

Ratio Nationalis
GUIDELINES FOR PRIESTLY FORMATION IN JAPAN

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan
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Introduction

“Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15)

Jesus Christ, sent by God the Father, called the apostles to continue his mission of preaching the gospel of God. He trained them by his side, endowed them with the authority of the Holy Spirit, and sent them forth. Just as Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church, did, the Catholic bishops of Japan recognize the formation of priests for future evangelization as a most important task. As called for by The Gift of the Priestly Vocation (December 8, 2016)¹ we hereby promulgate guidelines for the training of priests in Japan.²

It was pointed out by Pope Benedict XVI in his Moto Proprio *Ministorum Institutio* that in addition to the guidelines in the Congregation of the Clergy’s The Gift of the Priestly Vocation for the initial formation of priests further guidelines for ongoing formation will be needed.³ Here we deal with the initial seminary formation of priests in Japan.

We will first discuss the basics for becoming the priests that the universal Church seeks by referring to various documents on priestly formation published since the Second Vatican Council which are summarized in The Gift of the Priestly Vocation.⁴ After reconfirming that (Part 1), we will highlight the image of priests that is especially desired by the Japanese Church and society (Part 2). Based on this, we will present concrete measures for training priests in Japan in Part 3.

Part 1: Envisioning the priest sought by the universal Church

Formation can be explained by four characteristic elements: “The journey of priestly formation that begins at the time of entering the seminary is one, comprehensive, and cultivates a missionary spirit in a community context.”⁵

A - A continuous process of becoming a disciple of Christ

Priestly formation is understood as a lifelong missionary journey that is nurtured through the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist), strengthened through the sacrament of ordination, and continues throughout one's life.⁶

1. Gratitude for God's invitation

¹ Congregation for the Clergy: The Gift of the Priestly Vocation. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 2016.

² Ibid., 3-4.

³ Ibid., Foreword 1.

⁴ Vatican II, *Optatam totius*, 28 October 1965; The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 1970; Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries”, 1979; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, (6 January 1970; second edition 19 March 1985 “Basic Norms for Priestly Formation”; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Norms for Priestly Formation,” 2 vols., 1993 ; “Guide to the Training of Future Priests concerning the Instruments of Social Communication”, 1986; “Directives on the Formation of Seminarians concerning Problems related to Marriage and Family”, 1995.

⁵ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, Foreword, 3.

⁶ Ibid.

For the sake of the plan of salvation God has specially chosen and invited some from among those made members of the Church through the Sacrament of Initiation to serve the Church for life through the Sacrament of Ordination. This vocation to the priesthood is the result of God's immeasurable providence, and the choice is the result of God's free will. God chooses "the foolish in the world," and "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." (1 Corinthians 1:27).

For those who have received Christ's call to the priesthood and wish to respond wholeheartedly, the Church has prepared a community in which priestly formation can take place.⁷ Seminarians, grateful for having been chosen by God, live in this community with zeal to know what God wants of them and to dedicate their lives in accordance with God's will.⁸ The most important thing in a seminary is for seminarians to faithfully live their vocation in the grace of God. Fundamental to the vocation to the priesthood is the seminarian's dedication to self-formation while following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁹

2. Following Christ

Christ commanded his apostles to follow him (cf. Luke 5:11; Matthew 4:20). In order to follow Christ, "The seminarian is called to 'go out of himself.'"¹⁰ It means choosing a way of life that is "dedicating himself to work with the Holy Spirit"¹¹ and being "all things to all people" (1 Cor. 9:22), guiding them to salvation in Christ. The aim is to become a guiding servant.

To this end, seminarians walking the path of vocation are required to have the faith to leave everything in God's hands, rather than relying on their background, academic history, or experience. This is because it will be difficult to embark on a new path if dragging around the burdens of one's old self. Seminarians who aspire to the priesthood strive to become disciples of Christ, who was obedient to God "to the point of death -- even death on the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Complete dedication is the ideal image of those who aim to become disciples of Christ.

B - Aiming for the fullness of Christ (integral maturity)

Seminary life exists for seminarians to form their identity as disciples of Christ and mature in the image of Christ, the servant and good shepherd of all people. All the elements of prayer, study, and community life that take place there "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Eph. 4:13).

In order to help seminarians develop their character, formation takes into account four dimensions: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.¹² Seminarians experience an intimate communal life with seminary formators and fellow students with the intention that these dimensions become unified, integrated, and harmonized.¹³

⁷ Cf. Ibid., 11-27.

⁸ Cf. Ibid., 43.

⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), 69.

¹⁰ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 29

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43-59; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 3, 89-124.

¹³ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 50-52, 89-90, 188.

1. Human formation¹⁴

Human formation is the foundation of the entire training of priests. Training in this dimension relates to the *physical sphere* such as health, diet, exercise, and rest, the *psychological sphere* such as emotional equilibrium, self-restraint, well-controlled sexual tendencies, and internal harmony without falling into various forms of harassment,¹⁵ the *moral field* of making correct judgments based on conscience and objectively perceiving things, and the *social field* of being able to contribute to the community in which one lives.

