

**Presentation
Seminary Rectors' Gathering
January 30, 2013
Bishop Richard Pates**

Thank you. I am here today as a former rector of St. John Vianney Seminary in St. Paul, as the local ordinary of Des Moines and as chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which works in tandem with the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

The bishops of our two committees meet jointly on a wide variety of issues, all of which address challenges to human life and dignity -- whether at home or abroad - from health care to war, from poverty to religious persecution.

The suffering of our sisters and brothers in the parish, in the neighborhood, in the country and in the world is our concern as shepherds and as disciples of Jesus Christ. Hearing, with Christ's ear, the cries of those who suffer, means not only addressing short-term needs, like a bag of groceries or baby clothes, but long-term solutions, like fair wages and safe, affordable housing as well as addressing world hunger which claims the lives of 5 million children every year. It means contributing to efforts to reach peace such as tirelessly advocating for a long proposed two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestine stand-off. Catholic Social Teaching insists that assistance must go hand-in-hand with the difficult work of transformation, individually and as a community.

I also come to you as a former Rector having served in that capacity for six years at St. John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota from 1980-1987. Certainly, over time the culture of seminaries and the quality of formation have immeasurably improved.

During the years at St. John Vianney Seminary, I also replaced Cardinal Wuerl as Executive Secretary of the Papal Seminary Study when the Cardinal was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle.

The study was under the direction of Bishop John Marshall, Bishop of Burlington, Vermont. I have never known an individual so totally dedicated to a task. The Bishop personally spent endless days pouring over the self-studies submitted by each seminary so the on-site visit could be productive and customized to each institution. Thanks to him and Cardinal Wuerl the initiative was conducted on the basis of objective criteria developed from Church documents.

The study took over five years to complete. Each year a report was made personally to Pope John Paul II. The study served as a vehicle for institutional accountability after Vatican II. Since then, the vision for seminary education and formation has evolved significantly with contributions coming from the subsequent editions of the Program for Priestly Formation, the Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and the most recent Papal Seminary Study chaired by Cardinal Edwin O'Brien.

The vision that has emerged over time is organizing Seminary programs around four main pillars: human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral. The goal is not to treat these foci separately but to strive for integration. It is from this perspective that I propose addressing the topic of social justice.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops in the Synodal Document *Justice in the World* declared: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel." (p. 6) Moreover, justice as Pope Benedict reminds us in *Caritas in Veritate*, is where Charity

starts. “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity.” (p. 6)

Pope Benedict continues: “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity . . . This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly.” (p. 7)

To support the justice, peace and human development work of our USCCB committees, education and advocacy resources addressing real life issues in the light of a comprehensive understanding of Catholic Social Teaching are developed and offered across the United States, as part of the Church’s response to suffering and her witness to God’s love.

Feedback from the pews always includes comments like, “But we never hear about this from Father” and “I’ve been a Catholic all my life, if justice is part of the teaching of the Church, I would have heard about it on Sunday,” and the counter assertion to such preaching, “I go to church so I can get away from the world.”

The messiness of the world is precisely where we are called to love God and neighbor. From the new document “*Preaching the Mystery of Faith: the Sunday Homily*” we hear: “Our encounter with Jesus inevitably leads to mission; our love for Jesus translates into our love for others. This is why the homily, which participates in the

power of Christ's Word, ought to inspire a sense of mission for those who hear it, making them doers and proclaimers of that same Word in the world. ” (p. 21)

Seminarians must focus on their preparation for priesthood. Yet they must also become present to the broader life of the Church and of the world, which they will serve and which we are called anew to evangelize, through faith, worship and witness. What can help in this task of preparation for today's Church and world?

More than a year ago, in partnership with the Committee on Consecrated Life and Vocations and with input from Msgr. Jerry McCarthy and Sr. Katarina Schuth, OSF, our committees engaged the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to survey seminary rectors at 43 theologates and 30 college-level seminaries that operate under the Program of Priestly Formation of the USCCB.

The purpose of the survey was “to assist the Bishops' Conference in understanding more clearly how and to what extent Catholic Social Teaching is taught within the seminary curriculum and integrated into seminary formation so that future priests can share and act on this in their preaching, liturgical and pastoral leadership and other elements of priestly ministry.”

