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A CASE STUDY ON PASTORAL FIELD EDUCATION IN THE FORMATION PROCESS OF CATHOLIC CLERGY

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary regarding the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program in preparing them for the role of Catholic pastor in priestly ministry. Due to a smaller number of Catholic priests, graduates of this institution were appointed as pastors without the adequate mentoring. As a result of graduate feedback, administration and leadership skills were added to seminary curricula. This study sought to understand the perceptions of graduates regarding the pastoral field education experiences intended to prepare them for their pastoral ministry after ordination. Pastoral field education should also effectively prepare emerging clergy for their priestly ministry, particularly the duties of a pastor. Literature supported the idea that pastoral field education programs should enhance training of the site supervisors, include quality theological reflection, and prepare the seminarians for the ministries in which they will serve. Graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary were interviewed to understand the effectiveness of pastoral field education on the actual ministry of a pastor. The data collected from the research study is presented as a Composition of Place case study. Recommendations for revisions to the pastoral field education program included mentor training, bi-weekly pastoral field education courses, theological reflection, integration of the academic courses to pastoral field education site assignments, and an appreciation of teaching as a part of priestly ministry.
Dedication

My grandfather, Lewis (“Pepop”) Britton embedded in my soul four great loves: the Catholic Church, books, learning, and chocolate. This dissertation combines three of those four. Pepop was a constant spiritual companion during my doctoral studies. I know he is watching my progress from Heaven. I dedicate this case study to him as my role model for being a life-long learner, disciple of Christ, and grandparent.
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First, I would like to thank my family for their constant support. My husband, George, was a companion in every class. My daughter, Margaret Mary, encouraged me to become Dr. Mommy. My daughter, Madeleine Grace, completed her Master’s in teaching during my studies. She taught me while we studied together. My son, Alexander Conway, inspired me with his questions about educational pedagogy and philosophy. This kept me motivated to never settle for mediocrity. My youngest son, Nathaniel Pedrick, is also a college student. We shared stories about professors and papers. Our blogs and love of learning ignited numerous discussions. It was their love that carried me through the entire course of study.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Seminary and Theological Education

A Catholic diocesan seminary prepares men for priestly ministry. Men who attend seminary have responded to a vocational calling to serve Christ and His people. The preparation for priesthood includes a process of formation that is not the same as secular schooling or job training. Rather, it is an act of cooperation with the grace of God to make the seminarian available to God’s work (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). This openness gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to transform the seminarian into a pastoral leader.

However, current studies and research demonstrate the fast track at which priests become pastors mean there is less time to be mentored as a parochial vicar. Therefore, seminaries should evaluate the pastoral field education program to insure pastors acquire effective pastoral mentoring and pastoral skills during formation. Fernández (2014) claimed that “theological schools have as one of their main purposes to serve the church in her ministry to culture and society but they seldom cultivate a healthy conversation with her or with the world” (p. 340). His solution was to “identify the main challenges affecting her own context, so that she doesn’t get lost and frustrated in the midst of many cultural and social demands” (p. 340). Seminarians should now add foundational pastoral leadership and administrative courses in order that the seminarians may effectively serve as priestly ministers.

Unlike a traditional student, a seminarian seeks to earn a Master of Divinity degree that involves a process of formation. The Master of Divinity is not regarded as an academic degree because an academic degree, such as a Master of Arts in theology
involves only educational coursework. The seminarian’s formation includes four dimensions, or pillars: intellectual, spiritual, human, and pastoral. Seminary education is organized so that the dimensions of priestly training intertwine (Carey & Muller, 1997). The seminary prepares men to serve God’s people and build up the Earthly Kingdom by preaching, teaching, and promoting the love of Christ rather than climbing the corporate ladder. All the forms of training, spiritual, intellectual, and disciplinary, are “ordered with concerted effort towards the pastoral end” (Paul VI, 1965, no. 4). This insures that the priest can translate the theological concepts into relevant language and stories as a means for people to grow closer to Christ.

Seminary academic coursework teaches philosophy, theology, doctrine, ethics, scripture, Latin, Greek, and Church history. On the theological level, the goal of education for ministry is to engage the student in a serious and systematic study of the sources and development of the Christian religious tradition (Whitehead, 1975). The light of faith and the guidance of the magisterium of the Church frame the theological disciplines. Each subject should be taught so that the “students will profoundly penetrate it, make it the food of their own spiritual lives, and be enabled to proclaim, explain, and protect it in their priestly ministry” (Paul VI, 1965, no. 16).

According to the online Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, the word seminarian means “nursery or plantation” in Latin. This spiritual womb nurtures the seeds of priestly vocation until maturity (Schlesselmann, 2011). A seminaries’ goal is to develop more than just a well-rounded, prayerful, priest. Seminary formation challenges the seminarian to understand his spiritual development within the context of his call to service in the Church, his human development within the context of his call to advance the mission of
the Church, his intellectual development as the appropriation of the Church’s teaching
and tradition, and his pastoral formation as participation in the active ministry of the
Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). The pastoral program
enables seminarians to use their academic training in a pastoral situation, thereby
bringing pastoral insights to academic studies and enhancing ministry with a solid
theological foundation (Schuth, 1999). The theological foundation will support the
mission of the parish at which the priest will serve.

**Effective Priestly Ministry**

Effective priestly ministry communicates Christ’s love. Priests need to be
comfortable conversing with various generations of people, individuals and families in a
variety of circumstances and unexpected situations. The diocesan priest, therefore, seeks
not only to know God – scripture, theology, prayer – but also human realities. He seeks
to connect the two in his own spiritual life and in the lives of the people he serves. A
pastoral priest desires to know the people and their lives. He challenges himself to hear
new ideas, change, and work with others. His ministry includes “building community,
working collaboratively, extending compassion, and offering hospitality” (Schuth, 1999,
p. 194).

An effective priestly minister demonstrates personal involvement in the life of the
community and responsibility for it (Saint John Paul II, 1992). The pastoral priest cares
for the parish at all times. Parishioners learn about Christ from the priest’s teaching and
actions. Therefore, pastoral ministry serves God (Paul VI, 1965). The parish community
benefits from his spirituality, teaching, and leadership. The priest represents Christ to the
faithful and the community. The role of a priest is “to articulate and preach the faith
convincingly” (Schuth, 1999, p. 79). Preaching the faith takes practice within the environment of the seminary community.

**Pastoral Leadership**

Pastoral leadership models itself after Christ, “who did not come to be served but to serve” (Mt. 20:28). This service-oriented philosophy is rooted in the spirituality and wisdom of Christ who focused on the needs of others. Ideally, the seminary integrates the four pillars of formation into a vibrant liturgical life, healthy community interaction, and a spirit of servanthood (Carey & Muller, 1997). During formation, the seminarians have the opportunity to connect their relationship with Christ to their ministry. A servant leader is characterized as being a listener, empathetic, aware, persuasive, conceptual, forward-thinking, a steward, committed to the growth of the people, and a community-builder (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Christ, the Apostles, Mary, Joseph, Martha of Bethany, and many other Saints modeled servant leadership. Both the Bible and Church history contain examples that may resonate with a particular seminarian.

The seminary faculty has the responsibility for aiding the seminarian’s understanding of the role of leadership in ministry. Service-oriented leadership role modeling and mentoring from the seminary formation team help foster the seminarian’s desire and commitment to this servant leadership style. This process helps seminarians get to know Christ and how He led His disciples. Christ gave each of us a natural leadership style that can be used to serve His Church. Lowney (2003) said that “only those who have identified their own strengths and weaknesses can wholeheartedly engage in leadership and stay motivated in growth” (p. 95). Developing a personal leadership style aids the seminarian in his pastoral ministry.
Priestly ministry carries a great deal of responsibility regarding administration, liturgy, education, spirituality, and social outreach. Therefore, a “leader’s biggest responsibility is to create the social and material conditions under which people can and do flourish” (Cuilla, 2004, p. 326). Learning to balance these requires practice and mentoring. Proper pastoral leadership allows for teamwork and collaboration. The focus is always on the community

**Pastoral Field Education**

Pastoral field education within a seminary requires seminarians to practice the necessary skills to share Christ’s love. The director of pastoral formation assigns seminarians to a parish with a priest-mentor. Pastoral field education’s aim is to help seminarians integrate the spiritual, human, and academic aspects of their formation and develop habits of theological reflection on ministry (Carey & Muller, 1997). Effective pastoral field education assignments facilitate growth in the seminarian with feedback and evaluations of his interactions with parishioners, staff, and members of the community.

The seminarian has the chance to translate the philosophical and theological concepts into language for people of all backgrounds and needs. Other goals of a pastoral field education program are to provide a realistic test of what constitutes working in the Church, to teach seminarians how to work within the structure of the Church, and to develop a sensitivity to people’s needs, aspirations, circumstances of life and attitudes toward God and humankind (Carey & Muller, 1997). The ability to adapt to the needs of the people cannot be taught in a classroom setting. Therefore, the pastoral field education experience at different sites is necessary for adequate formation.
Statement of the Problem

In order for seminaries to graduate effective priestly ministers, the pastoral field education program is a primary tool for assessment of pastoral skills. One problem seminaries face is that fewer seminarians have studied at Catholic institutions at any level and thus may lack fundamental knowledge about their faith before they enter into the field to practice a leadership position. (Carey & Muller, 1997). This creates a problem in parishes when seminarians are asked questions because seminarians may not have a grasp of the Catholic Church’s basic culture and traditions. One solution is for seminaries to adapt their programs and methodologies. Carey and Muller (1997) stated that “members of the current generation lack awareness of history and the Catholic tradition, are rigid, closed, defensive, theologically fundamentalistic, and convinced of their correctness” (p. 166). A seminarian must be open to growth and feedback for the pastoral field experience to be effective.