Bearing in mind that maturity on the human level, including in these areas, forms an important basis and medium for evangelization,¹⁶ while accepting the advice and encouragement of the formators and other seminarians with whom they live, seminarians should look at themselves and recognize their talents, and devote themselves to the formation of a harmonious character to prepare themselves for service to God's people.

2. Spiritual formation¹⁷

A seminarian who aspires to become a priest of Christ seeks to “[fortify] his personal union with God after the example of Christ, who had, as his program of life, to do the will of His Father (cf. Jn 4:34).”¹⁸ To this end, seminarians value speaking with God (prayer), just as Christ valued prayer to realize the will of the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42, 22:42).

At the heart of spiritual formation is intimate union as a lifelong friend of Christ,¹⁹ and this unity is born primarily in time spent in meditation fostered through hearing the Word of God, prayer, and enthusiastic participation in the sacraments, liturgy, and community life.²⁰ To this end, primarily through the Eucharist and the prayer of the Church (Liturgy of the Hours) seminarians come into contact with the Word each day, pray with Christ for others without ceasing, and dedicate themselves to community life in accordance with Christ's service.²¹ Regularly partaking of the sacrament of Penance, valuing the daily examination of conscience, is also a useful opportunity “to recognize with humility his own frailties and sins and, above all, to understand and experience the joy of feeling loved and forgiven by the Lord.”²² It is also important for seminarians to become familiar with the practices of piety, and especially to cultivate devotion to Mary,²³ for Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church, watches over and assists those who aspire to be priests of Christ.

God the Father helps and guides seminarians in their vocation to deepen their “personal union with Christ”²⁴ through the Holy Spirit. As a helper in this inner journey, the seminarian has a spiritual director with whom he prays and thinks, and from whom he receives advice in

¹⁴ Ibid., 93-100.

¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., 97.

¹⁷ Ibid., 101-115.

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰ Ibid., 102.

²¹ Ibid., 104-105.

²² Ibid., 106.

²³ Cf. Vatican 2: *Optatam totius*, Decree on Priestly Training, 8; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 112.

²⁴ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 102

becoming a true companion of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ The seminarian is free to choose his spiritual director from among the priests appointed by the bishop, and to receive “scheduled and regular” spiritual direction.”²⁶ This spiritual companionship is “a privileged means for the integral growth of the person.”²⁷

3. Intellectual formation²⁸

Intellectual formation aims to enable the seminarian and future priest to communicate the message of the gospel in a credible and understandable manner and to bear witness to the truth of faith while interacting with people in modern society. This intellectual training is part of the comprehensive formation of the seminarian which also affects his human and spiritual formation.

It is beneficial for seminarians to study the general liberal arts of contemporary society, especially such humanities as psychology, pedagogy, and sociology.²⁹ Through systematic study, mainly in philosophy and theology, seminarians strive to grow as witnesses of the Word of God and servants of the truth of faith in the Church and in the world. Seminarians also need to learn the arts of preaching, catechizing, and performing the liturgy appropriately (*ars celebrandi*) to meet the needs of future pastoral ministry. They also require an introduction to the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and, today, the use of social communications.³⁰ In addition, seminarians are encouraged to interpret the problems they face in the performance of their priesthood under the light of faith and to develop an attitude to address them. However, academic achievement should not be the sole criterion for determining the suitability of seminarians in the formation program.

4. Pastoral formation³¹

The entire preparatory course for the priesthood aims to guide seminarians to be in union with the love of Christ, the servant and Good Shepherd.³² Therefore, pastoral formation is provided to cultivate in future priests the gaze and attitude of the Good Shepherd who seeks the sheep, accompanies them, and guides them.

To this end, seminarians must be given the opportunity to practice apostolic activities as well as to study pastoral theology. Care should be given to ensure that parishes and institutions selected by the seminary are provided to seminarians during the school term, and parishes and other pastoral training sites in their dioceses during long vacations.³³

In this way, seminarians can fully understand and work in cooperation with other priests, deacons, consecrated persons,³⁴ and laity in the performance of their future priesthood by

²⁵ Cf. Vatican 2: *Optatam totius*, Decree on Priestly Training, 8; Code of Canon Law, 246.4; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 107, 136.

²⁶ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 107.

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁸ Cf. Ibid., 116-118.

²⁹ Cf. Ibid., 122.

³⁰ Cf. Ibid., 176-184.

³¹ Cf. Ibid., 119-124.

³² Cf. *Optatam totius*, Decree on Priestly Training, 8.

³³ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 124.

