

# Strengthening the Foundation for Seminarians

Since 1995, the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) has offered seminarians an intensive spiritual formation program during the summer at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. This program was established to provide dedicated time for developing a more intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ and for immersing seminarians in the identity of diocesan priesthood.



Over the years, more than 3,500 seminarians have completed this program. Their testimonies and experiences illustrate this formation's profound impact on their lives. The faculty and staff at IPF are honored and humbled to provide the resources and environment that allow seminarians to deepen their love for God and nurture their relationship with the Trinity during their seminary years and into their active priestly ministry.

## Vatican Insights on the Stages of Discernment.

In 2016, the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy issued a new document titled *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, which incorporates insights from St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, along with guidance from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This document outlines the "four stages of discernment" for men entering the seminary:

- **Propaedeutic Stage:** An introductory phase focused on foundational spiritual development.
- **Discipleship Stage:** A period in which seminarians become true disciples of Jesus before ordination.
- **Configuration Stage:** A deepening of the future priest's identity as shepherd, leader, and teacher.
- **Vocational Synthesis:** Formation that cultivates a compassionate, merciful, and pastoral heart for parish ministry.

*The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* emphasizes the importance of virtue, integrity, strength, courage, and humility in future priests.

## Responding to the Evolving Formation Needs of Seminarians and Dioceses.

Over the past two years, IPF full-time staff, adjunct faculty, and spiritual directors prayerfully evaluated the Summer Program for Diocesan Seminarians.



Our goal was to ensure that IPF continues to meet the Church's spiritual formation needs, considering the Vatican's latest directives. While individual courses and components of the program have been evaluated regularly over the years, this was the first comprehensive review of the entire program.

*"We have shifted our mentality from seeing the Summer Program as an introduction and foundation into the spiritual life for seminary and priesthood, and now see it as a transition point that allows for deepening and strengthening into the subsequent phases of formation and lifelong priesthood."*

