

Do not describe yourself as a seminarian
Describe yourself as a DISCIPLE

Four Dimensions



I liken formation to a four legged stool. Each leg representing one dimension of formation.

Some of you are natural academics.

For some, you will be naturals around other people, charismatic and outgoing and energetically on the go doing things all the time.

Some of you will be more contemplative and find spiritual solitude fits like a cosy pullover.

For others, the human and deep relational way of being comes easy.

We rely on our natural talents and often, the areas of our ministry we find most difficult or uncomfortable, we neglect or avoid. These areas become retarded.

Four Dimensions

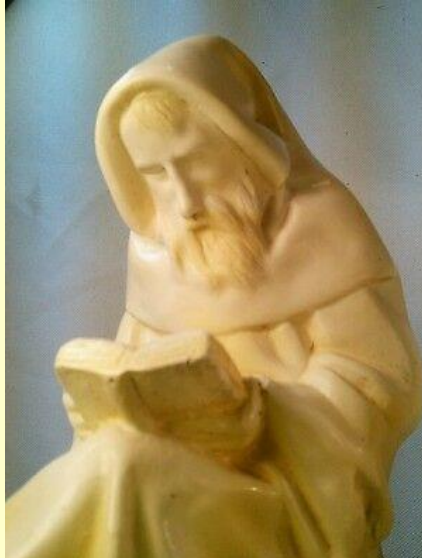


Avoidance will only work for so long. I am not knocking it. I think avoidance is a much under rated skill.

However, when we are called to use the neglected areas of ministry, the stool can become rather unstable.

Four Dimensions

Intellectual



I am with John Duns Scotus. I favour wisdom over knowledge every time.

The wise grow slowly

Seminaries thrive on academic success. It is easy to measure academic development. If only this were a criteria in the formation and ongoing formation of clergy.

No, we do not have an academic dimension to our formation. We have an intellectual dimension. The ratio continually reminds us that formation has to be one of integration. If the stuff we are learning is solely for qualification then no transformation is happening. We are encouraged to learn in the hope that we may be changed.

I don't hear too many priests say "if only I had studied more at seminary".

Preparing enquirers for rigorous academic learning, checking out any specific learning needs, even arranging a dyslexia assessment would help us in seminary a great deal.

Four Dimensions

Spiritual



The deep well that stores the source of a grace-filled life and contains our relationship with Christ is constructed out of prayer and prayer is kept sweet because of our ongoing deepening relationship with Jesus. This spiritual conversion towards a locus of holiness requires focus and accompaniment and it is the tradition of the church to offer spiritual direction as a way of maintaining that focus.

I know that the many priests and religious I see have come to me because they are struggling or facing a period of crisis but I am always surprised to notice that, the very first indication that something was wrong was that their prayer life was drying up. They had long since abandoned the need for an SD.

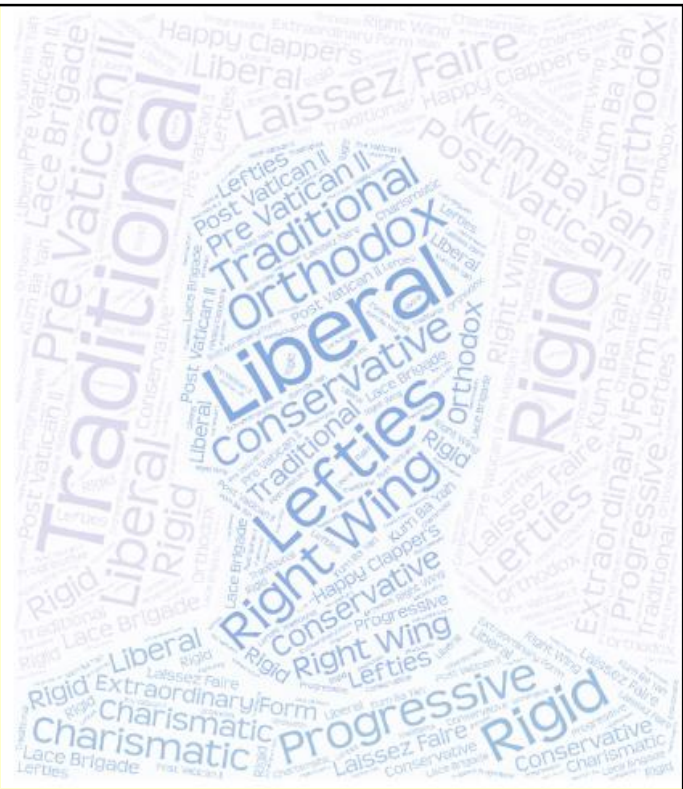
Do we still see the need for spiritual direction across the span of our lifetime conversion?

