

**PROGRAM FOR PRIESTLY FORMATION:**

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SEMINARY  
ADMISSION**

**The Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte  
Charlotte, North Carolina**

# **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SEMINARY ADMISSION**

## **CONTENTS**

### **PART I – POLICIES CONCERNING ADMISSION**

#### **SECTION A – GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS**

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Canonical Impediments

#### **SECTION B – APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

- 1) First Phase
- 2) Second Phase
- 3) Third Phase

#### **SECTION C – PARTICULAR REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS**

- 1) Age
- 2) Neophytes and those Recently Received into the Church
- 3) Applicants Previously Admitted in Other Dioceses or in  
Congregations or Institutes of Consecrated Life
- 4) Language Requirements
- 5) Non U.S. Citizens
- 6) Men Who Have Been Married, Divorced, and Who Have Received  
a Decree of Nullity
- 7) Alcohol and Drug Dependence
- 8) HIV/AIDS Testing
- 9) Policy of Diocese of Charlotte Concerning Ministry Related Sexual

Misconduct by Church Personnel

## **PART II – POLICIES CONCERNING THE PROGRAM OF STUDIES**

- 1) Overview
- 2) College Seminary
- 3) Pre-Theology
- 4) Theological Studies
- 5) Seminaries

# **PART I**

## **POLICIES CONCERNING ADMISSION**

### **SECTION A**

#### **GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS**

##### **1. INTRODUCTION**

“Right training demands not only the prudent selection of students, but also serious trial of individuals during their course of studies, to be made with the advice of experts, in order to reach certainty about the will of God regarding their vocation. In this sincere search for the will of God, the candidates on trial themselves readily should be asked to share, the more quickly and surely to obtain their greater spiritual good.

Consideration is to be given to the young men’s human and moral qualities (e.g. sincerity, emotional maturity, good manners, keeping their word, steady concern for justice; feelings for friendship, for just freedom and responsibility; industry, the will to work for others, and so on); to their spiritual qualities, too (e.g. love of God and neighbour (sic), spirit of fellowship and self denial, docility, well-trying chastity; appreciation of the faith and the Church, apostolic and missionary concern); and intellectual qualities (e.g. correct and sound judgment; sufficient ability to complete ecclesiastical studies; a right notion of the priesthood and of what it involves, etc.). Such consideration makes it possible to judge whether they are suited for priestly ministry.

Likewise as a general rule their physical and mental health should be examined if the case merits it, by expert doctors and others competent in psychological science; possible inherited traits should also be given attention. Bishops have a grave obligation to investigate especially the cases of those who were dismissed from another seminary or religious institute.

The first thing is to help the students seriously and sincerely to ponder before God whether they can really believe themselves called to the

priesthood, and make them able to sort the motives of their intention. So, if God wills, they may proceed to the priestly office with a right and free will.”<sup>1</sup>

“Given the age and diverse background of many candidates, the admission procedure is crucial, indeed central, to every dimension of priestly formation. In regard to personality and disposition, candidates admitted are very similar to the seminarians who only a few years later will be recommended for sacred orders. In cases in which the admission committee has reservations, caution should be the watchword and the benefit of doubt given to the Church. It is also important for the admission procedure carefully to weigh the impact the admission of each individual candidate will have on the seminary community.”<sup>2</sup>

## 1.CANONICAL IMPEDIMENTS

### *Article 3: Irregularities and other Impediments (cc. 1040-1049)*

**Canon 1040** – Those affected by any impediment, whether perpetual, which is called an irregularity, or a simple, are prevented from receiving orders. The only impediments incurred, however, are those contained in the following canons.

**Canon 1041** – The following are irregular for receiving orders:

1. A person who labors under some form of amentia or other physic illness due to which, after experts have been consulted, He is judged unqualified to fulfill the ministry properly;
2. A person who has committed the delict of apostasy, heresy or schism;
3. A person who has attempted marriage, even only civil, while either impeded personally from entering marriage by a matrimonial bond, sacred orders or a public perpetual vow of

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<sup>1</sup> CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION *Basis Norms for Priestly Formation* (19 March 1985) no. 39.