There is also a need to structure the pastoral field education program so that the feedback facilitates growth. The feedback from pastoral field education supervisors indicates that not all seminarians are open to constructive suggestions. Any new insight is a threat to the seminarian’s orthodoxy; he exhibits ecclesial arrogance (Schuth, 1999). “An increasing number of Christians have a reduced sensitivity of the doctrine of faith because they are subjectively attached to what pleases them, to what corresponds to their own experience, and to what does not impinge on their own habits” (Saint John Paul II, 1992, no. 7). Pastoral staff and older clergy express concern that seminarians lack necessary skills for effective pastoral leadership. Bishops and seminary administrators have lowered expectations and done a poor job of connecting education in the classical
disciplines with practical theological reflection focused on nurturing excellence in the congregational life (Jones & Jones, 2010). Pastoral field education programs are uniquely positioned to facilitate raising expectations and improving the quality of ordained clergy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary regarding the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program in preparing them for the role of Catholic pastor in priestly ministry.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this dissertation in practice was to improve the pastoral field education at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary based on evidence gathered from the qualitative study of graduates who now work as ordained clergy serving at Catholic parishes.

Method Overview

The qualitative research study utilized open-ended questions regarding pastoral field experiences of 14 graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary who are now serving as pastors. The results were compiled as Composition of Place case study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to ordained Catholic pastors who graduated from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary. This study’s delimitation was ordained Catholic clergy serving as pastors of a parish. The themes were consistent among participants as saturation was reached at interview number six.
Summary

This dissertation in practice investigated the perceptions of Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary graduates about their field education experiences during seminary. The resulting recommendation integrated the data collected from the study, applicable literature, and observations for a well-rounded field education experience. This dissertation in practice combined the required United States Conference of Catholic Bishop elements of pastoral education with the outcomes of pastoral field education to create recommendations for a pastoral field education program grounded in spirituality and theological reflection. As a result, the intent is that emerging Catholic clergy will have better skills for priestly ministry, especially the ministry of a pastor.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Study

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Theological Education

Mission

The main purpose of a theological education is to prepare ministers. A Roman Catholic seminary “then becomes that very privileged place where the candidate to the priesthood can do theological reflection and study the theology that has been written as a reflection of the life of the church” (Gutierrez, 1998, p. 26). Ideally, the seminary exudes a sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Theological education should be reflective and transformational in order to engage the seminarian in the learning process. Hopko (2009) stated that “the goal in this process is that students and teachers, from the first day in school, engage in a fruitful interaction with those who have the power and resources to promote transformational changes in their community” (p. 331). Academic learning, prayer, reflection, and pastoral outreach should transform a seminarian into an effective
parish priest modeled after Jesus Christ. It is the passion of the student who, “in faith, seeks to commit himself more deeply to Christ through surrender of self” (Lajiness, 2009, p. 34). This passion nurtured by the seminary environment.

Theological education and formation helps seminarians take on the character of Jesus Christ. In formation, Christ is the model “teacher, priest and shepherd” (Paul VI, 1965, no. 14). Jeremiah 3:15 reinforced that God will “give you shepherds after my own heart” (New American Bible). Every priest teaches the Gospel through homilies and with actions. He also shepherds by caring for the community. Theology, therefore, is rooted in Jesus Christ. It is not merely a dispensing of knowledge for the sake of more knowledge, nor is it superficial development of a pastoral skill set that will allow the seminarian to perform well in active ministry. Rather, seminaries foster a passion for Christ in the heart of every student, thus leading to a genuine knowledge of the divine mysteries (Lajiness, 2009, p. 31). Gutierrez (1998) said “a seminarian must think and reflect on the reality of God in his own life as well as the life of the community” (p. 27). Theological reflection continues to be a strong theme in literature. “One task that must engage the energies of any seminary faculty is the formulation and articulation of a theology of the priesthood” (Brown, 2005, p. 17). Pope Francis (2013) stated that “theology demands the humility to be touched by God, admitting its own limitations before the mystery, while striving to investigate, with the discipline proper to reason, the inexhaustible riches of this mystery” (p. 2). The seminary faculty through prayer and reflection may be able to challenge the seminarians to explore strengths and weakness for personal growth.

The community life of a seminary plays a large role in theological education. “It should come across as a place of prayer, an environment of trusting, reverent friendships,
and a community of faith that believes it is doing what God wants” (Brown, 2005, p. 21). Fraternity and brotherhood in the seminary nurture a lifetime bond for clergy. Pope Francis (2014) reinforced this important aspect of theological education, “the life of the seminary, that is, community life, is very important because it is sharing among brothers, who are walking toward the priesthood” (p. 1). This fraternal bond creates a support system during seminary as well as post-ordination.

Theological education should help seminarians embrace a poverty of spirit and love of the poor. “The seminary must instruct the seminarian’s heart to embrace poverty of spirit that leaves him free to depend on the Father as Jesus does and to set his own will aside in favor of the Father’s desires” (Clark, 2012, p. 36). A healthy prayer life will foster a strong relationship with Jesus and discernment of His will. “This is good theology to enter into the mystery of God and to walk with the church in the discipleship of our lord Jesus Christ” (Gutierrez, 1998, p. 28). Discipleship of Christ involves an appreciation for the community in which the seminarian serves. “Theological reflection specifically aims to correlate theological concerns and insights with current social issues and events, integrating belief with practice” (Gerhardt, 2013, p. 135). Providing the time and tools helps seminarians to reflect on how God works through people for His glory. “Preparation for the priesthood must necessarily involve a proper training in charity and particularly in the preferential love for the poor in whom our faith discovers Jesus” (Saint John Paul II, 1992, 49). The community builds up its own history as a seminary which adds to the formation process.

Each seminary has its own unique history and traditions, its own particular ethos, stories, myths, its own rules and regulations and
certain attitudes that mark the institution as a sense of legitimate
pride in itself and a spirit of joy. (Brown, 2005, p. 21)

Seminarians engaged in theological learning need to understand that their ministry requires them to share the knowledge. “Theology is not an individual labor; theology is done for the evangelization of the church” (Gutierrez, 1998, p. 26). The mission of a theological education should be for the faculty and support staff to form disciples. “There is a uniqueness about the activity of teaching theology in a Catholic seminary” (Lajiness, 2009, p. 35). The mission of the seminary should be integrated into each course. “The priesthood does not belong alone to the seminary faculty and administration but rather must reflect the best wisdom of the wider church served by the seminary” (Brown, 2005, p. 18). This mission-oriented education serves as a role model for pastoral leadership.

It is not the program but the relationships built within the seminary that transform the men into effective priestly ministers. “Excellent programs and curricula must help students shape new mental models of reality as well as new ways of interacting with that reality by focusing on transformational learning” (Fernández, 2014, p. 342). Transformational learning makes the information useful for ministry rather than only valuable for passing a test. “Transformative learning is a process of reflection that is not just about the acquisition of knowledge but also about the appropriate application or manifestation of that knowledge as evidence of that learning” (Gerhardt, 2013, p. 134).

Teaching reflectively involves more intentional efforts by the professor to connect the material with the learning processes for students and, therefore, is manifested in the student who falls in love with Christ.
The love of Christ is the foundation of service to God.

History

Initially, men called to the priesthood studied and practiced in an apprentice-style format. Jesus Christ began by personally instructing the Apostles. “Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them” (Mt. 10:5). Monasteries continued to teach and form priests until the reforms of the Middle Ages. In the 16th century, a new environment for the formation of priests emerged in the creation of the seminary. “At the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Catholic Church officially adopted the term seminary as the place where spiritual leaders would be developed apart from the corrupting influences of the culture” (Sebastian, 2010, p. 2). According to the Program of Priestly Formation (5th ed.) the 16th century model required 10 years to complete: three years of philosophy, four of scholastic theology and three of moral theology (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p.4). During the last four centuries, both theory and practice were united.

The current norms for priestly formation were established by documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). “They form an essential resource for the program of priestly formation along with the Council’s specific treatment of priestly formation found in Optatam totius (Decree on the Training of Priests)” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992, no. 4). The Program of Priestly Formation (5th ed.) was shaped by numerous documents such as Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis (1970/1985), the Code of Canon Law (1983), and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993). It is truly an example of collaboration across cultures and ages.
Goals of Formation

The Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provide the goals of formation to seminaries. The seminary has a responsibility and duty to fulfill the requirements of Vatican and episcopal documents (Brown, 2005). In the current edition of the Program for Priestly Formation, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops combined the directives of the Vatican and reflected on the realities of seminaries in the United States. The Program for Priestly Formation is a guidebook for United States seminary programs.

At the same time, each seminary, with the approval of the diocesan bishop or the bishops concerned, or of the religious superior as the case may be, is to develop, articulate, and implement its own particular program in conformity with the Program for Priestly Formation. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992, p.4)

Pope Francis (2014) told seminarians that they “are becoming pastors in the image of Jesus, the good pastor, resemble him and act on behalf of him amidst his flock, letting his sheep graze” (p. 2). Vatican Council II addressed the issue of priestly formation.

Here the entire training of the students should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. They are therefore to be prepared for the ministry of the word: that they might understand ever more perfectly the revealed word of God; that, meditating on it they might possess it more firmly, and that they might express it
in words and in example; for the ministry of worship and of sanctification: that through their prayers and their carrying out of the sacred liturgical celebrations they might perfect the work of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments; for the ministry of the parish: that they might know how to make Christ present to men, Him who did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many, and that, having become the servants of all, they might win over all the more.

(Paul VI, 1965, no. 4)

Pope Francis (2014) presented the four pillars of seminary learning: “a strong spiritual life; a serious intellectual life: community life, and, lastly, an apostolic life, in no particular order. All four are important. If one is missing, the formation is no good” (p. 2).