Do we have enough suitably trained and experienced SD's?

Am I in a healthy relationship with an SD?

From the very first moment of enquiry, we must instill a cultural and personal desire for spiritual accompaniment to feed a lifetime of contented and growing relationship with Christ

The Holy Spectrum



Trainees try too hard to “get it right” or “do it correctly”
 Hopefully they relax enough to “do it well”.
 These words or labels here do not actually exist in the Catholic church. They are designed as a form of tribalism in order to define people.
 “I am more right than you”
 If you don’t hold your hands in a certain way then the Mass is not valid.
 This is normal in all professions
 Our job as formators is to challenge, gently loosening the grip on correctness and establishing a foundation of goodness.

Hiding Behind The Altar



I describe this rigidity as “Hiding Behind the Altar” and we can offer a gentle hand behind the veil “come on out, it is not that scary”.

We need to encourage “thinking outside the sanctuary” and beyond the church doors.

A wide range of life experience can be achieved and we need to really value the journey the enquirer has already made.

Four Dimensions *Human*



A retired and somewhat aged priest once said to me after a few sessions of accompaniment, Pete, how did I get into my 8th decade of life and not know these things about myself? As we have discovered, we have a tendency towards incongruence. Seminary is a seedbed for clerical pretending. “keep your head down, stay under the radar, play the game, only let them see what want to see, it’s easier to ask for forgiveness than permission” are comments that need to be continually banished from formation.

They are the language of pretending and if propagated through a judgmental system or an insecure low self-worth, they can remain dormant, affecting our very being. Like the journey toward holiness, human formation is a life long, directional process of discovery and rediscovery that we need to remain open to, always.

And, like SD, human formation needs accompaniment. More on this later.

Four Dimensions *Pastoral*



Ongoing formation is the most pastoral thing you can do because the ultimate beneficiaries of ongoing formation are the faithful. However, if we do not reflect upon our pastoral encounters, asking what went well, what might I have done differently, how were my interventions, what was the cost of my giving, then, we will just plough on regardless. Perhaps we should be brave and ask our parishioners, “who do you say I am?”

This reflective practice is a skill and needs to be learned. We have heard how Valladolid and Oscott both use personal formation journals as a tool.

I would encourage all VD's to get their enquirers to keep a journal and to use this with them to track their growth and highlight areas for further focus and integration.

Four Dimensions *Integrated*



It is the seminarian, priest or deacon himself that is the person primarily responsible for their own formation. The Bishop or rector or VD has some canonical responsibility to appoint and oversee that opportunities are provided but we must take responsibility for our ongoing personal and priestly development.

This requires initially identifying and realising a need and then being empowered to go out and find the support we need. This requires taking responsibility and then being open to being held accountable.

The ratio para 48 states that “accompaniment must be present from the beginning of the journey of formation and throughout life..”

This accompaniment helps to be held accountable and we need to bathe in this accountability not be bullied by it.

What Does a “good” Candidate Look Like? The SJ’s

- An Intelligent Faith;
 - Free from scrupulosity, prays, open, converting not simply converted, joy for God, a growing relationship with Christ
- Is Liveable With;
 - Good manners, life skills, compassionate, considerate, polite, kind, caring, cooperative, a safe pair of hands
- Can Do a Days Work;
 - Resilient, committed, a marathon runner not a sprinter, willing, obedient

Young candidates grow

Older candidate needs to be more accepted of “as he is”

