

The Heart of Seminary Life: An In-Depth Exploration of Integrating Spirituality into All Aspects of Seminary Formation

Bernie Giangan¹, Juniel Laranjo², Jingle Selgas³

¹Saint Columban College, Pagadian City Institution: bernie.giangan@sccpag.edu.ph

²Saint Columban College, Pagadian City Institution: juniel.laranjo@sccpag.edu.ph

³Saint Columban College, Pagadian City Institution: jingle.selgas@sccpag.edu.ph

Abstract

The study examines how spiritual formation is integrated into various aspects of seminary formation, which leads to answer the main question "*How do the Holy Infant Seminarians integrate spiritual formation to the different aspects of seminary formation?*" , using a qualitative single case study of the Holy Infant Seminary. It highlights that communal prayers, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and Eucharistic celebrations are key seminary structures that support the spiritual growth of seminarians. Additionally, personal prayer, meditation, journal writing, and reading spiritual books nurture both their spirituality and intellectual development. These practices also enhance their human formation, offering opportunities for self-reflection. The study concludes that integrating spiritual practices into both the seminary's structures and seminarians' personal lives is essential for the holistic development of seminarians.

Keywords Spirituality; Aspects of Seminary Formation; Spiritual Practices; Challenges; Coping Mechanisms

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Introduction

In a systematic way of understanding, spirituality is defined as a personal and private belief that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness, connectedness, and openness to the infinite (Myers, 2000). In light of this notion, spirituality encompasses the journey of deepening one's self-awareness and fostering a profound connection with God through worship and prayer. It involves the exploration of the meaning and purpose of life, offering hope and courage along the

way. Additionally, spirituality guides individuals in cultivating moral and ethical values, enriching their lives and the lives of those around them (Myers, 2000).

However, spirituality is not only confined to the absolute being, but it also refers to the connection of other people, all living things, nature, and the universe (Bone, 2008). Thus, spirituality, in the broader sense, can be defined as an individual relationship to the higher power that affects one's behaviors and provides meaning and purpose in one's life (Coward, 2013). It is the genesis of the cultivation of religious belief through spirituality. It provides a wider entrance to a profound understanding of God (Mata, 2014).

Spirituality magnetizes all aspects of life to make them balanced. Lydia Paola G. Marave (1999) stated that spirituality is leading towards one's relationship to the Divine. It is believed that a person was created with an innate relationship to the Divine. It means that from the birth of the person, there is already an imprinted relationship between him and the Divine. Nevertheless, it not only pertains to the interiority of one's humanity but also includes the exteriority (Marave, 1999).

In the seminary context, spirituality is an essential aspect of one's whole being, especially in priestly formation; it is the core that links all aspects of formation (Pastores Davo Vobis, 1992, nos. 231-234). While all aspects of formation are vital, it is spirituality that provides the essential balance, filling the gaps inherent in each dimension of development. Among these various facets, spiritual formation stands out as uniquely significant because it serves

as the driving force that energizes and sustains the other areas of formation. In this sense, spirituality enables individuals to achieve a harmonious balance in their lives by encouraging deep reflection on the diverse aspects of existence. This is precisely why seminaries prioritize spiritual formation: to foster the spiritual growth of seminarians. Ultimately, spirituality acts as a guiding light, steering seminarians toward a holistic and meaningful formation that enriches their lives and prepares them for their future vocations (Canoy et al, 2023).

Without spirituality, the formation will become like a table without a leg, which completes the four; it cannot stand out. Indeed, spirituality is the heart of the formation. Truly, the absence of spirituality will result in the imbalance of formation. Thus, the Holy Infant Seminary tries to integrate spirituality into the formation. The seminarians are not only formed physically, intellectually, and pastorally but spiritually.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops emphasizes that the spiritual formation is the core that unifies the life of a priest, and it stands at the heart of seminary life and is at the center around which all other aspects are integrated" (USCCB). Spiritual Formation is essential in the seminary, for the seminary ought to be spiritually alive, filled with the marvel of encountering Christ (Lilles, 2013). Thus, the spiritual formation of the seminary must lead the seminarians in a way that they may learn to live an intimate and perpetual union with God (Pastores Dabo Vobis). The boundless seeking of God may ignite the spirituality of the seminarians.