Human formation encourages the man to meet his potential and capacity to minister. Hebrews 5:1 states that, “every priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God.” According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006), “the identity to be fostered in the candidate is that he becomes a man of communion, that is, someone who makes a gift of himself and is able to receive the gift of others” (no. 83). The qualities to be fostered in a human formation program are “freedom, openness, honesty and flexibility, joy and inner peace, generosity and justice, personal maturity, interpersonal skills, common sense, aptitude for ministry, and growth in moral sensibility and character” (United States Conference of Catholic
Bishops, 2006, no. 85). These skills closely align with the list of human qualities that Pope Saint John Paul II (1992) deemed necessary for a priest:

- educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person,
- to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely
- compassionate, to be men of integrity, to be balanced in judgment
- and behavior, and the capacity to relate to others. (p. 372)

The spiritual growth of the seminarian is not just for personal enhancement but for his priestly ministry and the benefit of the entire Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 45). Personal and community prayer, participation in liturgy, retreats, and pilgrimages give seminarians a chance to develop positive prayer habits.

Hillman (2009) stated “growth and change does not happen without a relationship with someone who is able to provide resources, assessment, motivation, and accountability” (p. 221). A spiritual director guides and aids the seminarian in his spiritual formation.

The goal of intellectual development is to develop in the seminarian a foundation in the Church’s teaching and tradition. Being a pastor requires that he enable people to learn, absorb, and even internalize the material being communicated (Nauss, 1974). The main focuses of evangelization are parishioners, young adults, and school children.

The very heart of intellectual formation in the seminary is the development of pedagogies through which the student encounters the compassion, mercy of the Father, the obedience and humility of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit, all leading to a vibrant life of self-giving witness to a secularized world.

(Lajiness, 2009, p. 31)
Effective formation helps seminarians transfer the intellectual formation from the mind to the heart. Through this transformation, the seminarian develops a deeper relationship with Jesus. “Pastoral integration is one of the key outcomes that should take place through effective intellectual formation. Effective intellectual formation begins with a genuine encounter with Christ and leads naturally to intelligence of heart” (Lajiness, 2009, p. 40). McGarvey (2014) said, “the Pope cautioned that seminary formation must be “a work of art, not a police action” where seminarians “grit their teeth, try not to make mistakes, follow the rules smiling a lot, just waiting for the day when they are told, you have finished formation” (p. 209).

Pastoral formation creates a shepherd or leader who will govern with a charitable heart.

The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. Hence, their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character.

(Saint John Paul II, 1992, no. 57)

“Listening skills and empathy, vital to pastoral care, can be taught in the classroom” (Doehring & Fontenot, 2001, p. 16). Pastoral training gives the seminarian “the art of caring for souls” (Suarez, 2009, p. 119). Developing pastoral skills allows the priest to translate theological concepts into everyday language. “A seminarian becomes effective at pastoral ministry over long hours of practice by developing practical reasoning for the sake of the well-being of others and the community” (Cahalan, 2010, p. 351). The faculty supervises courses, programs, seminars, and evaluations. “The formation staff, by its ministry to the seminarians, actually models effective priestly
ministry” (Walsh, 1999, p. 37). The role models integrate the pastoral dimension to the other pillars of formation.

**Pastoral Formation**

Pastoral formation encompasses a personal commitment to develop the knowledge and skills to teach and preach well, to celebrate the sacraments both properly and prayerfully, and to respond to people’s needs as well as take initiatives in the community that holy leadership requires.


It is the duty of the seminary community to provide an environment where these skills can be nurtured. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006), the aim of pastoral formation is to “teach, sanctify, and govern or lead” (p. 77). Learning to teach and govern have been added to the coursework at numerous seminaries in order to better prepare emerging clergy.

The curriculum must then be rigorous to engage the seminarian. Jones and Jones (2001) made a strong case for “offering the transmission of information instead of stressing sacrifice and the importance of formation and retreating from engaging the deep questions” (p. 26). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2004) recognized that pastoral formation in seminary developed the foundation skills for priestly ministry; pastoral formation means that seminarians learn how to “take spiritual initiatives and direct a community into action” (p. 85). Hopko (2009) stressed that “every course in a theological school—surely in institutions dedicated to educating, training, and forming
pastors—should have a clear and explicit pastoral dimension and purpose, a content and goal” (p. 334). This applied to all theology courses and seminars including sacred scripture, church history, canon law, liturgy, homiletics, music, parish administration, and pastoral counseling. Hopko (2009) also stated that classes in Biblical exegesis, Church doctrine, worship, and ecclesiastical history, for example, would be consciously and purposefully related to the pastoral tasks of edifying the church, conducting parish life and work, and inspiring, healing, and saving souls in the given time and place. (p.334)

Clark (2012) added that “pastoral studies and formation in our seminaries need to include both discussion and training with regard to effective use of these new technologies and emerging forms of communication” (p. 11). Keeping the discussion relevant to the needs of the schools and parishes where the seminarians will serve insures more effective pastoral care.

**Effective Priestly Ministry**

Pope Francis (2014) stated that being a good pastor “means feeding on faith and love of the Eucharist in order to provide nourishment to the Christian people and being men of prayer so as to become the voice of Christ that praises the Father” (p. 1). The effectiveness of theological training must therefore be measured by how it enhances the practice of ministry in the work of its graduates (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992, p. 1). Therefore, “the pastor’s real task is being wholly involved in the real life of those in his care as the sacramental head of a given ecclesial body” (Hopko, 2010, p. 332).
The first sign of an effective pastor is an openness to growth. Priestly ministry happens in a variety of locations, not always inside a church building. According to Kent (2007), growth can be exciting and painful, and a priest has to meet that opportunity with an openness of mind and heart.

An effective priest sees the human condition with the eyes of faith. Kent (2007) stated that through all the highs and lows, a priest must see God’s grace at work in the world. Priests celebrate new life at baptisms, weddings, and funerals. They minister in rural parishes, the inner cities, and the suburbs. Effective priests learn new languages and cultures that belong to their parishes and communities.

Kent (2007) quoted Fr. John Stowe of El Paso, TX, “generosity is another key attribute of effective priestly ministry.” Priestly ministry is about caring for souls. Fr. Stowe insisted that “a healthy self-understanding and a generous spirit are the real marks of greatness and excellence (p.10).”

A sense of humor keeps everything in perspective (Kent, 2007). A priest should laugh at himself and the strange happenings of his ministry. Kent (2007) insisted laughing “acknowledges a gift from God and admits our own human foibles and limitations (p.10).”

A good priest must be comfortable with himself and his leadership style. He must know and accept his strengths and weaknesses. Kent (2007) also quoted Fr. Miguel Bueno of the Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla Park, saying, “To be a faith-filled priest, one must be aware of not only his gifts but also areas of growth—and not be afraid to admit them to himself and others (p. 10).”
Fr. Tom Merrill (2009) of Assumption Parish in Richfield, MN, stated that “a deep sense of service to the church and all people, along with a deep faith, is what lies at the basis for meaning in this very special vocation.” In the ministry of Jesus, pastoral charity can be described as humble service. “The spiritual life of effective priests should therefore be marked by a fundamental attitude of service to the People of God” (Terrien, 2005, p. 5). Priestly ministry incorporates generosity, humor, leadership, and humility. The qualities ground the priest to humanity while still conveying the message of Christ’s mercy and love.

Leadership

The priest is often referred to as a shepherd. A seminary should “strive to train men, called as priests to be living images of Jesus Christ, to become more like Christ the Good Shepherd, men of deep humility and genuine pastoral charity, sharing Christ’s love” (Paul VI, 1965, no. 4). This model “serves as an excellent synthesis of the spirituality of those called to be leaders of the community” (Cachia, 2006, p. 23). The love of a shepherd for his sheep expresses the compassion and presence needed to minister to the flock. The authority is understood in terms of service, full dedication, and commitment to the parish and community. A good shepherd is always adjusting to the path and needs of the sheep. Cachia said that the priest must “be open to new methods and new ways of answering Jesus’ call to follow him who is the Good Shepherd and who is always present and leading” (p. 23). A priest-shepherd balances the call to serve God and the variety of leadership expectations to serve God’s people. The United Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) stated that “to be a true shepherd of souls means standing with and for Christ in the community, the Christ who teaches and sanctifies and guides or
leads the community” (p. 238). Just as a shepherd cares for the flock of sheep, so the priest-shepherd watches over the needs of the people in the parish.

Fischer (2010) insisted that while good shepherd may be the preferred description of the Catholic pastor, leadership is one of his essential duties. Pope Francis listed several key characteristics of a good leader: humility, compassion, flexibility, community, courageous, selflessness, relational, humor, simplicity, and transparency (Hamel, 2015). The leadership relationship between a pastor and his parishioners may be reflected in two Scriptural criteria that describe the pastor as a man who is industrious in the Church's work and also serves as a model (Nauss, 1974). As a role model, the pastor connects Christ to the people and their lives.

The center of gravity is within the faith community (Ward, 2013). According to Roberts (1993), “both the leadership of congregations and seminaries, therefore, must include creation of communities of learning and faith which themselves nurture new leaders” (p. 290). Therefore, “leaders of the church must know, they must do, and they must become in order to be exemplars of the values, style, and social-emotional orientation demanded for the tasks, management, and purpose-fillement of the organization” (Yu, 2014, p. 375). “The priest should also offer the witness of a total honesty in the administration of the good of the community” (Paul VI, 1962, no. 30). Pastoral leadership focuses on parish change and growth. “As leader, the priest influences others through witness, martyrdom, persuasion, inspiration and personal power, that is, to force his vision, personality and situational expertise” (Lelon, 2003, p. 109).
Effective pastoral leadership brings the community together. “Using the strategies of leadership, pastors need to persuade dedicated and extraordinary parishioners to fully participate and join in the efforts to create a vision and a plan of action for achieving the parish's intrinsic mission” (Lelon, 2003, p. 109).

Seminaries must develop new connections with congregations, and see the task of formation and education for ministry as a complex partnership between seminaries and congregations—one that must draw clergy and laity, faculty and students, together on a more regular basis. (Jones & Jones, 2001, p. 27)

Administration encompasses eleven distinct tasks, including the leadership of pastoral and finance councils, the oversight of planning ministry, and stewardship, as well as the supervision of staff, property, and communication (Fischer, 2010). The parish thrives spiritually under an effective pastoral leader.