Four Moments of Crisis Post-Ordination



Five Years after Ordination

Four Moments of Crisis Post-Ordination



First Time Living Alone

Four Moments of Crisis Post-Ordination



Following the Death of
Mother

Four Moments of Crisis Post-Ordination



Retirement

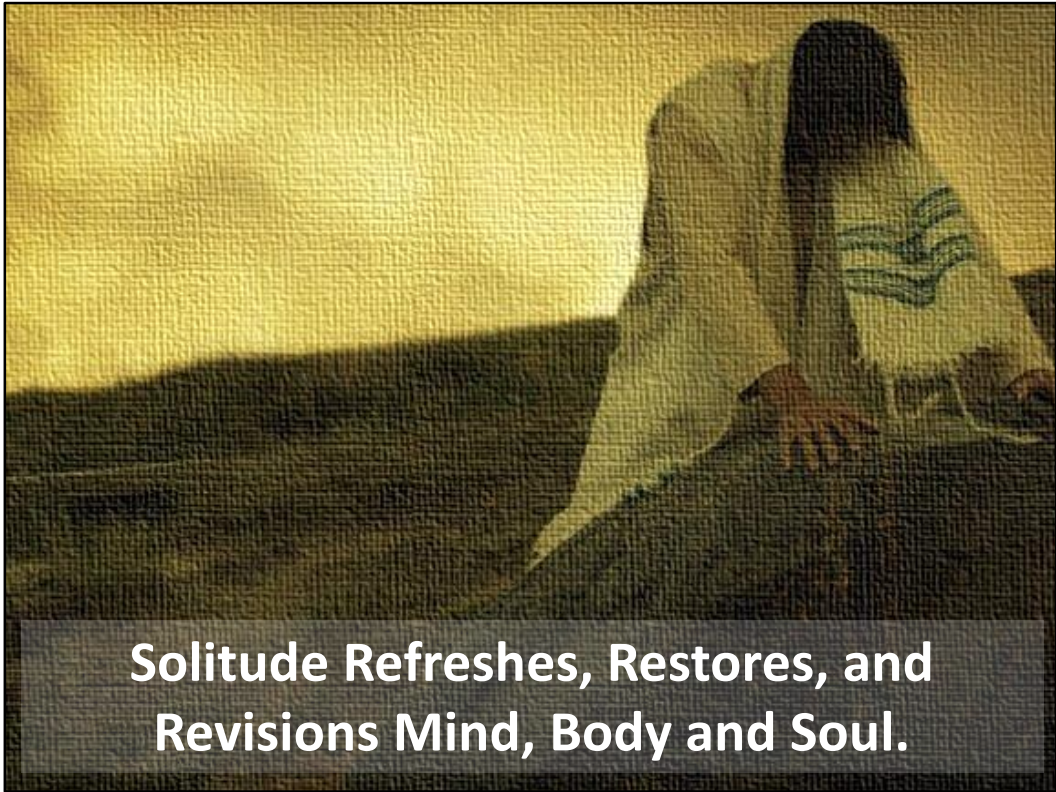


Young candidates grow

Older candidate needs to be more accepted of "as he is"

Retired priests can become isolated and forgotten. They can also thrive in focusing on the sacramental parts of priesthood, free from the burden of administration.

Being lonely can encourage over use of the internet, shopping, gaming, porn, etc



Solitude Refreshes, Restores, and Revisions Mind, Body and Soul.

Getting ready for the reality of parish life.
Who switches the lights off after midnight Mass

“By learning to be alone
with ourselves we learn
to be with and for others”

Anna Polcino (1977 pg17)
From “Loneliness to Holiness”
In “Loneliness” by James Madden





- Gossiping is simply bullying someone who isn't there
- The Episcopal hole or the rumour-mill
- Influenced by wisdom? Knowledge? or opinion?
- Blog sites.



Who are the Formators, the positive and healthy voices?

Bishop

Vicar General

Priests

VD

Seminary Staff

Other seminarians

Friends

Family

The people of God

Press

Media

Myth: Mental health problems are very rare.

Fact: Mental health problems affect 1 in 4 people.

What you can do to help
 Set an example's life – be there, make time to help in such.
 Your support will help their recovery.
 If someone tells you about their problem, don't brush it off.
 Ask the person how you can best support them.
 Don't advise people to their mental health problems.
 Think about your everyday language: "anxious", "crazy", "psycho" can hurt.
 Learn and make people about mental illness, get the facts.

time to change
let's end mental health discrimination

You can help. Find out how at www.time-to-change.org.uk

mental health trusts | Mind | Rethink | South London Partnership | CIPSI | OASIS RELIEF

1 in 4

Is it

- 1) him?
- 2) her?
- 3) you?
- 4) me?

Reduce stigma
Make a difference

Men, strong and silent – mixed roles in society, huge demands, competitive not so much “I can do” attitude so much as “I should be able to do”.

Seminary should be a healthy environment which facilitates growth. It is not however a therapeutic community.

We have the facilities and skills to work with emerging struggles and health issues but it is unfair to think that seminary will deal with pre-existing conditions.

Empowerment

“The only person who cannot be helped is that person who blames others”

Carl Rogers



Taking ownership of my behaviours, thoughts and feelings.

