



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF LEXINGTON

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lexington, KY

SEMINARIAN HANDBOOK

Revised June 2025



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

17 October 2025

Dear Seminarians, Aspirants and Vocations Personnel,

I am once again promulgating a revised Handbook for Seminarians for the Diocese of Lexington. This is meant to be a guide for the regular matters of a practical nature that our seminarians face on a regular basis. This Handbook must be consulted in addition to the Policies of any seminary or institute of higher studies that a seminarian is attending in the course of their formation for the priesthood.

The Vocation Director, Father G. Marc Bentley, is the person to whom you should direct any questions or need for clarification regarding the contents of this Handbook. Of course, I also take a great interest in our seminarians and the policies that are meant to assist them in their time of discernment; if there are circumstances that are unforeseen in this Handbook, I will need to be made aware of this.

If a seminarian has any conflict with the Vocation Director, he should inform me of the precise nature of the problem. I will respond as soon as possible or delegate someone with authority should I not be able to respond promptly.

It is my hope and expectation that anyone actively discerning a call to priesthood in the Diocese of Lexington will feel the support that he needs to pursue that discernment through a sound academic education, spiritual resources and direction, attention to personal growth and needs, as well as a growing familiarity with the diocese, its presbyterate, its people and its pastoral mission.

Please know of my daily prayers for each of you. Let God continue the good work He has begun in you.

Peace and all good,

Most Reverend John Stowe, OFM Conv.
Bishop of Lexington

Chancellor

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This Handbook has been compiled to assist candidates for admission to the Catholic Diocese of Lexington’s seminarian discernment and formation program, seminarians, Office of Vocations, and diocesan personnel who are engaged in one way or another in supporting those who seek to discern a vocation to priestly ministry for the diocese.

Seminarians are expected to **review this handbook in its entirety upon their acceptance as a seminarian *and at least annually thereafter***. Seminarians are, at all times, responsible for the information it contains. It is the Seminarian’s

responsibility to obtain the current version of this Handbook from the vocations director for the annual review. It is also the seminarian's responsibility to address, *in writing*, any questions or needs for clarification (including issues not addressed explicitly within the handbook) to the vocations director.

The Catholic Diocese of Lexington, by virtue of promulgation by the Bishop of Lexington, considers the policies and procedures outlined in this handbook, as well as those referenced herein, as binding on all Seminarians, the Office of Vocations, the vocations director and all diocesan personnel engaged in one way or another in supporting those who are discerning a vocation to priestly ministry for the diocese. It reserves the right to update and revise this Handbook or the policies/procedures referenced herein at any time. In all cases, the Bishop of Lexington is the ultimate authority in the interpretation and application of the provisions contained herein.

I. VOCATIONS OFFICE MISSION

The Vocations Office exists to preach the “good news” that the Lord Jesus calls all disciples to particular vocations in service of the Church and the world around us for the salvation of souls and the spread of the Gospel. We do this by making concrete invitations to discern vocations to priesthood and religious life among those God seems to be calling, and by providing the relationships, resources, and opportunities that support vocational discernment and bring it to fruition. Our core values are prayer to and reliance upon the Lord of the Harvest to send forth workers, and being **generous** in sowing the seeds of vocational calling.

The discernment and formation of men for priestly service in the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, as consistently attested to in universal Church law and teaching, is ultimately the responsibility of the bishop, and is always exercised primarily for the good of the Church and then the good of each man engaged in discernment and formation. In a special way, then, the Vocations Office exercises a ministry of counsel and collaboration with the Bishop of Lexington in his shepherding and

governing the diocese with respect to those pursuing the priestly vocation within the diocese, and a ministry of stewardship and accompaniment for those men who God may be calling forward into priestly ministry within our diocese.

In this work, the Vocations Office is guided by national and universal norms established by competent ecclesial authority. ***The Program of Priestly Formation, 6th Edition***, promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is the fundamental standard-setting document within the United States governing the screening, ongoing evaluation, formation, and promotion to Holy Orders of seminarians. The Program of Priestly Formation, 6th Edition itself is the fruit of Pope Francis' 2017 document, ***The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis***

II. ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The typical process by which a man moves from initial discernment to acceptance into the Seminarian Program is outlined below. Each step represents a shared discernment among the Candidate, the Church, the vocations director and the bishop regarding whether participation in the Seminarian Program will assist in manifesting a genuine call to serve as a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Lexington. Ultimately, however, the admission of a man into the diocese's seminarian discernment and formation program for seminarians can only be accomplished by the bishop himself, in whom the Church entrusts final responsibility for the formation and discernment of diocesan seminarians.

Entry into seminary is no more a guarantee of priestly ordination than a committed dating relationship is a guarantee of marriage. Nevertheless, admission to the Seminarian Program *is a full-time commitment* on the part of the seminarian to give oneself *completely* to the work of better hearing and becoming ever more able and willing to say "yes" to God's call to the priesthood if it is manifested as a result of the process and prayer.

SECTION 1 – DISCERNMENT NORMS & MILESTONES

Every man discerning priesthood is different, comes to discernment with a different history and at different stages in life. Nevertheless, there are some typical patterns that are common in most situations - and there are norms that guide the role of the diocese, the bishop, and the seminary in the shared work of discernment. Deviations from these norms and milestones are considered on a case-by-case basis and are granted only in writing and at the discretion of the Bishop of Lexington.

1. Initial Inquiry

Interest and early discernment can begin in as many different contexts as there are men who discern, but they all reach a common stage when there is formal contact between a candidate and the vocations director. Depending on the age, circumstance, and sense of calling, the path from early discernment to initial inquiry and formal application can be a matter of months or years. The Vocations Team, bishop, parish priests, seminarians, and many others often play a role in assisting a discerner to hear God's call and freely respond by taking the next step(s). In all cases, the goal is to provide the relationships, resources, opportunities, support and encouragement that will make God's call clearer and the "yes" response more complete.

In general, the period of inquiry helps the candidate to understand and work toward discovering if he is (or he is becoming) a man who manifests these basic characteristics, which are generally requisite for application to the Seminarian Program:

- A believing, practicing Roman Catholic Christian (generally for at least 3 years).
- A joyful disciple of Jesus Christ engaged in his parish.
- Striving to live a life of virtue (including, specifically, chastity).

- Has spent time sincerely discerning and feels that God is calling him to discern priesthood in seminary, usually with the aid of a routine, formal relationship with a Spiritual Director.
- Has a thirst to bring Jesus and His teachings to the world, ***manifested by his involvement in the apostolic activity of his parish***, the diocese, or the Church.
- Feels a desire to generously sacrifice himself for others.
- Deeply appreciates the sacraments, including fidelity at least to weekly Mass and routine celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Has an overall personal life balance (emotional, spiritual, and physical).
- Has a healthy psycho-sexual development as a foundation for formation to live the celibate life.
- Is at least 18 years of age.
- Possesses a high school diploma or GED for entrance into college seminary, or a bachelor's degree for entrance into major seminary.
- Has no canonical impediments (as listed in Canons 1041-1042).
- Has no inhibiting obligations (such as responsibility for raising young children).

2. Aspirancy

In some cases, particularly those outlined under “Special Situations” below, discerners will be asked to participate in a period of Aspirancy before submitting an application for acceptance as a seminarian. The period of Aspirancy generally lasts 6 - 12 months during which aspirants receive a pastoral placement within the diocese. Aspirants engage in the life of prayer, ministry, and pastoral activity that will support their discernment and readiness to engage formal discernment and formation as a seminarian.

The Aspirancy serves to help the candidate become familiar with the people, places, culture and co-workers in our mission diocese, and provides an opportunity for the bishop, vocations director, priests, ministers and people of the

diocese to become more familiar with the candidate. At the conclusion of this structured experience, aspirants may be invited to submit their application to join the seminarian formation & discernment program.

3. Application

When it seems clear that God is inviting a formal period of prayer, study, formation and discernment to better understand if God is calling a man to priesthood, and when contact with diocesan personnel has provided a reasonable assurance that a man is free from those indications which would preclude advancement into seminary formation, it is time to apply for acceptance into the Catholic Diocese of Lexington's Seminarian Program. ***It isn't possible to completely discern a priestly vocation outside of - or before - time spent as a seminarian.***

Application to seminary doesn't signify that a man is certain he's called to the priesthood, nor does it commit him to ordination. Similarly, acceptance of a man into the seminarian program doesn't signify an intention on the part of the bishop to ordain a man for priestly ministry. It does indicate a readiness on the part of the man to devote himself to full-time discernment and formation in response to God's invitation, and a willingness on the part of the diocese to formally discern with the applicant and to commit significant diocesan resources (human, pastoral, spiritual, and financial) to support that process with and for the Church and the applicant.

The application process is in-depth, and is designed to give both the applicant and the diocese the opportunity to reflect on how God is working in the life of the discerner. Portions of the application also assure that there are no impediments or obstacles to pursuing a priestly vocation based on physical or emotional health or personal circumstance.