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 5-11.

cultivating within themselves a spirit that, “frees the pastor from the temptation to abstraction, to self-promotion, to excessive self-assurance, and to that aloofness, that would make him a *'spiritual accountant'* instead of a *'good Samaritan'*.”³⁵

C - Toward service to the People of God and society (community orientation)

The recipient of the grace of ordination to the priesthood must have complete devotion to Christ the Bridegroom for the service of God's people.³⁶

1. With the People of God ...

The vocation to the priesthood sprouts and grows in the Church, the People of God, and bears fruit with the support of the Church. This is the reason ordination ceremonies are held in the presence of God's people. Priests are ordained to serve and work with Christ's Church. By the grace of Baptism and Confirmation, God's people partake in the common priesthood of Christ, preaching the word of God, taking an active part in the liturgy, and performing the service of love. On the other hand, in fellowship with the bishops and priests who receive the office of priesthood through the sacrament of ordination, the clerical priest guides and serves the religious and laity and shepherds the People of God so that they may better fulfill their common priesthood.³⁷ Therefore, seminarians should learn about the roles of consecrated religious and laity in the Church, encourage them, and cultivate a spirit of cooperative activity.³⁸

For the seminary to be a place where seminarians can experience this kind of fellowship of God's people based on faith, it is important that among its teaching staff, working staff, and specialists who give special lectures the seminary have laity and religious and it is important that women be included. Those who have lived a truly evangelical communal life with the diverse members of God's people will be able to serve that people and become the ones who will preach the gospel of God and practice love in society together with consecrated people and believers in the future.³⁹

2. ... as a collaborator with the bishop ...

Christ chose apostles from among his many disciples. He raised them up to be his successors, forming them by living with them, and strengthening them with the Holy Spirit. In the same way, by the laying on of hands and prayer the apostles appointed bishops as successors.⁴⁰ The bishops need collaborators to carry out the mission entrusted to them. Therefore, by the laying on of hands and prayer, bishops bring priests to the priesthood of Christ.⁴¹ Priests are the bishop's primary collaborators, and under the bishop share his labor of teaching, sanctifying, and guiding God's people.

³⁵ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 120.

³⁶ Ibid., 39.

³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 143, 150-151.

³⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 59.

³⁹ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 143, 150-151.

⁴⁰ Cf. Vatican 2: *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 28.

⁴¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 28; *Apostolorum Successores*: Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, 15; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17.

Therefore, the bishop as the primary person responsible for the vocation of priests⁴² and their formation, fulfills his duty by taking into account the vocation of priests, and in particular by selecting formators, and by approving the rules, courses, and rules of life of seminaries.⁴³ Those who aspire to the priesthood learn obedience to their bishops from their seminary days and appreciate and heed the “community of formators”⁴⁴ of seminary and diocesan formators.

3. ... and a member of the presbyterate.

Those who have received initial formation in discipleship are ordained to the service of Christ's mission by the grace of the Holy Spirit. After ordination, they will be intimately united by sacramental brotherhood under the bishop of their own diocese, forming a single presbyterate,⁴⁵ working together to assist the bishop in the realization of the kingdom of God by dedicating themselves to the service of the diocese.⁴⁶

Lifelong formation as a priest continues in this “family of the presbyterate.”⁴⁷ This is so that the experience of “becoming a disciple of Christ” will never be interrupted, and that the priest will gradually be “made in the image of Christ”⁴⁸ throughout his life and ministry supported by the work of the Holy Spirit. To this end, priests support each other with brotherly love so that they can continue to grow inwardly with each other and deepen their “love as shepherds” in imitation of Christ.⁴⁹

At the same time, the priests in fellowship with the diocesan bishop cooperate and share responsibility in the formation of seminarians who will work with them in the future.⁵⁰ On the other hand, seminarians should take advantage of long holidays to deepen their interaction with the priests of the diocese to which they belong. At the same time, they should study and live with other seminarians so that they can work together as fellow priests in the future. They learn the spirit of teamwork, share wisdom with each other and acquire an attitude of working together.

D - Toward priestly ministry that continues the mission of Christ (missionary element)

Priests called to continue Christ's mission in this world carry out their mission to preach the Word of God (prophet), sanctify people through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (priest), and strengthen the bonds of God's family and lead them to God the Father (pastor).⁵¹

1. Prophetic

Above all, a priest is one who proclaims the gospel of God to all people in imitation of Christ. Priests apply the Word of God to specific life situations to teach people and lead them

⁴² The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 13.

⁴³ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 128.

⁴⁴ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 139.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Presbyterium Ordinis*: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 8; *Lumen Gentium*, 28.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 129.

⁴⁷ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 79.

⁴⁸ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 80.

⁴⁹ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 80-88.

⁵⁰ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 129.

⁵¹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 6.

to conversion. They nurture and encourage believers to shape their lives by the gospel and become proclaimers of the gospel themselves.⁵²

To fulfill this teaching task, seminarians must be deeply familiar with the Word of God. It is important for them not only to strive for a deep understanding of God's Word through the study of the Bible, but also to read Scripture daily, learn methods of contemplation, meditate deeply, share the Word with others, and make it a guideline for their lives.⁵³

In addition, the revelation from God brought about by Christ has been revealed not only by the Bible but also by the magisterium of the Church passed down to the present day as a holy tradition. Priests need to accurately study the sacred traditions and teachings of the magisterium to faithfully convey the truths of the faith. The theologies that have developed in the Church and the philosophies that clarify them through human reason are also indispensable for a deeper understanding of the mysteries revealed by Christ and for systematically organizing and teaching.