Autonomy

Powerlessness

Frustration

Negative narrative

Division

Network of interdependence – bishop, priests, deacons, laity, ecumenical, wider community.

Stress Inducing Factors

- Perfectionism
- Fear of Failure



The Achilles Syndrome



Achilles Syndrom

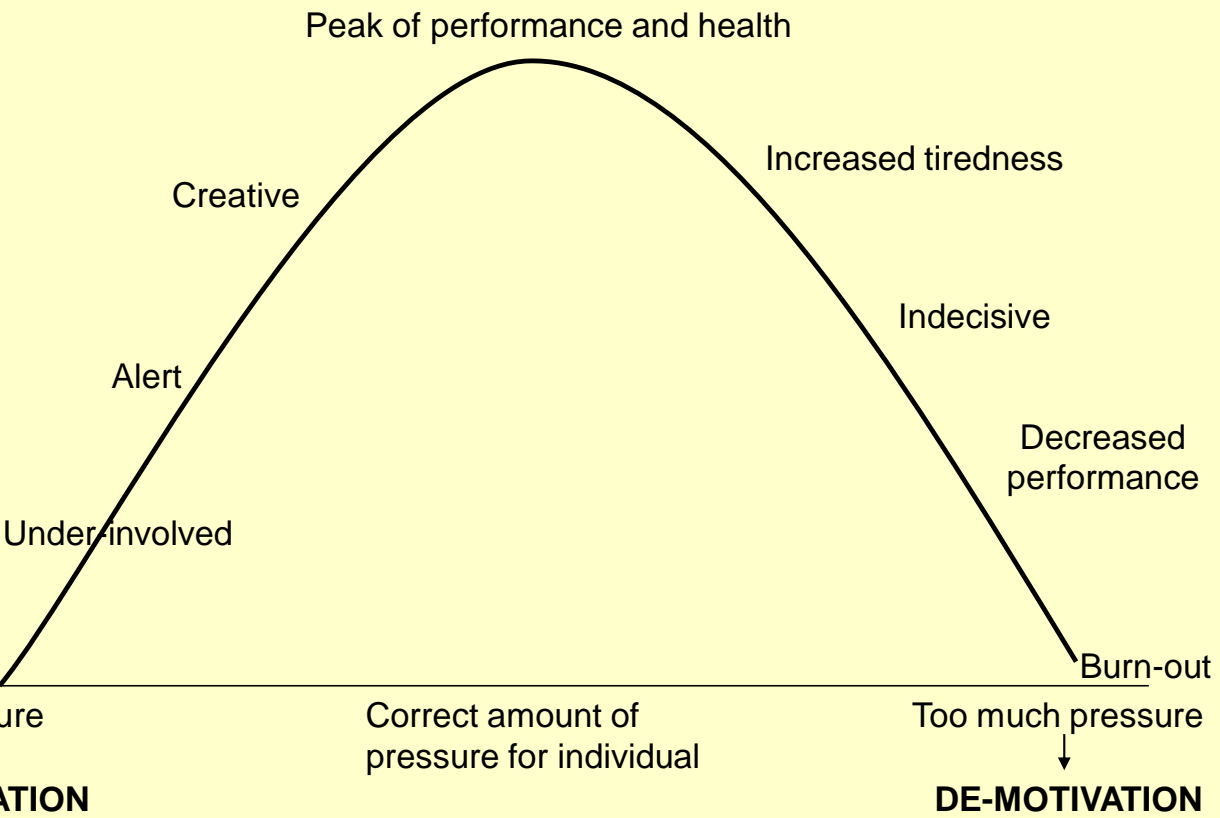
Stress Inducing Factors

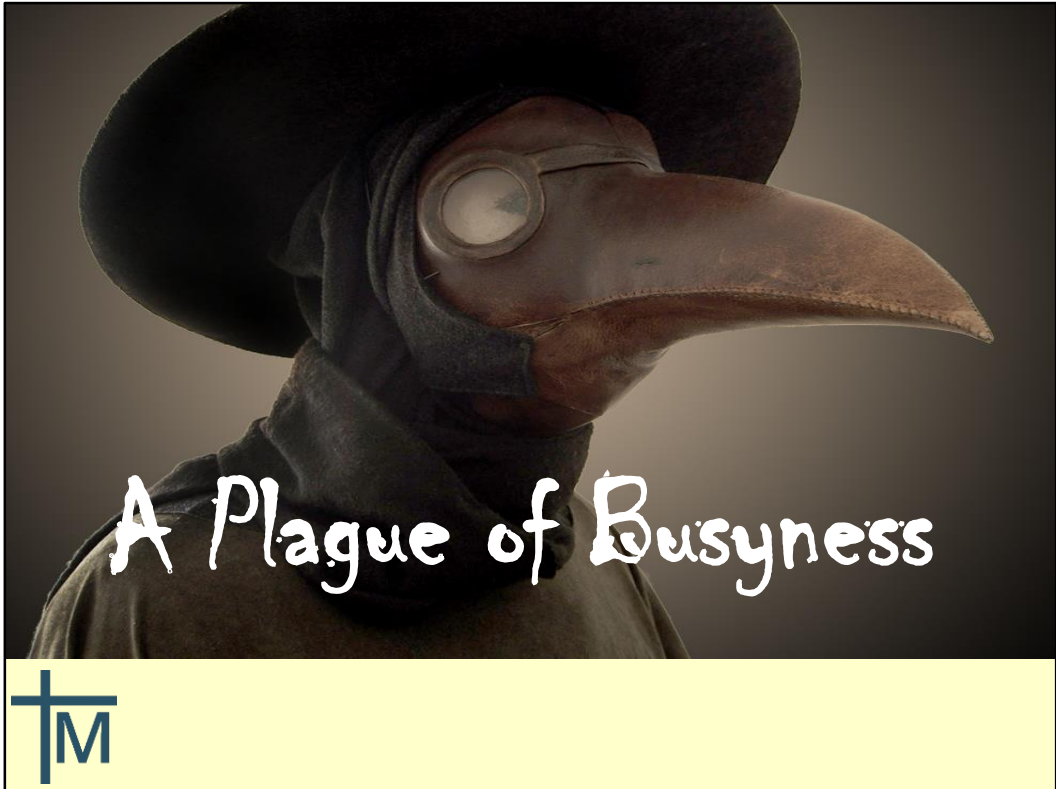
- Perfectionism
- Fear of Failure
- Ego/Identity/Control
- Holiness
- Faith & Hope/
Belief & Trust
- Docility to His Holy Spirit



Human function curve

Too much or too little pressure leads to de-motivation





Cambridge dictionary definition; **to cause worry, pain or difficulty** to someone or something over a period of time

Getting the balance right

Saying
“no”
is a way of saying
“yes”
to what matters.



SLIDE 15



If we measure our worth against what we do rather than who we are, then we are destined towards a very unhappy life, where we fall into the trap of the perils of the pleaser. We will only be content with the success of our latest endeavours.

The list of these perils is almost endless. From resentment to depression,

Fraternity Supportive not Competitive



Many priests experience the priestly brotherhood as pockets of support, fraternal groups, great friendships and many examples of brotherly love, inclusive, open and collaborative.

AND

Some experience the priesthood as pockets of competitiveness, motivated by ego, defensive and exclusive.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols addressing a gathering of priests in Birmingham talked about the need for “networks of interdependence”.

I like this word interdependence. It suggests a connection. I am again reminded of what I read what Bishop Maurice Taylor wrote in his conclusion of a portrait of a Diocese. The Diocese is a community of communities, a communion of communions.