Accordingly, spiritual formation is the heart of the seminary, which is true even in today's reality. Indeed, this is how the seminaries give importance to spiritual formation. Spiritual formation helps the seminarians become more spiritual as they journey to priesthood. As researchers have scrutinized, McCarthy (2013) is presenting ideas regarding spiritual formation as an integrating dimension of priestly formation. He said that spiritual formation unifies the life of a priest and is the center around which integrates the other aspects such as human, intellectual, and pastoral.

The study answers the central question, "How do the Holy Infant Seminarians integrate spiritual formation to the different aspects of seminary formation?" Specifically, it answers the following questions:

1. What are the seminary structures that help the seminarians nurture their spirituality?
2. How do the seminarians nurture their spirituality in the seminary?
3. How does spiritual formation help the seminarians in their intellectual, human, and pastoral formation?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative design to deeply understand spiritual formation processes, focusing on description, analysis, and interpretation of seminarians' experiences regarding spiritual life. In-depth interviews were used to gather data from participants' diverse perspectives, though the researchers noted that this method requires significant time for data collection, analysis, and interpretation

(Merriam, 1998). A single case study approach was also utilized, centering on the Holy Infant Seminary as the unit of analysis, following Sharan B. Merriam's Case Study Model, which emphasizes defining a case as a bounded entity (Merriam, 1998).

Research Environment

This research gathered data from a college seminary of the Diocese of Pagadian, the Holy Infant Seminary. It is located in the City of Pagadian, Zamboanga del Sur province in the western hemisphere of Mindanao, Philippines. By selecting the Holy Infant Seminary as the research environment, this research focused on contextualized research gap. The researchers believed that the research study is relevant to the given context, for the environment has insufficient study.

Research Participants

The participants were purposively selected based on their year of formation, as the researchers believed that those at higher stages of formation possess broader experiences relevant to the study's objectives. A total of twenty-six (26) seminarians from various formation levels at Holy Infant Seminary participated in the research. These included:

- Sixteen (16) seminarians from Discipleship Year 1, who had completed one year of formation.
- Five (5) seminarians from Discipleship Year 2, with two years of formation experience.
- Two (2) seminarians from Discipleship Year 3, who had undergone three years of formation.

- One (1) seminarian from Discipleship Year 4, who had completed four years of formation.
- Two (2) seminarians from the Pre-Configuration Year, who were college graduates undergoing a two-year formation program.

This diverse group, representing seminarians from the Discipleship Years (1st to 4th year) and the Pre-Configuration Year, was deemed appropriate for the study. Their varying levels of experience and stages in the seminary formation process provided a comprehensive perspective, contributing valuable insights to achieve the research's objectives.

Data Analysis

The researchers gathered descriptive data from participants' responses and documents, transcribing, summarizing, and categorizing the preliminary data into general categories. This process involved transcribing audio-recorded interviews, clustering the data into common themes, and using these to develop a textual and structural description of the seminarians' experiences (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation was employed by interviewing seminary formators to verify the participants' data, which enhanced the validity and credibility of the research findings by reducing bias (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to the ethical considerations to ensure that participation was voluntary, informed, and secure. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary,

allowing them to freely decide whether to participate and withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained through a consent form detailing the study's purpose, benefits, risks, duration, and funding, emphasizing participants' right to discontinue participation at any time. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with signed consent forms stored securely in a locked file drawer and all interview data kept in a password-protected folder accessible only to the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews conducted focused on the integration of spiritual formation across various dimensions of seminary formation and revealed three overarching categories: seminary structures that nurture spiritual formation, personal strategies to nurture spirituality, and ways spiritual formation contributes to intellectual, human, and pastoral formation of seminarians. These categories highlight the dual approach to fostering spiritual growth, combining institutional frameworks with individual initiatives to ensure a holistic and transformative formation experience.