A good pastor must know how to think institutionally, work together as a part of a body rather than a brilliant individual, exercise good judgment, not play favorites, not bully, and not lie (Wheeler, 2011). Organizational leadership clearly describes the mission and goals. “The leader is skillful in strategic planning and developing clear action plans in collaboration with key stakeholders” (Floding, 2010, p. 280). “We’re less tempted to abuse power or to accumulate leadership perks, for instance, if we remember that we have obligations both to our immediate followers and to the entire communities in which we live” (Johnson, 2012, p. 167). The pastor’s main focus should always be on the best needs of the parish.
Pastors must also manage the budget, staff, and the temporal goods of a parish. Canon Law addresses the administration of a parish. In the Code of Canon Law (1983), Canon 1287 stated that a pastor must “pay a just and honest wage which will be sufficient to provide for their needs and those of their dependents.” In order to meet this goal, he should engage in the lives of his staff as well as the budget process. Canon 1287 also stated that the budget must be submitted each year to the local bishop after examination by the parish finance council. The contemporary pastor should have foundational skills in finance, human resources, and leadership.

The seminary administration, faculty, and staff foster leadership by being role models to the seminarians. The seminary should “foster initiative and responsibility by observing principles of subsidiarity and collaboration while demonstrating forthright and confident leadership” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 103). Leadership, then, is a part of the formation process.

**Pastoral Field Education**

**Goals of Pastoral Field Education**

Pastoral field education is an internship program for seminarians. Pastoral field education provides a broad exposure to pastoral service and integrates the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral pillars of formation. According to Schuth (2009), the purpose of pastoral field education has always been to help students become effective practitioners. Through supervised field placements and theological reflection they begin to acquire the skills and attitudes appropriate for ministry (Schuth, 2009). Saint John Paul II (1992) reminded seminarians that “pastoral formation develops by means of
mature reflection and practical application, and it is rooted in the Spirit” (no. 57). Hopko (2012) stated:

- theological schools must provide for opportunities in which teachers and students can submerge themselves in the world of those they are to serve to engage in a fruitful interaction with those who have the power and resources to promote transformational changes in their community. (p. 331)

Pastoral field education sites can be Catholic parishes or schools, hospitals, or prisons. Sites should include multi-cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity to reflect the richness of the Universal Church. Pastoral field education assignments working with the poor or ecumenical activities are also encouraged. Hillman (2009) stated that “a great internship opportunity can place a seminary student in an environment where God can work through the student in the lives of other people” (p. 220). Pastoral field education is an attempt to understand and recognize God’s revelation in one’s own life and in the experiences of others (Carey & Muller, 1997). Clark (2012) stated that “for the seminarian, the pastoral placement is not merely the setting where he shares himself, it is also the place where the father blesses the seminarian by giving him others with whom to share himself” (p. 37). Working in parishes and schools provides seminarians the opportunity to use talents and develop new ones. A variety of site choices also make the seminarians more aware of the kind of pastoral relationships that are found in priestly ministry (Blanchetter, 2012). In order to be prepared for the challenges faced in pastoral relationships, seminarians are often inspired to grow and expand their horizons.
A pastoral field education program consists of site work, supervision, and mentoring of seminarians, reflection, and evaluation. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) stated that the pastoral formation program should provide supervised pastoral service, especially in parishes. Placing seminarians in carefully chosen pastoral field education sites provides the seminarians with the opportunity to get feedback from a mentor/supervisor. Gerhardt (2013) explained that the purpose of reflection is it develops self-awareness, helps understanding about learning, shows how to integrate theory with practice, helps explain to other what it is we do, empowers us as practitioners, liberates us from assumptions, is creative problem solving, leads to action, and develops the capacity to work with new situations. (p. 140)

Professional education is not a less intellectual enterprise but one in which application plays a critical interpretative role.

**Mentors/Supervisors**

Jesus utilized field education as He did not lecture to the Twelve Apostles in classrooms or pass out how-to manuals; rather, He invited them to travel alongside Him as He healed and preached, afterwards reflecting on their experiences with them (Garrido, 2010). The mentor-seminarian relationship can help connect the service directly with human, spiritual, and intellectual formation. According to Gula (2010), the mentor relationship is “an intentional, apprenticing to someone who embodies the kind of life to which we aspire” (p. 79). During the field education experience at a parish, the seminarian may collaborate with the liturgy coordinator, watch the planning of a wedding or funeral, participate in a finance committee meeting, help with Sunday liturgies, and
learn how to facilitate a staff meeting. The supervisor can demonstrate how to balance his own life and ministry (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). An additional role of a supervisor is to help the seminarian to collaborate with others. The supervisor should encourage the seminarian to interact with the parish staff and get to know the parish culture.

The success of pastoral formation depends on the quality of supervision (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). Hillman (2009) stated that the “on-site field education mentor at the internship site is actually more important than the internship site itself” (p. 221). The mentor “takes on the responsibility of cooperating with the student in the pursuit of ministerial skills, in the development of a ministerial identity, and in bringing book knowledge into dialogue with the life of the community” (Hillman, 2009, p. 221). The experience of a mentor provides the seminarian with added resources to the seminary courses.

There are several characteristics of a positive mentor-seminarian relationship in the pastoral field education experience. Hillman (2009) recommended consistent interaction during the internship experience as these meetings provide regular opportunities for communication and instruction. Hillman stated that the “on-site field education mentor must create an environment where the Holy Spirit can work in the life of the student intern so that the student can focus on spiritual and professional development” (p. 228). Great mentors create trust and build strong communication.

A supervisor must be committed to the mentor relationship, willing to set aside time to supervise and understand the needs of the seminarian. The seminary must train the supervisors in the expectations of the program in order for the pastoral field education
to be effective. Without training, supervisors may see the seminarians as extra labor and not provide the necessary supervision nor mentoring. Specific learning goals for both the seminarian and formation program make the assignment meaningful for the seminarian and supervisor (Bradesca, 2004). The seminarian needs to know that he will learn from the site and the supervisor. He also must be assured that there will be the opportunity for pastoral growth from the supervisor’s feedback. “A major function of professional field educators at seminaries is to equip their on-site field education mentors with the fundamentals of how to mentor those preparing for ministry roles” (Hillman, 2009, p. 224). Listening to and learning from feedback is an important component to the ability of the seminarian to grow from the pastoral field education experiences.

**Expectations**

Training on the pastoral field education expectations and evaluation process is needed for both the seminarian and supervisor. The seminarian needs skills for the parish, school, or outreach organization. Bradesca (2004) encouraged an all-day meeting at the seminary in order for the supervisors to understand the goals and objectives of priestly formation. The supervisor must know how to mentor and provide high quality learning experiences. Schuth (2009) stated that “a realistic critique of the student’s readiness for ministry should both reinforce positive qualities and identify, with a view to correcting, negative ones” (p. 197). The supervisor can train staff or teachers who may interact with the seminarian. Schwartz (2003) stated that “mentoring and supervision in ministry involves lay people in a support system” (p. 48). Clark (2012) encouraged seminary formation to instruct seminarians on how to share their life journeys in an effective and appropriate manner. Having both the seminarian and supervisor trained in
the formation theory and expectations gives them both a better chance of having a positive outcome.

Effective pastoral field education also depends on the quality of the site. Onsite pastoral formation is an integral part of priestly formation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). The seminary should choose pastoral field education sites wisely. The healthy seminary will maintain a connectedness with the wider church and will keep its vision broad and open. It will manifest a lived concern for the poor and for justice, moving theory into practice (Brown, 2005). Parishes, schools, or outreach organizations should meet certain criteria in order for the seminarian to grow pastorally. A pastoral field education site must have trained supervisors and a diversity of experiences for the seminarian. Some churches are too small and may not have enough events for the seminarian to engage fully in parish life.

**Theological Reflection**

During the pastoral field education site experience, the seminarian needs to reflect on how the pastoral experiences are fostering pastoral skills. The seminarian should reflect on different events, people, and encounters and how these fit each of the four pillars. Theological reflection “tries to help a person discover God’s presence in the experience (Kinast, 1996). This process of reflection can be the foundation for a lifelong practice. Schuth (2009) stated that “at every stage of development, pastoral formation equips students to reflect on their pastoral identity and to grow in appreciation of their ministerial role” (p. 197). The supervisor and director of pastoral field education can aid the seminarian in reflection. The process of reflection also integrates the other pillars of formation. Banks (1999) encouraged making “the classroom a place to relate life and
service” (p. 202). The seminarian should reflect on the integration of his academics, spirituality, and humanity into the pastoral care. The primary purpose of this reflection is to interpret the pastoral experience in light of scripture, church teaching, personal experience, and pastoral practices (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). The formation advisor, supervisor, and director of pastoral field education can advise the seminarian on how to interpret the reflections.

In addition, the seminarian and supervisor need to give the director of pastoral field education a detailed evaluation. This will allow the experience to be properly assessed. The seminarian and supervisor should review the seminarian’s growth during the year at the site. The supervisor provides insights on the skills the seminarians have learned for ministry. The seminary formation team also must reflect the growth of the seminarian in each of the four pillars. These evaluations play a part in the discernment of the seminarian’s call to the priesthood. Bradesca (2004) underscored the need for evaluations in order to chart the growth for the seminarian. He stated that “specific goals for both the intern and the seminary formation program spell out in greater detail the desired learnings of the pastoral internship” (p. 32). This provides documentation for the diocese, especially the vocation director, about the discernment process of the seminarian. Hillman (2009) encouraged sites to provide a formal evaluation for the seminarian that is separate from the school’s field education assessments. The evaluation may include a self-evaluation, supervisor evaluation, staff evaluation, and an evaluation of those to whom the seminarian ministers (students, parishioners, or hospital staff). Having multiple evaluations gives a more complete understanding of the seminarian’s pastoral growth.
Summary

Formation involves intellectual, spiritual, pastoral, and human development. The literature demonstrated a need for a quality pastoral field education experience during seminary formation to integrate these four areas. The pastoral field education helps prepare emerging clergy for leadership and working with the various types of people in a parish or school setting. The literature indicated a strong need for structured seminary pastoral field education programs. Key components to field education are mentoring, theological reflection, and evaluations.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary regarding the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program in preparing them for the role of Catholic pastor in priestly ministry.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this dissertation in practice was to improve the pastoral field education at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary based on evidence gathered from the qualitative study of graduates who now work as ordained clergy serving at Catholic parishes.