To bear witness to Christ who is Truth seminarians not only study the Bible, the sacred traditions, the teachings of the Magisterium, theology, and philosophy but also try to use ingenuity and new means of communication so that the gospel can be transmitted to the hearts of people in modern society as a living force.⁵⁴

2. Priestly

Priests are given the authority to lead the liturgy in the name of Christ. "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows."⁵⁵ In particular, the Church, renews its life every day through the Eucharistic celebration and draws from it inexhaustible strength.

Therefore, seminarians who aspire to the priesthood are trained every day to participate in the Mass and other liturgical rites so that they can administer the sacraments appropriately and in an enriching manner, encouraging the active participation of the faithful.⁵⁶

3. Kingly (pastoral)

Like Christ the Good Shepherd, the priest has the mission of uniting God's people and leading the flock entrusted to him to God the Father by the love and power of Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit while giving his all for the salvation of people.⁵⁷

To this end, seminarians acquire a mature humanity that enables them to become aware of the troubled and suffering believers in modern society⁵⁸ and to treat all people with the mercy of Christ.⁵⁹ In addition, it is important to live in a communal life while adhering to the regulations of the seminary and fulfilling various roles. In these living situations and through

⁵² Cf. Vatican 2: *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 10; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 4.

⁵³ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 103.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 97-100.

⁵⁵ Vatican 2: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.

⁵⁶ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 167, 177.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 6.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 33; *Presbyterium Ordinis*, 6.

pastoral practice, seminarians develop open-hearted dialogue with others, work collaboratively, develop inclusive flexibility, and develop leadership skills to lead church communities.⁶⁰

Part 2: Envisioning the priest sought by the Japanese church and society

A - Facing the challenge to evangelize modern society

1. Bringing the Gospel to Japanese society

To renew the Church to live in modern society as set forth by the Second Vatican Council, the Church in Japan held the First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE-I) in 1987. In its message “Let’s Live Together with Joy,” the bishops of Japan expressed the hope that “our Church, which exists in society, will become a community that walks together with society and shares the suffering of people.” To that end, they call for “Gospel-Illuminated Guidelines for Problem Solving” to be widely communicated to the Church and society.⁶¹

Traditional mission efforts were focused on proclaiming the gospel to those who did not know Christ, leading them to conversion, baptizing them, and teaching them faith. The new evangelization⁶² that the Church has been teaching in recent years includes evangelizing human standards, values, cultures, and ways of life. It targets believers in the normal pastoral realm, believers who have been baptized but have left the Church, and those who do not know or reject Jesus Christ. The mission of the Church is not only to lead people to baptism, but also to deepen their faith and transform society.⁶³ The gospel of Christ is the driving force that frees each human being from sin and society from its structural evils. Priests in the service of God and the Church are required to instill the values of the Gospel not only in the personal dimension of human beings but also in various areas of society, and to take on the challenge of evangelizing society through new media and social communications.⁶⁴

Therefore, formators, lecturers, other collaborators, and seminarians involved in training priests to live in modern Japanese society must be sensitive to the signs of the times in Japan. The signs of the times today are evident in respect for life and human rights, the family, war and peace, environmental issues, new possibilities and ethical challenges in science and technology.⁶⁵ Those who teach and study in seminaries judge these signs in the light of the gospel,⁶⁶ read messages from God in them, and strive for a “living theology” that works with society. In this way, the priest of the future will be the one who teaches and encourages each believer to play a role in modern society.

2. Signs of the Times – Human Life and Rights

In modern Japanese society, among the prominent signs of the times are life and human

⁶⁰ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 119-124.

⁶¹ First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE I), 1987: “Together Let Us Join in Deepening our Understanding of the Meaning of the First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization” (Japanese).

⁶² Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 121.

⁶³ Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 17-19.

⁶⁴ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 169.

⁶⁵ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 51. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 172.

⁶⁶ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 97-110, 182.

rights. In obedience to the spirit of Vatican II, the Church has been actively working on the issue of life and human rights with those who are sensitive to the signs of the times.⁶⁷ The bishops of Japan have marked important turning points in society, publishing documents such as “Resolution for Peace” (1995), “Reverence for Life” (2001), “The Road to Peace Based on Nonviolence” (2005), “On the Abolition of Nuclear Power Generation” (2016), “Reverence for Life: A New Look” (2017), and “To Live Together (Comprehensive Ecology Initiative)” (2024). Emphasizing the importance of life and human rights, issues of life and death, justice and peace, and environmental issues, the Bishops’ Conference has also augmented its organization to promote the evangelization of society. These efforts have also helped the Church gain credibility, and addressing these issues highlights the significance of the Church’s presence in society.