Seminary Structures that Nurture Spiritual Formation

The research participants highlighted several seminary structures that play a vital role in nurturing their spirituality. These structures foster spiritual growth by promoting the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines, including communal prayers, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and participation in the Eucharistic Celebration (Daily Mass). Such practices serve as foundational pillars in

their journey toward deeper spiritual formation, fostering a sense of devotion, community, and personal connection with God.

Communal Prayers. Out of the twenty-six participants, fifteen emphasized that communal prayers are among the seminary structures that significantly nurtured their spirituality and deepened their relationship with God. This shared practice fosters a sense of unity and spiritual solidarity, providing an environment that encourages personal reflection and collective devotion. When asked what seminary structures helped them nurture and integrate spiritual formation, a significant number of them made mention about communal prayers.

“One of the seminary structures that helped me nurture my spirituality is the prayer itself. The communal prayers we have done 6 times a day: morning, midmorning, midday, midafternoon, evening, and night prayer. These truly helped nurture my spirituality for through these I learned to communicate to God. So there no reason for me to say that I don’t have enough time to pray because the schedule is already given which I have to abide. The more I pray, the more I become spiritual person for I believe that prayer is my fuel in the formation.” – P3

“I truly believe that prayer is the center of all the seminary activities, that is why I considered it as the most important one especially when having communal

prayers which we are all obliged to go to the chapel to pray. Through communal prayers, I learned to value the importance of prayer, and also, I become more prayerful compared to before. For I believe that I become what I repeatedly do; the more I talk to God, the more I become prayerful. Prayer helped strengthen my relationship to God because the more I talk to him, the more I become closer to him, and the more I feel the presence of God.” – P6

“Having prayer every day, especially the liturgy of the hour (LOH) is one of the seminary structures that helped me nurture my spirituality because through this I could be able to communicate to God and to get closer to him. Praying the LOH is one way of praying the whole church.” – P7

“I considered communal prayers as one of the seminary structures that helped me nurture my spirituality because having this 6 times a day made me become prayerful. Since communal prayers have to be done every day, I can say that I have enough time to talk to God. I have enough time to pray not only for my own sake but also for others’. In praying the communal prayers, we don’t pray by our own words but we used our breviary (prayer book) which contains prayers for the whole church.” – P8

“Communal prayers helped nurture my spirituality because prayer, as the basic foundation of spirituality, made me realize the importance of establishing and strengthening relationship to God. I joined the communal prayers not because we are obliged but because I need it. Having a one-hour to pray inside the chapel is more than enough for me to talk to God. Throughout this duration, I believe that I have shared a lot to God. The more I talk to God the more I express myself in front of Him.” – P9

“Communal prayers helped nurture my spirituality because I am able to communicate to God. I can't make an excuse for this because as part of the structures, the time is already provided for us to pray together inside the chapel. Also, through this I am able to strengthen my faith to him. I believe that in prayer, God always intervenes.” – P10

“Communal prayers, one of the seminary structures that helped nurture my spirituality and helped develop my relationship to God. In what way? Through communal prayers I can speak to God the feelings I have inside my heart. Although we are using a prayer book, and upon using it, we are not only reading what had been written there, but we also express our feelings by reading it sincerely. This helped nurture my spirituality because I am always

doing it. The more I pray, the more I like prayer itself and the more I love God.” – P12

“This is one of the reasons why I become closer to God. Having prayers 6 times a day helped me become more inspired and perseverant in responding to the call of God. Also, this helped me nurture my spirituality because among all the seminary structures only prayer has to be done repeatedly. It is like when I always pray, I become more prayerful.” – P14

“Communal Prayers helped nurture my spirituality because if I am to compare myself now and before, I am not really into prayer when I wasn't yet a seminarian. Praying together with my brother seminarians is quite inspiring. It's a nice feeling while watching all of us praying together. This makes me realize the importance of prayer and how prayer transforms life.” – P17

“I am actually grateful for having schedules to pray together. Praying together makes me realize the presence of God to each of us. By having this communal prayer, I am able to develop my prayer life because inside the seminary, schedule is a schedule, whatever schedule it is we have to follow it. And so, by following the prayer schedules every day, prayer becomes my habit.” – P18

