

# Frequently Asked Questions about ... College Seminary

## 1. What is a college seminary?

A college seminary is a place where men of college age go to begin their preparation for priesthood. The college seminary prepares them intellectually with the required coursework in philosophy and theology to enter the next level of priestly formation, the graduate seminary or theologate. There are two basic models of college seminaries. One is the affiliated model where students live together at the seminary and take their academic coursework at a Catholic college or university. The other is the free-standing model where all aspects of seminary life, including academics, are through the seminary. Typically free-standing seminaries are much smaller in size and offer more individual attention to the needs of the seminarian.

## 2. Do I have to know for sure that I am going to be a priest to go to the college seminary?

No. Certainty of a call to priesthood is not needed to enter the college seminary. In fact, certainty of the call may never come. Doubts about one's vocation are common among seminarians at every stage. What is required is a sense that priesthood would be a good fit and a joyful life for you. You should also sense in your heart that God is asking you to take this step to consider more carefully the priesthood. Through the experiences of being a seminarian, one fairly early on gets the sense as to whether the seminary is the right place for him and whether priesthood is something he should be preparing for.

## 3. How old do I have to be to go to the college seminary?

One needs to simply have graduated from high school to enter a college seminary. Many young men enter right after high school, while others will begin college seminary studies after a couple of years of working or going to another college or university. Generally the right age to respond is when the Lord calls!

## 4. What's the biggest difference between going to college and going to a college seminary?

Colleges and universities typically only focus on academics, and the evaluation of college work is a report card and transcripts showing courses taken and grades achieved. The college seminary is concerned with several other areas of growth, including but also going beyond academics. The college seminary focuses on human formation (growth as a person, communication and relationship skills, leadership, etc.); spiritual formation (becoming a man of prayer; being a disciple of Jesus Christ; daily Mass and prayer; having a spiritual director, etc...); and pastoral formation (service to the poor; helping at a parish; teaching religious education; visiting the sick, etc...) College seminary focuses on the growth of the total person, and evaluations of college seminary formation look at how well the man has grown each year as a person, as a follower of Christ, and as a man of the Gospel.

## 5. What advantages are there to being a college seminarian?

As mentioned, the greatest benefit to college seminary is being a part of a supportive environment where all aspects of human growth are encouraged. One's faith life tends to really flourish in the seminary because of the focus on meeting the Lord daily through the Mass and other prayers. Living in an environment where being Catholic is supported helps

men make good moral choices for life as well. After completing college seminary the man is prepared to enter the graduate program. For those who don't go to the college seminary, there is usually one or two years of pre-theology work that must be done before beginning the graduate seminary. So a man can save one or two years of formation by going to the college seminary.

## **6. What do I study at the college seminary?**

This depends on the seminary one goes to. In many seminarians there is a choice of several majors that a man can select from, in others just a few majors are offered. One also takes a minimum of 24 credit hours of philosophy and 12 credit hours of theology. Most seminarians receive degrees in liberal arts majors, but some do get degrees in science, engineering, or business. The academic program is designed to meet the needs and interests of the seminarian.

## **7. How smart do I have to be to be a college seminarian?**

Diocesan seminarians should have above average intelligence and above average grades. They don't need to be geniuses, but they have to be able to do well academically in college. Sometimes guys struggle with math and sciences and do very well in English and history. That's okay, because some fields are more critical than others. Many seminaries also provide special help for students who have certain learning disorders, such as dyslexia. Most seminaries have a very supportive learning environment that helps each student excel to their capacity.

## **8. How much does college seminary cost, and how do I pay for it?**

Tuition and room and board charges vary among seminaries, but typically a college seminary education costs less than a private university education, ranging from \$11,000 to \$20,000 per year. Seminaries usually have fairly good financial aid programs to assist students in need, and many dioceses provide scholarships and grants for college seminaries. For example, the Joliet Diocese provides a full-tuition and room and board scholarship for our first year college seminarians who are giving God the first chance with their lives. In the following years, our college students receive half-tuition and room and board scholarships. No one is denied the opportunity to prepare for priesthood because of financial reasons.

## **9. What can I do if my parents think I should wait until I graduate from college or work a few years before I start studying for priesthood?**

Unfortunately there are some parents who think that 18 is too young of an age to think about priesthood and act on a possible call. That is a young age, but we believe that God does indeed genuinely call young people to serve Him. Many times the objections are more of an issue for the parents than for their son, i.e. a desire for grandchildren or to pass on the family name, or thinking their son can't be happy or won't be wealthy as a priest.

Sometimes education is helpful because parents need to realize that by merely going to seminary a young man isn't limiting his options for the future, but is really expanding them by offering a host of opportunities other college students don't have. Those who decide not to continue on in seminary formation almost always leave with a greater sense of who they are and what they are called to do and are grateful for their experiences in the seminary. God never abandons those who step out in faith to respond to a call to priesthood.

It also might be helpful to ask whether parents would respond in the same way if their son wanted to be a doctor or lawyer. Would they encourage him not to enter pre-medicine or pre-law programs in college but instead study engineering or business in case that might be better for him? The basic point is that parents ought to support their sons to become who God needs them to be, independent of the parents' own hopes and plans for what they would like for their son. We find that the majority of parents are supportive of their sons' pursuit of priesthood once they understand what seminary life is really about.

#### **10. What will my friends think?**

I don't know what your friends will think, because a lot depends on who your friends are! In most cases, though, once they learn what a college seminary is like, they will see it as a good choice for you. Those who have difficulty understanding why you might want to be a priest are more likely questioning their own faith and ability to make commitments rather than saying anything about you.

#### **11. Can I date if I go to a college seminary?**

Seminarians are encouraged to build strong relationships with men and women, so social interaction with women is encouraged. Exclusive dating relationships are not permitted, because a man needs to discover whether the commitment to celibacy will be possible for him. You cannot fully and fairly discern priesthood while in a dating relationship. College seminarians are encouraged to live the challenge of celibate love to see if it fits them. This includes: striving to use their energies to grow passionately in love with God and to feel His passionate love for them; to make efforts to be inclusive in their relationships seeking out those whom others keep at a distance; to stretch themselves in their commitments of service so that they feel themselves spending their lives tirelessly for the sake of the many; to speak fearlessly for the truth in defense of life and the vulnerable today; to live more simply in the world so as to witness more effectively to the Gospel of Jesus we profess; to be radically involved in people's lives as a means of God's forgiveness, mercy and compassion; and to see each person as brother and sister in the Lord. If these kinds of experiences draw a genuine sense of joy to their heart, then priesthood will likely be a good fit for them.

#### **12. Can I go to parties if I go to a college seminary?**

Going to parties and being involved in college social life are important for seminarians. They don't lead separate lives from other college students. Obviously good moral behavior is important for seminarians, so legal and appropriate use of alcohol is expected.

#### **13. Can I play sports if I go the college seminary?**

Absolutely! Physical exercise and athletic competitions are important for all seminarians as well. Some seminaries are involved in campus interhall athletic competitions in football, basketball, soccer, and baseball. Depending on the sport, some seminarians participate on the varsity teams at the college or university they attend. Many seminaries also have seminary competitions in various sports, such as basketball, soccer, and racquetball.

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If you have other questions you can contact

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