The application process consists of the following:

- a. **Written Application** - General information about the candidate is collected on the Seminarian Application Form, including a biography and religious and family history. The written application also provides an opportunity to explore the applicant's understanding of the Church, ministry, faith and discipleship to assure they are consistent with one who is prepared to enter formation and discernment for priesthood.

While the written application form is available at our Diocesan Vocations website, and while certain portions of the application may be completed during the period of *Initial Inquiry* as a tool to further his exploration, it is not our practice to accept application from men with whom we have not developed at least some basis of relationship upon which to make at least a qualitative determination of their readiness and suitability for formation and serious discernment. Those who submit a completed application as their first step in making contact with the Vocations Office are accompanied through the *Initial Inquiry* stage described above as the first steps in our response; only after having a chance to develop the qualitative determination described above does the process move forward.

- b. **Letters of Recommendation** - Six references/recommendations, including the candidate's canonical pastor, are requested. If his canonical pastor and the pastor of the church, or the PLD, that he currently attends are different people, then the candidate must acquire letters of reference from both of them. These references are contacted by the Vocations Office based on information provided by the applicant. Responses are required to be submitted on forms which seek information both general in nature and also specifically posing clear, direct questions to help assure the norms for entry can be met for each candidate and that there aren't any indications of potentially problematic behavior or canonical impediment.

c. **Diocesan Admissions Board**- The written application and letters of recommendation are reviewed in a preliminary way by the vocations director and the bishop to provide an initial assessment of the candidate's suitability for admission to the seminarian program. If such suitability continues to present itself as a possibility, an ad hoc Diocesan Admissions Board is empaneled to review the materials and meet with the applicant. Each Diocesan Admissions Board panel is comprised of clergy, religious and laity, from various backgrounds and ages, women and men, married and single. They are presented with all of the information gathered to that point and also conduct an interview with each candidate during which they are free from any restraint in the scrutiny they wish to apply. Each member of the Board is specifically asked to offer their assessment of freedom from those items outlined in the documents mentioned above which would prohibit entry, as well as their overall assessment and recommendation to the bishop regarding the application.

d. **Preliminary Scrutiny** - The written application, letters of recommendation, and recommendations of the Diocesan Admissions Board are then passed to the bishop who makes a preliminary determination on the suitability of the candidate to enter formation. If so, the process continues with the Psychological Evaluation.

e. **Psychological Evaluation** - Each applicant who passes the preliminary scrutiny next participates in a psychological assessment in accordance with the norms of the PPF. Generally, these assessments are conducted by the St. Luke's Center in Louisville, an extension of the St. Luke's Institute of Maryland. These assessments are generally conducted as a 2-day comprehensive psychological, psychosocial, psychosexual, and psychospiritual evaluation conducted by a team of 2 psychologists and a Spiritual Director who are all specifically trained in clergy screening assessment, informed specifically by the research findings from investigations of all kinds of clergy malformation and malfeasance (including substance abuse, other forms of addiction, financial or

administrative malfeasance, and sexual malfeasance including abuse of minors, inappropriate sexual activity with adults, etc.)

Note: In the case of men we've accepted into the college seminary program, or those previously in formation who seek to return, the Assessment is repeated when they move to theology studies or re-apply if their previous assessment was more than two years prior.

The vocations director or his delegate attend an in-person session along with the applicant and the assessment team at the conclusion of the evaluation to receive preliminary findings and both are given the opportunity to seek clarification or additional information at that time. The results of the evaluation - generally 15-20 pages of professional assessment by the three-person team, is then provided in writing to the candidate and the Office of Vocations. This written evaluation is reviewed by the vocations director and the bishop. (For those who are eventually accepted as a seminarian by the diocese, the written assessment report is also subsequently provided to the Rector of the selected seminary as described below.)

Note: The use, maintenance, and strict confidentiality of the Psychological Evaluation is consistent with prevailing civil law and the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in Seminary Admissions.

f. **Application Disposition** - All of the information assembled thus far is passed again to the bishop, along with the recommendation of the vocations director regarding whether to accept, defer, or reject the application. Ultimately, the bishop makes a final determination regarding whether to accept the man as a seminarian for the diocese. If the bishop chooses to accept the application, that acceptance is understood to be provisional until the final steps in the process outlined below are completed.

g. **Background Check and Child Protection Training/Processes** - Based on the bishop's provisional acceptance, he proceeds to complete the employment onboarding processes required for every priest, deacon, or diocesan employee which includes a criminal background check and child protection training and processes that constitute the Catholic Diocese of Lexington's compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* promulgated by the USCCB ("Dallas Charter"). Of course, any contraindications of his suitability for formation or ministry at this point (or at any other point in the future) results in re-evaluation by the bishop.

h. **Medical Examination** - A complete medical examination is required to establish the health necessary to adequately carry on the functions of priestly ministry. A medical report from a physician will be required from each applicant ensuring their physical health.

i. **Seminary Application and Scrutiny** - Each seminarian accepted by the diocese is then referred to the seminary we intend to engage in his formation and discernment. Each seminary has their own processes through which they are independently required to comply with the provisions of the PPF regarding admission of a seminarian into their program of discernment and formation. While most rely on the Psychological Evaluation already obtained, their own Admissions Committees review information obtained from their own application forms, recommendations, and other materials obtained from us, the candidate, and those from whom the seminary freely chooses to seek information. Ultimately, the Rector of each seminary, collaborating with the seminary's own Admissions Committee, makes a determination regarding whether to accept a seminarian into their program.

SECTION 2 – SPECIAL SITUATIONS

In certain special situations the general process outlined above may be adjusted. Requests for accommodation in these or other situations beyond what is outlined below must be addressed to the vocations director who will present them to the bishop for final determination, which is communicated to both the aspirant/ applicant and the vocations director in writing.

1. Those New to the Practice of the Catholic Faith - Our diocese has been blessed with many priests who are converts to Catholicism. Generally, a man must have been received into the Church and lived as a practicing Catholic for at least three years before applying to begin formal discernment and formation with the Catholic Diocese of Lexington. Men in these situations are encouraged to engage diligently in conversation and discernment with the vocations director and a Spiritual Director, and to engage actively in the life and ministry of their local parish. Application to enter the diocesan seminarian formation & discernment program may not be made within the first three years of entering communion with the Church without express permission from the Bishop of Lexington.

2. Second Career and Older Vocations - The universal Church, and in particular the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, has been blessed by men who discern their priestly vocations later than the high school or college years. We view discernment and application to our program of seminarian formation among second career and older vocations *through the same lens* (and, therefore, governed by the same norms, policies, and procedures) as all other priesthood discernment.

However, considering the challenges of effective human formation in later years, and balancing the fiscal and spiritual investment in men discerning and being formed for priesthood with their potential service for the diocese, we generally only accept candidates for the seminarian discernment and formation program who have the potential to be ordained before their 55th birthday. In most cases, this means that a man would need to be able to begin seminary formation in the fall *before* his 48th birthday. At the same time, previous time spent in formal

discernment or formation (e.g., the candidate was previously a seminarian, in religious formation, in formation for the permanent diaconate, etc.) may sometimes suggest a deviation from this policy and/or an adjustment to the length of seminary discernment and formation. Such situations are considered on a case by case basis by the bishop, and determinations are communicated to both the aspirant/applicant and vocations director in writing.

3. Transfers - Transfer candidates are those who are presently, or in the past have been, engaged in formal discernment and formation in another (arch)diocese or religious community. Generally, transfer applicants are required to complete a period of Aspirancy within the diocese (6 - 12 months) before being invited to submit an application for acceptance as a seminarian. (See information regarding Aspirancy above.) In all cases, the Catholic Diocese of Lexington follows the norms of the *Program for Priestly Formation* regarding inquiry among the religious superiors and seminary personnel of applicants who have previously been affiliated with other dioceses, religious institutes or religious communities.

4. Applicants from Outside the Diocese - Generally, applicants who reside outside the Catholic Diocese of Lexington or who have resided within the diocese for less than one year, are not considered unless there is some demonstrable connection with the diocese or explicit expressed interest in (and capacity for) the specific needs, mission, and ministry of our mission diocese. In these cases, applicants are generally required to complete a period of Aspirancy within the diocese (6 - 12 months) before being invited to submit an application for acceptance as a seminarian. (See information regarding Aspirancy above.) Existing personal relationships and/or experience either within the diocese itself or in the particular ministries or missionary realities of our diocese may suggest excusing this initial residency/Aspirancy within the diocese before application, at the discretion of the bishop.

5. Applicants Without U.S. Citizenship - The Catholic Diocese of Lexington welcomes the working of the Holy Spirit in calling forth priestly vocations

regardless of citizenship, immigration, or document status pursuant to the other norms contained in this Handbook and national/universal ecclesial norms. Men who are not US citizens and who are interested in discerning a vocation to the priesthood with the Catholic Diocese of Lexington should feel free to contact the vocations director for support in discernment. When a period of Aspirancy (above) or application for acceptance as a seminarian is appropriate, the diocese will provide assistance in obtaining the appropriate immigration status and filings. In all cases regarding the seminarian formation and discernment program the Catholic Diocese of Lexington and the Office of Vocations complies with applicable civil law.