Therefore, seminarians strive to become courageous priests who take on the challenges of modern society by cultivating a sense of the value of the lives and rights of each human being. Furthermore, seminarians are aware that the themes of life and human rights are also connected to becoming aware of problems on a global scale, such as justice and peace, North-South issues, poverty and hunger, and environmental problems.⁶⁸

3. Sharing the suffering of others

The bishops of Japan call for “sharing suffering with others”⁶⁹ as one of the priorities of the Church in working with society. Jesus taught: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matt. 25:35-36). These words of Scripture clearly express Jesus’ solidarity with those who suffer. In a society where economy and efficiency are paramount, priests are required to be wise shepherds who are close to those who suffer, empathize with their various difficulties, and extend a helping hand in their need.⁷⁰ In addition, Japan is a country prone to natural disasters caused by typhoons and earthquakes, and the Catholic Church must be prepared to quickly stand by suffering people in such emergencies.

For this reason, those who aspire to become priests actively participate in various activities such as social issues study groups, volunteering, cleaning services, reconstruction support, and fundraising in order to meet and learn from the suffering and the poor and share these experiences with each other. In this way, seminarians do not forget⁷¹ to care for the vulnerable in society, pray for them, try to live a simple life themselves,⁷² and think about possible means of helping and ways to solve problems.

4. Caring for families facing difficulties

“The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and

⁶⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*.

⁶⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 172.

⁶⁹ Cf. NICE – 1: “Together Let Us Join in Deepening our Understanding of the Meaning of the First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization”; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 119-120.

⁷⁰ Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, *Reverence for Life*, 2001, 1-5.

⁷¹ Cf. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Fifth and Sixth Plenary Assemblies, *The Church in Asia Faces the Year 2000*; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 119-120.

⁷² Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 111.

culture.”⁷³ The Church is keenly interested in the difficulties faced by these modern families, especially those of Christians, and wishes to lend a helping hand in need.⁷⁴ To this end, the Church calls on priests to value pastoral care for families in difficulties and for men and women preparing for marriage. This is because the family has received from God, “this mission -- to be the first and vital cell of society.”⁷⁵ and the Christian family is the “the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society.”⁷⁶

Therefore, seminarians study the teachings of the Bible and the Church on marriage and the family, become familiar with these ethical issues, and strive to prepare for a pastoral ministry in which the believer's family itself can become missionary, as well as dealing with families in the mercy of Christ with appropriate counsel and means.

5. The Japanese Church in the Asian context

The Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Church in Asia (1998) calls for the promotion of the inculturation of the gospel in each country, region, and field in each country, region, and field, with the aim of creating a Church that serves the salvation of all.⁷⁷

To this end, the Church in Japan hopes to deepen understanding of various religions and traditional cultures not only in Japan but also in Asia, and to value dialogue and cooperation. It encourages believers to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values”⁷⁸ which are found in them and become the light that leads to the gospel. In this way, the Church in Japan strives to identify the elements that lead to the Gospel in religions and traditional cultures, to accept them into the life and activities of the Church, and to sometimes admit such things into the liturgy itself.⁷⁹ In addition, in Japanese society, people of various nationalities meet, and as the exchange and fusion of different cultures progresses, there is a possibility that a new culture will be born. The mission of the Church is to bring to it the light of the gospel.

Therefore, seminarians learn the concept of gospel inculturation⁸⁰ and the principles of interreligious dialogue.⁸¹ Through dialogue and cooperation with people of different nationalities, religions, and cultures, they strive to become suitable missionaries to make the gospel take root in the hearts of many people.

6. Aiming for a “synodal church” together with the world’s churches

Under the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission" the Church held the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops October 2021 -

⁷³ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 1.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ibid., 2; Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 86-88.

⁷⁵ Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

⁷⁶ *Familiaris Consortio*, 43.

⁷⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20; The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 25.

⁷⁸ Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁷⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37.

⁸⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy* (1994).

⁸¹ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*.

October 2024 after preparations by local churches and continents.⁸² This is the vision of the Church in the third millennium, when members of God's people commune and participate in evangelization through “spiritual dialogue” and work together to recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit.⁸³ The Church in Japan also needs to recognize and promote the importance of this “dialogue in the spirit.” To this end, seminarians must learn about the Synodal Church during their training and receive appropriate instruction to acquire the appropriate practices of the “spiritual dialogue” that will be its spiritual impetus.

B - Bearers of the New Evangelization

The Church needs “new passions, new methods, new expressions”⁸⁴ to confront social difficulties and problems in different countries and regions and to promote evangelization. It is true that “the pressing pastoral task of the new evangelization calls for the involvement of the entire People of God,”⁸⁵ but as the central bearer of the new evangelization the modern priest is especially required to have the following qualities:

1. a spirit of dialogue and fellowship

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the importance of dialogue and fellowship in order for the Church to carry out its mission in the modern world. While proclaiming salvation through Christ with conviction, in order to open the Church outwards,⁸⁶ the Church promotes dialogue and fellowship with societies,⁸⁷ religions, and cultures, and even finds in the “true and holy”⁸⁸ therein something to cherish and embrace.⁸⁹

At the same time, in the spirit of Vatican II, the Church has undergone an internal renewal to break away from the traditional clergy-centrism and to walk with the laity. For this reason, for the modern priest to be a “man of communion,”⁹⁰ “of special importance is the capacity to relate to others.”⁹¹

Therefore, seminarians should keep an eye on the situation in society and cultivate a spirit of open-mindedness and cooperation in the community life of the seminary, talking with each other, praying together, sharing and discussing the problems they encounter, and cooperating with each other.⁹²

2. teamwork and leadership

The modern church must respond to diversifying needs, such as multicultural coexistence

⁸² 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, October 2023, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission,” 1-8.