“I really value our communal prayers inside the seminary. That is why if I cannot join the prayer with the community, I feel guilty and I feel that there is really lacking. Being used to pray helped me become more prayerful. What I mean is that I don’t only read what is in the prayer book, but I really feel every word written there. This helped nurture my spirituality because whenever I pray, I really feel the presence of God in every word I uttered.” – P19

“The seminary structure that helps me most in nurturing my spirituality is by simply following the prayer schedule in the seminary, which I am referring to communal prayers. Through simply conforming the prayer schedule it’s somehow nurtured my spiritual aspect. It is because by following those schedules in the seminary, it is also a way of following Christ.” – P22

“The part of the seminary structures that helped me most in nurturing my spirituality are the communal prayers. Having this practice like every day prayer, really helped in developing my relationship to God and gradually I become closer to him.” – P23

“Praying together as one community helped nurture my spirituality and developed my relationship to God. For through this I realize that the call to

building relationship to God is not a solo journey.” – P24

“I am really strengthened every time I go inside the chapel and pray together with the community. Having this kind of practice in the seminary I realize how strong our voices are and how loyal we are to pray. I can say that his help my strengthened my relationship to God.” – P26

Such a sentiment was verified by one of the spiritual directors in the seminary. He echoed,

“Communal prayers are very important among all the seminary structures that helped seminarians nurture their spirituality. He added that the very core of the formation is the spiritual aspect in which the communal prayers are integrated. For without prayer life, the seminary itself is just like a boarding house. Prayer is truly the very nature of the seminary. That’s why in the seminary there are communal prayers.” - SD1

Communal prayers play a vital role in nurturing seminarians’ spirituality and should remain an integral part of seminary formation. The ultimate goal of formation extends beyond shaping attitudes, fostering community life, refining interpersonal skills, and cultivating intellectual growth. Most importantly, it aims to nurture seminarians' maturity in their relationship with God through prayer. While personal prayers are essential, many seminarians found the communal aspect of prayer to be

the most profound and transformative experience.

Ryan Ferrigan, a theology seminarian from another diocese, captured this sentiment by stating, “This is what the seminary is like – praying together with a life centered around Christ.” This reflects the words of Jesus to His disciples, “Could you not spend one hour with me?” In line with this, seminary structures include designated communal prayer times, during which seminarians are encouraged to spend an hour in the chapel in prayerful devotion. Communal prayers, alongside the Eucharistic celebration, serve as the cornerstone of spiritual life in the seminary. As Caserta (2009) emphasizes, prayer is the most profound way to encounter God and witness the movement of the Holy Spirit in one’s life.

Adoration to the Blessed Sacrament. Some seminarians highlighted that adoration, as a key seminary structure, significantly nurtures their spirituality and deepens their relationship with God. They shared how spending time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament allowed them to reflect, pray, and cultivate a more intimate connection with Christ. Additionally, five seminarians specifically mentioned that meditation during adoration is one of the practices that profoundly enhances their spiritual growth, enabling them to center their thoughts and listen to the movements of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

“Every after communal prayers, there is really an allotted time for us all to meditate – all the lights are off, and all of us were silent. Through meditation, I can really

feel the presence of God beside me.” – P7

“Honestly, I usually meditate after communal prayers and even after the mass. Meditation helped nurture my spirituality in a way that I am able to communicate to God and express myself in front of him. Aside from prayers, I found this as a way to communicate to God constantly, and by having this constant meditation to God I am able to get closer to him.” – P11

“I considered this as an essential practice that I applied to myself in nurturing my spirituality. It helps me a lot especially when I have problems which I don’t want to let the others know, and so, I opt to share it to God instead. Meditation makes me feel that I am listened to by God and this makes me feel that my feelings are validated. This helped develop my relationship to God in such a way that it allows me to talk to God as my friend.” – P12