Methodology

Overview of Data Collection

Seminary graduates provided qualitative data for the case study on the pastoral field education program at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary. The participants for the study were ordained Catholic priests, currently serving as pastors at Catholic parishes, located in multiple regions of the country. Graduates were sent letters of invitation to participate in the study. Selection for participation of 14 priests was based on availability to meet with the researcher at a given time period.

The seminary development office provided a list of graduates who were ordained from 1994-2014. The list of graduates contained 517 names. Therefore, the researcher sorted names into regions: New England, Mid-Atlantic, South, Mid-West, and West. The list of graduates did not indicate the current position of each priest. The researcher
established which graduates were pastors. A select group of pastors from the sorted list allowed for diverse backgrounds, regions of the United States, and urban/rural settings while providing enough input for saturation to develop common themes. This study earned Institutional Review Board authorization from the researcher’s institution before data collection began. The researcher obtained informed consent from the clergy before interviewing.

Each pastor was sent a letter to participate. Very few priests responded to the letter. Therefore, the researcher called the parish offices to speak with the pastors. With the phone contact, pastors were willing to set up appointments. The interviews were conducted in five different regions of the country during the months of May, June, and July of 2015.

Each participant was asked a planned set of qualitative questions during the in-person interviews. These questions facilitated a discussion based on the participant’s experience in the pastoral field education program during his own seminary formation years at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary. The in-person interviews were conducted over a three-month period during which the researcher utilized bracketing and reflection in order to capture meaningful data connections.

The first part of the interviews insured that details, such as Institutional Review Board consent, establishing that participants were indeed graduates of Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary, and serving as pastors were met. The first question of the interview related to the participant describing his first year as a pastor. This open-ended question allowed for reflection by the participant. For most of the interviews, the relationship of
researcher and participant was comfortable by the end of the first year of participant’s story.

As the participants told their stories, each answered the questions directly and also gave detailed feedback on how the field education program could be improved. After the sixth interview, saturation was reached and themes began to emerge.

**Analysis of Data**

After all interviews were completed, the researcher hand-coded the data. Coding the data organized the data into clusters of similar topics (Creswell, 2014). The similar topics helped to analyze the data. Horizontalization highlighted meaningful segments of the participant’s responses. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) defined horizontalization as “the process of laying out all the data for examination” (p. 27). The segments were then categorized into themes. Common themes emerged from the data gathered.

Triangulation determined the reliability of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation came from the data, member checking, and literature. Data from different participants justified building common themes (Creswell, 2014). The data for this study included the interviews of multiple participants; this reinforced the trustworthiness of the results.

Member checking with the participants allowed for feedback and the opportunity to validate the interview content. Sending the summary of the interview to the study participant verified that the study findings were accurate. Of the participants who replied to the member checking opportunity, all agreed the content of the summaries was accurate.
The themes were compiled into a Composition of Place case study. The case study utilized analyzed data, best practices from literature, and personal observations to provide recommendations for the revision of the seminary pastoral field education program.

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to protect the identity of each participant, an identification code was assigned to each participant. The code was listed on the interview sheet and cross-referenced on a master list. When the data were analyzed, only the identification codes were used. All informed consent forms and interview sheets were kept in a locked file cabinet. The case study did not mention any participant names.

Bracketing provided the opportunity for journaling the process of data collection. By keeping detailed notes, the committee can easily access the professional practices, personal experiences, and decisions during each phase (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary regarding the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program in preparing them for the role of Catholic pastor in priestly ministry. Letters of invitation to participate in this dissertation in practice were sent to graduates of Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary who were serving as pastors. This study earned Institutional Review Board approval from the researcher’s institution before research commenced. Fourteen pastors were interviewed over a three month period. Saturation was reached at interview number six. Once all interviews were completed, the researcher hand coded the data. Triangulation was
practiced using the data, member checking, and literature. In addition, the researcher practiced bracketing during the data collection. The case study is presented as a Composition of Place.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMPOSITION OF PLACE CASE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary regarding the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program in preparing them for the role of Catholic pastor in priestly ministry.

Presentation of Findings from Data

This qualitative study investigated the effectiveness of the pastoral field education program at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary as it relates to seminarians’ preparation for priestly ministry, in particular the Ministry of a Pastor. While many parishes have more than one priest serving them, the pastor is the one who bears the responsibility to the bishop to insure that the parishioner’s needs are met. The pastoral field education program provides a series of practical experiences for seminarians to gain insights about the realities of the Ministry of a Pastor.

The participants were chosen from a list of graduates from Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary ordained from 1995-2014 currently serving as pastors at Catholic parishes. Only graduates serving as practicing pastors were interviewed as the priestly ministry skills culminate in the role of pastor. Graduates serving in other roles were not included in this study as the focus on the research was to study the skills needed for the ministry of a pastor and not every aspect of priestly ministry. The qualitative research study explored pastoral field experiences of Our Lady of the Mountain graduates by utilizing open-ended questions during in-person interviews regarding pastoral field experiences.
Four main themes emerged from the data: the participants did not have adequate leadership or administrative-skill training to be effective pastors; the most effective pastoral field experiences had pastors who actively mentored the seminarians at their practice sites; theological reflection was not taken seriously; and pastoral field education was not aligned to the rest of formation at the seminary. One additional unexpected theme emerged: five priests indicated that teaching does not apply to priestly ministry.

The following case study is presented as a Composition of Person and Place. Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. (2000) described this Ignatian tool as

an exercise of the imagination to situate prayerful contemplation in concrete human circumstances. Since this world is the arena of God's presence and activity, Ignatius believes that we can find God if we approach the world with generous faith and a discerning spirit.

(p. 6)

The Composition of Place merges the data from the qualitative study. The goal is for the reader to be fully immersed in the pastoral field education experiences of a seminarian as recalled by the perspective of an Our Lady of the Mountain graduate. The priest, Fr. Peter, represents the majority of responses from the questions asked during the interviews. For this Composition of Place, Fr. Peter was ordained a diocesan priest in 2008. He was assigned as parochial vicar at two different parishes before being appointed pastor in 2013. This priest/character only represents the data from this research. The narrative utilizes additional characters to indicate any relevant data that may be outside the average participant response.
Fr. Peter’s Pastoral Field Education Experience

Theme One: leadership skills are required for the Ministry of a Pastor

During the interviews, 14 out of 14 participants specifically noted the need for leadership and administrative skills to be effective pastors of Catholic parishes. Many participants indicated they were not prepared to handle the leadership and administrative roles upon their installation as pastor. Participants described their first year as “hell”, “rough,” “overwhelming,” and “terrifying.” The challenges of merging parishes, closing schools, and renovating campus structures caused unexpected hardships for new pastors.

During his first year as a pastor, Fr. Peter faced numerous administrative challenges. He considered himself a “company man” who was faithful to the teachings of the Church and loyal to the bishop. As a parochial vicar, he did not need to worry about the budget, staff issues, or a parish in crisis, which fell under the pastor’s authority. In his first assignment as a pastor, he learned to handle conflict with the pastoral council, to understand the need for a strategic plan, and to value consensus. During pastoral council meetings, highly spirited debates accompanied discussion regarding the updates to the parish hall. In order to afford the new commercial kitchen and other significant remodel upgrades, the parish needed to add fundraising to its agenda and budget. The parish hall improvement was a high priority to many councilmembers. In addition, the boiler needed to be replaced at an unexpected cost of $38,000. At the end of his first year as pastor, Fr. Peter was tired and felt that he had not been prepared for the administrative and leadership aspects of priestly ministry.

However, Fr. Peter remembered good advice from seminary, “the history of the parish does not begin upon your arrival.” He took time to get to know the people and the
culture. He worked to build trust by listening to the parishioners. He also helped the parishioners appreciate the sacred space of the sanctuary; he perceived that reverence increased at Masses. Slowly, parishioners stopped comparing him to the previous pastor.

Five of the participants had to merge parishes or close the parish school. “The bishop did not know how bad the school finances had become so depleted. When I arrived, it was clear that the school needed to close” stated one participant. Fr. Peter learned quickly that there are a variety of challenges facing the Ministry of a Pastor.

While the majority of the participants had challenging first years as pastors, four of the participants described good years. These participants finally put their gifts and talents into use in a parish setting. Figure 1 contrasts the responses when the participants were asked to describe their first year as pastor.

Figure 1. The range of words used to describe the first year as pastor
When Peter arrived at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary to begin his formation, he had a bachelor’s degree and had worked in corporate America for several years. Seminarian Peter then felt called to serve the Catholic Church as a priest. He was ready to pray and study for God’s glory. His years of discernment for the priesthood included volunteering at his parish as a catechist, lector, and helping serve Mass. He was ready to prepare for the priesthood by immersing himself in philosophy, theology, and especially prayer. He imagined his priestly ministry as caring for the souls of his parishioners as the spiritual father of a parish.

**Theme Two: The quality of mentor affected pastoral field experiences**

Participants were also asked about their most effective pastoral field education site experience. Most of the participants indicated that their most effective pastoral field education sites had a priest-supervisor. The non-clergy supervisors did not have the same positive effect on the participants since their ability to role model the position of pastor was limited. However, not every participant had a good relationship with his priest-supervisor. Some of the participants described their mentor as “militaristic,” “absent,” and “ethically questionable.”