Often, when faced with relationships that feel difficult I want to become “detached”, a word with a strong history in our faith. However, as the desert fathers knew only too well, the art of healthy and appropriate attachment is far more important than retreating into a hermitage, traditionally a position held only by the most senior elders in ancient communities.

In this changing world, of course that is the very nature of Gods creation, whilst often I feel I want to withdraw, the way forward is to immerse ourselves even deeper into what has always been a secular world.

We can only do this if we feel fully supported.

We need to encourage our guys to encounter difficult relationships and to work out what is really going on.

Stating the Obvious

Eat most things, in moderation, mainly
plants

Don't smoke

Alcohol in moderation

Exercise is very good for you

So is rest



I want to take a brief pause to state something very obvious. I heard a GP talking to a large group of priests who were looking for some medical advice. This is what I heard.

Not So Much A Day Off



It took me a while to understand the idea of a priest having a day off. It is a phrase I think originates in seminary.

I encounter many priests who struggle to really take a day off. They feel guilty, too busy, work alcoholics,

I really don't like the term, "Day off".

More of A Day On



I prefer the term, "Day On"

A day on doing something that refreshes you, a day doing something different so that you return ready for another day in service is in fact a moral and ethical obligation.

Because you are worth it – because they are worth it.

This is something our enquirers need to start learning from day one and all the way through formation

Affected





Not
Diminished