“Meditation helps me a lot in nurturing my spirituality because just by being silent in front of God, I am allowing God to enter in my heart. During the meditation, there’s no sound that I listened to other than the sound of my breath. It is true that when you go deeper into yourself, you will truly see God. For the moment I listen to it, I am also listening to the sound of God’s breath. This helped me get closer to God because this makes

me feel the presence of God.” – P13

“Honestly, I just realize the importance of meditation when I’m already here in the seminary. It helps me grow spiritually because through silence I can hear the loud voice of God.” – P21

Meditation guides seminarians into the depths of prayer and fosters profound self-awareness, serving as a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. It allows the Spirit of God to penetrate the innermost core of one’s being, unveiling the presence of the false self and illuminating the path toward authenticity (Merton, 1996). Meditation is both a personal and transpersonal journey, promoting enlightenment and growth that transcends individual boundaries, reaching the soul’s deeper levels and connecting to the Eternal Source (White, 1974). It begins with the calming of the mind, leading to focused concentration. This state of concentration—fixing the mind on a single point, whether it be a mantra, breathing, or an object in nature—eventually evolves into deeper meditation, creating a gateway to spiritual transformation (Satchidananda, 1978).

Eucharistic Celebration (Daily Mass). The Eucharistic celebration is regarded as one of the most significant seminary structures in nurturing the spirituality of seminarians. Seven participants specifically highlighted the profound impact of the Eucharistic celebration in deepening their spiritual lives. Their responses underscore how this sacred practice not only strengthens their relationship with God but also fosters a sense of communal worship and personal

transformation. Below are the responses and insights shared by the seminarians regarding the vital role of the Eucharist in their spiritual journey.

“I can really say that because of the Eucharistic celebration that we have daily, it already becomes my routine to go to church when I go home. It seems like I can’t live without attending the mass. This truly helped develop my relationship to God because there are already changes in me – the Eucharistic celebration has changed my life, in other words, God changes my life. Thus, through the Eucharistic celebration, I believe that I am 100% connected to God.” – P1

“Eucharistic celebration helped develop my spirituality because it is already an “all-in-one” celebration in which I can listen to the word of God, the homily of the priests, and I can partake the body and blood of Christ.” – P6

“My religious experience of Eucharistic celebration is really different compared to the other prayer schedules. That’s why it is considered as the highest form of prayer for it is the source and summit of Christian life. This helped nurture and strengthen my spirituality because when I attend the mass, I am not only listening to the words of God, but I am also allowing God to enter in to my life through partaking the body and

blood of Christ during the Holy Communion.” – P7

“By attending the Eucharistic celebration, I am able to get closer to God because literally, I receive God himself especially during the Holy Communion. I can say that I really encountered God for I have truly received him. Thus, this religious experience of mine helped nurture my spirituality.” – P15

“I really believe that Eucharistic celebration helped nurture my spirituality for having this makes me different from those young individuals outside. Indeed, Eucharistic celebration has changed my life; and I believe that it is God who changed me. By attending the Eucharistic celebration, I am able to establish and strengthen my relationship to him.” – P16

“Being here in the seminary is a great opportunity for me to join the Eucharistic celebration every day. I consider this helpful in nurturing my spirituality because in this celebration, all prayers have been unified for I strongly believe that the mass is the culmination of all prayers. It is very important to me because this is my source of strength. I am already strengthened before doing my works for that day because I have attended the mass. That’s why the mass should be the first activity in the seminary that has to

be done first in the morning.” – P20

“I believe that it is the Eucharistic celebration that helps me in nurturing my spirituality and in strengthening my relationship to God because every time I received the Holy Communion, I can say to myself that God is really with me despite the challenges in the formation.” – P25

Participation in the daily Eucharistic celebration is an integral part of seminary formation. Seminarians are trained to regard the Eucharist as the central moment of their day, actively engaging in it rather than merely attending out of routine. This aligns with the guidance in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (no. 48), which describes the Eucharist as "the high point of Christian prayer" and emphasizes its place at the core of a priest's daily life.

As part of their formation, seminarians are not only required but encouraged to participate fully in the Mass, preparing them for their future responsibilities as priests. Presiding over the Eucharist will be a central aspect of their vocation, and cultivating a deep love and appreciation for it during their formative years fosters a lifelong devotion to priestly ministry.

