

Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative: Saint Mary Seminary, Cleveland, Ohio

Fr. Andrew Turner¹

CERTIFICATE IN PASTORAL SUPERVISION FOR MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Answering the call for quality supervision in pastoral field education as described in the *Program for Priestly Formation* (6th edition), Saint Mary Seminary, Cleveland, and the Seminary Formation Council have developed a new Certificate in Pastoral Supervision for Missionary Discipleship that will begin in August 2024.

Over the past two years, through the generosity of the Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative, Saint Mary Seminary has collaborated with professional associations such as the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM) and the Catholic Association for Theological Field Education (CATFE) to develop resources and tools to assist pastors and staff in pastoral placements in the supervision of candidates who are preparing for professional ministerial leadership. Recognizing the parish's special responsibility for accompaniment of transitional deacons during the new Vocational Synthesis Stage of seminary formation, Saint Mary Seminary recently expanded its collaboration to partner with the Seminary Formation Council in the development and implementation of a new six-module certification program for pastoral supervision.

The Seminary Formation Council, which is guided by seminary rectors and bishops of the United States, is best known for its successful work in forming seminary formators nationally and internationally. The goals of the new six-module certificate program are to empower missionary discipleship, support collaborative ministry, model formational accompaniment, and assist the pastor and staff in assessing the benchmarks of the Vocational Synthesis Stage. The content of the modules is adapted from the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, as presented by Archbishop Jorge Patron Wong when he was secretary for seminaries for the Dicastery of the Clergy in Rome. This content reflects the need for pastors, assistant pastors, permanent deacons, and lay leaders serving in parish ministry to strengthen their skills in mentoring for holistic and integrated accompaniment of transitional deacons within the new Vocational Synthesis Stage. The *Program of Priestly Formation* states that the purpose of the Vocational Synthesis Stage is to support a deacon's integration into the life of a cleric and to incorporate 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 provides a setting in which the new deacon learns to live as an ordained minister in a new ontological and existential reality. Having already demonstrated the required pastoral competencies during his seminary formation, the deacon adjusts to the life of full-time ministry before advancing to priestly ordination and the full weight of priestly responsibilities.

The Vocational Synthesis Stage is unique because the primary formational community for the transitional deacon is no longer the seminary but the pastor and parish staff of the parish where he is assigned. In this way, the deacon experiences the life of clerical ministry in an environment of openness and dialogue with people who can accompany him personally regarding his ministerial experiences. Different from seminary formation, this accompaniment

¹ Rev. Andrew B. Turner, STL, DMin, serves as President-Rector of Saint Mary Seminary, Cleveland. Email: aturner@dioceseofcleveland.org

should help the deacon to appreciate his new status in the church as a public figure, while deeply integrating and incorporating the four dimensions of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—received during his time in seminary.

Equipping the pastor and the staff for the Vocational Synthesis Stage are six modules: “Listening for and Responding to the Holy Spirit,” “The Art of Accompaniment in Parish and Presbyteral Life,” “Christian Psychological Integration and Parish Life,” “The Church as Field Hospital: Receiving and Administering Mercy,” “Formation for a Life of Discernment: Personal, Ecclesial, and Pastoral,” and “The Parish as Culture of Encounter and Evangelization.” Each of these six modules lasts five days (Sunday dinner until Friday lunch), and they occur three weeks a year over two years.

Supporting each of the modules are small group practicum exercises that facilitate fruitful assimilation of the living principles within the content of each week. Practicum exercises are not role plays, nor are they small group discussions. Rather, they serve as a form of peer coaching that fosters ongoing integrated formation and the ability to remain with and adhere to the presence of the Holy Spirit—for us and through us.

Connecting the entire certification program is an online tool, Percorso Parish, which provides a series of assessments and reports that guide the pastor and staff in tracking their progress in the ten factors that support the accompaniment of a transitional deacon: empathy, respect, trust, alignment, partnership, conflict resolution, communication, accountability, expectation management, and spirituality. When a pastor and staff begin the certification program, they complete an online Collaborative Ministry Assessment, which identifies their strengths and growth opportunities toward the ten factors of a collaborative ministry environment. Concurrently, the transitional deacon receives an assessment from his seminary formator, which identifies his beginning proficiency toward the benchmarks of the Vocational Synthesis Stage and is connected to the ten factors of collaboration. The results from the staff and deacon assessments are summarized in a report that leads to the development of goals that are then reviewed and processed through theological reflections by the pastor, transitional deacon, and the staff. Finally, at the end of the stage, the pastor, staff, and deacon complete a post-assessment demonstrating growth areas in the transitional deacon’s formation as well as ongoing opportunities for the staff’s growth in collaborative ministry. This information can be shared with those who evaluate the suitability of the deacon for the conferral of the Order of Priesthood and assist with future assignments of ministry candidates.

This new Certificate in Pastoral Supervision for Missionary Discipleship will support the building of collaborative co-responsible pastoral field education placement sites and will fulfill the Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow initiative to enhance the vitality of Christian congregations. Rooted in the threefold impact of this project’s proposal, it is believed that the modules, practicum exercises, and assessment resources will provide a pathway that best prepares candidates to be faithful coworkers in the vineyard of the Lord (Matthew 20:1–16).