

How the diocese accepts candidates for seminary

With the recent difficulties facing the church, there have been questions regarding the process of accepting seminarians to study for the priesthood, as well as the effectiveness and integrity of the seminaries in which they study. Many have asked, "How is one accepted to become a seminarian?" "What is the process they go through?" "How can we know the seminary in which they attend is training them to become holy priests?" These are all legitimate and pertinent questions, and ones that I am happy to address.



Fr. Mark Mleziva

As the new Vocation Director for the Diocese of Green Bay, I am learning much about the acceptance process, and, having recently gone through it myself as a newly ordained priest, I can confidently say that we complete a thorough, substantial and objective screening process before one is formally accepted to

study for our diocese.

The process begins with conversations to get to know the person better. Elements such as their vocation story and family history are asked at this time, as we begin to get a better picture of the prospective candidate. If, after consultation with Bishop David Ricken and others, we feel that he has an authentic call to the priesthood in our diocese, we will begin the formal application process. Today, the application is 19 pages long and asks everything from their educational, work and legal background to their physical health and spiritual journey.

Knowing that this alone is not exhaustive, seminarian candidates also complete a full psychological evaluation. They meet with an independent psychologist in order to thoroughly evaluate the mental health of the applicant as well as their opinion on whether or not this person would be a good candidate for seminary.

In the midst of this process, we also contact their parish priest, as well as a diverse group of references. They also undergo a mandatory background check. We ensure that every one who applies is trained through the VIRTUS program, which is our Safe Environment training. The

program identifies best practices to promote safe and appropriate interactions between adults and children within our diocese. Every seminarian must read and complete the monthly bulletins that VIRTUS writes and sends to all those trained.

After all this, the candidate will be accepted as a seminarian, and then proceed to fill out another application for the seminary in which they will attend. The application for the

particular seminary is typically similar to ours. However, the seminarian must complete this as a separate process. The reason for this is to either verify or challenge the work that we have done thus far with the candidate.

Currently, we send our seminarians to five different seminaries within the Midwest and abroad. We fully trust these seminaries to help train and form these men into happy, holy and healthy priests. The seminaries that Bishop Ricken chooses to utilize follow the church's norms as found in the Program for Priestly Formation.

Lastly, I do want to address the issue of same-sex attraction as it relates to admitting seminarians to seminary formation and to Holy Orders. In this document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, it states, "the necessity to state clearly that the church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture.'" While fully recognizing the difficult discernment that comes with this, we as a church have a duty and

obligation to ensure anyone admitted for Holy Orders has reached a level of affective maturity necessary to carry out his ministry in our parishes.

In all of this, it is important to remember that the desire on the part of the applicant to be a priest is not sufficient alone, but a vocation must also be discerned with and by the church. We strive to do our best with what we know and the people we accompany. This is done in a pastoral way to ensure to the best of our ability that we are ordaining shepherds after Jesus' own heart who are willing to lay down their lives in life-long service to our parishes.

Fr. Mleziva is Vocation Director for the Diocese of Green Bay.

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