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REMARKS TO THE NCDVD MEMEBRSHIP

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I would like to begin by saying how delighted I am to be here with you for this meeting of the NCDVD. I bring you the greetings of His Eminence, Cardinal Stella, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, who sends his best wishes and prayers.

In January of 2013, at the initiative of Pope Benedict XVI, the responsibility of overseeing seminary formation and the promotion of priestly vocations was transferred from the Congregation for Education, to the Congregation for the Clergy. In September of 2013, Pope Francis took the unprecedented step of creating a separate department for seminaries within the Congregation for the Clergy. It is clear from this step that the Holy Father places a tremendous importance upon the promotion and formation of priestly vocations, and I hope that my presence here with you representing that department can be a concrete sign of the Holy Father's love for you and for your ministry.

At the Congregation, we desire very much to enter into a relationship of collaboration, support, and encouragement not only with Bishops, but also with you, the vocation directors, with seminary rectors and staff, and even with seminarians themselves. We see all of you as co-workers in the important tasks that are set before us, and I hope that you can see us in the same way.

We are striving to build a positive approach to our relationship with you and with the others. We are not focusing only on what must be avoided, but we also want to work with you to articulate the vision or goal toward which we are all working. We see this as very important, because the goal toward which we are striving must be a goal that is rooted in the Church, in the priesthood, and in Christ. In this sense, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*, which the Congregation was happy to present to the participants of last year's conference, was a tangible sign of our collaboration in working with you toward a shared vision of the priesthood, according to the heart and mind of Christ and his Church.

Perhaps a word about the Congregation itself, and especially its seminary department, might be helpful. As a Congregation, we are responsible for overseeing the whole program of priestly formation, ministry, and life. This begins with the first initial stages of promoting priestly vocations, and proceeds through the process of screening and admission of candidates, through the years of seminary formation and eventual ordination, and then through the years of the ongoing formation and education of those already ordained.

The seminary department in particular also oversees the programs of formation in the Pontifical houses of formation and seminaries in Rome and throughout the world, receives the annual reports of seminaries, and collaborates with the Congregation for Education regarding curriculum and other matters.

Let me update you on an important item. We are working on a new *Ratio Fundamentalis* for seminaries. This is the foundational document for the Universal Church that guides seminaries in their work of forming candidates for the priesthood. Each national bishops' conference has to adapt the *Ratio Fundamentalis* to the particular needs and concerns of its own nation. Here in the US, that local adaptation is called the *Program for Priestly Formation*. You're all quite familiar with the PPF.

Although the PPF has gone through numerous revisions, the last time that the *Ratio Fundamentalis* itself was updated was in 1985, before the publication of *Pastores Dabo Vobis!* There's a lot that has happened since 1985, so you can see why we need an update! Once the *Ratio Fundamentalis* is updated, then each episcopal conference will need to update its program of priestly formation in turn.

I would like to underline three main ideas which we are likely to see in the new *Ratio Fundamentalis*:

1. **Integral Formation.** In accord with *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, priestly formation must be balanced in regard to the spiritual, intellectual, human and pastoral dimensions of formation. Formation in the seminary must include all four elements, without emphasizing one part at the expense of the others. This respects the integrity of the seminarian as a whole person.
2. **Gradual Formation.** Formation takes place slowly, in a specific progression across the stages of formation. At the beginning, seminarians must strengthen their Christian formation, in order to be firmly grounded as disciples. Only then can they be configured to Christ the Good Shepherd. For this purpose, an Introductory or Propaedeutic Course may be necessary. This kind of work is properly in the house of formation, and not in the University.

Then, the study of Philosophy should help them to grow in their faith, and should provide a foundation for their decision to follow Christ.

Lastly, the very heart of theological education is spiritual configuration to Christ, the Good Shepherd. This transformation requires much prayer and a regular reliance on spiritual direction.

3. **Communitarian Formation.** The team of priests who are responsible for the formation of seminarians are themselves a necessary reference point in the building up of community. Their own fraternal relationship among themselves serves as a testimony to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The ability of seminarians to see true priestly fraternity lived out is profoundly formative and will help them in their future ministry. By God's grace, seminarians will one day belong to a presbyterate, whose deep communitarian sense has its origin in a common sacrament and in a common mission.

With that as an overall introduction, I want you to know that the Congregation for the Clergy is here to support you, to encourage you, and to help you in your ministry of promoting and forming vocations to the priesthood.

I urge you to take initiative in your ministry, and to be a motivating force for hope and encouragement for your bishop and for your presbyterate. The Lord has led you to a wonderful place in life when you have both the boldness and courage of youth, and also the knowledge and wisdom that comes from experience. You have gifts of your own; use them in the promotion of priestly vocations. Take courage from the words of Jesus in the Gospel, "Do not be afraid". (Mt. 14: 22-36)

The heart of the work of encouraging priestly vocations, of course, does not begin at the Vatican. It begins at home, in your own dioceses. It takes place in families, in parishes, in youth groups, and in schools and college campuses. Even more so, it takes place in the personal encounters which young people have with priests who love being priests and who live their priesthood well. Most of all, it takes place in the encounter which young people have with Jesus. As you lead others to him, may he bless you in your ministry, and may he provide abundant shepherds for his Church.