6. Reapplying to the Catholic Diocese of Lexington –

a. Men who have withdrawn from the Seminarian Program in good standing (e.g., were not dismissed or asked to leave the program, either by the seminary or the diocese) within the last two years may make application to re-enter the program by providing a letter to the bishop outlining their reasons for reapplying and accounting for their activities and ongoing discernment in the interim. At the discretion of the bishop, additional aspects of the typical application process outlined above may or may not be required.

b. Men who have been dismissed or asked to leave the Seminarian Program by either the diocese or a seminary, or who have been dismissed or asked to leave any program of discernment and formation by another (arch)diocese or religious community must wait a minimum of 2 years before making application to the Catholic Diocese of Lexington. In such a case, before submitting the written application and the other steps outlined above, the man must provide in writing an account of his experiences with the previous (arch)diocese(s) or religious community/communities, including his account of what led to the dismissal. The vocations director will conduct appropriate inquiry among the religious superiors and seminary personnel of such applicants as outlined in the PPF and present this

together with the applicant's account to the bishop who will offer a determination regarding whether to engage the application process in their case.

III. GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

The Catholic Diocese of Lexington Seminarians' primary ministerial assignment is full-time discernment and formation. Generally, this consists in faithful participation in the priestly formation organized by the seminary to which the seminarian is assigned and/or other pastoral placement assigned by the vocations director (e.g., pastoral year, language immersion, Clinical Pastoral Education, etc.). Regardless of the context or assignment, the following General Expectations **apply to seminarians at all times** (including times away from the seminary, vacations or breaks from any official functions, etc.). The state of life of a seminarian is such that there is no "off time" where he may act as if, or be perceived as if, he were not a minister of the Church.

SECTION 3 – AUTHENTIC ROMAN CATHOLIC DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. A seminarian acknowledges that he is, at all times, in priestly formation and his behavior must reflect that reality. He must take all areas of formation with due seriousness, seeking to grow spiritually, intellectually, personally, and pastorally regardless of his current assignment.

2. Toward that end, a seminarian must place Jesus Christ and growth in the likeness of Christ as the heart and focal point of all his endeavors. Any behavior contrary to this principle is unacceptable. Therefore, Seminarians must deem the following behaviors unacceptable, understanding that they jeopardize his continuation in the Seminarian Program:

- Drunkenness, vulgarity, and rudeness.
- Gossip, slander, backbiting, and uncharitable remarks.
- Dating or other relationships not consistent with a man being formed for priesthood.

- Sexual activity, “in-person” or “online”, including inappropriate touching, flirtation, sexual remarks, or innuendos.

3. A seminarian must be guided in his behavior toward others by principles of Christian charity and a spirit of collaboration and mutual regard. Seminarians must seek to resolve differences between and among others in a mature manner - that is, through person-to-person encounters and open, fair discussions between the parties involved. Seminarians must avoid malice at all times.

4. Seminarians are expected to be men of prayer, including the Liturgy of the Hours, regular participation in the Eucharist, devotional and private prayer. Similarly, seminarians are expected to regularly examine their consciences and critique their behavior, making regular recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to support their growth in virtue and authentic discipleship.

SECTION 4 – ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

1. Each seminarian is the primary agent of his own spiritual, moral, intellectual, and human development and formation.

2. The seminary, the presbyterate, the vocations director and Office of Vocations, the bishop, and others who participate in the formation and discernment of seminarians all seek to foster and promote this growth - but each seminarian is accountable and responsible for his own formation. In practice, this means it is the seminarian’s initiative and responsibility to meet the expectations of his discernment and formation. Likewise, this means the seminarian is accountable for initiating prudent self-disclosure to the vocations director of any need, challenge, situation or obstacle that arises *before* they become insurmountable.

3. Seminarians, as all the faithful, should fully and freely embrace the teachings of the Church’s Magisterium. They must strive to be faithful to the purpose, precepts and guidance spelled out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the

Code of Canon Law, and the most current versions of other official Church documents, including the *Program of Priestly Formation*.

4. Seminarians should be at all times mindful of the public promises they will one day make in approaching ordination to:

- always preserve communion with the Catholic Church,
- hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety and faithfully hand it on and explain it while avoiding any teachings opposed to it,
- unite oneself with what is expressed by the bishops as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith,
- and be faithful to the teachings which either the Pope or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise the authentic Magisterium.

5. Seminarians who cannot drive must learn to do so upon arriving in the diocese. They are required to obtain a driver's permit within three months and a driver's license within six months. The vocations office will arrange professional driving lessons. Before taking the license exam, seminarians must complete at least 60 hours of practice driving, including 10 hours at night. They should coordinate with their pastor and the vocations office to schedule these practice hours and find a volunteer to assist. Failure to learn how to drive will result in a pause in formation until the requirement is met. Upon obtaining a driver's license, the vocations director will assign a diocesan vehicle to the seminarian for the duration of his time in seminary.

SECTION 5 – PASTORAL CONDUCT

The Diocesan *Code of Pastoral Conduct and Policies and Procedures for Creating a Safe Environment for Minors and Vulnerable Adults*, which govern all ministers throughout the diocese, express norms that govern Seminarians and are therefore incorporated by reference in this Handbook. Seminarians are obligated to review

these documents at least annually. In addition to the provisions of these documents, the following norms guide the pastoral conduct of all Seminarians.

1. When giving advice or counsel, seminarians must respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person.
 - a. Information disclosed during the course of providing counsel or advice must be held in the strictest confidence possible.
 - b. Seminarians are to be diligent in not offering care, providing counsel, or otherwise ministering or offering care to others beyond their training, capacity, or specified assignment, and should always assist those to whom they are ministering seek the qualified care they need.
2. When working with youth, seminarians shall maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between youth and adult supervisors and follow all diocesan guidelines for protecting youth and vulnerable populations.
 - a. This includes always working within a team approach to participate in youth activities; seminarians should *never* be alone with a minor under the age of 18 in *any* circumstance.
 - b. Kentucky law requires the *mandatory reporting* of any known or suspected abuse of children, vulnerable adults, or domestic partner abuse. Seminarians who suspect such abuse should either contact the relevant authorities directly *or* contact the vocations director who will *immediately* assist the seminarian in making notification to the proper authorities.
3. Physical contact with any person (youth or otherwise) can be easily misconstrued and should occur (a) only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and (b) never in private.

4. Seminarians must not exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community, including exploiting their trust for sexual gain or intimacy,

5. Seminarians must not engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment nor tolerate harassment (of themselves or anyone else) by any other minister, staff or volunteer in any context. Instances of harassment of any kind, regardless of who is involved, should be reported by the seminarian to their ministry supervisor, seminary superior and/or the vocations director as soon as possible.

6. Seminarians will maintain strict confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of parish, religious community/institute, or other organization's records. Similarly, seminarians are expected to maintain the confidentiality of all involved in the pastoral and/or ministry situations in which they find themselves in carrying out their ministerial duties, pastoral assignments, etc.

7. Seminarians should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call into question the integrity and professional conduct of the seminarian and others involved and should, therefore, be avoided.

8. All ministry assignments of any nature, regardless of who makes the assignment, are to be exercised in a manner which is consistent with Catholic Social & Moral Teaching, Civil & Canon Law, this Handbook and those norms, policies and procedures to which they refer. Ministry should always unfold without any undue or inappropriate use of power and authority.

9. As developing professional ministers and leaders in the Christian community, seminarians have a duty to report their own ethical or professional misconduct

and the misconduct of others as soon as it occurs. In all cases, seminarians are directed to make reports directly to the vocations director, the Vicar General, or the Bishop of Lexington without delay.

SECTION 6 – HOME PARISH

1. A seminarian's home parish, and in particular the pastor of that parish, are in partnership with the bishop and the Vocations Office in a seminarian's discernment and formation. The pastor of a seminarian's home parish will be a participant in diocesan discernment as the seminarian progresses through formation, including formal participation in discernment regarding advancement to Orders (coordinated either by the seminary or the Vocations Office). When seminarians are staying at their parish for an extended period, the Vocations Office will pay the parish \$150/month for rent and utilities. If the parish believes \$150 is insufficient, this amount can be adjusted after approval from the vocations director. Providing for food will be the responsibility of the seminarian, who is to pay for it with his stipend.

2. The pastor should see himself as a seminarian formator and as an essential agent in his priestly formation. The pastor's responsibilities are the following:

- a. Host the seminarian in the rectory on the seminarian's breaks from seminary. If the rectory does not allow for this, or if there is no rectory, the pastor should coordinate with the vocations director to find a place for the seminarian to stay.
- b. Coordinate with the vocations office in any transportation needs that the seminarian may have. Pastors who have seminarians learning to drive should coordinate with the vocations office to train the seminarian and help him to obtain his driver's license.

