

TALKING POINTS FOR BISHOPS

INSTITUTE FOR PRIESTS AND PRESBYTERATES



Saint Meinrad
Seminary & School of Theology



In our work at the Saint Meinrad Institute for Priests and Presbyterates, we occasionally hold exploratory conversations on important challenges and opportunities facing the Catholic Church. Following one of those conversations with bishops, it was decided to compile the suggestions and best practices into a list of talking points for bishops to use at three important junctures:

- Before sending a man to the seminary to study for the priesthood
- Before the man's ordination to the priesthood
- Before assigning a priest to his first pastorate.

In each case, the talking points offer an opportunity for the bishop to address his expectations in the areas of human, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual formation. We have learned that when bishops are not proactive in outlining their expectations, some seminarians and priests are left to assume that they are free to make their own decisions, set their own goals and follow their own plans.

Our conversations with bishops lead us to believe that many attendant problems could be avoided if expectations were made clear and discussed beforehand. Such a discussion also offers an important opportunity for the bishop to build a more unified presbyterate by molding a more common vision among his priests.

"The Church, especially through the bishop and other presbyters, has a right to call priests to accountability for the ways that they have or have not fostered their human, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual growth. A public position renders priests more visibly accountable for following through on a commitment to grow as men, disciples and priests."

The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests, p. 38

TALKING POINTS:

BEFORE SENDING A MAN TO SEMINARY

HUMAN FORMATION

In the area of Human Formation, I would like to see...

- A candidate who demonstrates healthy relationships with others: peers, women and minors
- A candidate who presents himself well in appearance, behavior and demeanor
- A candidate who seems appropriately self-reflective and ready for formation
- A candidate who has a good work history
- A candidate who has been active in the Church for a significant amount of time
- A candidate with a reasonably good mental health history, problem-free financially (especially credit cards), no history of addictions (alcohol, drugs, pornography) or obsessive behavior (video games, Internet use), and no history of problematic dating or significant family conflict
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- Extreme clericalism and rigidity in thinking
- A narcissistic personality pattern

- An inability to follow the directions of the vocation director
- A candidate who is basically headstrong and formation resistant
- Dishonesty about money, evaluations and summer assignments
- An inability to listen well
- One seriously lacking in the basic skills for parish administration or an obvious lack of interest in learning them
- _____
- _____

INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

In the area of Intellectual Formation, I would like to see...

- An intelligent candidate with academic transcripts that prove his fitness for quality academic work on a graduate level
- Examples of intellectual pursuits not required or mandated
- What material the candidate likes to read
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see....

- Notable general negative patterns in his academic history that have no explanation or resolution

- Any serious learning disabilities that a seminary is not prepared to deal with effectively
- Serious lack of curiosity and disciplined study habits
- A history of challenging the authority or orthodoxy of approved theology professors either publicly or on personal blogs and social communication sites
- _____
- _____

PASTORAL FORMATION

In the area of Pastoral Formation, I would like to see...

- A candidate with a shepherd's heart and a serving style of leadership
- A candidate with a capacity for empathy, compassion and sympathy for those who are hurting or in need
- A candidate who shows an interest in serving people from various cultures
- A candidate with some significant characteristics of leadership in his personality and history
- A candidate with a vision of the Church, the ministry of a priest, being part of the presbyterate, authority and power and obedience that is consistent with the teachings of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, not some self-selected period in the past or personal vision for where the Church ought to be going in the future
- A history of community building
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- Extreme clericalism, rigidity in thinking and divisive actions
- A narcissistic pattern in his personality
- A candidate who is basically headstrong and formation resistant
- An inability to listen well
- One seriously lacking in basic skills for parish administration or an obvious lack of interest in learning them
- _____
- _____

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In the area of Spiritual Formation, I would like to see...

- Whom he chooses as models in the spiritual life
- One who can learn to pray as a priest
- One who is open to daily conversion of life
- One who has an interest in liturgy, sacraments and personal prayer
- One who can balance a sacramental and devotional prayer life
- One who understands the nature of the “intimate sacramental brotherhood” of the presbyterate
- _____
- _____



It would be problematic if I see...

