" (Mk. 3:13). On the one hand, we have the completely free decision of Jesus; on the other, the "coming" of the Twelve, their "following" Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

Freedom makes the work of formation easy both on the part of the seminarian and on the part of the formators. But of more importance here is the freedom of the one to be formed. The success of formation depends on the openness of the formed and his willingness to follow the master. "Freedom, therefore, is essential to vocation - freedom

which, when it gives a positive response, appears as a deep personal adherence, as a loving gift - or rather as a gift given back to the giver who is God who calls, an oblation...<sup>29</sup>

Very often the problems that arise can be numerous: in common experience, we have candidates who seem to respond and present themselves for formation who do not really wholeheartedly submit to the formation. Some also come into the seminary with a disposition that makes it impossible for the process of the formation to be authentic and fruitful. Cases abound in parishes and dioceses where seminarians who were highly esteemed in the seminary for discipline and maturity turn to have pretended all through their formation process only to reveal their true colours after ordination. Some seminarians are also caught in the web of the confusion between the principles of their life in the seminary and the remarkable difference they come to experience in the parish setting. What could be done to bridge the gap between the authentic life that the call of the gospel demands on the individual and the reality of the personal experience and his environmental influences? The answer is a structural one. All stakeholders are to be diligent in the discharge of their duties from the family to the parish priest and the individual seminarian who should be honest in the search for God and the direction of such a hunger for God in the right direction.

But since it is necessary for the students to learn the art of exercising the apostolate not only theoretically but also practically, and to be able to act both on their own responsibility and in harmonious conjunction with others, they should be initiated into pastoral work, both during their course of studies and also during the time of vacations, by opportune practical projects.<sup>30</sup>

If there is a true and sincere commitment on the part of the seminarian and the formators, the gap between the seminary experience and the reality in the parish will reduce if not completely eliminated. What is the seminary?

---

### **5. The Seminary**

The word “seminary” is from the Latin word *Seminarium*, which means plots where plants are raised from seeds. It means breeding ground, nursery. When is used for in reference to the priesthood, it means a breeding ground for priests. The history of training for service in the house of God dates back to the Old Testament experience when God called different people to serve in his house. Aaron, Samuel, prophets, and the disciples in the early formation of the church. It serves the use of this project to make the above reference to some of the ways in which candidates were formed for service at the altar of God. As we have it today, the role of the seminary is more systematic and theoretical.

### **6. The Moment of Transition**

Once a seminarian has completed his formation in the seminary, he returns to his diocese. Most dioceses do have policies that require pastoral formation while formation in the seminary is going on. Seminarians that are assigned to parochial ministries, that is, pastoral work, function under the supervision of the parish priest. He determines the nature of the work of the seminarian, and ensure that the theoretical intellectual formation is brought to bear in the pastoral field. The Post Synodal Exhortation on Priestly formation reads:

And so pastoral formation certainly cannot be reduced to a mere apprenticeship, aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques. The seminary which educates must seek really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work. Thanks to an initial and gradual experience of ministry, future priests will be able to be inserted into the living pastoral tradition of their particular church. They will learn to open the horizon of their mind and heart to the missionary dimension of the Church's life. They will get practice in some initial forms of co-operation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work.

These priests have a considerably important role, in union with the seminary programme, in showing the candidates how they should go about pastoral work.<sup>31</sup>

One can say that this is the point where the work of the parish priest and that of the seminary meet. It continues from here and strongly demands that the parish becomes a priority of place when it comes to getting really involved in the work of service as priests and consequently priests to be.

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....These and other pastoral activities will teach the future priest to live out as a "service" his own mission of "authority" in the community, setting aside all attitudes of superiority or of exercising a power if it is not simply that which is justified by a pastoral charity.<sup>32</sup>

## **7. The Dimensions of the Work of the Parish Priests as a Bridge between the Seminary and Parish.**

It is clear from the analysis above that the most important role of the parish priest is providing the seminarian with an opportunity to experience first-hand a practical application of the various aspects of theoretical formation he received from the seminary – The human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. The proper integration of these aspects of formation both by the individual who aspires to ministry and the system that receives and trains him become the hallmark of a fruitful ministry.

### **7.1 Human**

The priest is expected to have the natural human virtues that should dispose of him to function properly as a pastor. Human virtues such as honesty, dedication, fear of God, love of human being, etc. It is the

---

view of the new Ratio and other church documents that the basis and purpose of formation is priestly identity.<sup>33</sup> Priestly identity is being another Christ.