- c. Invite the seminarian to participate in the life of the parish. This includes meetings, liturgies, and informal gatherings.
 - d. Check in with the seminarian at least once a semester through email or phone.
3. It is a basic expectation that each seminarian will cultivate an ongoing relationship with his home parish and the pastor of that parish.
- a. The seminarian should make every effort to assure he is well known to the parishioners, leaders, and pastoral staff of his home parish.
 - b. It is recommended that the seminarian seek to schedule informal “check-in” meetings with their pastor during longer breaks from the seminary to facilitate the development of this relationship.
 - c. Seminarians should coordinate their plans for longer breaks - in particular Christmas and Easter holidays - with the pastor of their home parish, at least offering to participate in key community and liturgical gatherings as possible given other assignments or expectations in an effort to nurture their relationship with the home parish and pastor.
 - d. As a way to facilitate this relationship, the Vocations Office will communicate routinely with the pastor of each seminarian’s Home Parish to provide general updates on the progress of the seminarian and facilitate the development of the pastor seminarian relationship.
 - e. Seminarians can contact the vocations director for assistance in cultivating this relationship.

SECTION 7 – ELECTRONIC/DIGITAL COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA

These norms are intended to provide for the safety and protection of the seminarian as well as those with whom he ministers. They apply not only to email and social media, but by extension to website, online forum, text messaging or other online or mobile messaging applications, and any form of digital or electronic communication.

1. To support formation for living life as a public ecclesial person in the social media and digital age, ***it is required that the vocations director and one additional member of the Vocations Team be “friended” or otherwise invited into or connected with all social media spaces, accounts, etc. that seminarians maintain.*** This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Snapchat, etc.

2. In general, seminarians must engage in social media and electronic/digital communication of any kind in a manner that is safe, responsible, and civil - and *recognize that they may be thought to represent the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese of Lexington at all times, even in their ‘private’ communications.*
 - a. The state of life of a seminarian is such that there is no “off time” where they can act as if, or are perceived as if, they are not a seminarian - and this applies explicitly to online, internet, mobile, or other digital contexts.

 - b. All social media activity should be grounded in charity, the seminarian’s Catholic Christian faith, a respect for the Church and its teachings, self-respect, and the respect and dignity of all who are engaged in such communication.

3. While there are both private and public means of digital/electronic communication, everything posted/shared/etc. should be considered as being offered in a quasi-public forum because it is always possible that such communication can be retrieved and/or made public in one form or another. Nevertheless, the difference between private and public forms of communication

should be taken into account in terms of propriety, especially regarding communication with minors (see below).

4. Engagement with all forms of electronic communication and social media must be consistent with, and not distract from, discernment and formation in terms of manner, forum, and the time invested. Social media lends itself to misinterpretation and is therefore not an appropriate medium for in-depth pastoral care, catechesis, or other forms of ministry - it should never take priority over or seek to replace in-person communication.

5. Social Media/Electronic Communication with Minors

- a. Communicating or interacting with minors over social media is **strongly discouraged** in almost all circumstances.
- b. In all cases, no personally identifiable information of a minor (name, address, photo, etc.) should ever be posted or shared without parental consent.
- c. Communication with minors over social media, email, or other electronic means should never be initiated by a seminarian.
- d. Should a minor request a social media connection or initiate digital contact, communication should be charitable, transparent, and involve the parent(s)/guardian(s) - at a minimum with their awareness and permission.
 1. While a minor may send a non-public message (e.g., direct message, email, etc.), communication with a minor should never be secretive.
 2. Seminarians must either involve/notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) or change the context of the conversation to a

more public forum. For example, consider responding to private messages in person, through a public post, or in an email to the minor his/her parent(s)/guardian(s).

e. If confidentiality is required in social media/electronic communications with minors for a legitimate ministry or pastoral purpose, the vocations director should be directly consulted and/or included as a party to the communication.

6. E-Mail

a. Seminarians are required to have and make use of an “@cdlex.org” email address for **all** diocesan/ministerial/formation-related electronic correspondence. This is a requirement demanded by issues related to stewardship, legality, and protecting vulnerable populations.

b. ***The expectation is that seminarians check their “@cdlex.org” email account every day, and reply to emails sent to that address no later than the end of the next business day.***

c. Seminarians may make use of a seminary-supplied email address, ***but this does not replace daily interaction with the “@cdlex.org” email account.***

d. Personal email addresses/accounts should only be used for absolutely personal correspondence and purposes.

SECTION 8 – VOCATIONS PROGRAMS, EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

1. Seminarians are expected to actively participate in the life of the diocese, nurture authentic community among their brother seminarians, and collaborate with the Office of Vocations in ‘preaching the Good News’ of God’s vocational call in the life all disciples while remaining faithful to the demands and expectations of the seminary to which they have been assigned. Toward

that end, seminarians are expected to attend the following events unless excused by prior arrangement with the vocations director:

- Chrism Mass
- Priesthood Ordination
- Diaconate Ordination
- Diocesan gatherings at St. Meinrad (when assigned there; all others following Configuration III)
- Seminarian Convocation
- Rock the Collar
- Other events communicated in advance by the vocations director

2. Because building relationships with seminarians is a key factor in supporting vocations among the faithful in the diocese, intentional efforts are made to include seminarians in diocesan and parish youth events.

a. Whenever possible, seminarians are expected to be generous when presented with requests to attend parish/diocesan youth retreats, pilgrimages, events, etc. and when invited to host/direct similar events.

b. Likewise, various programs of the Office of Vocations rely on seminarians to initiate and/or maintain supportive contact with discerners, youth groups, CCD programs, Catholic school classrooms, etc.

3. Balancing the demands of seminary formation with a generosity of time and talent in supporting these opportunities and initiatives is expected as formative for balancing the demands and opportunities of the priestly life of ministry and service.

IV. PARTICIPATION IN SEMINARY FORMATION & DISCERNMENT

Seminarians attend different seminaries based on their prior education, age, needs, and ultimately the bishop's discretion. As specified in the *Program of Priestly Formation*, seminary formation for the priesthood incorporates four core areas, or "pillars" - human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. These pillars remain the same regardless of which seminary a seminarian attends. Each "pillar" works together with the others to form an integrated program of preparation for priestly life and structured discernment to support hearing and responding to God's call to priesthood.

Seminary Formation & Discernment is not adequately understood when considered in terms only of the pursuit of the necessary degrees as a student of philosophy or theology. "Formation, as the Church understands it, is not equivalent to a secular sense of schooling or, even less, job training. Formation is first and foremost cooperation with the grace of God." (PPF, 68)

The Bishop of Lexington chooses seminaries for the formation of those discerning priesthood to cooperate as his agents and with his collaboration and the oversight afforded him. Seminarians should regard seminary personnel as agents of the bishop himself in guiding their formation and discernment. Any questions or concerns regarding the seminary formation program or personnel should first, if possible, be addressed with the seminary's formation team and/or Rector by the seminarian. When that is not possible, or if there is concern that the issues raised either will not be addressed by seminary personnel or may cause inappropriate difficulty for the seminarian, he should address those issues with the vocations director and/or the bishop.

Seminary Formation typically includes seven to eight years of formation:

- Propaedeutic Stage: One Year
- Discipleship Stage: Two or Three Years (depending on previous academic work), including the study of philosophy
- Configuration Stage: 3 ½ to 4 Years, including the study of theology
- Vocational Synthesis Stage: 6 months in a parish ministry assignment

SECTION 9 – FRATERNITY

1. Building authentic fraternity is an absolute necessity among seminarians who are being formed to join an intentional brotherhood of men dedicated to service of a particular Church in a particular place (e.g., a diocese) gathered fraternally around their particular bishop.
2. Diocesan fraternity must not wait until one is ordained; seminarians are expected to foster and develop it throughout their period of formal discernment and formation.
3. A seminarian should pray with and for his “diocesan brothers” regularly - at a minimum weekly among those attending the same seminary.
4. Seminarians are also expected to set aside time for common prayer and social interaction *in addition to those required by their seminary community* (e.g., designed night of prayer and fraternity, periodic communal dinners or social excursions, etc.)
5. Seminarians should be mindful and supportive of one another, especially when long distances separate those studying at different seminaries, and should invest themselves in developing fraternity across such distances by intentional use of common time shared in the diocese, telephone communication, social media and electronic communication.

SECTION 10 – COUNSELING

1. The most basic component of all formation is human formation. A seminarian’s formation faculty at the seminary and/or pastoral supervisors in other placements and Spiritual Director assist in all areas of formation. However, there are times

when the more focused care of seeing a counselor or psychologist is not only prudent, but necessary.

2. Either the vocations director, the seminary formation team, or the seminarian himself may request such counseling. When such counseling is to be sought outside the seminary itself, the vocations director is to be consulted prior to the beginning of counseling.

3. Although some incorrectly perceive the need for counseling as a weakness, it should never be misconstrued that such a need discounts someone from discerning a priestly vocation. Rather, counseling is an opportunity to assist the seminarian in an important and sometimes overlooked aspect of human development and/or formation and is always encouraged and supported.

4. In some circumstances when counseling is undertaken at the request of the diocese and/or when the diocese will be providing the funds to engage the counselor, the choice of provider may be a shared discernment between the seminarian and the vocations director and/or bishop. In these circumstances, a common agreement will be reached by the counselor, seminarian, and vocations director regarding what role, if any, diocesan personnel will play in the effort at the outset.