- No history of prayer (Sunday Mass, daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Sacrament of Reconciliation and personal prayer)
- One who is so rigid that he cannot accept direction from various formation voices or be open to various styles of prayer
- One who shows no understanding of the connection between his spiritual life and his moral life
- One who sees no connection between his spiritual life, his ministry and his connection to the presbyterate
- _____
- _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:


TALKING POINTS:

BEFORE ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

HUMAN FORMATION

In the area of Human Formation, I would like to see...

- An ability to show appropriate personal initiative
- An ability to relate to the bishop as a colleague in an adult manner in ways outlined by him
- An ability to take direction and correction appropriately
- A solid and obvious commitment to be a contributing member of the presbyterate
- A priest others would enjoy living with
- A priest I would be comfortable with serving my family
- A clarity about what he needs to know, or not know, about brother priests
- Memberships in national organizations of priests
- An understanding about the ongoing formation and sabbatical policies of the diocese
- An understanding with international priests about their relationships with their countries of origin (vacations, personal finances, fund raising, incardination and maintenance of legal documents)
- An understanding of internal and external forum matters in bishop-to-priest relations
- A public persona that honors the Church

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- Ability to make friends with priests and laity while maintaining appropriate boundaries
 - _____
 - _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- General lack of transparency and secretiveness in dealing with the bishop and diocese
- A lack of awareness of the difference between a private life and a secret life
- Lack of transparency in finances: personal, diocesan and parish
- Inability to resolve differences with the bishop constructively
- Operating like a priest in private practice or participating in secretive “tribalism” within the presbyterate
- Unrealistic retirement expectations
- Inappropriate dress for public events
- The appearance of new tattoos, change of hair color or body piercings
- A general resistance to considering a challenging assignment if needed
- An unhealthy, slovenly or inappropriate personal and professional demeanor
- _____
- _____

INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

In the area of Intellectual Formation, I would like to see...

- A real commitment to lifelong ongoing formation
- Consistent attendance at presbyteral study days
- One who is involved in the leadership of the local community, beyond the parish
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- Teaching, preaching or the joining of organizations contrary to the teachings of the Church
- Resistance to ongoing formation programs in general
- _____
- _____

“With priests who have just come out of the seminary, a certain sense of ‘having had enough’ is quite understandable when faced with new times of study and meeting. But the idea that priestly formation ends on the day one leaves the seminary is false and dangerous and needs to be totally rejected.”

Pastores Dabo Vobis, #76

PASTORAL FORMATION

In the area of Pastoral Formation, I would like to see...

- One who sees himself as helping the bishop carry out his ministry rather than his own personal priesthood
- One who can relate responsibly and work effectively with the chancery offices
- One who can deal with, and balance, diversity in its various forms
- One who can admit mistakes and take correction
- One who takes preaching, presiding and spiritual leadership with utmost seriousness
- One who accepts a mentor during his first years of priesthood
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- Resistance in considering a challenging assignment, if needed
- An authoritarian style that alienates people unnecessarily
- An inability to lead or relate to a parish staff, parish council or various ethnic groups within the parish
- One who does not answer mail, return calls or attend necessary meetings
- One who uses the Internet for angry, brash and destructive communication

One who abdicates his rightful responsibility and authority while in a position of responsibility and authority

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In the area of Spiritual Formation, I would like to see...

One who has regular meetings with a spiritual director

One who attends annual diocesan-approved retreats

One who is faithful at praying the Liturgy of the Hours

One who has a healthy, adult understanding of, and clarity about, the priest's promise of obedience

"Just as for all the faithful spiritual formation is central and unifies their being and living as Christians,... so too for every priest his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his being a priest and his acting as a priest. ... (W)ithout spiritual formation, pastoral formation would be left without foundation."

Pastores Dabo Vobis #45



It would be problematic if I see...

- One who has a secret life, rather than a private life
- Public violations of the promises of celibacy and obedience
- One who does not have the demeanor of a serious spiritual leader
- One who does not celebrate the sacraments of the Church with reverence, care and according to the norms of the Universal Church and local diocesan policies
- _____
- _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

TALKING POINTS:

BEFORE ASSIGNING A PRIEST TO HIS PASTORATE

HUMAN FORMATION

In the area of Human Formation, I would like to see...