These participants strongly recommended training for mentors as well as a process of choosing mentors very carefully, as 13 out of 14 participants encountered supervisors who did not effectively mentor. Seminarian Peter recalled that he did not feel his supervisor properly mentored him at his hospital pastoral field education site. One participant recommended that seminarians be placed at a site with a good pastor who is able to communicate and have the time with help form a good pastor.
A helpful tool is for the seminarian to have dinner with a group of pastors. They need to see real life in action in positive situations. Figure 2 provides some quotations from the participants on their pastoral field education experiences.

As a first year theologian, Seminarian Peter was assigned to a parish with a hospital to learn chaplaincy skills. His supervisor was the pastor who taught him how to visit a hospital and make sick calls. The pastor met with him at the beginning of the year and went over the calendar and scheduled the days when Seminarian Peter would handle the hospital visits. Seminarian Peter felt the whole time during the conversation that the pastor was happy to have a seminarian so that he did not have to go make sick call visits himself.

After the initial training, the pastor never watched Seminarian Peter visit someone in the hospital nor did he inquire about the visits. The evaluations by the pastor to the seminarian were based on how many patients received Holy Communion or if there were...
any compliments or complaints. There was no meaningful mentorship between the pastor and Seminarian Peter. The lack of spiritual and emotional support was noticeable in the assignment. While he still uses some of the hospital practices today, such as knocking on doors before entering a hospital room, this pastoral field education assignment did not prepare Seminarian Peter for the Ministry of a Pastor where the spiritual, emotional, and visitation skills meet.

In reality, it is unclear whether the real issue was the openness to mentoring or the quality of mentors. Seminarian Peter debated with his classmates about the value of pastor mentors. These pastors had been ordained over 30 years ago and their leadership methods and liturgical styles were outdated. The seminary administrators made it quite clear that this Catholic seminary was the “cradle of bishops” with the finest theological academic instruction. Many of Seminarian Peter’s classmates felt that in reality, it was they who could teach the pastors a few things rather than needing any mentoring.

**Theme Three: The importance of theological reflection**

The seminary assigned theological reflection papers. Many of the participants regretted not paying more attention to this part of formation. Reflection is used to seek God’s will in the experience as well as learn from the mentor’s feedback. Most participants approached pastoral field education without the attitude that it would help their priestly ministry.

Seminarian Peter felt that theological reflection seemed to be a hoop to jump through. He wished that he had paid more attention and valued this. Theological reflection keep would have helped keep Peter open to where God was working in his life. These reflections were meant to aid in the spiritual development during pastoral outreach.
This integrated the pillars of formation. The pastoral field education supervisor should have promoted reflection and taken time to review growth during the year. According to Fr. Peter, holiness for self with God is part of the foundation of pastoral field education. Pastoral leadership has a foundation in reflection.

During his second year of theology, Seminarian Peter was assigned to teach in a Catholic school. The principal was his official supervisor but she rarely saw him teach. He mostly worked with the guidance of classroom teachers. Seminarian Peter had taught in his own parish’s religious education program. He felt this assignment was a waste of time as he was just a warm body in the classroom, a babysitter. He did not really learn much that would apply to the priesthood. He wished that he would have had more time with the principal or felt like a part of the school community.

**Theme Four: Teaching as a component of priestly ministry**

While not a majority, 5 out of 14 participants indicated that teaching was not a part of priestly ministry. Enough participants responded that teaching was not a component of priestly ministry that is seemed necessary to include it in the findings. Some participants felt that the laity could handle teaching. Fr. Matthew indicated that the “clergy has no time to teach RCIA or school classes. Also, teaching is not a gift of mine and I don’t even like children”. Neither the seminary nor the site supervisor helped educate these participants on this misunderstanding of the catechetical aspects of priestly ministry. Only one participant liked teaching because he learned planning and implementation from doing lessons. He felt that being prepared is a real skill that a pastor needs.
When Seminarian Peter returned in his third year of seminary, his pastoral field assignment was located at the university campus ministry office. The supervisor was a priest who did not provide much structure to the position. Seminarian Peter showed up each week but did not connect with the campus ministry office staff. He just did what he was told. At one point Seminarian Peter walked through the dorms to help with the blessing of the rooms. He stocked the prayer card racks and did busy work rather than something meaningful. The activities did not seem particularly formative to his upcoming priestly ministry.

**Theme Five: Alignment of pastoral field education to formation**

Most of the participants suggested that the sites be purposeful and linked to formation. The participants indicated the need for more balance between the pastoral, intellectual, human, and spiritual pillars of formation. Since 11 out of the 14 participants indicated that the deacon year was the most effective pastoral field education experience, Deacon Peter will have his most effective experience.

In his final year of seminary, Deacon Peter was assigned to a local parish. He looked forward to the opportunity to preach and baptize. Upon arrival at the parish, the pastor told Deacon Peter to “be himself and get involved.” Deacon Peter was expected to be a member of the pastoral team by visiting the sick and pulling his weight. The pastor mentored him by including him on the numerous decisions that had to be made for the parish. This made him “feel important to the parish community.” The clergy gathered each Saturday after the vigil Mass for dinner. Deacon Peter saw the need for clergy fellowship and rest. The dinner conversations included parish problems as well as
inquiry about the well-being of each clergy member. The time spent in the parish helped Seminarian Peter understand the dynamics of rectory life as well as parish life.

The evaluations sent to the seminary for Seminarian Peter were both formal and informal. The pastor gave “good feedback about homilies and working with difficult parishioners.” The pastor was always available and provided some financial help during the year. The pastor showed a vested interest in Deacon Peters’ formation. Even today, Fr. Peter still hears the pastor talking in his head. “He set a good example for working with seminarians” which Fr. Peter uses with diocesan seminarians assigned to his parish.

In addition to his theology courses and spiritual prayer life, Seminarian Peter found himself sitting in pastoral formation seminars. These workshops and seminars were designed to help prepare for his pastoral field education site assignments. Over his years in seminary, he also gained advice and tips for visiting patients in the hospital and how to teach students in a classroom setting from these pastoral field education workshops and seminars. One seminar by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops focused on Immigration Reform. However, the basics such as writing a letter to help a family prevent deportation was not covered. The seminars did not contain administration and leadership components.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the skills developed during formation at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary as reported by graduates of the program. Through a series of personal interviews with 14 graduates, five themes emerged: leadership and administrative skills are required for the Ministry of a Pastor, the quality of mentor affected pastoral field experiences, the importance of theological reflection, teaching as a
component of priestly ministry, alignment of pastoral field education to formation. The main character of the Composition of Place, Fr. Peter, represented the average responses from the participants. The narrative of his story incorporated direct quotations as well as the summary of data statistics. Seminarian Peter’s experiences of teaching, hospital ministry, evangelization, and a deacon assignment were incomplete in helping prepare him for the demands and leadership skills required to serve as a pastor.
CHAPTER FIVE – A NEW PASTORAL FIELD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Problem with Pastoral Field Education

The literature, research data, and observations indicated that some seminarians do not develop the necessary pastoral skills necessary to minister as a pastor of a parish. Seminaries can provide structures needed to facilitate the growth in the areas of leadership, theological reflection, administration, and collaboration. The improvement in these areas will aid the emerging clergy in supporting the mission of the parish.

Recommendations

The following revised pastoral field education program is based on best practices for pastoral field education combined with data from this dissertation in practice. The implementation of the program will require the collaboration of the seminary administration, especially the offices of pastoral and intellectual formation.

The learning goals set the expectations for the seminarians, faculty, and administration of the pastoral field education program. Klimonski (2005) stated that the “alignment of goals insures that individual courses and formation programs form a coherent program of study” (p. 71). These connect the site experiences to effective priestly ministry. The integration of pillars will reflect the real life experiences where the seminarian must use his intellectual knowledge, spiritual graces, humanity, and pastoral care. Figure 3 illustrates the learning goals of the pastoral field education program. The importance of having all the pillars work together is emphasized by the literature and the participants in the study.
Figure 3. Learning Goals of Pastoral Field Education Program

1. Practice theological reflection
2. Apply theoretical concepts to pastoral situations
3. Identify best practices of effective pastors and ministry leaders
4. Practice ministry skills in pastoral settings
5. Synthesize feedback and reflection for personal growth

Figure 3. A summary of the revised learning goals for the pastoral field education program.

Whitehead and Whitehead (1975) stated that “the field education program is primarily responsible for assisting the ministry student to see the links between theory and action, to test his theology in life, to put his theological knowledge into ministerial practice.” The participants in the research study indicated that the pastoral field education experiences were not effective in their formation of the ministry of a pastor. Garrido (2010) encouraged “regular theological reflection, anticipating that the habit will provide an opportunity for personal synthesis, clarification of motivations, and the development of directions for life and ministry, enrich spiritual life, help the development of pastoral skill, interpret pastoral experience in light of scripture, church teaching, personal faith, and pastoral practices and lead to a lifelong effort in reflecting on his ministry in light of faith” (p. 32). These were among the themes that emerged from the research data. In addition, other skills from seminary experts are listed as essential: conflict management, cross-cultural sensitivity, and preaching.

In Pastores Dabo Vobis, Saint John Paul II (1992) insisted that pastoral formation cannot be "reduced to a mere apprenticeship aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques" but should help the seminarian understand the “sensitivity of
being a shepherd" (no. 58). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops anticipates that students will develop "a better inner sense of direction because of an enriched spiritual life" (no. 239). Garrido (2010) also underscored that pastoral field education “interweaves theology and real-life questions bringing about a more cohesive formation experience” (p. 33). Finally, “field education reveals if the seminarian’s gifts are well-suited for the ministerial life and makes clear the areas of growth necessary to thrive in ministry” (Garrido, 2010, p. 34).