⁸³ Cf. Ibid., 32-42.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 11, 15.

⁸⁵ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18.

⁸⁶ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 121.

⁸⁷ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Nosta Aetate*, 2; Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, A Guide to Interfaith Dialogue in the Catholic Church: Practice Q&A, (Japanese):

⁸⁹ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37.

⁹⁰ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 52.

⁹¹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43.

⁹² Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 52.

and multidisciplinary pastoral care. In view of these circumstances, priests are under pressure to engage in joint missionary pastoral work.⁹³ There has never been a time when priests who can pray together, talk with and help each other – work in a team – have been in greater demand than they are today. This spirit of dialogue and fellowship enables priests to transcend their own boundaries to become servants and to work wherever they are needed in Japan beyond the boundaries of parishes and dioceses. Furthermore, there is a need for priests who work in solidarity beyond the boundaries of Japan, especially in Asia and other developing countries.

Today, congregations are active in a variety of fields, including Bible sharing, prayer groups, partnerships with civic movements for justice and peace, and engagement with the elderly and disabled beyond church activities and liturgical services. Therefore, the priest must be understanding of these movements and service activities, form teams as needed, give advice, and provide leadership to ensure that the community entrusted to him becomes a vibrant and active missionary community.

Seminarians need to develop the qualities to work in a team through fellowship, discussion, and sharing with others. In addition, they must keep in mind communal identity through “dialogue in the spirit” and acquire the ability to lead the community according to God’s will.

3. living in a multicultural era

Since 1975, the number of immigrants in Japan from all over the world, including Vietnamese refugees, other Asians, and Latin Americans, has increased, and the number of non-Japanese Catholics in Japan is on track to exceed the number of Japanese believers. The Church in Japan has received the great blessing and challenge of multicultural coexistence. To this end, churches in Japan are required to provide Masses, catechesis, and sacraments in various languages for refugees and migrants. In addition, parishes must educate children about faith, work with migrants as reassuring partners, join them in building communities, encourage them in evangelization, and develop vocations.⁹⁴

Therefore, those who aspire to the priesthood are encouraged to willingly experience multiculturalism, to learn about migrants’ histories, cultures, and customs for pastoral and liturgical purposes for a multinational laity, and to acquire at least one modern language other than their own.⁹⁵

4. reading God’s message in history

God unfolds the work of salvation through human history. The history of the Church in Japan tells of hardships and glory as the seeds of faith sown by missionaries bore much fruit in the midst of martyrdom, as they were preserved by the power of the faithful in the face of severe persecution.

After the seeds of Christianity were sown in the 16th and 17th centuries, the persecution of the rulers of the time produced many saints and blessed martyrs. These include the 26 Martyrs of Japan, the 205 Blessed Martyrs, St. Thomas Nishi and 15 Companion, the priest Blessed Peter Kibe and 187 Martyrs, and Blessed Justo Ukon Takayama. In addition,

⁹³ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 65.

⁹⁴ Cf. *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, 26-27.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 183.

generations of believers who hid for about 250 years under prohibition risked their lives to pass on their faith. The believers of the early Meiji period who after welcoming missionaries who returned to Japan were once again severely persecuted and lost their lives in exile. We are their heirs in faith.

Seminarians must gain insight into the work of God by looking at the history of the Christian era that began with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier, the prohibition period of about 250 years, and the work of Japanese priests during that time.⁹⁶ In the same way, they must learn from the modern history of Japan and the Church.

Today's Christians, especially priests, need to have the sensitivity to look at and marvel at God's work throughout history, and to read the message that history is offering the Church in the 21st century. When we look at the history of the Church, we also realize that there are dark parts of human weakness. Priests must face the history of the Church with the eyes of faith and have the courage to humbly reflect on the reality of the Church's failure to fulfill its prophetic role.⁹⁷ True renewal of the Church will come from there.

Those who aspire to become priests should study the history of the Church in Japan, read God's message and the issues of the Church found there, and make the necessary preparations to apply history's lessons to the modern Church.⁹⁸

Part 3: Formation Curriculum for Japan

Nurturing the shepherds desired by the Church and society in Japan involves formation according to the requirements outlined above. Following the initial identification of a vocation, candidates undergo a “preparatory course,” a “philosophy course,” and a “theological course” culminating with a “pastoral formation course” prepared by each diocese followed by priestly ordination.

