

St. Peter's Seminary Spiritual Benchmarks Document

Updated 27 March 2025

- I. St. Peter's Seminary Spiritual Benchmarks Document begun in 2022 as a *living* document.
 - A. Preamble: Three Principles guide the creation of these benchmarks: graduality, tolerance, mystery.
 1. Graduality acknowledges that everyone is at a different “place” of spiritual development, no one is a finished product, and all are in need for ongoing formation.
 - a. It also acknowledges that while all persons have a spiritual life, owing to their nature as body and spirit, development in the spiritual life can only occur in communion with God and with others (particularly family and the Church).
 - b. The development of the spiritual life, which occurs within communion, requires conversation and conversion.
 - i. Conversation and conversion are dialogical – meaning they require two or more people to be in communication.
 - c. Moreover, the development of the spiritual life presumes the free cooperation of the individual with the grace of God.
 - i. No development can occur without the grace of God.
 2. Tolerance identifies the upper (avoiding exaggerated manifestations of piety) and lower (minimum spiritual requirements for a healthy pastoral life) limits of spiritual life.
 - a. This document may not define the upper limits of the spiritual life as these may be too numerous and varied. It will, however, as this is its purpose, seek to define the lower or minimum limits of the spiritual life with respect to one's stage in the formation program
 3. Mystery: we are, throughout this exercise of identifying benchmarks of spiritual development, dealing with the mystery of the participation in divine grace – which cannot be quantified.
 - B. A Living Document:
 1. This is a living document. It will undergo ongoing development to communicate new insights of the Church, to respond to the needs of seminarians, or to articulate ideas more clearly. Nonetheless it is meant to be used even in its unfinished state. As soon as the parties involved in formation have given assent to its content, it may be employed.
 - C. Objective:
 1. The object of this document is to offer seminarians, spiritual directors, counsellors, and formators (including bishops, vocation directors, and pastoral year supervisors) some guideposts and goals for formation in the dimension of the spiritual life.
 - D. A Holistic Perspective:
 1. While this document treats the spiritual life on its own it is understood that the spiritual life is not lived out in isolation but in communion with the other three dimensions of formation – human, pastoral, and intellectual.
 2. Furthermore, what affects the spiritual life will affect the other three dimensions – and vice versa.
 - a. i.e. good sleep, exercise, good relationships, etc. will support one's life of prayer.

II. Introduction

A. *Dabo vobis pastores juxta cor meum* (Jer 3.15). Bishop Michael Francis Fallon, OMI, the founding bishop of St. Peter's Seminary in London, chose this as the motto of the seminary: "I will give you shepherds according to my own heart"

1. This motto is at the heart of our Chapel Prayer, which we pray as a community for the seminary family and all her alumni.

a. Here is that prayer:

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R. Who made heaven and earth.

V. Let us pray for N. our pope, N. our bishop, for all our bishops, and all servants of the Lord.

V. No longer will I call you servants but friends,

R. for I have told you all that I have heard from my Father.

V. I will give you shepherds according to my own heart,

R. and they will lead you with wisdom and understanding.

V. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit,

R. for the common good and building-up the Body of Christ.

V. Let them give themselves first to the Lord;

R. for the love of Christ impels us.

V. Father, you give to us the ordained, religious, and lay apostles to restore all things in Christ by the Holy Spirit. May they abide in your heart and, from there, be sent out to refresh the hearts of the saints to proclaim your name to the ends of the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

V. Holy Mary, Mother of God,

R. Pray for us.

2. It is according to the Heart of Jesus, Sacred and adored by the Church, that the seminary seeks to offer a program of formation for men preparing for ordination and women and men preparing to serve in positions of leadership in the Church.

III. Foundational Year

A. Intro:

1. In the first year of a seminarian's formation, regardless of his academic standing, he is assigned to the Foundational Year program.

a. Therefore, a man coming to the seminary for his first year, who has a philosophy degree, will begin in Theology I. A man with no degree will begin in Philosophy I. Both of these men will enter the Foundational Year program.

B. Personal Prayer (cf: IV. A. 1 for a definition)

1. The men who enter the seminary for their first year come from various walks of life where there are a variety of values assigned to such things as prayer. Since personal prayer has a prime importance in the spiritual life, and since community life and silence are to be cultivated, the Foundational Year seminarian will be given an intentional, structured, and communal form of personal prayer – which will introduce him to this highly valued aspect of the spiritual life.

a. As such, each Foundational Year seminarian will have a scheduled 30-minute communal personal prayer period each day – to which their attendance is expected.

- i. The means of prayer during this 30-minute period are described below in IV.A.4.