SECTION 11 – ADVANCED STUDIES

1. The opportunity for advanced studies (beyond what is required for ordination) generally presents itself as a nexus between a seminarian's interests, his demonstrated capability, the needs of the diocese, the availability of funding and priestly personnel, and the bishop's discretion.

2. If a seminarian develops such an interest or desire, they should communicate and begin to explore that with the vocations director and relevant seminary personnel.

V. FORMATION DURING SEMINARY BREAKS

Being a seminarian of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington is a full-time commitment, 24 hours per day, 365 days per year - as is living the vocation of priesthood the seminarian is discerning and toward which a seminarian is progressing. While there are scheduled breaks in the seminary academic calendar and/or the diocesan seminarian expectations, ***there are no “breaks” from living the life and satisfying the expectations of a seminarian*** set forth in this Handbook.

SECTION 12 – WEEKEND & SHORT SCHEDULED SEMINARY BREAKS

1. There is generally no need to be absent from seminary an excessive number of weekends - this sometimes raises serious questions or concerns regarding a seminarian’s intentions and discernment.
2. Seminarians are expected to follow the guidelines established by the seminary program to which he is assigned.
3. When situations that merit special considerations arise, the seminarian should contact the vocations director *in advance* for assistance and collaboration.
4. Generally short breaks from the seminary (long weekends, breaks lasting fewer than five days) are to be enjoyed at the discretion of the seminarian consistent with his dedication to full-time discernment and formation toward priestly ministry and service.

SECTION 13 – LONGER, SEASONAL & HOLIDAY BREAKS

1. Seasonal breaks (Christmas, Easter, Summer) or breaks in the seminary calendar longer than ***five (5) days invite discussion and collaboration with the vocations director***, just as such breaks would invite discussion and collaboration with fellow priests and ministry colleagues when serving in full-time ministry.

2. Beginning with Configuration I, seminarians should generally attempt to make arrangements to reside a significant portion of these longer breaks from the seminary program in rectories with pastors/priests of the diocese and - without compromising the intended rejuvenation and relaxation intended in scheduled breaks - participate in the life of the parish hosting them.
 - a. At a minimum, this would include serving Masses, engaging in social/hospitality opportunities, and common prayer with hosting priests.

 - b. This is expected to facilitate formation *and* to serve as a helpful transition period for seminarians and their families leading up to ordination and full-time ministry.

3. Arrangements for these breaks may come in the form of assignments from the Vocations Office, planned time in the seminarian's home parish, or other arrangements at the request of the seminarian.

4. In all cases during these extended breaks, seminarians should undertake opportunities to connect in some fashion with the pastor of their home parish.

5. Visiting and being present to parishes in which seminarians have been previously assigned and/or intentionally exploring opportunities to be present in parishes the seminarian has no experience in are also valuable and encouraged.

6. Seminarians whose families reside outside of the country will be permitted to visit them on breaks at most once every two years.

These trips will take place at the seminarian's own expense and should be communicated to the Vocations director at least six months in advance. The Vocations Office can assist with funding when necessary.

SECTION 14 – SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS

1. Some form of summer assignment is the typical expectation for seminarians at all levels of formation.

a. College seminarians may request the opportunity to secure a summer job and to reside with their families or other place of their choosing in order to earn and save funds to support their college expenses.

b. In these cases, college seminarians excused from summer assignment are, nevertheless, expected to coordinate an agreement with the vocations director concerning their summer plans that includes routine involvement in parish life and other appropriate activities.

2. During the course of each year of formation, the vocations director will discuss the formational needs of each seminarian with the seminarian himself and the seminary faculty in order to plan the most beneficial summer assignment for the seminarian.

a. If there are particular interests and/or requests regarding summer opportunities, it is important to express those as early as possible for consideration.

b. Summer assignments are ultimately at the prerogative of the Bishop of Lexington.

3. Generally, summer assignments are arranged to assure seminarians have the opportunity to be exposed to the different regions of the diocese and develop relationships with several parishes and priests of the diocese.

a. At a minimum, seminarians should anticipate at least one summer assignment in a locale/context within the diocese that is significantly unlike the one in which they were raised and routinely practiced their faith.

b. This is to help prepare them for flexibility and familiarity with the varied realities of ministry within our mission diocese.

4. Summer assignments generally begin near the first week of June and continue until 7-10 days before the scheduled return to seminary.

a. Each year the vocations director will confirm the specific summer schedule with seminarians in detail.

b. Beyond these short breaks before and after the summer assignment, additional time off must be cleared by the assigned pastor or supervisor.

c. Requests for modification of the typical summer assignment parameters must be made in advance.

5. The vocations director will initially discuss the goals and expectations for the summer assignment with the seminarian and their assigned supervisor.

a. The seminarian and assigned supervisor then collaborate together to arrive at a concrete agreement expressing the parameters for a successful placement.

b. The vocations director is available to facilitate this process when necessary.

c. In all cases, the goals and objectives, concrete expectations, and a plan for a successful placement, are documented in a format provided by the Vocations Office and/or respective seminary early in the assignment.

d. Likewise, seminarians are evaluated by placement supervisors, colleagues, and those who are recipients of his ministry as part of concluding the assignment.

e. The vocations director reviews these evaluations directly with the seminarian so he may bring them into the subsequent year(s) of formation.

f. It is the seminarian's responsibility to seek clarity from the vocations director at any point in the assignment if any confusion or lack of direction is perceived concerning goals and objectives, progress, next steps, etc.

6. Generally, the working expectations of a Parochial Vicar guide the organization of summer placements in a parish in terms of time off, way of life, expectations for investment in parish life and pastoral/ministerial activity, etc.

7. Normally, the Vocations Office will have made arrangements with the parish or ministry site for the seminarian's room and board. If there are additional expenses that are to be covered by the diocese or the Office of Vocations (e.g., not to be covered by the seminarian or the assigned parish/ministry site) these will be individually negotiated *as proactively as possible*.

8. In general, a seminarian can expect their portfolio of summer assignments to follow this general plan for the summer following the years of formation listed below:

- Propaedeutic Year- Diocesan Immersion/Archive Project
- College I - Beiting Mission Center
- College II - Beiting Mission Center/Parish
- College III/Discipleship I - Parish/Beiting Mission Center/Area of Interest
- College IV/Discipleship II - “Out of your comfort zone” Parish
- Configuration I - Spanish Language Immersion
- Configuration II - Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) *within the diocese*
- Configuration III - Parish Assignment
- Vocational Synthesis- First Assignment as Priest

SECTION 15 – PASTORAL PLACEMENTS

1. When seminarians are assigned away from the seminary for extended periods of time, as for example is the case with a pastoral year, aspirancy, or other pastoral placements - the specifics of the assignment (dates, location, pastoral supervisor, etc.) are to be worked out with the vocations director well in advance and confirmed by the bishop. Seminarians can request a pastoral year from the bishop and vocations director at any time.

2. The vocations director will initially discuss the goals and expectations for the pastoral placement with the seminarian and the assigned pastor or supervisor.
 - a. The seminarian and assigned pastor or supervisor then collaborate together to arrive at a concrete agreement expressing the parameters for a successful placement.

- b. The vocations director is available to facilitate this process when necessary.
- c. In all cases, the goals and objectives, concrete expectations, and a plan for a successful placement, are documented in a format provided by the Vocations Office and/or respective seminary early in the assignment.
- d. Likewise, seminarians are evaluated by placement supervisors, colleagues, and those who are recipients of his ministry as part of concluding the assignment.
- e. The vocations director reviews these evaluations directly with the seminarian so he may bring them into the subsequent year(s) of formation.
- f. It is the seminarian's responsibility to seek clarity from the vocations director at any point in the pastoral year or pastoral placement if any confusion or lack of direction is perceived concerning goals and objectives, progress, next steps, etc.

3. Generally, the working expectations of a Parochial Vicar guide the organization of a pastoral year or pastoral placement in terms of time off, way of life, expectations for investment in parish life and pastoral/ministerial activity, etc.

SECTION 16 – PERSONAL VACATIONS & TRAVEL

1. Seminarians are welcome to plan personal travel and vacation around the other expectations and commitments expressed in this handbook ***at their own expense***, keeping in mind that there are no vacations from the moral/ethical obligations of a Catholic man pursuing priesthood nor are there vacations from the reality of being a 'public person' in the Church.

2. All travel outside the continental United States should be preceded by consultation with the vocations director.

3. Any travel/vacation that would result in a seminarian being away from his seminary and/or pastoral placement for longer than two weeks should also be preceded by consultation with the vocations director, Formation Staff, and pastor.

VI. SEMINARIAN EVALUATION & ADVANCEMENT

A seminarian's continuation in discernment and formation is contingent upon positive Seminary and Diocesan evaluations (described below). This includes, but is not limited to: academic progress, earnestness in spiritual growth, general attitude and conduct, willing and honest participation in priestly formation, and abilities that may impact a seminarian's potential ability to function as a priest.

Any issues that arise are handled with the best interests of both the seminarian and the diocese in mind - when those best interests are in conflict, the favor is always given to the ministry and stability of the Church. In all cases, however, the vocations director works to assure all involved are seeking to resolve any issues or address any concerns in a positive manner that is as positive for the seminarian as possible while favoring the ministry and stability of the Church.