Figure 4 illustrates the outline the new elements for the revised pastoral field education program at Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mentor Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Integration of Pastoral Formation with other Pillars</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Bi-Weekly Pastoral Field Education Course</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Pastoral Field Education at Assigned Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
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</tbody>
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*Figure 4. An overview of the new elements of the revised pastoral field education program.*

**Part I – Mentor Training**

Every participant in this study indicated the importance of a good mentor in the pastoral formation process. The seminarian and the site supervisor establish the roles and details of the site assignment (Reddicliffe, 2010, p.129). The mentor and seminarian should mutually agree on the terms of the partnership. In order to have effective pastoral field education sites, the site supervisors should understand the learning goals and have the ability to mentor the seminarian. Careful selection of the sites and mentors gives both the mentor and seminarian assurance that the learning goals can be met. Parker (2009) outlined the role of a supervisor in “theological field education depending on the
expectations and approach of the institution; however, it appears that the supervisory role affords the supervisor-mentor the opportunity to make disciples by training emerging leaders to exercise their gifts in ministry through active, formal mentoring processes” (p. 54). The mentor may impact the ministry of the seminary for his whole priestly life. This discipleship has the potential for a powerful relationship for both men.

Training in theological reflection should be included in the mentor orientation. The mentor should model this key component of the field education program. Parker (2009) defined “theological field education as about both the development of competencies and the enhancement of character for the present and future” (p. 56). The mentor needs to be able to nurture the competency and character of the seminarian. According to Burke-Sullivan (2015), “theological reflection is where praxis meets prayer (personal communication).”

Mentors should have sufficient time to orient the seminarians and provide quality feedback. Participants indicated the need for seminarians to see real life parish and rectory life during the assignments. Therefore, other staff and volunteers should be included in the pastoral field education experience. Hillman, Hart, Herbert, and Jones (2009) stated that the on-site field education mentor must create an environment where the Holy Spirit can work in the life of the seminarian for spiritual and professional development (p. 228). Invitations to the finance council, staff meetings, or liturgy committee give seminarians insight into the duties of a pastor. The mentor experience includes decision-making, collaboration, and prayer needs.

According to Bradesca (2012), “primary responsibility lies with the priest supervisor as the supervisors are provided with the goals and objectives of priestly
formation, the seminary program, and their role in assisting” (p. 33). In order for Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary to form priests who will become pastors, putting the seminarians in sites with involved pastors is essential. Blanchetter (2012) stated that “the seminarians learn what it means to share the faith with each other and with those to whom they will be ministering as priests” (p. 36). Click (2007) expected the students and mentors to practice ministry and engage in reflection together (p. 32). The type of site did not matter (teaching, hospital, or parish) as much as the involvement of the mentor as a role model. Garrido (2010) reinforced that “ministerial candidates need to become comfortable being in the public eye and cognizant of how their behavior is being observed within the community at all times, not only when performing ministerial tasks (p. 32).” The priest as a public person can be molded during the pastoral formation experiences.

An important component to pastoral field education is feedback from the site supervisor. The feedback helps the seminarian understand how to improve and know what he is doing well. McCrabb (2004) stated that “field educators understand the challenge to forge a healthy self-esteem by helping people know themselves, know their gifts, and accept themselves” (p. 29). It is not enough to just be at a site. According to Beisswenger (1974), “there is also a general recognition that while experience teaches, and therefore students may learn simply by being there and working in a field placement, there is a need to provide an educational support system so that learning can be maximized” (p. 51).

Mentors model leadership. Britton (2009) stated that “theologically based leadership is fundamentally a form of questioning, derived from the pattern of asking
questions that is at the heart of the divine-human interaction (p. 95). The pastoral field education site experience forms the image of a pastoral leader.

Figure 5 provides a rubric to evaluate the qualities of an effective mentor.

| Criteria                   | Superior                                                                 | Excellent                                      | Acceptable                                      | Unacceptable                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Schedule/calendar          | Mentor and seminarian mutually set up days and times for ministry       | Seminarian had some input in days and times for ministry | Seminarian had little input in days and times for ministry | Seminarian had no input in days and times for ministry |
| Learning goals             | Mentor and seminarian reviewed and understood the learning goals of the program together | The mentor or seminarian reviewed and understood the learning goals of the program separately | Mentor and seminarian did not review or understand the learning goals but discussed what they thought the seminarian should learn. | Mentor and seminarian did not review or understand the learning goals of the program. |
| Learning environment       | Mentor created a positive environment including prayer, theological reflection, active ministry, and a place in the community | Mentor created an environment which included active ministry | Mentor created an environment which included active ministry at times | Mentor created a hostile environment at which the seminarians felt uncomfortable |
| Quality of mentor          | Seminarian will apply much of the learned skills and wisdom of the mentor to his priestly ministry | Seminarian will apply some of the learned skills and wisdom of the mentor to his priestly ministry | Seminarian will not apply any of the skills of the mentor to his priestly ministry | Seminarian will apply the opposite skills of the mentor to his priestly ministry |

Figure 5. Mentor Evaluation Rubric helps assess the effectiveness of a mentor.

**Part II – Integration of Pastoral Formation with other Pillars**

The participants in the study indicated that the pillars of formation were not balanced or integrated. One step to integrate the pillars is rearranging the order of the pastoral field experiences so the seminarians are theologically prepared for the assigned
site. Administration and faculty should consider synthesizing the four pillars into the curriculum. In addition, the academic dean can monitor the course offerings to insure the appropriate courses are offered for each year connected to pastoral field education.

Seminary faculty should consider incorporating the pastoral field education into the coursework as topics for discussion or assigned papers. Roberts (1993) stated that “lay people in churches want leaders who can do concrete tasks that help the organizational church survive and thrive. Teachers of the theological curriculum want students prepared to be theologically faithful to the traditions of the Christian faith” (p. 272).

For example, during the year the seminarians visit hospitals, courses on Anointing of the Sick and medical ethics should be offered. Discussions pertaining to the experiences in the field would enhance these courses. Brown (2005) stated that “integrating the various components of formation must also be known and appreciated by faculty members and students alike” (p. 18). The mission of the seminary and pastoral field education should be well communicated.

**Part III – Bi-Weekly Pastoral Field Education Course**

The participants in the study indicated that the seminary did not prepare them for their pastoral field education. The addition of a pastoral field education classroom course into the curriculum allows for the seminarians to incorporate theme-specific education, theological reflection, and assessment into the program.

“Field education takes the best of both of field experience and classroom reflection, allowing the integration that allows the formation of ministers equal to the task of ministry today” (Copp, 2009, p. 409). A bi-weekly course provides an avenue to review the specific expectations of pastoral ministry. By providing the seminarians with
the goals and expectations of pastoral field education, the seminarians will be more open to pastoral field education experiences. Copp (2009) continued to reinforce that “an understanding of the purpose and process encourages teachable attitudes that are essential for learning” (p. 42). The course will provide a meaningful framework of skills, standards, and ethics for the site assignment.

Seminarians should practice theological reflection. As a part of the Bi-Weekly Pastoral Field Education Course, seminarians can be instructed on theological reflection and assessed for growth. Beisswenger (1974) stated that “experience teaches best when it is reflected upon, brought to greater consciousness, and looked at holistically in terms of feelings, behavior, and one's conceptual framework” (p. 51). Roberts (1993) described practical theologians as “persons who are self-reflective about methodologies and pay attention to criteria for their theological truth claims and they have a clear way of determining what is appropriate to do in ministry” (p. 274). Thoughtful ministry is evident by the choices of words and actions. Taking time to reflect adds extra care to ministry.

Theological reflection may help reduce rigidity in priestly ministry. Hjelle (1971) stated that “Catholic seminarians have frequently been viewed as dogmatic and close-minded which emphasizes that certain attitudes be maintained” (p. 49). Champlin (2007) affirmed this view, “some clergy and pastoral ministers were actually more strict and rigid than the official Church” (p. 3). The participants indicated a limited view of the Church and its teaching. A discussion group, open forum, or written theological reflection may encourage this essential step in the formation process. Seminarians should be prepared to arrive at pastoral field education sites ready to learn from trained mentors
rather than trying to reform the sites with a yet-to-be-completed theological education. Champlin (2007) continued with the solution that, “all its members should strive to imitate in their lives by being flexible, kind and gentle, but faithful and firm as well” (p. 19).

Maples and Schuth (2006) insisted that self-knowledge and personal growth are integral to seminarian formation. They proved in their study that these “develop especially in pastoral settings that emphasize reflection; the earlier students are introduced to these experiences the more helpful they are and students seem to learn best when they feel assured that their professors are teaching them what is necessary for them to become effective ministers” (p. 44). Fostering an open heart and mind will help the seminarians in their future role as pastors.

The seminarians will go to their pastoral field education sites on a weekly basis. The experiential learning cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

**Part IV – Pastoral Field Education at Assigned Sites**

Pastoral field education experiences with the process of evangelization. The experiences begin with foundational outreach ministry then get refined to specific ministries each year. Figure 6 indicates the revised yearly themes of pastoral field education experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theology Year</th>
<th>Pastoral Field Education Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Theology</td>
<td>Evangelization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Theology</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Theology</td>
<td>Visiting the Sick/Hospital Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Theology</td>
<td>Parish Ministry (Deacon Year)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Revision of field experiences by year to match the learning and growth in seminary.*
First Theology: Evangelization Experience

This first year begins the experience and lays the foundation as evangelizers and representatives to the people. The Evangelization ministry year provides the platform for the seminarians to be a part of campus ministry, prison ministry, vocations support, tribunal work, or other outreach groups. Bernard (1999) stated that priests have to look for new approaches in their teaching/preaching in order to make the Gospel message meaningful to the people (p. 260). Wehner (2010) reinforced that “seminarians are being formed to understand that ministry does not just occur in the sacristy or rectory. They need to be out among the faithful, shepherding them to Christ and serving them with a Gospel that cries out for justice” (p. 39). Evangelization becomes the foundational pastoral field education experience.

