

## PASTORES DABO VOBIS

### PASTORAL EXHORTATION OF JOHN PAUL II

#### INTRODUCTION

1. "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15).

In these words from the prophet Jeremiah, **God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them:** "I will set shepherds over them [my sheep] who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed (*Jer.* 23.4).

**Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the very heart of her existence and her mission in history, an obedience in response to the command of Christ:** "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (*Mt.* 28:19) and "Do this in remembrance of me" (*Lk.* 22:19; cf. *1 Cor.* 11.24), i.e., an obedience to the command to announce the Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world.

**2. This gift of God does not cancel human freedom; instead it gives rise to freedom, develops freedom, and demands freedom.**

It can be said that through her work of forming candidates to the priesthood and priests themselves, the Church throughout her history has continued to live this passage of the Gospel in various ways and with varying intensity. Today, however, the Church feels called to relive with a renewed commitment all that the Master did with his apostles -- urged on as she is by the deep and rapid transformations in the societies and culture of our age; by the multiplicity and diversity of contexts in which she announces the Gospel and witnesses to it; by the promising number of priestly vocations being seen in some dioceses around the world; by the urgency of a new look at the contents and methods of priestly formation; by the concern of bishops and their communities about a persisting scarcity of clergy; and by the absolute necessity that the "new evangelization" have priests as its initial "new evangelizers."

#### CHAPTER I

##### CHOSEN FROM AMONG MEN

##### **The Challenges Facing Priestly Formation at the Conclusion of the Second Millennium**

##### *The Priest in His Time*

**5. God always calls his priests from specific human and ecclesial contexts, which inevitably influence them; and to these same contexts the priest is sent for the service of Christ's Gospel.**

Certainly "there is an essential aspect of the priest that does not change: the priest of tomorrow, no less than the priest of today, must resemble Christ. It is equally certain that the life and ministry of the priest must also "adapt to every era and circumstance of life.... For our part we must therefore seek to be as open as possible to light from on high from the Holy Spirit, in order to discover the tendencies of contemporary society, recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations."(10)

### *In the Church as Mystery, Communion and Mission*

**12. The apostolic exhortation *Christi fideles Laici*, summarizing the Council's teaching, presents the Church as mystery, communion and mission:** "She is mystery because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:5) and called to relive the very communion of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history [mission]."(22)

**It is within the Church's mystery, as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension, that every Christian identity is revealed, and likewise the specific identity of the priest and his ministry.** Indeed, the priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the sacrament of orders, is sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured in a special way as head and shepherd of his people, in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world.(23)

**In this way the fundamentally "relational" dimension of priestly identity can be understood.** Through the priesthood which arises from the depths of the ineffable mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's gift of unity, the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and with other priests(24) in order to serve the People of God who are the Church and to draw all mankind to Christ in accordance with the Lord's prayer: "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:11, 21).

Consequently, the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships which arise from the Blessed Trinity and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as a sign and instrument of Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity.(25) In this context the **ecclesiology of communion becomes decisive for understanding the identity of the priest, his essential dignity, and his vocation and mission among the People of God and in the world.** The priest finds the full truth of his identity in being a derivation, a specific participation in and continuation of Christ himself, the one high priest of the new and eternal covenant. **The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest.** The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute "newness" in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared

by all Christians and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood.

### ***The Fundamental Relationship With Christ the Head and Shepherd***

**13.** Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant.(26) He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, death and resurrection.

**The new priestly people which is the Church not only has its authentic image in Christ, but also receives from him a real ontological share in his one eternal priesthood, to which she must conform every aspect of her life.**

**14. For the sake of this universal priesthood of the new covenant Jesus gathered disciples during his earthly mission (cf. Lk. 10:1-12), and with a specific and authoritative mandate he called and appointed the Twelve "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:14-15).**

The sign and presupposition of the authenticity and fruitfulness of this mission is the apostles' unity with Jesus and, in him, with one another and with the Father -- as the priestly prayer of our Lord, which sums up his mission, bears witness (cf. Jn. 17:20-23).