A - Accompaniment in initial vocation discernment⁹⁹

It is an important task of the Church to arouse, identify, and nurture priestly vocations from among God's people. In Japan, the number of priestly vocations is decreasing due to the declining birthrate and other social phenomena. Bishops who are primarily responsible for the vocation of priests, need to encourage priests, religious, and laity (especially parents and educators) to pray for vocations and to promote vocation pastoral care to seek new gifts of vocations from God. This vocational pastoral care is responsible for discerning the response generated by God's inner call, discerning the authenticity of motives, and helping to improve candidates' human and spiritual qualities.

Priestly vocations can be found in various circumstances and different periods of life, such as adolescence, middle age, and even childhood. In recent years, Japan has seen vocations among adults and immigrant families. To promote priestly vocations, it is important that each diocese appoint at least a vocation officer to accompany those who feel a vocation, and it is desirable to establish facilities to support and identify such vocations if possible.

⁹⁶ Cf. H. Cieslik, Japanese priests in the Kirishitan era (in Japanese).

⁹⁷ Cf. CBCJ: Resolution for Peace.

⁹⁸ Cf. The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 173.

⁹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 11-27.

This initial accompaniment to the vocation of a priest requires effort and ingenuity to find suitable candidates and send them to the initial formation program.

B - From initial formation to priestly ordination

To achieve the overall maturation of those who journey toward the priesthood, formation in the four dimensions of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral care emphasized in Part 1, Section B of these guidelines is carried out over a period of 7~8 years. A detailed curriculum based on the provisions of the “Gift of the Priestly Vocation” will be presented separately.¹⁰⁰

1. Preparatory course (introductory stage)

The Church in Japan provides a one-year preparatory program prior to the main course in philosophy and theology as an introduction to the overall training conducted in the seminary program.¹⁰¹ This preparatory course is distinct from philosophical study and is an indispensable period of formation with a unique character,¹⁰² and shall be conducted in a specific institution.¹⁰³ An applicant to this preparatory course must be a suitable single man aged 22 or older who is recommended by his diocese with at least a high school diploma and the intellectual ability to study philosophy and theology in the future. For this purpose, a preliminary examination of acceptance into the preparatory program is conducted.

In this preparatory course, a seminary formator will be in charge and, with the help of other formators and collaborators, will carry out a unique program based on the provisions of the “Gift of the Priestly Vocation.”¹⁰⁴ Its main purpose is to deepen the self-awareness of applicants in order to promote personal growth and lay a solid foundation for a spiritual life, especially as an introduction to B-1 (Human Formation) and 2 (Spiritual Formation) in Part 1 of these Guidelines.

Based on the blessing of daily Mass, candidates read the entire Bible in order to become more familiar to the Word of God. Spiritual reading, the Liturgy of the hours, and instruction in meditative prayer help them meditate. In addition, through the study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the documents of Vatican II, students acquire a basic and comprehensive understanding of Christian doctrine. They also encourage them to mature their own character through being sent out to local parishes and service activities for the love of God and their neighbor.

At the completion of this preparatory period, only applicants recommended by those involved in the preparatory course will be recognized as students of the seminary and will be allowed to proceed to the main course.

2. Philosophy course (becoming a disciple of Christ)

The first stage of training in the seminary is the philosophy course, which is intended to

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid., 153-187.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ibid., 69-69, 154-157.

¹⁰² Cf. Ibid., 59.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ibid., 59-60; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 59-60, 155-157.

solidify the determination to choose the life of a disciple of Christ. During this two-year period, the seminarian as a disciple of Christ who through obedience, chastity, and poverty, fulfilled his life in order to accomplish God's will, accepts the evangelical exhortation for the priestly ministry entrusted to him in the future. Devoting his will to the service of God and his neighbor, and as a sign of total consecration, the seminarian freely chooses to remain celibate and live a simple and poor life. The more he decides to live a life in which he generously shares his possessions with others,¹⁰⁵ the more he matures as a disciple of Christ.¹⁰⁶

This maturity as a disciple of Christ in the spiritual dimension is based on growth in the human aspect. In fact, the holiness of the priest depends upon the maturity of his humanity. To this end, it is necessary to synthesize the basic elements of a well-proportioned personality at the stage of the philosophical curriculum and to “attain the solid physical, psycho-affective and social maturity required of a pastor” in the future. “This will make them a living reflection of the humanity of Jesus and a bridge that unites people with God.”¹⁰⁷

During this period “systematic philosophy should be given particular importance, for it leads to a sound and coherent knowledge of man, of the world and of God, providing a wide synthesis of thought and perspectives.”¹⁰⁸ That is, they study metaphysics, natural theology, the history of philosophy, philosophical anthropology, logic, epistemology, ethics, etc. To appreciate the intellectual heritage of the Church in its original texts, languages such as Latin, Greek, and Hebrew¹⁰⁹ are also studied in this philosophical course (or part of it in the theological course that follows).

