



# ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

OFFICE OF THE RECTOR

10701 South Military Trail ~ Boynton Beach, Florida 33436-4899

Tel: 561.732.4424 ~ Fax: 561.737.2205

## RECTOR'S CONFERENCE

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### *“Anima Christi”*

Begin with Psalm 127

I recently ran across an inspiring talk by Archbishop Jorge Patron Wong of the Congregation for Clergy who is in charge of seminary formation and the implementation of the new *Ratio*:

An important element in accompaniment is trust (Cf. *RFIS*, 47), with which the candidate is able to entrust his life to another person, handing over his own intimacy. Respect, empathy, listening, are, among others, the keys to help the seminarian grow in trust within an interpersonal relationship. When one feels heard one learns to entrust one's life to another. One is only willing to embrace a piece of advice or a proposal when one feels listened to, before that it is difficult to do so. We need, as companions, to learn how to listen, and to listen not only to what is communicated verbally but, especially, to what is expressed in non-verbal ways, which constitute the greater part of the communication ([“Fundamental Principles of the New RFIS,”](#) pg. 7).

This quote has served as a good reminder to me, as spiritual father and rector, and I hope to you, that both sides of our house, faculty and seminarians, are to remain in trusting and open dialogue. I am so grateful for my listening sessions with the first and second theologians, the pre-theologians, and with numerous others with whom I have met with in order to hear to your comments and to consider your recommendations. As you know, I have always had an open door policy when you have cares and concerns that you would like to bring to me. These meetings have been a real grace for me as you shared your gratitude for our professors and their contributions to your formation – we really do care and love each of you on this journey and want to foster your vocation and give you the very best formation we can – although sometimes it comes through like a fire hydrant instead of a water fountain! At the end of tonight's conference, I will share some of the ideas that we are discerning for next year.

But first let's look at our integrating relationship with Christ from which all else flows. For we can make all kinds of changes, and if you ask the older brothers in the house, they can tell you we do so regularly, but if we don't root all in Christ, we are just spinning our wheels. Archbishop Patron Wong refers to the need for our interiorization of what he calls a “mystical identification with the person of Jesus” ([“Foundations of Priestly Formation,”](#) pg. 5). As you deepen your relationship with Christ during these years of the Discipleship and Configuration Stages, one begins to relate to St. Paul who writes: “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives

in me” (Gal. 2:19b-20). That is the real purpose of all formation, both initial while in the seminary and ongoing after ordination, to allow Christ to live in and through us. This is not just something we can “do” but must “allow” Jesus to be configured within us. *You* must allow it for *you* are the main “protagonist” of your own formation (*Ratio* 130). *Christ* is the point of integration! In fact, the *Ratio* envisions that each of the four dimensions leads us into greater configuration with Him: “Each of the dimensions of formation is aimed at ‘transforming’ or ‘assimilating’ the heart in the image of the heart of Christ, who was sent by the Father to fulfill his loving plan. [...] As the Second Vatican Council indicates, the entire process of formation in preparation for priestly ministry, in fact, has as its aim the preparation of seminarians to ‘enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd’” (*Ratio* 89).

So as I reflected and prayed on each of the dimensions and our call to mystically identify with Christ, the *Anima Christi*, arose with me. As we now pray this prayer, let’s invite Christ to dwell within our souls, bodies, minds, and hearts.

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me.*

*Body of Christ, save me.*

*Blood of Christ, inebriate me.*

*Water from the side of Christ, wash me.*

*Passion of Christ, strengthen me.*

*O Good Jesus, hear me.*

*Within your wounds hide me.*

*Permit me not to be separated from you.*

*From the wicked foe, defend me.*

*At the hour of my death, call me  
and bid me come to you*

*That with your saints I may praise you*

*For ever and ever. Amen.*

How do I live an integrated human formation? By taking on the “Body of Christ.” Christ dwells within us, and to be conscious that everything we say and do, act and think, is in union with Him Who dwell within us! Only then does human formation begin to make sense. Our bodies given for Him who gave His Body for us, and Who continues to do so every day on the Altar. “To that end, the seminarian is called upon to develop his personality, having Christ, the perfect man, as his model and source” (*Ratio* 93). Human formation is about much more than the externals, but the outer man is meant to reflect our inner realities. Christ is our model and source – “Body of Christ, save me!”

Spiritual formation is integrated in our mystical identification and configuration in the “Soul of Christ.” Christ’s soul dwelling within us. “The heart of spiritual formation is personal union with Christ, which is born of, and nourished in, a particular way by prolonged and silent prayer” (*Ratio* 102). Our daily prayer and dialogue with the Father is done in union with Christ. The words of Augustine come to mind: “He prays for us as our priest, he prays in us as our head, he is the object of our prayers as our God. [...] We pray then to him, through him, in him, and we speak along

with him and he along with us.” In being ever more conscious of this truth we can unite our souls to His and say “Soul of Christ, sanctify me!”