**15.** In their turn, the apostles, appointed by the Lord, progressively carried out their mission by calling -- in various but complementary ways -- other men as bishops, as priests and as deacons in order to fulfill the command of the risen Jesus who sent them forth to all people in every age.

In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ -- the head and shepherd -- authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation -- particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. **In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd. (27)**

This is the ordinary and proper way in which ordained ministers share in the one priesthood of Christ. By the sacramental anointing of holy orders, the Holy Spirit configures them in a new and special way to Jesus Christ the head and shepherd; he forms and strengthens them with his pastoral charity; and he gives them an authoritative role in the Church as servants of the proclamation of the Gospel to every people and of the fullness of Christian life of all the baptized.

### ***Serving the Church and the World***

**16.** Consequently, the ordained priesthood ought not to be thought of as existing prior to the Church, because it is totally at the service of the Church. Nor should it be considered

as posterior to the ecclesial community, as if the Church could be imagined as already established without this priesthood.

**Thus, by his very nature and sacramental mission, the priest appears in the structure of the Church as a sign of the absolute priority and gratuitousness of the grace given to the Church by the risen Christ.** Through the ministerial priesthood the Church becomes aware in faith that her being comes not from herself but from the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

**17. The ministry of priests is above all communion and a responsible and necessary cooperation with the bishop's ministry, in concern for the universal Church and for the individual particular churches, for whose service they form with the bishop a single presbyterate.**

Each priest, whether diocesan or religious, is united to the other members of this presbyterate on the basis of the sacrament of holy orders and by particular bonds of apostolic charity, ministry and fraternity. All priests in fact, whether diocesan or religious, share in the one priesthood of Christ the head and shepherd; "they work for the same cause, namely, the building up of the body of Christ, which demands a variety of functions and new adaptations, especially at the present time,"(32) and is enriched down the centuries by ever new charisms.

Finally, **because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity.** They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church's mission.(33) The ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or "royal" priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree,(34) are ordered one to the other -- for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received.(35)

**18. Furthermore, precisely because within the Church's life the priest is a man of communion, in his relations with all people he must be a man of mission and dialogue.**

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME The Spiritual Life of the Priest

*A "Specific" Vocation to Holiness*

**19. Indeed, the Spirit is the principle of the "consecration" and "mission" of the Messiah:** "Because he has anointed me and sent me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. Lk. 4:18). Through the Spirit, Jesus belongs totally and exclusively to God and shares in the infinite holiness of God, who calls him, chooses him and sends him forth. In this way the Spirit of the Lord is revealed as the source of holiness and of the call to holiness.

**This name "Spirit of the Lord" is "upon" the entire People of God, which becomes established as a people "consecrated" to God and "sent" by God to announce the Gospel of salvation.** The members of the People of God are "inebriated" and "sealed" with the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21ff.; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) and called to holiness.

### *Configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, and Pastoral Charity*

**21. The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should therefore be marked by this fundamental attitude of service to the People of God (cf. Mt. 20:24ff.; Mk. 10:43-44), freed from all presumption of desire of "lording over" those in their charge (cf. 1 Pt. 5 :2-3).** The priest is to perform this service freely and willingly as God desires. In this way the priests, as the ministers, the "elders" of the community, will be in their person the "model" of the flock, which for its part is called to display this same priestly attitude of service toward the world -- in order to bring to humanity the fullness of life and complete liberation.

**22.** The figure of Jesus Christ as shepherd of the Church, his flock, takes up and represents in new and more evocative terms the same content as that of Jesus Christ as head and servant. Fulfilling the prophetic proclamation of the Messiah and savior joyfully announced by the psalmist and the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ps. 22-23; Ez. 34:11ff.), Jesus presents himself as "the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11, 14), not only of Israel but of all humanity (cf. Jn. 10:16). His whole life is a continual manifestation of his "pastoral charity," or rather, a daily enactment of it.

**23. The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is pastoral charity, as a participation in Jesus Christ's own pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.**

The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ. "Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ's love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us."(51)

Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist. As the Council states: "This pastoral charity flows mainly from the eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the center and

root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice."(55)

### *The Spiritual Life in the Exercise of the Ministry*

**24. The priest's mission is not extraneous to his consecration or juxtaposed to it, but represents its intrinsic and vital purpose: Consecration is for mission.** In this sense, not only consecration but mission as well is under the seal of the Spirit and the influence of his sanctifying power.