The priest, who is called to be a "living image" of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to this – “Future priests should, therefore, cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper and due growth and realization of self but also with a view to the ministry. These qualities are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities.”<sup>35</sup> This is what the priest is called to be. It is expected that the parish priest having lived such an experience as pastor will be in the best position to guide the seminarian to begin to mirror his life to it through an apprenticeship in the parish with the pastor. All of this will come to its proper expectation if the one who is aspiring is rightly motivated and truly available to be guided in the way of Christ. In order for the human formation to complete and become available for the task of leading others, there is a need for spiritual formation.

## **7.2 Spiritual**

In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “Since therefore grace does not destroy but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the bent of will ministers to charity.”<sup>36</sup> It is in this richness of expectation that the life of the church minister to her members. Every Christian is called to holiness<sup>37</sup>. But there is a peculiarity in priestly spirituality.

The spiritual training should be closely connected with the doctrinal and pastoral, and, with the special help of the spiritual director, should be imparted in such a way that the students might learn to live in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Conformed to Christ the Priest through their sacred ordination they should be accustomed to adhere to Him as friends, in an intimate

companionship, their whole life through. They should so live His paschal mystery themselves that they can initiate into it the flock committed to them.<sup>38</sup>

The parish and the parish priest provide the seminarian with the required atmosphere and living example to carrying out his spiritual exercises. Having been taught in the seminary the practice of meditation and *Lectio Divina* as a routine, the parish now presents the seminarian the opportunity to live out the spirituality developed in the formation ground. It is through the interaction of the seminarian with the parish priest and generally with the parish life that will make the expected accompaniment possible.<sup>39</sup> He sees the challenges in the ministry and learns to channel his energy to the required disposition of pastoral integration of the spiritual principles he has acquired in the seminary. With the intellectual and practical applications that he lives in the seminary, the seminarian begins to realize in a concrete way the various aspects of the spirituality of the life of the priest. He also begins to recognize his own personal strengths and weakness so as to be able to equip himself to develop a personal relationship with Christ through an authentic practical spiritual life. This can have a tremendous effect on the seminarian while in training to constantly and in a profound manner improve on his own response to the formation. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* points this out:

It introduces him to deep communion with Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit, in a filial attitude toward the Father and a trustful attachment to the Church. Spiritual formation has its roots in the experience of the cross, which in deep communion leads to the totality of the paschal mystery.<sup>40</sup>

### **7.3 Pastoral**

Pastoral dimension speaks to the willingness of the seminarian to take up assignments such as the teaching of catechism, preparation for the liturgical celebration, solicitude for the poor and organization of lay apostolate groups in such a way for them to function properly. Here the parish priest is to work assiduously to channel the energy of the

---

seminarian to the vast pastoral need of the parish while guiding against excesses. Just as it is the duty of the parish priest to take care of the pastoral need of the parish he presides over, it is his duty to gradually introduce the seminarian to the dynamics of this task.

The pastor is obliged to see to it that the word of God in its entirety is announced to those living in the parish; for this reason, he is to see to it that the lay Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially through the homily which is to be given on Sundays and holy days of obligation and through the catechetical formation which he is to give; he is to foster works by which the spirit of the gospel is promoted, including issues involving social justice, is promoted; he is to take special care for the Catholic education of children and of young adults; he is to make every effort with the aid of the Christian faithful, to bring the gospel message also to those who have ceased practising their religion or who do not profess the true faith.<sup>41</sup>

In the first paragraph of the can. 528 above, one can claim that a lot of the pastoral work in which the seminarian is to be involved under the supervision of the parish priest is expressed. Practical activities to this effect could be the teaching of catechism to the parishioners of different ages and professions. The seminarian can also be given charge of lay apostolate groups in the parish and in fact, the seminarian is a-priest-in-making and should be very intimate with the pastoral life of the priest.<sup>42</sup>

The seminarian is one who is training to mirror the life of Christ in his own life and conducts among the people of God. So, he must be made to take a serious part in liturgical celebrations. He is not only to participate actively but must also help other parishioners to understand the importance of liturgical celebrations. Principal among these mysteries of the Liturgy is the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass. "The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the centre of the parish assembly of the faithful."<sup>43</sup> The earlier those training for the priesthood understand and appreciate the role of the liturgy in their training and eventual ministry as priests the better for the Church and for the proclamation of the gospel message.