- A priest who can take care of himself if alone: cooking, cleaning and basic management of a home
- A priest who takes his day off, takes his vacation and does regular health maintenance: vision, dental and annual physical
- An honest discussion on why he was made parochial administrator instead of pastor, if that is the case
- An authentic human person who can relate and minister to a variety of people
- A priest who is a man of communion, “a bridge not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43)
- A man of integrity and principle who is true to his word, prudent, discreet, loyal and compassionate
- _____
- _____

“To be a pastor stretches a priest’s humanity as he strives to relate to and care for a community as their father, brother, spouse and servant.”

The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests, p. 72



It would be problematic if I see...

- Overeating, overdrinking, oversleeping, overwork, overspending
- Inability to listen, impulsive decision-making and a narcissistic attitude
- Slovenly, unprofessional or juvenile public persona
- An arrogant or quarrelsome attitude
- Isolation and disengagement from other priests
- _____
- _____

INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

In the area of Intellectual Formation, I would like to see...

- One who uses continuing education funds responsibly and intentionally to hone one's skills at preaching, presiding, counseling and parish management
- One who reads appropriate books and journals (and attends workshops) on leadership and pastoring
- A person who has learned the skills necessary to multitask and be organized
- One who is aware of diocesan sabbatical policies
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- Resistance to ongoing formation programs offered to all the priests of the diocese
- Teaching, preaching, writing or joining organizations contrary to the teachings of the Church
- _____
- _____

PASTORAL FORMATION

In the area of Pastoral Formation, I would like to see...

- A priest who can bear the weight of pastoral responsibilities – one balanced in judgment and behavior
- One who can minister to individuals and the parish as a system
- A priest who would take his time and seek advice before making significant changes, even necessary changes
- A priest who is not caught up in the political struggles among parishioners during a change in pastors
- One who takes the time to learn the history of the parish and to ask questions
- One who is willing to study the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops documents about pastoring
- One who is willing to enroll in a program for new pastors
- One willing to accept a mentor
- One willing to join a support group
- One who is willing to engage in face-to-face discussion with the bishop in times of disagreement, rather than talking behind his back

- One willing to learn pastoral canons in the *Code of Canon Law*
- One willing to negotiate about pets in the rectory, especially where there is a parochial vicar
- One willing to inventory personal and parish items when entering and leaving an assignment
- One who is meticulous about keeping records and filing canonical forms
- One who makes an effort to meet the civic and religious leaders of the community
- One who constantly reviews the mission statement of the parish and holds that vision up to the people
- One who is willing to prepare, from the beginning, to make a smooth transition for the next pastor
- One who is always aware of who is in front of him on Sunday, as well as who is missing
- One who is willing to learn the skills and talents of the parishioners and put them at the service of the community, instead of trying to do everything himself
- One who is willing to create a parish handbook for consistency and good communication
- One who knows whom to call in times of crisis or when help is needed
- One who is open to receiving seminarian pastoral placements
- _____
- _____

It would be problematic if I see...

- A priest who speaks negatively about the former pastor or bishop, especially in public settings
- Inappropriate relationships with staff members or youth
- The inappropriate presence of parishioners, staff members and youth in private areas of the rectory
- The co-mingling of personal and parish funds and the misuse of stipends

- One who leaves an assignment with the rectory and offices in a mess
- One who maintains personal chaplaincies to certain families
- One who regularly shirks off appropriate pastoral duties to deacons
- One who does not know or follow the financial, human resources and building policies of the diocese
- One who does not celebrate the sacraments according to the liturgical norms of the Church and diocese
- One who does not follow civil tax laws, Church collections and *cathedraticum* policies
- One who does not comprehend the demands and boundaries of being a public person
- One who blasts the Church, the bishop, fellow clergy or parishioners on social networking sites

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In the area of Spiritual Formation, I would like to see...

- One who has proven ability in leading public prayer effectively
- One who has a regular spiritual director
- One who is faithful to the Liturgy of the Hours
- One who has the discipline of a regular Holy Hour
- One who has the ability to develop the skills for praying alone
- One who has a plan for seeking help if he falls in love or has a vocation crisis
- _____
- _____



It would be problematic if I see...

- One who does not see a connection between one’s spiritual life as a priest and participation in the presbyterate
- One who does not make an annual retreat
- One does not have the demeanor of being a public spiritual leader of a faith community
- _____
- _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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