Therefore, an intimate bond exists between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry,(58) a bond which the Council expresses in this fashion: "And so it is that they are grounded in the life of the Spirit while they exercise the ministry of the Spirit and of justice (cf. 2 Cor. 3:8-9), as long as they are docile to Christ's Spirit, who gives them life and guidance. For by their everyday sacred actions, as by the entire ministry which they exercise in union with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are being directed toward perfection of life. Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry."(59)

**25. For a spiritual life that grows through the exercise of the ministry, it is essential that the priest should continually renew and deepen his awareness of being a minister of Jesus Christ by virtue of sacramental consecration and configuration to Christ the head and shepherd of the Church.**

This awareness is not only in accordance with the very nature of the mission which the priest carries out on behalf of the Church and humanity, but it also provides a focus for the spiritual life of the priest who carries out that mission. Indeed, the priest is chosen by Christ not as an "object" but as a "person." In other words, he is not inert and passive, but rather is a "living instrument," as the Council states, precisely in the passage where it refers to the duty to pursue this perfection (61) The Council also speaks of priests as "companions and helpers" of God who is "the holy one and sanctifier."(62)

**In this way the exercise of his ministry deeply involves the priest himself as a conscious, free and responsible person. The bond with Jesus Christ assured by consecration and configuration to him in the sacrament of orders gives rise to and requires in the priest the further bond which comes from his "intention," that is, from a conscious and free choice to do in his ministerial activities what the Church intends to do. This bond tends by its very nature to become as extensive and profound as possible, affecting one's way of thinking, feeling and life itself: in other words, creating a series of moral and spiritual "dispositions" which correspond to the ministerial actions performed by the priest.**

**26. The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God.** He proclaims the word in his capacity as "minister," as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. As a result, in order that he himself may possess and give to the faithful the guarantee that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special

sensitivity, love and docility to the living tradition of the Church and to her magisterium. These are not foreign to the word, but serve its proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning.(68)

**From the various sacraments, and in particular from the specific grace proper to each of them, the priest's spiritual life receives certain features.** It is built up and molded by the different characteristics and demands of each of the sacraments as he celebrates them and experiences them.

If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his priestly being and his priestly action would feel its effects very soon, and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor."(70)

**Finally, the priest is called to express in his life the authority and service of Jesus Christ the head and priest of the Church by encouraging and leading the ecclesial community, that is, by gathering together "the family of God as a fellowship endowed with the spirit of unity" and by leading it "in Christ through the Spirit to God the Father."**(71) This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who "presides over" and "leads" a community, of an "elder" in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (cf. Ti. 1:7-8).

### *Priestly Life and the Radicalism of the Gospel*

**27. For all Christians without exception, the radicalism of the Gospel represents a fundamental, undeniable demand flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with him brought about by the Spirit** (cf. Mt. 8:18ff.; 10:37ff.; Mk. 8:34-38; 10:17-21; Lk. 9:57ff.). This same demand is made anew to priests, not only because they are "in" the Church, but because they are "in the forefront" of the Church inasmuch as they are configured to Christ, the head and shepherd. equipped for and committed to the ordained ministry, and inspired by pastoral charity. Within and as a manifestation of the radicalism of the Gospel one can find a blossoming of many virtues and ethical demands which are decisive for the pastoral and spiritual life of the priest, such as faith, humility in relation to the mystery of God, mercy and prudence. A particularly significant expression of the radicalism of the Gospel is seen in the different "evangelical counsels" which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt. 5-7), and among them the intimately related counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty.(73) The priest is called to live these counsels in accordance with those ways and, more specifically, those goals and that basic meaning which derive from and express his own priestly identity

**28. "Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition of soul by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5 :30; 6:38)."**(74) It is in the spiritual life of the priest that obedience takes on certain special characteristics.

Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ are really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel.