Intellectual formation finds its source of integration in the “Mind of Christ.” As we study and take in the Word made flesh, we are also united to Him, allowing Christ to form our thoughts and absorb His doctrine in a spirit of humility and docility to the Truth. This “forming of the mind” comes about through a trans-formation and con-formation of the mind of Christ (cf. *Ratio* 118). For according to St. Paul, we are called to have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). When we study, read, and write, we do so “in Christ” and for His holy people. The rigors of study only really make sense in this context. Even when we feel overwhelmed, we invite Christ into the given moment to help us discern what we can actually do with the time entrusted to us. I just learned a great line from the great philosopher, saint, and martyr, Edith Stein, when she was teaching Latin at an all-girls schools in Speir:

The benefit of studying Latin is not primarily to learn the ecclesiastical language of the church or the language of ancient Western civilization, but this study elicits from people sacrifice, diligence, and it builds character because many people do not find it naturally interesting.

Apologies for language enthusiasts, but we are encouraged in intellectual formation to follow her lead of growing in sacrifice, diligence, and character. We certainly want you to fall in love with theology and have a more integrated culture of learning in the seminary that will remain with you throughout priesthood, and at the same time all of us recognize that there is hard work involved in this endeavor particularly in one’s seminary years. Integration occurs in the mind of Christ “who learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:9). Put on the mind of Christ – “O Blood of Christ, inebriate me!”

And of course pastoral formation is integrated when we unite our hearts with the “Heart of Christ” the Good Shepherd. According to the *Ratio*, “The gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks out, walks alongside and leads his sheep, will form a serene, prudent and compassionate outlook in [the seminarian]” (*Ratio* 120). Our pastoral charity and love expressed in ministry is precisely that of allowing Christ to love through us. We can’t love like Christ if we don’t allow Him to do it through us. Trust that God wants to give us precisely such a heart which allows us to be a greater self-gift to others. “In fact it is only in the crucified and risen Christ that the path of integration finds meaning and completion; all things are united in him (cf. Eph. 1:10), so that “*God might be all in all*” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28). “Passion of Christ, strengthen me!”

Affective maturity in the seminarian means that he can give himself without reserve to these four dimensions of formation by inserting himself into Christ. Integration happens when we are present to God in prayer which allows us to be present to the people of God in our daily lives. The quality of the presence we give to God will be the quality of the presence we give to the people. Be with Him, dwell in Him, allow Him to dwell in us. As our Lord tells us in the fifteenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel: “Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me” (Jn. 15:4). This

“remaining in” is the source of our mystical identification in Christ and is also the source of our identity, our pastoral authority, and our zeal and fire of love for souls. We are to strive to be “configured to Christ, Head and Shepherd, Servant and Spouse [...] These characteristics of the person of Christ help us to understand better the ministerial priesthood in the Church” (*Ratio* 35).

Relationship, Identity, Mission: Through learning to relate all to Jesus and allowing Him to dwell in our bodies, souls, minds, and hearts, we grow in our identity of being configured to Him. Then the mission of missionary discipleship the passion and zeal of our pastoral hearts will flow unreservedly and freely from and through us.

Now let’s turn back to listening. To allow the depth and breadth of study and prayer needed in your lives we are listening to your input and studying the horarium. We so desire to make space for you so as to live in the seminary with a less “frenetic pace” so that your hearts can be formed in contemplative prayer and study allowing the four dimensions to “interact simultaneously [...] Each of the dimensions of formation is aimed at ‘transforming’ or ‘assimilating’ the heart in the image of the heart of Christ” (*Ratio* 89). This puts pressure on us to help provide for you and it puts pressure on you to be responsible for what is given to you – we are called to be good stewards entrusting all to Christ. This means conversion for all of us! And so what are some of the things that you have brought forward?

- A more consistent daily schedule
- Better blocks of time for consecrated and dedicated study
  - I found this brief video on “[Deep Work](#)” insightful
  - In addition, tonight I am giving you a wonderful booklet entitled *Wonder and the Prayerful Study of Theology*
- More collaboration and communication among the faculty teaching in each year of the program, to ensure a balanced study and work load
- Foster greater awareness among the faculty of those working in a second language

Of course there are some things that we are unable to alter in a seminary schedule, but we have always done our best to listen and make necessary adjustments as needs arise. Although often some of you may not be aware of it, the faculty and administration continually collaborate with the student council; certainly ask upper classmen or look at old student council minutes and you will see many changes that have been made which have been brought forward through your initiatives. As faculty and seminarians, let us work hard as a community of faith to reject the evil one who scatters and divides (*diabolein*) and build a hermeneutic of trust, gratitude, and integration. Let us be united in our mission in the Heart of Christ, our integrating principle. This is a good time for us to pray again the second half of the *Anima Christi*:

*O Good Jesus, hear me.  
Within your wounds hide me.  
Permit me not to be separated from you.  
From the wicked foe, defend me.  
At the hour of my death, call me  
and bid me come to you*

*That with your saints I may praise you  
For ever and ever. Amen.*

Brothers, we do not want you to be workaholics, which leaves one in isolation and out of relationship with God and others. Rather we want you to be hard-workers who remain in communion with Christ at all times: at prayer, study, leisure, apostolate, etc. This is the true integration and balance the Church needs of us despite our schedules, because we know that Christ is dwelling within: we have taken on His body, soul, mind, and heart. At times, this certainly entails self-denial, trust and obedience to the process of priestly formation, but you are not doing it alone, but with and for Christ and guided by your daily prayer and spiritual direction. I wish to close with the *Serenity Prayer* which gives us an apt tone for moving forward as a community of faith: “God grant me the *serenity* to accept the things I cannot change; *courage* to change the things I can; and *wisdom* to know the difference.”