

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition *pre-Confirmatio*



TRANSITION AND INTEGRATION

Scripture Reflection: Hebrews 10:10-12

The **Vocational Synthesis Stage** is not entirely new. Rather, it is the name the Ratio gives to the stage of initial formation that has had the force of law since 1983: *“After completing the curriculum of studies, and before being promoted to the priesthood, deacons are to spend an appropriate time, to be determined by the bishop or by the competent major Superior, taking part in the pastoral ministry and exercising the diaconal order” (CIC can. 1032 §2).*

As the Code suggests, the Vocational Synthesis Stage is distinct from what has been commonly referred to as the “pastoral year.” The purpose of this stage is to allow **transition and integration** into the life of a cleric, incorporating the entirety of the formation he has received from the moment of Baptism until his reception of Holy Orders. Rather than “on the job training,” this stage is living as an ordained minister in a new ontological and existential reality. Having already demonstrated the required pastoral competencies during his seminary formation, the newly ordained deacon should be adjusting to the life of ministry before advancing to priestly ordination and the full weight of priestly responsibilities.

Prior to the **minimum six-month** Vocational Synthesis Stage, the seminary should resolve all questions regarding suitability for orders. The deacon will now live **away from the seminary**, within his own diocese, institute, or society, accompanied by his bishop or major superior, presbyterate or religious community, and parish. This vocational synthesis provides a formative environment which

KEY WORDS

Vocational Synthesis Stage

Transition & Integration

Six-Months Minimum

Away from the Seminary

most seminaries cannot offer. While seminaries are an invaluable intentional community, the Vocational Synthesis Stage transitions men as clerics into the parish or other ministerial setting where they will live their priesthood.

The primary formator of the newly ordained deacon during the Vocational Synthesis Stage is now either the pastor of the parish where the deacon is assigned, or someone delegated by the bishop or major superior who serves in their diocese, institute, or society. In this way, the deacon experiences the life of clerical ministry in an environment of openness and dialog with a person who can accompany him personally and directly regarding his ministerial experiences. Different from seminary formation, this accompaniment should help him to appreciate his new status in the Church as an official representative and a public figure, incorporating, again, all the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation he has received. While in some dioceses it may be appropriate for the deacon to return to the seminary for times of prayer, spiritual direction, group reflection, sacramental *practica*, and fraternity, he should not be enrolled in credited courses during this stage. The Vocational Synthesis Stage always takes place after the completion of the Configuration Stage, and the two can never be concurrent.

Upon completion of the Vocational Synthesis Stage, the suitability of the man for the conferral of the Order of Priesthood is now judged by those responsible in his diocese of incardination, religious institute, or society of apostolic life (*CIC can. 1028 and 1030*).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Because the diaconate is oriented toward ministry, what are ways that seminaries can assist a man in completing the equivalent of four years of theological studies *before* his diaconal ordination?
2. What is needed to best prepare priest/pastor formators for the Vocational Synthesis Stage?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does the PPF change the length of formation?

A man entering formation following high school could be ordained after eight years, and a man entering formation with an undergraduate degree could be ordained after seven years. In this situation, he could spend twelve-months in the Propaedeutic Stage, two years in the Discipleship Stage,

and three-and-a-half years in a compressed Configuration Stage. After diaconate ordination he would enter a parish to serve for six-months and be ordained to the priesthood at the satisfactory conclusion of the Vocational Synthesis Stage.