**Priestly obedience has also a "community" dimension: It is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate, which as such is called to cooperate harmoniously with the bishop and, through him, with Peter's successor.**(75)

This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents, and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry. **Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co - responsibility regarding directions to be taken and choices to be made.**

Finally, priestly obedience has a particular "pastoral" character. It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed," by the needs and demands of the flock. These last ought to be truly reasonable and at times they need to be evaluated and tested to see how genuine they are.

**29. It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy.** Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.

**30.** It is true that "the workman deserves his wages" (Lk. 10:7) and that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14), but it is no less true that this right of the apostle can in no way be confused with attempts of any kind to condition service to the Gospel and the Church upon the advantages and interests which can derive from it. **Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed even at the cost of personal sacrifice.** It is a condition and essential premise of the apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth," without traveling bag or personalities, following only the will of the Master(cf. Lk. 9:57-62; Mk. 10:17-22).



Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Moreover, his awareness of belonging to the one presbyterate will be an incentive for the priest to commit himself to promoting both a more equitable distribution of goods among his fellow priests and a certain common use of goods (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

**The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged; to practice solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society; to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life; and to promote a preferential option for the poor.** The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk. 4:18).

### *Membership in and Dedication to the Particular Church*

**31. Like every authentically Christian spiritual life, the spiritual life of the priest has an essential and undeniable ecclesial dimension which is a sharing in the holiness of the Church herself, which we profess in the Creed to be a "communion of saints."**

In this sense, "incardination" cannot be confined to a purely juridical bond, but also involves a set of attitudes as well as spiritual and pastoral decisions which help to fill out the specific features of the priestly vocation.

**The priest needs to be aware that his "being in a particular Church" constitutes by its very nature a significant element in his living a Christian spirituality.** In this sense, the priest finds precisely in his belonging to and dedication to the particular Church a wealth of meaning, criteria for discernment and action which shape both his pastoral mission and his spiritual life.

**32. Membership in and dedication to a particular church does not limit the activity and life of the presbyterate to that church: A restriction of this sort is not possible, given the very nature both of the particular church (87) and of the priestly ministry. In this regard the Council teaches that "the spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited or narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation 'to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). For every priestly ministry shares in the universality of the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles."**(88)

*"Renew in Them the Outpouring of Your Spirit of Holiness"*

33. Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is the principal agent in our spiritual life. He creates our "new heart," inspires it and guides it with the "new law" of love, of pastoral charity. For the development of the spiritual life it is essential to be aware that the priest will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit as a totally gratuitous gift and as a task which he is called to undertake. Awareness of this gift is the foundation and support of the priest's unflinching trust amid the difficulties, temptations and weaknesses which he will meet along his spiritual path.

Here I would repeat to all priests what I said to so many of them on another occasion: **"The priestly vocation is essentially a call to holiness in the form which derives from the sacrament of orders. Holiness is intimacy with God; it is the imitation of Christ, who was poor, chaste and humble; it is unreserved love for souls and a giving of oneself on their behalf and for their true good; it is love for the Church which is holy and wants us to be holy, because this is the mission that Christ entrusted to her. Each one of you should also be holy in order to help your brothers and sisters to pursue their vocation to holiness."**

## CHAPTER VI

### I REMIND YOU TO REKINDLE THE GIFT OF GOD THAT IS WITHIN YOU The Ongoing Formation of Priests

#### *Theological Reasons Behind Ongoing Formation*

70. "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tm. 1:6).

The words of St. Paul to Timothy can appropriately be applied to the ongoing formation to which all priests are called by virtue of the "gift of God" which they have received at their ordination. The passage helps us to grasp the full truth, the absolute uniqueness of the permanent formation of priests. Here we are also helped by another text of St. Paul, who once more writes to Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties; devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tm. 4:14-16).

Certainly there are also purely human reasons which call for the priest to engage in ongoing formation. **This formation is demanded by his own continuing personal growth. Every life is a constant path toward maturity, a maturity which cannot be attained except by constant formation.** It is also demanded by the priestly ministry seen in a general way and taken in common with other professions, that is, as a service directed to others. There is no profession, job or work which does not require constant updating if it is to remain current and effective. The need to "keep pace" with the path of history is another human reason justifying ongoing formation.