Second Theology: Teaching Experience

The primary role of priest is catechist. Therefore, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (1994) encouraged “suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods” (p. 559). Cardinal Hoyos (1998) stated that “the catechetical formation of priests and those preparing for ordination, hence, is an urgent priority for renewal efforts in the Church's pastoral care of catechesis which is required in order to meet the challenges posed by new evangelization” (p. 3). Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary should include in its catechesis course the foundational role of pastor as catechist. Roberts (1993) stated “that a seminary, to the extent that it prepares persons for leadership in ministry, must not only teach subject matter, it must teach teaching. It must have a dual role to all of its courses: the mastery of subject matter, and the development of skill in using and teaching that subject in congregations” (p. 280).
Teaching and education can be integrated into scripture, sacraments, and other courses. It also prepares the seminarians for giving good homilies.

Third Theology: Hospital Ministry

Visiting the sick at home, in the hospital, or in a nursing facility is an integral part of priestly ministry. According to Flannelly et al. (2009), “hospitalized patients consistently say that having their spiritual and emotional needs met is one of their top priorities” (p. 2). An effective pastor insures that the sick have home care. During this pre-deacon year, the seminarians have taken academic courses in medical ethics and have gained an understanding of the Sacraments of the Sick.

Fourth Theology: Parish Ministry

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) links pastoral formation with the “elements of human, spiritual, and intellectual formation in such a way that they can be put to practical use for others, especially in a parish context” (p. 77).

Part V – Assessment

A formal assessment tool will provide a way to evaluate the mentors and program. According to Hartley (2003), theological schools are “required to assess both student learning and the suitability of that learning for the students’ anticipated career” (p. 102). Therefore, pastoral field education should focus on the skills for a pastor.

Early in the academic year, an evaluation of seminarians and sites diagnoses a good fit. Putman and Schulderman (2003) suggested that the “focus should be on basic personal or functional problems. More complex problems are now formulated in terms of their interaction with the social practice of clients, and they will develop routines and
practical expertise to deal with these problems” (p. 40). The end of the year assessment evaluates the mentor, site, and seminary support.

Most participants in the study commented on a need for theological reflection. Gerhardt (2013) stated that “reflection implies purpose which leads to a useful outcome” (p. 134). Seminarians need to be aware of the purpose and criteria for theological reflections. They also should be made aware that reflection aids in spiritual growth; therefore, faculty and administration use the reflection paper as an assessment tool. A quality theological reflection paper demonstrates whether the seminarian met the program learning goals. McDonald (1998) encouraged seminaries to “monitor the process of transformation so that today’s seminarians have the necessary support structures” (p. 92). Milton (2014) provided “a general guide for use in grading theological reflection papers.” Figure 7 aids in the assessment of a theological reflection paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of theological themes</td>
<td>Demonstrates superior quality theology - identifies more than four themes</td>
<td>Demonstrates above average quality theology identifies more than three themes</td>
<td>Demonstrates average quality theology - identifies more than two themes</td>
<td>Demonstrates below average quality theology in reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Uses multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Uses few perspectives</td>
<td>Uses two perspectives</td>
<td>Uses one perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse backgrounds</td>
<td>Provides multiple examples from experiences, including cultural</td>
<td>Provides different examples from experiences</td>
<td>Provides one example from experiences</td>
<td>Does not include experiences in the reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing lessons</td>
<td>Demonstrates superior analysis of experience and provides answers to the statement, “I would prepare better next time by…” or “In the future, priests should handle these situations by…”</td>
<td>Demonstrates excellent analysis of experience and provides answers to the statement, “I would prepare better next time by…” or “In the future, priests should handle these situations by…”</td>
<td>Demonstrates good analysis of experience and provides one answer to the statement, “I would prepare better next time by…” or “In the future, priests should handle these situations by…”</td>
<td>Demonstrates poor analytical competency – does not give any solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching themes and findings</strong></td>
<td>Describes a superior vision to teach findings</td>
<td>Describes an excellent vision to teach findings</td>
<td>Describes a good outline/program to teach findings</td>
<td>Describes a poor outline/program to teach findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-reflection</strong></td>
<td>Recognizes and describes multiple ways God worked through him and experiences for personal transformation</td>
<td>Recognizes and describes one way God worked through him and experiences for personal growth</td>
<td>Has trouble recognizing and describing ways God worked through him with little personal growth</td>
<td>Does not see how God worked through him with no personal growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Theological Reflection Rubric. This helps assess the quality of theological reflection.*

**Program Effectiveness**

1. Theological Reflection Benchmark of 70%
2. Quality of Pastoral Field Education Site Survey by Seminarians
3. Observations of Director of Pastoral Formation and Staff

*Figure 8. Tools for assessment of pastoral field education program effectiveness.*

The administration of Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary should evaluate the effectiveness of its pastoral field education program annually. Figure 8 outlines the main tools for the evaluation process. Analyzing the results of the theological reflection rubric data allows insights into both the learning and personal growth of the seminarian. The seminary should expect a benchmark of 70% for seminarians to pass the theological reflection paper. In addition, the Director of Pastoral Formation should note any seminarians whose reflection papers indicated a need for special attention in this area of formation. In addition, these findings should be the basis for a roundtable discussion of the formators. This discussion will insure that the pillars continue to integrate and support each other.
Another tool for pastoral field education evaluation is the seminarian site survey. This survey gives detailed information about the quality of mentoring, duties, and learning from the pastoral field education site.

The Director of Pastoral Formation and his staff work closely with the site supervisors. The director and staff should visit the sites during the year and observe the seminarians learning. These personal observations add to the quality of program assessment.

The theological reflection and seminarian survey combined with pastoral field education observations provide a good overview of the program from different perspectives.

Implementation of a Revised Pastoral Field Education Program

Careful consideration and planning needs to take place when implementing a revised program. The administration and faculty should have full consensus and input on the various ways in which the revisions will affect the course structures, schedule, calendar, and formation. Robbins and Judge (2014) encouraged all affected by the change to “make a meaningful contribution to reduce resistance, obtain commitment, and increase the quality of the change commitment” (p. 266). In addition, as seminarians move from the old program into the new, previous pastoral field education experiences should not be repeated. Therefore, for the first four years, there may be some inconsistencies in the program.

The initial recommendation for implementation adds pastoral field education courses and to the theological reflection rubric. Rogers (2003) cautioned individuals who innovate to try it on a “probationary basis to determine its usefulness” (p. 177). Once an
evaluation of the benefits of the course and theological reflections happen, a change in the experience sequence can take place.

Phase II of the implementation moves the evangelization experience to First Theology and the Teaching experience to Third Theology. The First Theologians will have the revised experience schedule for their entire formation. The second year, Hospital Ministry moves to Third Theology and Teaching to Second Theology. Figure 9 illustrates the proposed changes by year as well as the current program experiences.

![Figure 9. Proposed Changes by Year of Pastoral Education Program](image)

**Summary**

The pastoral field education program should prepare emerging clergy to be effectively become pastoral leaders in their parishes. However, the literature, data, and observations indicate that this is not consistently happening in Our Lady of the Mountain Seminary. The recommendations for the revision of the pastoral field education program include: mentor training, the integration of pastoral formation with other pillars, bi-weekly pastoral field education course, pastoral field education at assigned sites, and assessment. Each of these components was identified by the study participants as necessary to prepare for effective ministry. The implementation of these five revisions may happen in two phases. Phase one includes mentor training, integration, bi-weekly
courses, and assessment. Phase two assigns new sites to seminarians to connect the pillars of formation to the academic courses.
References


doi:10.1179/1740714114Z.00000000019


Appendix A

Pastoral Field Education – Interviewing May-July 2015
Interview Identification #: __________
Date of Interview: ____________
Time of Interview: ____________
Location of Interview: ____________
Region: ____________

Words in italics are read by the interviewer.
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey.
ALL of your answers are absolutely confidential. They will be reported aggregated with other responses.
Are you a graduate of seminary?
Yes ___ No ____
Are you ordained Catholic clergy currently serving as a pastor in a Catholic parish?
Yes ___ No ____

The survey will take about 45 minutes for us to complete. And - You’ll receive a report of our key findings in a few months. There will be an opportunity for you to comment on the findings before we publish the final case study. The case study will be available for your review.

Question #1

Describe your first year as a pastor.
Question #2

*Please describe the different sites where you were assigned each year.*

1. Theology
2. Theology
3. Theology
4. Theology

Reflecting back on these different sites, the next questions will focus on the site the one site that MOST helped and prepare your for pastoral ministry and then the one site that LEAST helped and prepare you for pastoral ministry.

Question #3 – Questions about the Most Effective Pastoral Field Education Site

a. *Which site overall helped you understand and prepare for priestly ministry?*

b. *Why did that site come to mind as the most effective?*

c. *Describe the relationship you had with the site supervisor? Was he/she clergy/lay/religious?*

d. *Tell me about your initial conversations with your site supervisor. Did you review the job description and expectations? Were you given a handbook, contract, and clear boundaries? What type of things did you discuss?*
e. Describe the mentoring and feedback you received during your time at the site. In addition to the required written evaluations, what was the frequency, quality, and content?

f. How did the mentoring and feedback influence your behavior at the site?

Question #4 – Questions about the Least Effective Pastoral Field Education Site

a. Which site least help prepare you for priestly ministry? Why did that site come to mind as the least effective?

b. Describe the relationship you had with the site supervisor? Was he/she clergy/lay/religious?

c. Tell me about your initial conversations with your site supervisor. Did you review the job description and expectations? Were you given a handbook, contract, and clear boundaries? What type of things did you discuss?

d. Describe the mentoring and feedback you received during your time at the site. In addition to the required written evaluations, what was the frequency, quality, and content?

e. Explain how the mentoring and feedback influence your behavior at the site?
Question #5

_Tell me your thoughts on how the seminary helped prepare you for pastoral field education sites?_

Question #6

_Do you have any specific ideas on how you would revise the pastoral field education program at the seminary in order to better prepare emerging clergy for priestly ministry?_

_What other information would you like me to note that may be helpful?_