Another important aspect of the priest's role in the guidance of the practical application of the seminarian's knowledge in the pastoral fields is the ability to visit the parishioners. This is an important part of the formation. Sometimes priests are not aware of the material situation of parishioners. The ability to visit parishioners can help the seminarian to appreciate them and their faith-journey. This is within the requirement of the priest to know his parishioners and introducing the seminarian to this pastoral obligation becomes an opportunity integration of theory into the practical existential situation.<sup>44</sup>

### **8. Remarks**

The topic that has been addressed here is one that has a lot of practical undertones and it is pertinent to give some remarks. Formation for the priesthood has been prime in the church's evangelical mission. The agents of evangelization must be properly formed to respond to the needs of the human race in all ages. It is also true in our time that the world has known a lot of progress and experienced fragmentations. The church has not been exempted from the present human condition. In Nigeria, the effects of globalization also impact on the life of people. The church has tried over time to respond adequately to the imbalances in the world and address their implications on faith expression.<sup>45</sup> The most recent of such an effort as it concerns the formation for the priesthood is the *New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionalis*. One of the admirable points raised in the document is the capacity of Local Churches to fashion out their particular programmes based on their own experiences.

It is the opinion of this paper that the Nigerian church needs to use the opportunity of this document to re-evaluate the priestly training process in the country and create more practical synergy between the seminaries and other institutions like the parish through the dioceses. Priests need to be more involved in the work of formation, helping candidates through practical means to integrate their formation in the seminary in the existential life of the parish. The practice of keeping seminarians far away from the priest should be discouraged as there is the most auspicious opportunity that the seminarian has to see closely the realities of the priestly ministry even before ordination.

---

## 9. Conclusion

The danger every priest must avoid is the temptation to view the value taught in the seminary as mere transitory in the life of a person. The values are to become intimate habits in the life of the candidate for the priesthood. These habits create the ground upon which the grace of the sacrament of the Holy Orders will build upon. The principle of St. Thomas Aquinas is very helpful in underscoring the fact that it is the mode of the seminarians that the grace builds on: *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. Whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the receiver.”<sup>46</sup>

The role of the parish priest in the formation of candidates for the priesthood is to help the seminarian gradually integrate and appropriate the principles he has learnt in the seminary. Therefore, the seminarian should be very close to the priest in the parish when on official and even unofficial pastoral experience. The motivation of the parish priest to do this work should come from his love for the church. Failure to ensure that the taught doctrine and spiritual exercises in the seminary are lived out in the parish can cause a crisis of vocation and identity in the individual to be ordained a priest. Unfortunately, in many instances that is what obtains today. But the onus is on the parish and the seminary as great institutions of interdependence opportunity to help individuals aspiring to the priesthood to take their vocation seriously.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Fulton Sheen, *The Priest Is Not His Own*; Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2005. 10

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, 1965.

<sup>3</sup>Presbyterorum Ordinis no. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heb. 5:4; Ex. 28:1; Jn. 15:16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* nos. 3. & 7

<sup>7</sup> Alphonsus De Liguori, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, Redemptorist Fathers, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1927. 24.

<sup>8</sup>Presbyterorum Ordinis no. 3

<sup>9</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana Vatican City, 2002. No. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Vat. II., *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1965. No. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

- <sup>12</sup>Presbyterorum Ordinis no.
- <sup>13</sup>Pastores Dabo Vobis; no. 2.
- <sup>14</sup>Can. 515 §1.
- <sup>15</sup> Code of Canon Law 518. from the Vatican archive cited on the 31<sup>st</sup> of September, 2019.
- <sup>16</sup> Decree on priestly training, *OPTATAM TOTIUS* OCTOBER 28, 1965, no. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana Vatican City, 2002. No. 2
- <sup>18</sup> Jorge Carlos Patron Wong, *The Stages of Priestly Formation*, in *The Gift of Priestly Vocation in A Symposium For Formation Teams, English-Speaking Seminaries of Canada*, April 4-7, 2019.
- <sup>19</sup> Pastores Dabo Vobis, no. 61.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid 519.
- <sup>21</sup>Can. 521 §1
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid 521 §2.
- <sup>23</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, L' Osservatore Romano, Vatican City, 2016. No. 75.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid no. 12
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. Ratio 28
- <sup>26</sup> Ratio 44.
- <sup>27</sup> New Ratio Fundamentalibus, no. 130
- <sup>28</sup> Pastores no. 36.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Decree on priestly training, no. 20.
- <sup>31</sup> Pastores Dabo Vobis. 58
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. New Ration 30
- <sup>34</sup>Pastores Dabo Vobis 43
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theological*, Part 1, Question 1, Article 8, Response to objection 2.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid no. 45
- <sup>38</sup> Decree on priestly training, *OPTATAM TOTIUS*, no. 8
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. New Ratio no. 44
- <sup>40</sup>Pastores Dabo Vobis, no. 45
- <sup>41</sup> CCL, Can. 528 §1.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. Can. 530.
- <sup>43</sup>Can. 528 §2
- <sup>44</sup>Cf. 529 §1.
- <sup>45</sup> Church in the Modern World, nos. 5, 8, 9 & 10.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 3a, q. 5.
-