**But these and other motivations are taken up and become even clearer by the theological motivations mentioned previously and which demand further reflection.**

The sacrament of holy orders, by its nature (common to all the sacraments) as a "sign" may be considered, and truly is, a word of God. It is made manifest and communicated by the Church's voice, which is heard in the words of the bishop who prays and imposes his hands. The priest then gives his response, in faith, to Jesus' call. "I am coming, to follow you." From this moment there begins that response which, as a fundamental choice, must be expressed anew and reaffirmed through the years of his priesthood in countless other responses, all of them rooted in and enlivened by that "yes" of holy orders.

**All this constitutes the object of ongoing formation, understood as a conscious and free decision to live out the dynamism of pastoral charity and of the Holy Spirit who is its first source and constant nourishment. In this sense ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age.** It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that "new evangelization" which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the second millennium.

### *Different Dimensions of Ongoing Formation*

**71.** The ongoing formation of priests, whether diocesan or religious, is the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the seminary or the religious house with the training program which aimed at ordination.

It is particularly important to be aware of and to respect the intrinsic link between formation before ordination to the priesthood and formation after ordination. Ongoing formation is not a repetition of the formation acquired in the seminary, simply reviewed or expanded with new and practical suggestions. Ongoing formation involves relatively new content and especially methods; it develops as a harmonious and vital process which -- rooted in the formation received in the seminary -- calls for adaptations, updating and modifications, but without sharp breaks in continuity.

**By the very fact that ongoing formation is a continuation of the formation received in the seminary, its aim cannot be the inculcation of a purely "professional" approach, which could be acquired by learning a few new pastoral techniques. Instead its aim must be that of promoting a general and integral process of constant growth, deepening each of the aspects of formation human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral -- as well as ensuring their active and harmonious integration, based on pastoral charity and in reference to it.**

**72.** Fuller development is first required in **the human aspect of priestly formation.** In particular, through coming to know and share, his own the human experience of suffering

in its many different manifestations, from poverty to illness, from rejection to ignorance, loneliness and material or moral poverty, the priest can cultivate his own humanity and make it all the more genuine and clearly apparent by his increasingly ardent love for his fellow men and women.

In this task of bringing his **human formation to maturity**, the priest receives special assistance from the grace of Jesus Christ.

The People of God should be able to say about the priest, who has increasingly matured in **human sensitivity**, something similar to what we read about Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:15).

In this bond between the Lord Jesus and the priest, an ontological and psychological bond, a sacramental and moral bond, is the foundation and likewise the power for that "life according to the Spirit" and that "radicalism of the Gospel" to which every priest is called today and which is fostered by ongoing formation in its spiritual aspect.

### **The priest's prayer life in particular needs to be continually "reformed."**

What the apostle Paul says of all Christians, that they must attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), can be applied specifically to priests, who are called to the perfection of charity and therefore to holiness, even more so because their pastoral ministry itself demands that they be living models for all the faithful.

The **intellectual dimension of formation** likewise needs to be continually fostered through the priest's entire life, especially by a commitment to study and a **serious and disciplined familiarity with modern culture**.

In particular, **continuing theological study** is necessary if the priest is to faithfully carry out the ministry of the word, proclaiming it clearly and without ambiguity, distinguishing it from mere human opinions, no matter how renowned and widespread these might be. Thus he will be able to stand at the service of the People of God, helping them to give an account, to all who ask, of their Christian hope (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15). Furthermore, the priest "in applying himself conscientiously and diligently to theological study is in a position to assimilate the genuine richness of the Church in a sure and personal way. Therefore, he can faithfully discharge the mission which is incumbent on him when responding to difficulties about authentic Catholic doctrine and overcome the inclination, both in himself and others, which leads to dissent and negative attitudes toward the magisterium and sacred tradition."(218)

The pastoral aspect of ongoing formation is well expressed by the words of the apostle Peter: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt. 4:10). Pastoral charity is a gift, but it is likewise a task, a grace and a

responsibility to which we must be faithful. We have, therefore, to welcome it and live out its dynamism even to its most radical demands. This pastoral charity, as has been said, impels the priest and stimulates him to become ever better acquainted with the real situation of the men and women to whom he is sent, to discern the call of the Spirit in the historical circumstances in which he finds himself and to seek the most suitable methods and the most useful forms for carrying out his ministry today. Thus pastoral charity encourages and sustains the priest's human efforts for pastoral activity that is relevant, credible and effective. But this demands some kind of permanent pastoral formation.