<sup>2</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS *Program of Priestly Formation* (Fourth Edition) no. 510.

chastity, or with a woman bound by a valid marriage or by the same type of vow;

4. A person who has committed voluntary homicide or procured a completed abortion and all those who positively cooperated in either;
5. A person who has seriously and maliciously mutilated himself or another gravely and maliciously or who has attempted suicide;
6. A person who has performed an act of orders reserved to those in the order of episcopate or presbyterate while either lacking that order or prohibited from its exercise by some declared or imposed canonical penalty.

**Canon 1042** – The following are simply impeded from receiving orders:

1. A man who has a wife, unless he is legitimately destined for the permanent diaconate;
2. A person who exercises an office or administration forbidden to clerics according to the norm of canons 285 and 286 for which he must render an account, until he becomes free by having relinquished the office or administration and rendered an account;
3. A neophyte, unless he has been proven sufficiently in the judgment of the ordinary.

**Canon 1043** – If the Christian faithful are aware of impediments to sacred orders, they are obliged to reveal them to the ordinary or pastor before ordination.

**Canon 1044** – § 1. The following are irregular for the exercise of orders already received:

1. A person who has received orders illegitimately while affected by an irregularity to receive them;

2. A person who has committed a delict mentioned in Canon 1041, n.2, if the delict is public;
3. A person who has committed a delict mentioned in Canon 1041, nn. 3,4,5,6.

§ 2. The following are impeded from the exercise of orders.

1. A person who has received orders illegitimately while prevented by an impediment from receiving them;
2. A person who is affected by amentia or some other psychic illness mentioned in Canon 1041, n.1, until the time when the ordinary, after consulting with an expert, permits him the exercise of that order.

**Canon 1045** – Ignorance of the irregularities and impediments does not exempt from them.

**Canon 1046** – Irregularities and impediments are multiplied if they arise from different causes. They are not multiplied, however if they arise from the repetition of the same causes unless it is a question of the irregularity for voluntary homicide or for having procured a completed abortion.

**Canon 1047** – § 1. Dispensation from all irregularities is reserved to the Apostolic See alone if the fact on which they are based has been brought to the juridical forum.

§ 2. Dispensation from the following irregularities and impediments to receive orders is also reserved to the Holy Sec:

1. The irregularities arising from the public delicts mentioned in Canon 1041, nn. 2 and 3;
2. The irregularities from the delict mentioned in Canon 1041, n.4, whether public or occult;
3. The impediment mentioned in canon 1042, n.1.

§ 3. Dispensation in public cases from the irregularities from exercising an order received mentioned in Canon 1041, n.3 and even in occult cases from

the irregularities mentioned in Canon 1041, n.4 is also reserved to the Apostolic See.

§ 4. An ordinary is able to dispense from irregularities and impediments not reserved to the Holy See.

**Canon 1048** – In more urgent occult cases, if the ordinary or, when it concerns the irregularities mentioned in Canon 1041, nn. 3 and 4, the Penitentiary cannot be approached and if there is a danger of grave harm or infamy, a person impeded by an irregularity from exercising an order can exercise it, but without prejudice to the obligation which remains of making recourse as soon as possible to the ordinary or the Penitentiary, omitting the name of the person who has the irregularity.

**Canon 1049** – § 1. Petitions to obtain a dispensation from irregularities and impediments must indicate all the irregularities and impediments. Nevertheless, a general dispensation is valid even for those omitted in good faith, except for the irregularities mentioned in Canon 1041, n.4, and for others brought to the judicial forum, but not for those which have been omitted in bad faith.

§ 2. If it is a question of the irregularity from voluntary homicide or a procured abortion, the number of the delicts also to be mentioned for the validity of the dispensation.

§ 3. A general dispensation from the irregularities and impediments to receive orders is valid for all the orders.

## SECTION B APPLICATION PROCEDURE

A man who believes he is being called to the priesthood should first contact his parish priest, a priest in his high school ministry or college, or the Office of Vocations directly. The Director of Vocations facilitates both the discernment process, as well as the application procedure, and eventually presents the applicant to the Vocations Board, which will make a recommendation concerning acceptance.

It should be understood that the pastor of a candidate plays a significant role in the discernment process, recommendation for admission, and ultimately formation. The candidate should foster a relationship with his pastor based on respect for his special role.