SECTION 17 – ANNUAL EVALUATIONS

When the diocese assigns seminarians to a particular seminary, it is because the bishop and vocations director have confidence in the program of priestly formation and discernment being offered by that seminary and respect the opinion and expertise of the seminary faculty. Therefore, the evaluations and

recommendations provided by the seminary are relied upon heavily in making routine/annual and/or unplanned/incidental evaluations regarding advancement to the next stage of formation, reception of permanent ministries, candidacy for Holy Orders, and acceptance into the Order of Deacon and the Order of Presbyter.

1. At least once each year of formation (7-8 years, depending on the formation plan for each man established according to the guidance documents and this Handbook) a team of formators at each seminary coordinates a review process that is based on:

- the seminarian's own self-assessment against the norms of the documents mentioned above and the seminary's own norms,
- the formators' experiences of the seminarian having lived, prayed, and worked with him nearly every day,
- feedback from the faculty who teach them in classrooms, though the feedback sought is holistic in nature and based on their familiarity with the norms for priestly formation - and not based solely on classroom performance, and
- at least once during their years of formation, feedback from all the other seminarians living with them over the course of several years in the seminary.

2. Each year, that process results in a comprehensive report from the seminary which includes the seminarian's self-assessment and other feedback obtained by the seminary and a formal recommendation from the seminary regarding whether the man should proceed in formation.

3. That recommendation and the information provided is passed to the diocese for review by the vocations director together with his reflections based also on his experiences with the seminarian and those of others with whom the seminarian has interacted and collaborated with in parish and Diocesan assignments (and feedback from priests and others with whom he has worked).

4. Based on that review and reflection, the vocations director forms a recommendation for the bishop regarding the seminarian's continuation in formation and/or advancement to Holy Orders.
5. That recommendation, together with all the information assembled and reviewed is then shared with the bishop, who ultimately makes a determination each year based on the assembled information and his own experiences with the seminarian, as to whether the man will continue in formation and/or advance to Holy Orders.
6. The process unfolds with heightened scrutiny, within the seminary and in the diocese, in the final years of formation associated with the decision regarding reception of Holy Orders, diaconate and priesthood.
7. The primary purpose of all seminarian evaluation - formal/informal, routine/annual, and/or unplanned/incidental - is to assure collaboration between the seminarian, seminary, vocations director and bishop in being aware of each seminarian's growth, progress, and challenges in service of the seminarian's vocational discernment and formation.
8. Toward that end, each year the vocations director will discuss the seminary evaluation(s) received with each seminarian and assist in whatever manner possible in helping him attain his full potential.
9. Should a conflict arise between a seminarian and the seminary faculty regarding an evaluation, the seminarian should make every effort to resolve this conflict at the local level by speaking with the Rector and seminary formation faculty and/or seeking counsel from his Spiritual Director. However, should the conflict be unable to be resolved in this manner, the seminarian may then ask the

vocations director to become involved in the process in order to assure, from the diocesan point of view, that the seminarian has received a fair voice and hearing.

SECTION 18 – DIOCESAN EVALUATIONS & VISITATION

1. Each year both the vocations director (during the fall semester) and the bishop (during the spring semester) visit the seminaries to meet with the formation faculty and collaborate on the progress of each seminarian.
2. Generally, the bishop/vocations director meets individually with each seminarian as part of the seminary visit to reflect what is reported by the seminary formation faculty, answer any questions and address any concerns raised by the seminarian.

SECTION 19 – ADVANCEMENT TO ORDERS

As a Seminarian progresses through discernment and formation, and as the Seminarian and the diocese become progressively more certain of his vocational calling and suitability for ordained ministry, greater responsibility and greater expectation of service in and through the Church is formally granted through permanent installation in ecclesial ministries (Lector and Acolyte), public recognition as a Candidate for Holy Orders, and ordination as a Deacon and Priest.

1. Seminarians petitioning to be granted these greater areas of responsibility and service to the Church must do so according to the norms of the seminary to which they are assigned unless otherwise invited or requested by the bishop.
2. In all cases, Seminarians are expected to submit such petitions in accord with the norms of the Code of Canon Law, the *Program of Priestly Formation*, and the requirements of the seminary they are attending.

3. Generally the bishop accepts the various petitions from Seminarians only upon favorable recommendations from the Seminary Rector and vocations director, and grants his permission for the reception of these ministries based on his own discernment.

4. Ultimately, all progress toward Holy Orders, including those outlined below, are granted definitively only by the Bishop of Lexington.

5. Admission to Candidacy

a. Aspirants to the diaconate or the presbyterate (e.g., Holy Orders) must first be publicly acknowledged as a Candidate for Holy Orders according to the norms outlined in the Code of Canon Law (1016 & 1019) and in the Liturgical Rite of Admission.

b. In petitioning to be admitted to Candidacy, the Seminarian proclaims within the community of the Church in the liturgical assembly that his discernment has progressed to the point that he wishes to publicly acknowledge his firm faith and conviction that he is being called to ministry by God and the Church, and is himself ready and committed to complete his formation and petition for Holy Orders.

c. The Church, through the action of the bishop in granting admission to Candidacy, likewise makes a public acknowledgement that - barring anything unforeseen to the contrary - the Church concurs that the one admitted to Candidacy appears genuinely called and is ready and capable of completing formation toward possible admission to Holy Orders.

c. Nevertheless, an admission to Candidacy is not a guarantee that a seminarian's eventual petition for Holy Orders will be accepted by the bishop.

e. Generally, seminarians who are making satisfactory progress in their discernment and formation are invited by their assigned seminary to submit a petition to the bishop for admission to Candidacy in Configuration I.

f. Admission to Candidacy is generally celebrated within the seminary community.

6. Ministry of Lector

a. Lector is one of the ministries formerly referred to as “minor orders” that marks a Seminarian’s progress toward Holy Orders by investing him in a permanent way with a responsibility to serve as a minister of Sacred Scripture within the worshipping community.

b. Installed Lectors are appointed to read the Word of God in the liturgical assembly.

c. Accordingly, he reads the lesson from Sacred Scripture, except from the Gospel, in the Mass and in other sacred celebrations; recites the psalms between the readings in the absence of a psalmist; presents the intentions for the general intercessions when the deacon or cantor is absent; and may also direct the congregation in song. If necessary, he also assumes the responsibility of instructing any of the faithful called upon to read Sacred Scripture in liturgical celebrations.

d. Generally, seminarians who are making satisfactory progress in their discernment and formation are invited by their assigned seminary to submit a petition to the bishop for installation as a Lector in the Configuration I.

e. Installation to the ministry of Lector is generally celebrated within the seminary community.

7. Ministry of Acolyte

a. Acolyte is a ministry to which a man is specially appointed by the Church to assist the deacon and priest in their responsibilities as ministers of the Eucharist.

b. His duty is to attend to the service of the altar and to assist as needed in the celebration of the Mass and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass.

c. Installed Acolytes are also entrusted with serving the faithful as a permanently installed and universally commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion both at celebrations of the Mass and in bringing the Eucharist to the sick, homebound, imprisoned, and those otherwise impeded from attending the Eucharistic celebrations. He may also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who by appointment assist the priest or deacon in the liturgical assembly.

d. Generally, seminarians who are making satisfactory progress in their discernment and formation are invited by their assigned seminary to submit a petition to the bishop for installation as an Acolyte in the Configuration II.

e. Installation to the ministry of Acolyte is generally celebrated within the seminary community.

8. Holy Orders: Diaconate & Priesthood

- a. Following the successful completion of the necessary spiritual preparation, academic studies and pastoral formation requirements, a seminarian may petition the bishop in writing for ordination to the diaconate and intended subsequent petition for ordination to the priesthood according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law and the *Program of Priestly Formation*.
- b. Each of these petitions must be sent by the seminarian's Rector to the bishop along with the Rector's and seminary formation team's determination regarding endorsement for reception of Holy Orders.
- c. Seminarians must remember that they are never guaranteed ordination merely because they have completed their seminary formation.
- d. Only after the bishop has issued a formal Call to Orders (in writing) may seminarians announce or otherwise communicate the intention of the bishop to ordain him; no invitations may be distributed until the Call to Orders has been issued by the bishop. Seminarians must use the invitations printed by the diocese.
- e. Generally, the petition for ordination to the diaconate is considered at the beginning of Configuration IV and the petition for ordination to the priesthood is considered at the end of the Vocational Synthesis.
- f. Ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood are generally celebrated by the bishop himself in our diocesan Cathedral. Under normal circumstances, diaconate ordinations will take place in late-November and priesthood ordinations will take place in May/June.

9. Vocational Synthesis

The Vocational Synthesis Stage begins after the seminarian completes Configuration IV and is ordained as a deacon. This phase focuses on transitioning and integrating into ordained life, building on the formation received from Baptism through Holy Orders.

Having already demonstrated pastoral competencies during seminary, the deacon is expected to adjust to ministry life in preparation for priestly ordination and its full responsibilities. Before starting this stage, which lasts a minimum of six months, the seminary must resolve any questions about the deacon's suitability for ordination.