**The path toward maturity does not simply demand that the priest deepen the different aspects of his formation. It also demands above all that he be able to combine ever more harmoniously all these aspects, gradually achieving their inner unity. This will be made possible by pastoral charity. Indeed, pastoral charity not only coordinates and unifies the diverse aspects, but it makes them more specific, marking them out as aspects of the formation of the priest as such, that is, of the priest as a clear and living image, a minister of Jesus the good shepherd.**

Ongoing formation helps the priest to overcome the temptation to reduce his ministry to an activism which becomes an end in itself, to the provision of impersonal services, even if these are spiritual or sacred, or to a businesslike function which he carries out for the Church. Only ongoing formation enables the priest to safeguard with vigilant love the "mystery" which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind.

### *The Profound Meaning of Ongoing Formation*

73. The different and complementary dimensions of ongoing formation help us to grasp its profound meaning. Ongoing formation helps the priest to be and act as a priest in the spirit and style of Jesus the good shepherd.

**In the ecclesiological context which we have recalled more than once, we can consider the profound meaning of ongoing priestly formation in relation to the priest's presence and activity in the Church as mystery, communion, and mission.**

Within the Church as "mystery" the priest is called, by his ongoing formation, to safeguard and develop in faith his awareness of the total and marvelous truth of his being: He is a minister of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1).

**In this sense it can be said that ongoing formation has as its aim that the priest become a believer and ever more of one: that he grow in understanding of who he truly is, seeing things with the eyes of Christ. He must recognize this same truth in his fellow priests, for this is the basis of his respect and love for other priests.**

74. Ongoing formation helps priests, within the Church as "communion," to deepen their awareness that their ministry is ultimately aimed at gathering together the family of God as a brotherhood inspired by charity and to lead it to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit.(219)

**The priest should grow in awareness of the deep communion uniting him to the People of God: He is not only "in the forefront" the Church, but above all "in" the Church. He is a brother among brothers.**

More specifically, the priest is called to deepen his awareness of being a member of the particular church in which he is incardinated, joined by a bond that is juridical, spiritual and pastoral. This awareness presupposes a particular love for his own church and it makes that love grow.

The priest must grow in his awareness of the communion existing between the various particular churches, a communion rooted in their very being as churches which make present in various places Christ's one universal Church. This awareness of the communion of the particular churches will foster an "exchange of gifts," beginning with living and personal gifts, such as priests themselves.

This sacramental origin is reflected and continued in the sphere of priestly ministry: from mysterium to ministerium. **"Unity among the priests with the bishop and among themselves is not something added from the outside to the nature of their service, but expresses its essence inasmuch as it is the care of Christ the priest for the people gathered in the unity of the Blessed Trinity."**(224)

The presbyterate thus appears as a true family, as a fraternity whose ties do not arise from flesh and blood but from the grace of holy orders. This grace takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as the spiritual bonds which exist between priests. **This fraternity "takes special care of the young priests, maintains a kind and fraternal dialogue with those of the middle and older age groups, and with those who for whatever reasons are facing difficulties, as for those priests who have given up this way of life or are not following it at this time, this brotherhood does not forget them but follows them all the more with fraternal solicitude."**(225)

**Religious clergy who live and work in a particular church also belong to the one presbyterate, albeit under a different title. Their presence is a source of enrichment for all priests.**

**There is a loneliness which all priests experience and which is completely normal. But there is another loneliness which is the product of various difficulties and which in turn creates further difficulties. With regard to the latter, "active participation in the diocesan presbyterate, regular contact with the bishop and with the other priests, mutual cooperation, common life or fraternal dealings between priests, as also friendship and good relations with the lay faithful who are active in parish life are very useful means to overcome the negative effects of loneliness which the priest can sometimes experience."**(227)

It should be added that a certain type of solitude is a necessary element in ongoing formation. Jesus often went off alone to pray (cf. Mt. 14:23). The ability to handle a

healthy solitude is indispensable for caring for one's interior life. Here we are speaking of a solitude filled with the presence of the Lord who puts us in contact with the Father, in the light of the Spirit.