For the purposes of the survey, Catholic Social Teaching was defined as the “body of doctrine promulgated by the Magisterium through papal encyclicals and other means which focuses on the social dimensions of the Gospel and the social mission of the Church; human life, dignity and rights; charity and justice; work and the common good; solidarity and peace. This universal teaching is expressed and applied in statements of the USCCB, including their outline of the ‘seven themes’ of Catholic Social Teaching.”

As a preface to the report on the survey results and attentive to an aspect that is difficult to measure, I will first reflect on the human pillar. In the role of persuasion and effectiveness, it is vital for the seminarian to be grounded in the human component which stimulates a desire to engage Catholic Social Teaching in all its richness.

At lunch, a Des Moines college seminarian confided in me, “You know, Bishop, my first task as a seminarian is to concentrate on becoming the best human I can be.” My reaction, “This kid gets it.” As human development pertains to justice, it is essential to cultivate early on heartfelt compassion, and a sense of solidarity and identity with all our sisters and brothers in the human family. Seminarians should strive to enter into the suffering world of the other, near and far. They need to develop the ability “to feel” for them.

And in order to establish a foundation for social justice anchoring concepts based on human – self-evident truth – are key. *Pacem in Terris*, of Pope John XXIII celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and the *2013 World Day of Peace Message*, by Pope Benedict, emphasize as central themes of natural law and the common good. Seminarians need to be conversant with these themes in order to effectively enter into conversation with a society suffused in secular values and pervasive individualism.

In describing Natural Law, Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* states, “Men show the work of the law written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness to them. ...The Father of the universe has inscribed them (i.e. laws) in man’s nature, and that is where we must look for them; there and nowhere else.” (p. 5)

Pope Benedict XVI in The Message for the *2013 World Day of Peace*, re-states the undergirding principles of *Pacem in Terris* essential to achieving peace and justice

across the face of the world. A commentator on the text observes, “These principles are not truths of faith, nor are they simply a corollary of the right to religious freedom. They are inscribed in human nature itself, accessible to reason and thus common to all humanity.” (*L’Osservatore Romano, December, 19-26, 2012, p. 12*)

Natural Law is oriented toward achieving the Common Good. *Pacem In Terris* teaches, “...it is in the nature of the common good that every single citizen has the right to share in it – although in different ways, depending on his tasks, merits and circumstances.” Balancing this proposition is the assertion that the common good “must take account of all those social conditions which favor the full development of human personality.” (p. 5)

From the launching pad of the human, a seminarian is challenged to develop a capacity for compassion as well as having in hand the concepts of the natural law and the common good.

The CARA survey results, as would be expected, provided strong evidence that the intellectual/academic dimension of seminarian formation is the pillar most attended to. Certainly, this merits prolonged applause.

- Overall, three in four programs report that seminarians are required to complete at least one class specifically on Catholic Social Teaching. Theologates are more likely than college seminaries to have this requirement (95 percent compared to 33 percent).
- At least two-thirds or more of responding rectors at theologates agree that Catholic Social Teaching is “very well” integrated in their moral theology and pastoral ministry classes as well as in the pastoral placements of their seminarians.

- Rectors are less positive in their evaluation of how well Catholic Social Teaching is integrated into scripture, preaching, spirituality, and liturgy classes. About half of rectors at theologates report that Catholic Social Teaching is “somewhat” integrated and between a fifth and a third say it is “very well” integrated into these classes.
- Four in ten responding rectors integrate Catholic Social Teaching “somewhat” into faculty development in-service. Theologates are more likely than college seminaries (18 percent compared to 10 percent) to report that Catholic Social Teaching is integrated “very well” into faculty development in-service.
- Theologates are more likely than college seminaries to use required courses to impart the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching. College programs more typically use moral theology, electives, and general courses to impart these themes. Nearly all responding seminaries report that the seminary does “very well” at communicating the defense of human life from conception to natural death and eight in ten say they do as well at communicating the scriptural foundations for defending life and dignity, the defense of marriage, and the promotion of family life. College seminary rectors are at least as likely as rectors at theologates to say they communicate these three elements of Catholic Social Teaching “very well.”
- Regarding human rights, the common good, and priority for the poor and vulnerable, three in four rectors at theologates report that the seminary does “very well” at communicating these elements of Catholic Social Teaching. College seminary rectors are as likely to agree that the seminary communicates human rights “very well,” but less likely to agree that the seminary does as well with the other two elements, the common good, and priority for the poor and vulnerable.