When the man is ready to make formal application, he will meet with the Director of Vocations. The application is in three phases, marked by gathering canonical and academic documentation, undergoing physical, psychological and neurological examinations, and finally, being interviewed by the Vocations Board.

### 1.FIRST PHASE

2. Personal Background
3. Family Background
4. Religious Background
5. Educational Background (official high school and college transcripts)
6. Employment History
7. Canonical Information
  - a. Baptismal certificate
  - b. Confirmation Certificate
  - c. Parents Certificate of Sacramental Marriage
8. Letters of Recommendation from:
  - a. Proper Pastor
  - b. Teacher or Professor
  - c. Three other persons of the applicant's choice
9. Criminal Background Check
10. Child Abuse History Clearance

### 11.SECOND PHASE

### Physical Exam

A physical exam, taken within six (6) months of the interview with the Vocations Board, which includes all the testing deemed necessary by the Diocese, is required for all candidates. The candidate must be in relatively good health. Serious health problems could disqualify a candidate from acceptance.

### Psychological Evaluation

Psychological testing is required of all seminary formation applicants. The Diocese contracts trained professionals for this purpose and expenses are paid by the Diocese. The psychological profile is strictly confidential and is released only to the Vocations Director, the Bishop, and the Seminary Rector.

## 12. THIRD PHASE

After an interview with the Vocations Board a recommendation will be made concerning acceptance. The Bishop of Charlotte makes the final decision about the acceptance of an applicant.

When a candidate has been accepted by the Bishop, he is considered a seminarian for the Diocese of Charlotte; however, he must also be accepted by a seminary designated by the Bishop. This is a separate application procedure. Ordinarily, a candidate must already have the sponsorship of a bishop in order to apply to a seminary. A seminarian's sponsorship is contingent upon acceptance by a seminary.

## SECTION C PARTICULAR REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS

### 1. AGE

The Diocese of Charlotte considers the candidate's age and years of preparation for ordination as a factor. Ordinarily, a man must have completed high school and some college to be admitted. Application can begin prior to graduation.

Generally, men over the age of forty-nine will not be considered.

## 2.NEOPHYTES AND THOSE RECENTLY RECEIVED INTO THE CHURCH

“Especially careful screening will also be given to applicants who are recent converts to the Catholic faith. At least three years must pass between their full initiation/reception into the Church and their acceptance into a seminary program. A suitable period of time (at least three years) must pass before entrance to the seminary in cases of Catholics in whom a sudden conversion experience seems to precipitate a priestly vocation.”<sup>3</sup>

## 3.RESIDENCE

Ordinarily, a candidate will have resided in the Diocese for at least a year before and application will be considered.

## 4.APPLICANTS PREVIOUSLY ADMITTED IN OTHER DIOCESES OR IN CONGREGATIONS OR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The Diocese of Charlotte takes seriously the concerns of the Church as regards the application of a candidate from another diocese or religious community:

“When persons seek admission after they have been dismissed from another seminary or from a religious institute, further testimony is required from their respective superior, especially regarding the cause of their dismissal or other leaving.”<sup>4</sup>

“In cases where a candidate comes from another diocese or from a Congregation or Institute of Consecrated Life, or has received one of the stages of his formation in more than one house, the causes and motives of such an unusual occurrence should be studied. Of particular importance are those cases in which a candidate has been expelled from a formation house or has been invited to withdraw; the reasons for such a decision must be sought in confidentiality from those who made the decision. The reasons

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<sup>3</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS *Program of Priestly Formation* (Fourth Edition) no. 528

<sup>4</sup> *CODEX IURIS CANONICI* can. 241 SS

should be given with the greatest possible objectivity, avoiding both ambiguity and the use of euphemisms.”<sup>5</sup>

An applicant from another diocese or religious community should produce the following:

1. A recommendation from the former diocesan Bishop or Director of Vocations, or from the religious superior or formation director.
2. A recommendation from the previous seminary rector and copies of all seminary evaluations
3. Letter of release from religious community of affiliation
4. Any other pertinent documentation as deemed necessary.

## 5. LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

For those applicants whose first language is not English, special language testing may be required prior to entrance to the seminary. It is also possible that such applicants, once accepted into a formation program, will have to take additional training in the English language.