**75. Ongoing formation aims at increasing the priest's awareness of his share in the Church's saving mission.**

**Only a suitable ongoing formation will succeed in confirming the priest in the essential and decisive element in his ministry, namely his faithfulness.**

*At Every Age and in All Conditions of Life*

76. Permanent or ongoing formation, precisely because it is "permanent," should always be a part of the priest's life. In every phase and condition of his life, at every level of responsibility he has in the Church, he is undergoing formation. **Clearly then, the possibilities for formation and the different kinds of formation are connected with the variety of ages, conditions of life and duties one finds among priests.**

*The Agents of Ongoing Formation*

**79. In a certain sense, it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for ongoing formation.** Truly each priest has the duty, rooted in the sacrament of holy orders, to be faithful to the gift God has given him and to respond to the call for daily conversion which comes with the gift itself.

**The responsibility of the bishop and, with him, of the presbyterate, is fundamental.** The bishop's responsibility is based on the fact that priests receive their priesthood from him and share his pastoral solicitude for the People of God.

To fulfill his responsibility in this field, the bishop will also ask for help from theological and pastoral faculties or institutes; seminaries, offices and federations that bring together people -- priests, religious and lay faithful -- who are involved in priestly formation.

In the context of the particular churches, families have a significant role to play. The life of ecclesial communities, led and guided by priests, looks to families inasmuch as they are "domestic churches." In particular the role of the family into which the priest is born needs to be stressed. By being one with their son in his aims, the family can offer him its own important contribution to his mission.

*Times, Forms and Means for Ongoing Formation*

**80.** While every moment can be an "acceptable time" (2 Cor. 6:2) for the Holy Spirit to lead the priest to a direct growth in prayer, study and an awareness of his own pastoral responsibilities, nevertheless there are certain "privileged" moments for this, even though they may be common and prearranged.

Let us recall, in the first place, the meetings of the bishop with his presbyterate, whether they be liturgical (in particular the concelebration of the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday), or pastoral and educational, related to pastoral activity or to the study of specific theological problems.

There are also spiritual gatherings for priests, such as spiritual exercises, days of recollection and spirituality, etc. These are opportunities for spiritual and pastoral growth, in which one can devote more time to pray in peace; opportunities to get back to what it means deep down to be a priest, to find fresh motives for faithfulness and pastoral endeavor.

**81.** Spiritual direction too contributes in no small way to the ongoing formation of the priests. It is a well - tried means and has lost none of its value. It ensures spiritual formation. It fosters and maintains faithfulness and generosity in the carrying out of the priestly ministry.

## **CONCLUSION**

**82.** "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15).

The Church responds to grace through the commitment which priests make to receive that ongoing formation which is required by the dignity and responsibility conferred on them by the sacrament of holy orders. All priests are called to become aware how especially urgent it is for them to receive formation at the present time: The new evangelization needs new evangelizers, and these are the priests who are serious about living their priesthood as a specific path toward holiness.

God promises the Church not just any sort of shepherds, but shepherds "after his own heart." And God's "heart" has revealed itself to us fully in the heart of Christ the good shepherd. Christ's heart continues today to have compassion for the multitudes and to give them the bread of truth, the bread of love, the bread of life (cf. Mk. 6:30ff.), and it pleads to be allowed to beat in other hearts -- priests' hearts: "You give them something to eat" (Mk. 6:37). People need to come out of their anonymity and fear. They need to be known and called by name, to walk in safety, along the paths of life, to be found again if they have become lost, to be loved, to receive salvation as the supreme gift of God's love. All this is done by Jesus, the good shepherd -- by himself and by his priests with him.