During this period, the deacon resides outside the seminary, within his diocese, and his primary mentor is the pastor of his assigned parish. This arrangement allows him to experience clerical ministry in an environment of openness and dialogue, with direct accompaniment to guide him in his new role as an official Church representative and public figure. This guidance integrates the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation he has received.

At the end of the Vocational Synthesis Stage, the bishop, in consultation with the pastor and vocations director, evaluates the deacon's readiness for priestly ordination.

VII. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS & BENEFITS

The Catholic Diocese of Lexington seeks to provide fair financial support for men who are engaged in full-time formation and discernment in such a way that their necessities are provided for and finances do not form an undue barrier or obstacle. This financial support is support of the investment in time and effort the

seminarian offers in the missionary and apostolic activity of discerning and being formed for an ecclesial vocation.

A guiding principle is that expenses related to those phases or aspects of discernment, formation, and education whose benefit is primarily or exclusively future ministry in the Church are generally covered on behalf of the seminarian by the diocese, whereas expenses related to those phases or aspects of discernment, formation, and education that are only partially related to future ministry in the Church are generally shared between the seminarian (and/or his family and other resources) and the diocese.

SECTION 20 – COLLEGE SEMINARY

1. A bachelor's degree is required to enter the final stages of seminary formation (e.g., "Major Seminary") and attain the Master of Divinity (MDiv) required for ordination.
 - a. Nevertheless, the bachelor's degree in any discipline is a general educational preparation in service of the pursuit of any vocational or career path.
 - b. Thus, college seminary is a joint financial enterprise shared between the diocese and the seminarian and his family and other resources.
2. The diocese directly pays the college seminary of its choosing for those expenses related to room & board, books, and miscellaneous fees on behalf of the college seminarian.
3. In addition, college seminarians receive the standard monthly seminarian stipend to help the seminarian handle his incidental expenses.

a. College seminarians receiving summer assignments receive the higher of the standard monthly seminarian stipend provided by the diocese or other stipend/compensation typically associated with their particular assignment paid by the diocese or other organization - but not both.

b. College seminarians approved for summers without diocesan assignment generally do not receive the standard stipend for those months between the end of one academic year and the start of next.

4. Generally, college seminarians are required to remain on their parents' health, dental and vision insurance at the family's expense for as long as possible; situations where this would pose a financial burden or where this is an impossibility should be discussed with the vocations director for resolution as early as possible.

5. Tuition is a shared expense between the college seminarian and the diocese.

a. Seminarians are expected to complete the standardized application for financial aid (FAFSA) which determines an expected contribution to college education costs on the part of the seminarian and his family, and also qualifies the seminarian for grant, scholarship, work-study, and student loan programs.

b. Working with the financial aid office of the seminary or seminary affiliated university, ***the seminarian is expected to apply for and make use of all grant, scholarship and/or work-study programs available to offset their tuition expenses.***

c. Whatever remains of the seminarian's annual tuition expense beyond what is awarded through such programs are expected to be met either

by the seminarian or his family, by federal, state or other conventional student loans, or in extreme circumstances (where federal, state or other conventional student loans are demonstrably unavailable) by loans the diocese may offer to the seminarian for the purposes of paying tuition based on the terms/conditions and interest rates agreed to in writing and similar to prevailing student loan programs.

6. Any financial arrangements that deviate from the policies contained in this Handbook must be explored ahead of time, documented in writing, and signed by the vocations director, bishop, and the seminarian or seminarian's parents.

SECTION 21 – MAJOR SEMINARY

1. The diocese directly pays the major seminary of its choosing all expenses for tuition, room & board, books, and miscellaneous fees (billed by the seminarian or approved by the vocations director) on behalf of the major seminarian.

2. In addition, major seminarians receive the standard monthly seminarian stipend to help the seminarian handle his own incidental expenses.

3. In addition, the diocese provides health, dental, and vision insurance ***after*** the seminarian no longer qualifies to remain on their parents' insurance program at the family's expense. The seminarian should contact the administrative coordinator for vocations to make sure this is accomplished.

4. Seminarians who enter major seminary with student loan debt from expenses associated with earning the bachelor's degree which qualifies them to begin graduate theology studies (even when such loans/expenses were not incurred in college seminary) may place those loans in "deferment" status while they are in full-time discernment and formation. At the seminarian's discretion, they may either defer interest (which is typically capitalized into the loan's principal) or they

may pay the accruing interest from their stipend or other funds or support available to them.

5. Any financial arrangements that deviate from the above policies must be explored ahead of time, documented in writing, and signed by the vocations director, bishop and the seminarian.

SECTION 22 – SUPPORT DURING SUMMER ASSIGNMENT & PASTORAL YEAR

1. Generally, aspirants and seminarians completing summer assignments or pastoral year placements receive financial support according to the policies outlined under “Major Seminary” above.

2. Parishes hosting seminarians for aspirancy, summer assignment, and pastoral year placements are expected to provide the seminarian an adequate living space and an adequate, simple food supply at the rectory. However, if the pastor and parish find this too financially burdensome, they can request financial assistance from the vocations office for food expenses.

3. Expenses beyond that (including eating out at the seminarian’s choice, entertainment, travel, etc.) are expected to be provided by the seminarian himself from his stipend and/or other sources of income or support available to him.

4. Any financial arrangements that deviate from the above policies must be explored ahead of time, documented in writing, and signed by the vocations director, bishop, the pastor, and the seminarian.

SECTION 23 – MILEAGE & OTHER EXPENSES

1. The Vocations Office will reimburse seminarians and aspirants directly for mileage and other incidental expenses directly related to and required by their

legitimate ministry and/or formation assignments upon submission of necessary documentation according to the standard diocesan policies for reimbursables.

2. Seminarians provided the benefit of driving a diocesan vehicle may be reimbursed at an adjusted rate designed to reimburse fuel costs only.
3. Examples of expenses that generally qualify for reimbursement include: mileage to and from ministry sites or mileage explicitly required to satisfy assignment responsibilities (e.g., to/from hospital or parishioners' home for visits, etc.), purchases made at the direction of the diocesan ministry supervisor, etc.
4. Examples of expenses that generally do not qualify for reimbursement include: mileage to/from seminary (unless the trip is required by the vocations director for a purpose other than travel associated with normal school year start, end, and vacations), mileage for leisure, clothing, vehicle purchase/lease/rental/etc., personal vehicle expenses, car insurance or repairs, purchase of personal items (hygiene, school supplies, computer hardware/software), entertainment, personal telephone and/or cell phone purchase or service, meals taken away from the seminary or place of pastoral assignment/rectory unless necessary as part of the primary assignment.
5. In all cases, clarification should be sought *prior* to the travel or expense if not qualifying for reimbursement would be a deciding factor in incurring the expense.

SECTION 24 – REQUIRED RETREAT/ETC. FEES & EXPENSES

1. Expenses related to other **required** formation experiences, such as retreats, workshops, seminary-sponsored required pilgrimages, etc., that are **charged by the assigned seminary** or directly initiated by the Office of Vocations will be covered by the diocese when these required items have been approved by the vocations director in advance.

2. Seminarians have the responsibility to notify the vocations director as soon as they are made aware of such pending expenses so that proper arrangements can be made. Failure of the Seminarian to do so may result in their inability to participate in the program and/or the seminarian being held personally responsible for such expenses.

SECTION 25 – EXTRAORDINARY EXPENSES & PERSONAL DEBT

1. Should a Seminarian encounter extraordinary expenses that he is unable to meet from the provided stipend and/or other sources of income and support available to him, he should discuss the situation as early as possible with the vocations director to see what assistance, if any, may be provided by the diocese.

a. Assistance from the diocese will depend upon the specific circumstances and the availability of diocesan funds.

b. Generally, extraordinary expenses that are formational or are absolutely necessary in order for a Seminarian to continue in formation will receive priority consideration. Examples include professional counseling or significant medical expenses beyond what the Seminarian can support from their stipend and/or other sources of income and support available to them.

c. Whatever assistance the diocese is able to provide in these circumstances is generally, but not always, given to the Seminarian (e.g., there is no expectation or binding obligation to repay the diocese).

2. Assistance with extraordinary expenses that are not formational necessities may be considered, but is much less frequently available.

a. Examples include significant or unexpected vehicle repair expenses, computer purchase/repair, etc.

b. Whatever assistance the diocese is able to provide in such circumstances is generally structured as a loan to the Seminarian, with a signed Promissory Note at a fair and reasonable rate of interest, the repayment of which usually begins immediately and is expected to be funded from the Seminarian's stipend and/or other sources of income and support available to him.

3. Subject to the availability of diocesan funds, arrangements may be made for applicants to the seminary formation program with personal debt that cannot be liquidated, and which would otherwise prevent entering the full-time discernment and formation program. Similarly, whatever assistance the diocese is able to provide in such circumstances is generally structured as a loan to the Seminarian, with a signed Promissory Note at a fair and reasonable rate of interest, the repayment of which usually begins immediately and is expected to be funded from the Seminarian's stipend and/or other sources of income and support available to him.