It is a prerequisite for priestly ordination in the Diocese of Charlotte that the priest be able to administer the sacraments, preach and be able to converse with a degree of ease in the English language.

Prior to ordination, all seminarians should have a fundamental knowledge of and facility with the Spanish language. He should avail himself of every opportunity to learn Spanish while in seminary.

## 6. NON U.S. CITIZEN APPLICANTS

The Diocese of Charlotte does not accept applicants who do not hold a valid visa. Assistance will be provided after acceptance or in obtaining a student visa.

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<sup>5</sup> CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS Circular Letter *Scrutinies Regarding the Suitability for Orders* (10 November 1997) no. 8.

## 7. MEN WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED, DIVORCED AND WHO HAVE RECEIVED A DECREE OF NULLITY

“Applicants for the priesthood whose marriages have been annulled will be screened carefully. While these men may have the canonical freedom to pursue the priesthood, it is important to ascertain if and how previous obstacles to a marriage commitment would affect their viability as candidates for the priesthood. While such applications should be carefully weighed on a case-by-case basis, the presumption normally is against acceptance.”<sup>6</sup>

If a married/divorced/annulled man does apply, and if after due deliberation the Director of Vocations deemed it appropriate, the following conditions must be met:

- 1) The marriage ceremony must not have taken place within the Diocese of Charlotte.
- 2) This man did not live with his wife within the Diocese of Charlotte.
- 3) The man has settled all financial matters pertaining to the marriage.
- 4) Children are no longer financially dependent upon their father.
- 5) The age/educational background requirement is in keeping with diocesan policy.
- 6) The ex-spouse must be notified by the applicant for approval for the Diocese to at least read, if not obtain, any necessary Tribunal documentation (e.g. approval for release/reading of the Acts). The ex-spouse must write a letter to the Office of Vocations and the respective Tribunal permitting release or perusal of such documentation.
- 7) The civil divorce decree and all obtainable public records of the divorce must be sent to the Office of Vocations.
- 8) The grounds on which the decree of nullity was granted may preclude application.

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<sup>6</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS *Program of Priestly Formation* (Fourth Edition) no. 528.

## 8. ALCOHOL or DRUG DEPENDENCY

Any person applying to the Diocese of Charlotte who has experienced alcohol or drug dependency, except for that which is prescribed by legitimate qualified professionals for treatment of an existing malady or the maintenance of his health, should not be accepted as a candidate until such time as he has been totally free from the use of such drugs for a period of five (5) years.

## 9. HIV/AIDS TESTING

HIV/AIDS testing is a part of the required medical report.

## 2.POLICY OF DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTE CONCERNING MINISTRY RELATED SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY CHURCH PERSONNEL

Any person applying to the seminary program must read and agree to abide by the policies of the Diocese.

# **PART II PROGRAM OF STUDIES**

## 1.OVERVIEW

The usual course of studies in preparation for priesthood consist of two stages: 1) college education; and 2) theological studies. This is usually accomplished according to one of three “tracts”.

2. An applicant who applies prior to or during his college education.
  - a. Up to four years of college formation with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy
  - b. Four years of theological studies and formation
3. An applicant who already has a Bachelor’s degree.
  - a. Two years in a Pre-Theology program
  - b. Four years of theological studies and formation
3. A seminarian who needs to fulfill special requirements before admission to seminary or Holy Orders may be assigned to the Cardinal Newman House. A special program will be tailored to meet his needs.

## COLLEGE SEMINARY

An applicant who applies with a high school diploma will normally be required to complete some work on the college level. College seminarians are required to major in philosophy.

## PRE-THEOLOGY

The Program of Priestly Formation requires two years of pre-theology for candidates who enter already possessing a Bachelors degree. During this two-year period, the candidate is to earn the required amount of credits in philosophy and theology.

## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Seminarians will spend four years in a program of theological studies. They are to earn a Master of Divinity degree. In addition, theologians who possess the academic prerequisites are to pursue a Master of Theology, Master of Arts, Bachelor of Sacred Theology (S.T.B.) or the highest terminating degree that the seminary offers.

## SEMINARIES

The Diocese of Charlotte enjoys a working relationship with several seminaries. The determination of the seminary to which the candidate will apply will be made at the time of acceptance by the Bishop.