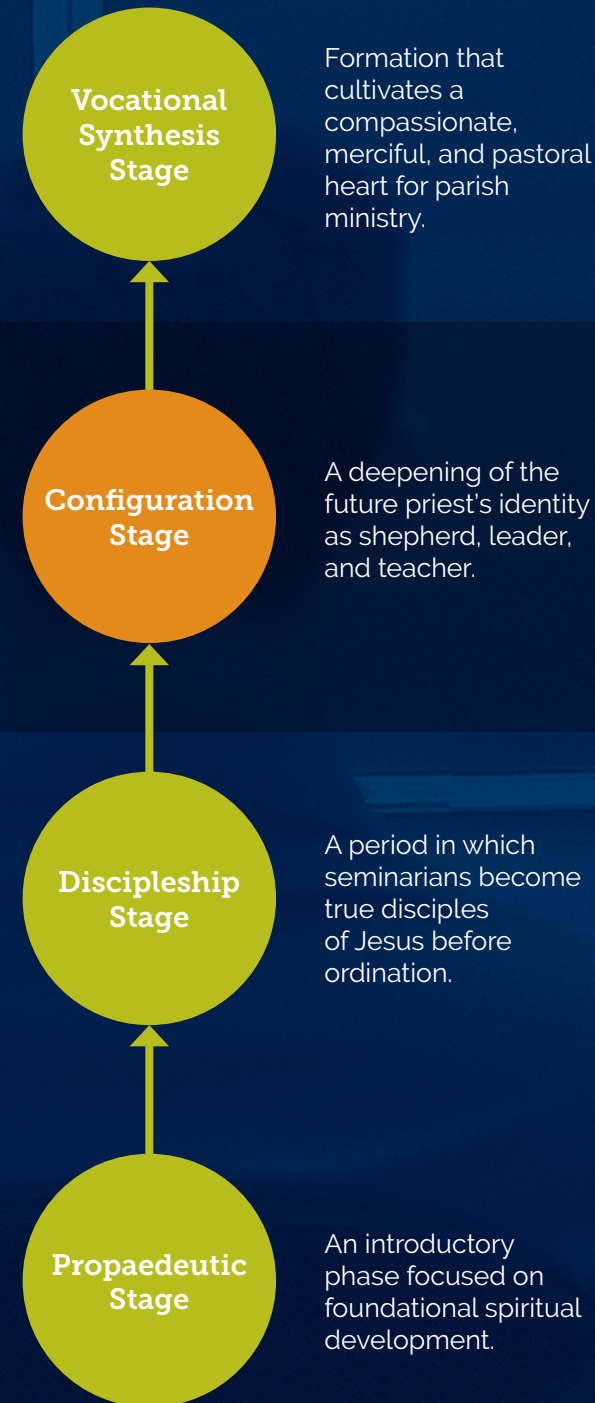
— Fr. James Rafferty



This evaluation revealed the necessity for agility in responding to the evolving formation needs of seminarians and dioceses. We clarified that the Summer Program aims to bridge the Discipleship and Configuration Stages of priestly formation, deepening and strengthening the foundations laid in the earlier stages.

"The configuration stage has very bold language in the Church documents. It's described as being intense and mystical. It's not simply an approach to professional preparation, to live in a certain career and to exercise certain capacities, but it really is a focus

# The 4 Stages of Priestly Formation



Our summer program is focused on the seminarian who is entering the "Configuration Stage" of priestly formation. The summer program builds upon the earlier stages, and allows what has been received to deepen so that the seminarian is prepared to enter the immediate years prior to ordination, which are demanding, in that he begins to model his life on Christ.

on the heart being deeply connected to the heart of Christ and sharing Christ's own thoughts, affections, desires, reflecting Christ's own love in a permanent, self-sacrificing way," said Father James Rafferty, S.T.D., IPF's director of Spiritual Formation.

By clearly identifying the program's role within the

broader framework of priestly formation, the group determined the essential components and necessary updates. "We are grateful for the contributions of many who helped develop the revised curriculum for the Summer Program, which will take place from May 25 to July 5, 2025," said Fr. Brian Welter, IPF executive director.

## Highlights of the new Summer Program for Diocesan Seminarians:

### What's New?

- Deepening and expanding the formation received in earlier discernment stages
- Shifting from a nine-week to a six-week program
- Focusing on one integrated curriculum instead of four distinct courses
- Offering a certificate program through Creighton University in place of graduate-level credits

### What Remains the Same?

- Continuing to host the Summer Program at Creighton University, where its facilities have supported our mission for 30 years
- Incorporating a silent, individually directed eight-day retreat as the hinge of the six-week program
- Providing an experience rooted in daily prayer and regular spiritual direction
- Ensuring seminarians benefit from a liturgical and communal life as brothers in formation



## Hopes for the impact of the curriculum.

The launch of the new curriculum in 2025 brings great hope for what it will offer to seminarians to help them grow in their priestly vocation. "I am profoundly grateful for all those who continue to support IPF and its programs, which serve the needs of our seminarians, priests, and the wider Church. I am confident these changes will further strengthen IPF's foundation in helping seminarians grow in holiness, drawing others to Jesus Christ," said Fr. Welter. "My

hope is that each seminarian is aware of the Lord with him at all times, not just in his power of prayer each day, but when he's out in the hospital or at meetings ... he's aware of God's presence with him while he's attending to everything else that's going on. And so when the seminarian becomes a priest, he is able to live more of a discerning life – a contemplative life – doing the needful thing before the Lord."



"I think people in the pews are, expecting, hoping, really, that their priest will be a prayerful man and that that they'll be men who have a personal relationship with the Lord, which they can talk about and share in their preaching and in their ministry."

– Archbishop George J. Lucas,  
Archbishop of Omaha



Watch to learn more about the program on [IPFsummers.com](https://IPFsummers.com)



Scan the code or visit [IPFsummers.com](https://IPFsummers.com) to watch and learn more about how we're strengthening the foundation of the IPF Summer Program and our seminarians.

"What falls away in the man's imagination and consciousness is the distractions of the age, and he becomes more and more concentrated on a Christological life, and therefore the distractions of the popular American culture become something that he can easily turn away from, because he now has a substance that makes all the distractions of the American life pale and his interests just wane. And so he's no longer a man who hears a lot of voices. He's a man who just follows the one voice, the voice of the living God. And that's what IPF wants to mature in the summer."

Deacon Keating



## STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION

*Forming Priests Configured to Christ*