SECTION 26 – FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

1. As men being formed to exercise pastoral responsibility and stewardship for Catholic communities of faith and ministries, seminarians are expected to cultivate and practice financial stewardship and responsibility throughout their time in full-time formal discernment and formation. This includes:

- managing the modest stipend responsibly,
- making sure that they ensure proper maintenance of diocesan vehicles under their care.
- budgeting funds to meet expenses not covered by the diocese,
- limiting purchases and spending to levels consistent with living the life of Gospel simplicity consistent with the priestly calling, and being proactive

and appropriately transparent in communication regarding financial arrangements or difficulties with the vocations director when necessary.

2. Consistent financial mismanagement or irresponsibility, as evidenced for example by frequent requests for non-standard financial assistance, are indications of the need for additional formation assistance and guidance in this area.

3. When advisable, the vocations director and/or seminary personnel will refer aspirants or seminarians to resources to enhance financial stewardship and responsibility - such referrals are to be considered expectations.

SECTION 27 – BENEFACTOR GIFTS

Seminarians often benefit from the direct financial support given by various individuals or groups. The Vocations Office attempts to facilitate fairness in such giving by keeping track of such gifts and facilitating the giving when requested.

1. When a seminarian receives a financial gift from a parish, priest, Knights of Columbus, Serra Club, or other diocesan or Church related group/individual, he is to report in writing (an email is sufficient) to the vocations director the following information within two weeks of receiving the gift: the name of the benefactor/group, the amount of the gift, and verification that a note/letter of gratitude has been sent to the benefactor/group.

(Note: The above does not apply to non-financial gifts or financial gifts from family, nor does it apply to ordination gifts, or other financial gifts less than \$100.)

2. Seminarians are **strictly prohibited from soliciting** financial gifts for any purpose from parishes, pastors, parishioners, Knights of Columbus Councils, seminaries, or other Church/seminary related groups or personnel without the prior approval of the vocations director.

SECTION 28 – TRANSITION TO FULL-TIME ORDAINED MINISTRY

The diocese recognizes that transition from four to eight years of full-time discernment and formation outside the typical ‘working world’ can make establishing credit a challenge, and may compromise a seminarian’s ability to benefit from significant savings from his own responsible stewardship. Initial placements typically provide for all the necessities to financially establish/re-establish the newly ordained man - room, board, etc.

1. Student Loan Debt

a. Assistance with Student Loan debt incurred either in College Seminary, or incurred in the seminarian’s undergraduate studies prior to entry into the seminarian program, is based on the principle outlined above: expenses related to those phases or aspects of discernment, formation, and education that are only partially related to future ministry in the Church (e.g., the Undergraduate degree which qualifies the seminarian to begin Major Seminary) are generally shared between the seminarian (and/or his family and other resources) and the diocese.

b. Upon ordination, the diocese agrees to retire the seminarian’s student loan debt (federal or diocesan) demonstrably incurred exclusively in the pursuit of the undergraduate degree at a rate of 20% per year for the first five years of active priestly ministry such that after that time the entire debt has been retired.

1. The diocese will need access to the payment booklet and/or access to the online student loan account to arrange this benefit.

2. Seminarians who step out of formation before ordination and/or cease to be engaged in active priestly ministry for the diocese

within the first five years keep the responsibility of student loan (federal or diocesan) payback according to the terms or conditions of their loan(s).

2. Reliable Transportation

- a. The diocese recognizes that reliable transportation is a necessary resource in priestly ministry and that often newly ordained priests do not have access to reliable transportation, financial resources, or sound credit required to purchase such a vehicle.
- b. To help address these concerns, the diocese will assist newly ordained priests purchase a reliable vehicle by co-signing a loan with a mutually agreeable financial institution (up to \$15,000 with a loan term not to exceed 60 months). The specifics of the transaction (lender, vehicle, etc.) will require coordination and approval of the vocations director and Diocesan Finance Officer.

SECTION 29 – TAX INFORMATION

1. When one receives certain payments or disbursements from the diocese and/or when certain expenses are paid on behalf of a seminarian by the diocese, federal, state, and/or local law may require the seminarian to report those amounts as income for taxation purposes. This may include:

- stipends,
- room and board,
- tuition,
- health,
- dental & vision insurance, and
- other benefits paid to or for the Seminarian.

2. Seminarians are personally responsible for preparing the necessary annual federal, state, and local tax returns that may be required by law, and for meeting any necessary tax liability from their stipend and/or other sources of income or support available to them.

3. For further information, planning, and tax preparation assistance, Seminarians are directed to consult a tax professional of their choosing.

SECTION 30 – LEAVE OF ABSENCE, RESIGNATION & DISMISSAL

The goal of the Seminarian Program is to inform the seminarian's and the diocese's discernment regarding God's call to priesthood and the seminarian's suitability in responding to that call for service in the Catholic Diocese of Lexington. A man progresses through the stages of seminary formation accordingly. In some cases, men proceed directly through those stages in a linear and uninterrupted fashion. In other cases, whether as a result of the seminarian's discernment, the recommendation of the seminary or the discernment of the diocese, a leave of absence, resignation, or dismissal from the Seminarian Program occurs.

1. Leave of Absence

a. At times, a seminarian finds it advisable or necessary to request a temporary "leave of absence" from the Seminarian Program in order to arrive more judiciously at a true discernment of his calling.

1. Should such a need surface, the seminarian will be assisted in any way possible by the diocese.
2. However, in the case of a Leave of Absence, the seminarian is responsible for his own activity (employment, ministry, etc.)

and financial arrangements (income, housing, food, health, dental & vision insurance, transportation, etc.) and support.

b. A Leave of Absence will normally be granted for a period of one year and will be reviewed at the end of that year.

1. Should additional time be needed, a limited extension may be granted, but ordinarily for no more than two years.

2. If, after that time, the seminarian still has not reached a decision about continuing in the Seminarian Program, he must resign from the Seminarian Program.

3. If he chooses to re-apply to the Seminarian Program at a later date, he may do so as described above.

c. Requests for a Leave of Absence should be made to the vocations director, and the specific terms of such a leave worked out, as far in advance of desiring to take the leave as possible.

d. Approval of a requested Leave of Absence must be confirmed by the bishop.

e. Seminarians on an approved Leave of Absence are governed by the provisions of this Handbook and are still formally affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Lexington as a seminarian. Their conduct should at all times remain consistent with their status as a Seminarian and as described in this Handbook.

f. A Leave of Absence differs from a Pastoral Year primarily in that the placement/assignment of a Seminarian taking a Pastoral Year is provided by

the vocations director/bishop, and the diocese continues financial support as outlined elsewhere in this Handbook.

g. A Leave of Absence differs from a Resignation or Dismissal primarily in that Resignations or Dismissals result in the complete termination of any official relationship with the Catholic Diocese of Lexington as a Seminarian.

2. Resignation & Dismissal

a. A seminarian may choose to discontinue his seminary formation/discernment at his own initiative (resignation), or the bishop may choose to discontinue a seminarian's formation/discernment on behalf of the diocese (dismissal).

1. If a seminarian resigns, he is asked to forward a letter to the bishop (with a copy to the vocations director) stating his desire to leave and briefly describing the circumstances and reasons for his departure.
2. If the bishop determines to discontinue a seminarian's formation/discernment on behalf of the diocese, he will forward a letter to the seminarian (with a copy to the vocations director) expressing the reasons for the dismissal.

b. Both resignation and dismissal result in the formal departure from the seminarian discernment and formation program of the diocese outlined in this Handbook.

VIII. EXPLICITLY INCORPORATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The following policies and procedures of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, and/or norms governing seminarian discernment and formation, are included in this

Handbook by reference. Seminarians are responsible for having reviewed and abiding by each, and any indication by the seminarian of having reviewed this handbook is understood as an indication of having reviewed and agreed to abide by these as well.

- **Program of Priestly Formation (USCCB) 6th Edition**
- **Catholic Diocese of Lexington Code of Pastoral Conduct**
- **Catholic Diocese of Lexington Policies and Procedures for Creating a Safe Environment for Minors and Vulnerable Adults**
- **Catholic Diocese of Lexington Employee Handbook**

Acknowledgement & Commitment

*Upon adoption of this Handbook or formal acceptance as a Seminarian of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington **and at least annually thereafter**, Seminarians are expected to review the most current version of the Handbook, then print and sign this statement of Acknowledgement & Commitment and forward it to the vocations director to be maintained in each Seminarian's file.*

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the current Seminarian Handbook for the Catholic Diocese of Lexington or have been provided with electronic access to it. Furthermore, I attest that I have read and understood its contents, and/or have

addressed any questions or desired clarification in writing to the vocations director.

I hereby agree to abide by the policies, expectations, guidelines, and procedures set forth in the Handbook throughout my time as a Seminarian, including those policies, procedures and norms incorporated by reference therein.

I understand that these commitments apply at all times and locations, and are not waived during seminary breaks, vacations, etc. or while “off duty.”

I understand that violation of any of these expectations may result in disciplinary action, which may include suspension or dismissal from the Seminarian Formation Program.

Signature

Date

Printed Name of Seminarian