IV. First Theology

A. Personal Prayer

1. Personal Prayer is distinct from Liturgical Prayer (Liturgy of the Hours) and from Devotional Prayer (Rosary, Chaplets, Stations, Novenas, etc.)
 - a. Personal Prayer is that prayer which is neither prescriptive nor formulaic – it is intimate and has the characteristic of presenting one’s whole person, personal experience, and personality into conversation with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.
2. First, a love for and a sense of value of personal prayer, is to be cultivated. The seminarian would value personal prayer, as a source of spiritual life, as he values the air he breathes to sustain his biological health. Personal prayer is not everything he needs for his spiritual life, as breathing is not everything necessary for biological life, but it is necessary.
3. How long should one be praying?
 - a. By the end of Theology I a seminarian will want to be praying:
 - i. 45-60 contiguous minutes in personal prayer each day – OR –
 - ii. Two 30-minute periods in personal prayer each day
 - b. The seminarian is to have an ongoing conversation with his spiritual director about the length of time spent in personal prayer and what shape that time is to take from the above two options.
 - c. Note that when it comes to prayer, duration of prayer can be, but is not necessarily, directly proportional to depth in prayer.
 - d. The seminarian who prays one hour of personal prayer daily ought not to lengthen the duration of his prayer or seek to pray a second hour or more of personal prayer in his day.
 - i. The exception to this is on retreat – when the seminarian may be asked to pray more than one hour of personal prayer in the day.
4. How should one be praying?
 - a. There are three means of personal prayer which we find in the tradition. They are known as meditation, contemplation, and being present to God. These will be described briefly.
 - b. Meditation (also known as *lectio divina*) involves the use of Sacred Scripture¹:
 - i. Meditation has the following moments: Relax, Read, Repeat, Reflect, Review.
 - a) Relax: find a place of silence; take the posture of prayer; acknowledge God is looking upon you with mercy; slow your breath and calm your spirit.
 - b) Read the chosen Scripture passage with care
 - c) Repeat: re-read the text being attentive to what word or phrase moves you
 - d) Reflect: hold onto and ponder the word or phrase that affected you. When distracted repeat the word or phrase or re-read the text.
 - e) Review: ask God, “what are you saying to me in and through this experience of prayer?” Then give thanks to God. You may want to enter something in your spiritual journal.
 - c. Contemplation:
 - i. Contemplation uses Sacred Scripture but it also deploys our imagination.

¹ Momney, A. “Gospel Contemplation.” Presented via Microsoft Teams for the Year End Retreat, London, ON, April 23, 2021.

- ii. Contemplation has the following moments: Relax, Read, Replace, Remain, Review.²
 - a) Relax: find a place of silence; take the posture of prayer; acknowledge God is looking upon you with mercy; slow your breath and calm your spirit.
 - b) Read the chosen Scripture passage with care and, with the gift of your imagination, enter into the scene with all its characters, action, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, drama, etc.
 - c) Replace: put yourself into the scene and allow it to unfold with you present.
 - d) Remain: remain in the scene and take part in what is happening. When distracted return to the scene.
 - e) Review: be aware of what moved you. Give thanks to God. You may want to make a notation in your spiritual journal.
 - d. Being Present to God:
 - i. Presence has the following moments: Relax, Receive, Respond, Remain, Review.
 - a) Relax: find a place of silence; take the posture of prayer; acknowledge God is looking upon you with mercy; slow your breath and calm your spirit
 - b) Receive: the language of God is silence, says St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata. Receive (listen to) the silence as a means of God speaking.
 - c) Respond: when you become aware of any thoughts, feelings, or desires, present these to God.
 - d) Remain: abide in the Lord; return to Him when distracted.
 - e) Review: be aware of what moved you. Give thanks to God. You may want to make a notation in your spiritual journal.
 - ii. This form of prayer is best described by St. Jean-Marie Vianney. Vianney was curious about a person who spent about an hour each day in the parish church. The man seemed to be doing nothing, so Vianney asked him what he was doing during the time he spent in prayer.
 - a) The man answered, “I do nothing. He [Jesus in the Eucharist] looks at me and I look at Him.”
 - e. One last note: we do well to recall throughout our day that God is always present to us, looking upon us with great affection, delighting in us, and, in a certain sense, contemplating us.
 - i. We also do well to recall that prayer is as much, if not more, the work of God as it is ours. In fact, St. Paul reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray “for we do not know how to pray as we ought” (*Rom 8.26*).
- B. Liturgy of the Hours:**
- 1. A seminarian is to cultivate a healthy respect for the official prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours, “like other liturgical actions, is not something private but belongs to the whole body of the Church, which it manifests and influences”³.
 - a. The praying of the Hours is to be seen as an offering, since this prayer is not about himself or exclusively for himself – but, united with the Church on earth and in

² Monney, A. “Gospel Contemplation.” Presented via Microsoft Teams for the Year End Retreat, London, ON, April 23, 2021

³ *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, 20.

Heaven, the seminarian offers praise to God, “expresses the prayers and desires of all the Christian faithful... [and offers prayers] for the salvation of the whole world”⁴.