Upon completion of this philosophy program, a seminarian who has been assessed as sufficiently mature in his intentions with the qualities required may apply to be recognized by the bishop of his diocese as a candidate for ordination.”¹¹⁰

3. Theological course (being formed in the image of Christ)

The second stage of seminary training is the theological course, which is intended to focus the efforts of seminarians on the cultivation of the imitation of Christ, the Good Shepherd and Servant. This four-year course, also known as the “Christhood Stage,” is above all designed to lead one to contemplate the persona of Christ, to reflect on one’s identity as a priest, and to undertake it with the support of the Holy Spirit. “This stage allows the gradual grounding of the seminarian in the likeness of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep, gives his life for them and seeks out the ones that have wandered from the fold (cf. John 10:14-17).”¹¹¹

To become priests in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd and Servant, seminarians are encouraged to develop the spirituality of a diocesan priest, characterized by selfless devotion to the diocese to which he belongs (or in which he exercises his ministry). The spirituality of the diocesan priest is based on the cardinal virtues that mature the human side, the divine virtues that deepen the spiritual side, a way of living in accordance with the evangelical counsels, and pastoral care for God's people. The aim is to develop a shepherd’s love dedicated to others. It

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 109-111.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 63,

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 159

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 166, 183.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

is also about building one's own way of thinking and working in fellowship with the bishop and his brother priests for the good of the diocese.¹¹²

During this period, biblical studies, doctrinal theology, ethical theology, patrology, liturgy, spiritual theology, pastoral theology, missiology, Church history, and Canon Law guide prospective priests to have "a complete and unified vision of the truths which God has revealed in Jesus Christ and of the Church's experience of faith."¹¹³

In parallel with this theological course, at the discretion of his bishop and based on an assessment of his maturity, the ministry of lector will be conferred upon the seminarian at the end of the first year of theology. Likewise, at the end of the second year the ministry of acolyte will be conferred.¹¹⁴ While exercising these ministries, seminarians make the final preparations for their ordination as deacons by preparing themselves to serve the Word of God and the altar in the future. In the fourth year of the theology program, a comprehensive theological seminar and deacon preparation course summarize the study so far.

At the end of the fourth year of theology, if after hearing the opinions of the formators the bishop determines that the seminarian is suitable the seminarian petitions for ordination as a deacon and is ordained a deacon.¹¹⁵

4. Pastoral stage (integrated vocational experience)

The pastoral training program is the stage from the completion of seminary program to diaconate and presbyteral ordination.¹¹⁶ It shall last at least six months but no more than one year. This pastoral training program is designed to guide the deacon to gradually take on the responsibility of pastoral life in a spirit of service, and at the same time to prepare himself with special guidance for priestly ordination.

A deacon shall at the discretion of his bishop be sent to an appropriate parish or pastoral site of his diocese to exercise his diaconate.¹¹⁷ The program is prepared by the particular diocese in accordance with the provisions of The Gift of the Priestly Vocation.¹¹⁸

※ Might it be necessary for the seminarian to return to the seminary during this period for ordination preparation?

During this phase, candidates for priesthood deepen their personal prayer, especially based on their intimacy with the persona of Jesus, and prepare themselves internally by meditating on the meaning of the ordination rite through meetings with exemplary priests. The deacon is then asked to declare his intention to become a priest freely, consciously, and definitively to his bishop.¹¹⁹

¹¹² Cf. Ibid., 71.

¹¹³ Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 73, 77.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ibid., 74.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 77.

Conclusion

The Catholic bishops of Japan hope that seminarians will be guided by the Holy Spirit to continue on the path of vocation, incorporated into the mystery of the Trinity, and become priests of Christ.¹²⁰ this end, while praying for the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of Priests,¹²¹ they will organize a training guide and curriculum that further embody the Guidelines for Priestly Formation. They will institute rules of life at seminaries, and entrust the task of training future priests to the formators, spiritual companions, and lecturers of each seminary in Japan.¹²²

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¹²⁰ Cf. Ibid., 35.

¹²¹ Cf. Ibid., Conclusion.

¹²² Cf. Ibid., 125-152.

A Seminary Prayer

Praise to you, God our Father.
In your boundless love and for the salvation of all
you sent your only-begotten Son into the world.
Preaching the gospel of God, your Son Jesus Christ
gathered disciples to be future workers with him.
Teaching and guiding them with deep love
and strengthening them with the power of the Holy Spirit,
he sent them out to all the world.

Praise to you, God our Father.
Even now in this place, through the work of your Son and the Holy Spirit
you train and send forth priests to be ministers of salvation.
Here, seminarians who live in the presence of Christ
and are supported by the Holy Spirit
face their weaknesses and overcome their sufferings and difficulties.
May they grow into the fullness of Christ.

O Mary, Mother of Priests,
may the seminarians who gather in this school of Godliness
be renewed each day with the heart of Christ
and become men of prayer worthy of the new age, and tireless evangelizers.
Pray to God that they will be good shepherds. Amen.