- On elements related to the workplace, such as the dignity of work, the rights of workers, economic justice and poverty, and immigration, half of responding theologates feel the seminary communicates these elements “very well.” Only about a quarter of college seminaries agree that they do as well in communicating these elements.
- Less than half of theologates and less than a third of college seminaries say they communicate “very well” these elements of Catholic Social Teaching: racism and discrimination, international solidarity and development, and the moral dimensions of the environment.

The integration of Catholic Social Teaching with Pastoral Programs is crucial. Organizing field education, both locally and internationally, to encounter situations where there is poverty, the denial of human rights, unnecessary suffering caused by war, and lack of education and paralyzing economic situations is invaluable. The students are called to experience and analyze these realities from the human foundation of the natural law and the common good, as well as biblical justice and love, and the social justice teachings of the Church.

We expect that all the requirements of the PPF with regard to Catholic Social Teaching are being met. Our concern is the ethos of the seminary in terms of Catholic Social Teaching formation and its incorporation and integration into other courses. How does the seminary experience model Catholic life and prepare men for servant leadership in terms of living the Church’s social doctrine?

Our committees and consultants discussed the survey results and, in the light of their own experiences, surfaced several areas of concern and opportunity for seminaries and beyond.

1. The need for better and consistent integration of Catholic Social Teaching into scripture, preaching and liturgy classes, as well as spiritual formation.
2. The need for inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching and cultural competency into faculty development and in-service -- especially in the light of the shortage of faculty and high faculty turnover.
3. The need for leadership training of seminarians with respect to Catholic Social Teaching, so they can integrate the teaching into their ministry and spiritual life – and witness to the Gospel in action.
4. The need to develop a “habit” of continuing formation and leadership training, beyond seminary years, as ordained priests, so as to enhance Catholic witness on a broad range of Catholic Social Teaching issues as a core aspect of parish life and evangelization.

Given the dwindling resources, staff shortages and other pressures on seminaries, the committee members, many of whom are former rectors themselves, discussed suggestions for multi-faceted approaches to these challenges, which could involve diocesan, seminary and committee staff, among others. Ideas included:

1. Evaluations that include measures of the integration of Catholic Social Teaching and cultural competency for seminarians and faculty, across the four pillars of seminary formation.
2. Practicums involving real world events, seen through the lenses of Catholic Social Teaching, cultural considerations, pastoral response and intentional inclusion in prayer and liturgy.

3. A “kit” to both brief and debrief seminarians as a bookends to the summer placement experience, helping them to integrate the summer’s personal, pastoral and spiritual experiences with their academic focus, as part of an effort to reframe outcomes for summer placement and emphasize “experiential learning.”
4. A convening of top seminary formatters, instructors and academicians at theologates to discuss best practices and new approaches regarding integration of the Church’s social doctrine and cultural competency.
5. Developing a model for a multi-day “Social Action Summer Institute” in Catholic Social Teaching for seminarians, to include experiences with groups addressing systemic injustice that has injured their communities.
6. Partnerships to help address the continuing education and experience of faculty with regard to Catholic Social Teaching and cultural competency.

In *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, Pope John Paul II tasks Catholic universities to serve, “The dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world’s resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level.” (p. 33)

And most of that effort is for lay students!

Preparing seminarians for ministry in the Catholic Church of today and tomorrow is a complex and demanding task, as you know better than most. It must include preparing hearts, in addition to minds, to receive and share experiences with others in the light of faith. It must include formation that supports leadership, teamwork with lay staff and volunteers and delegation of tasks. It must include an expectation of life-long learning

and formation, with ordination as a milestone on a lifetime journey of transformation and servant leadership.

It must include an ability to be present to an increasing diversity of cultures and viewpoints; to listen, and to preach, in a way that connects sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church with the daily struggles of the people who come to us for Sunday liturgy, to be fed, challenged and strengthened as the body of Christ, sent forth to do God's will where they, and we, have been planted, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for all you do to make that a reality. You labor intensely and with unflagging dedication. Your efforts along with the guaranteed presence of the Holy Spirit generate great hope.