- b. The psalms that are prayed are the very psalms that Jesus knew and prayed.
2. In keeping with the principle of gradualism the trajectory of progress is as follows:
 - a. During the Propaedeutic Year the seminarian will establish a habit of praying the Cardinal Hours (Morning and Evening Prayer) and the Night Hour.
 - b. By the end of Theology I, the seminarian will have established a habit of praying the Cardinal Hours, Night Prayer, and the Office of Readings.
 - c. By the beginning of second semester in Theology II, the seminarian will be praying all the Hours.
 - d. By the beginning of the Pastoral Year the seminarian will have a firmly established habit of praying all the Hours.
- C. Spiritual Reading:
 1. The way one reads spiritual reading material differs from the way one reads for academic research. Spiritual reading is intended to enrich the spiritual life and fortify mental prayer. Academic reading is intended to enrich the intellectual life, for research and information gathering, or as a dialectic means of gaining understanding and knowledge of the truth.
 2. Spiritual Reading is to be measured by the amount of time spent and not on how much was read – eg: 10 minutes, three days per week – such that a good habit would develop.
 3. The Spiritual Reading chosen by individual seminarians should be decided in conversation with his spiritual director.
- D. The Sacramental Life
 1. The role of the Mass in the spiritual life of a seminarian is to be of central importance. The sacred liturgy “is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit” (SC, 14). Since “the Eucharist is *the source and summit of the Christian life*” (CCC 1324) it is not merely something to attend – but to prepare for and to love. Seminarians are expected to have a habit of taking part in the Eucharist on a daily basis. Moreover they are to “take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, [so as to be] enriched by its effects” (SC, 11). During vacation times the seminarian should make a concerted effort to participate in daily Mass – taking reasonable consideration of such limitations as the lack of availability of a nearby Mass.
 2. The sacrament of penance is a means of healing, of growing in grace, and of ongoing conversion. The seminarian is expected to have a habit of celebrating the sacrament of penance at least once a month.
- E. Devotions:
 1. Eucharistic Adoration: “[T]he most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread.”⁵ “It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of

⁴ *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, 17.

⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, (17 Apr 2003) §1, at The Holy See https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccle-de-euch.html. See also Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, (7 Dec 1965) §5.

- Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species.”⁶
2. While “[t]he primary and original purpose of reserving the Eucharist outside of the Mass is the administration of Viaticum; the secondary purposes are the distribution of communion to the sick and adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ, present in the Sacrament.”⁷
 - a. The *primary* purpose of the solemn or simple exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is that of adoration of our Lord without diminishing the value of adoring the same Lord present in the tabernacle.
 3. To cultivate the pastoral responsibility spoken of by St. John Paul II, all seminarians are expected to attend at least one of the Holy Hours offered during the week. Moreover they are encouraged to do some of their personal prayers in the “presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass.”⁸
 4. “The faithful should be encouraged to read the Scriptures during these periods of adoration, since they afford an unrivalled source of prayer;” this is encouraged for seminarians, alongside “periods of silent prayer and reflection.”⁹
 5. The love of Christ cultivated in Eucharistic adoration should augment the love of our neighbour: “The faithful, moreover, do well to recall that, with this worship before Christ the Lord present in the Sacrament, they prolong the intimate union established with him in communion and they renew that covenant which moves them to express in their lives that which in the Eucharistic celebration they have received with faith and in the sacrament.”¹⁰
 6. Seminarians are encouraged, even during their summers and vacations, to continue this good habit by regularly visiting and praying in a Church or chapel where Christ is present under the Eucharistic species.
 7. “St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta reportedly once said: ‘When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now.’”¹¹ Ultimately Eucharistic adoration should make us yearn to feast at the Eucharistic table and desire that all might know Christ’s love.

⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, (17 Apr 2003) §25, at The Holy See https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccle-de-euch.html. See also *Rito Della Comunione Fuori Della Messa e Culto Eucaristico*. 1991. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana: Fondazione di Religione Santi Francesco d’Assisi e Caterina da Siena, §86-90.

⁷ *Rito Della Comunione Fuori Della Messa e Culto Eucaristico*. 1991. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana: Fondazione di Religione Santi Francesco d’Assisi e Caterina da Siena. No. 5. (translation my own)

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, (17 Apr 2003) §25, at The Holy See https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccle-de-euch.html.

⁹ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* §165, at the Holy See

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html.

¹⁰ *Rito Della Comunione Fuori Della Messa e Culto Eucaristico*. 1991. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana: Fondazione di Religione Santi Francesco d’Assisi e Caterina da Siena. No. 89. (translation my own)

¹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* §33 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021), 21 At <https://www.usccb.org/resources/7-703%20The%20Mystery%20of%20Eucharist,%20for%20RE-UPLOAD,%20JANUARY%202022.pdf>.