The Eucharist also becomes a source of spiritual sustenance, helping seminarians recognize their dependence on Christ in their journey. As Christ himself reminds us, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53, KJV). Through frequent participation in the Mass, seminarians grow in their understanding of

the priesthood and deepen their relationship with Christ, who is their strength and guide.

Personal Strategies to Nurture Spirituality

Personal Prayer and Devotion. Out of the twenty-six participants, eight emphasized personal prayer and devotions as integral to their spiritual practices, highlighting their significant role in nurturing their spirituality. They shared that these practices have profoundly strengthened their relationship with God, allowing them to experience a deeper sense of connection and purpose in their spiritual journey. Below are the responses shared by the participants, reflecting the transformative impact of personal prayer and devotions in their lives.

“Before going to bed I am doing my personal prayer. I believe that having this kind of practice helps me feel the presence of God – that God is always present not only in the works I am doing in the seminary, but he also listens to my personal concerns. By this way, it helps nurture my spirituality. – P1

“One of the strategies of mine in nurturing my spirituality is personal prayer. If I don’t have something to do, I go to the chapel alone and pray. Though it is just a simple way of praying but it helps me a lot in strengthening my relationship to God.” – P2

“It is very difficult to persevere in the study if you do not have

personal prayer. I ask God for the gift of knowledge to be more productive in my studies.” – P3

“I have my personal every after the mass and after night prayer. Having my personal prayer helps me nurture my spirituality and strengthens my relationship to God because through prayer I can have my deep talks with God whenever I want. It also gives me assurance that God is always guiding me to focus.” – P6

“My personal devotion is somehow my bridge towards God. The saints I venerate helped bring my prayers to God. This is how I nurture my spirituality.” – P7

“My personal devotion helped nurture my spirituality in such a way that the saints are also praying for me. I have started this personal devotion of mine because I feel like I can’t nurture my spirituality alone, without the help of the saints. With the help of their prayers, my faith to God has been strengthened and well-established. Personal devotion helped nurture my spirituality and relationship to God because it brings me closer to God.” – P10

“Aside from praying 6 times a day with the community, I also have my personal prayer. I have my own time to talk with God. Praying alone in silence is my way of communicating God in which I can express my gratitude, and it is

also my opportunity to ask God's providence." – P15

"My strategies that helped nurture my spirituality is that I really have my personal prayer before going to bed, before taking a bath, and before eating. These are my prayers aside from those included in the seminary structures." – P25

The perspectives of the participants are further supported by the insights of the spiritual director, who has extensive experience guiding seminarians through their formation journey. Drawing from his role in spiritual direction sessions, the spiritual director provided a nuanced understanding of the seminarians' growth and challenges. He emphasized that their reflections during these sessions often reveal the profound impact of personal prayer, community practices, and the structured environment of seminary life in shaping their spirituality. He added:

"Prayer helped them to realize that they have a partner in their difficulties in academics. The Lord is with them, that's why it is important to pray before they start their activities especially in academics. We will know if their connection to the Lord is superficial because their prayer is also superficial. That's why as a spiritual director, one of the things I will ask them is how they are doing in their academics, and how they let the Lord enters in their experiences in academics." – SD 1

The data gathered highlights the significant role of personal prayer and devotion in

nurturing the participants' spirituality and strengthening their relationship with God. While communal prayers provide an avenue for collective worship and communication with God, the participants emphasized the unique value of personal prayer in fostering a deeper, one-on-one connection with the Divine. Personal prayer and devotion allow seminarians to address their individual needs and concerns, which may not always be possible in communal settings, where prayers often follow a structured format from designated prayer books. This intimate and reflective practice serves as a vital complement to communal worship, enriching their spiritual growth and fostering a more profound relationship with God.

Personal Meditation. Another powerful practice that nurtures spirituality is personal meditation. The participants expressed that through quieting the mind, they are able to create space for divine guidance to enter their lives, fostering a deeper connection with God. Three participants specifically emphasized the importance of personal meditation in strengthening their relationship with God. They shared that:

"Personal meditation helped me relax, recharged, and strengthened especially to my relationship with God. In meditation, I did not listen to any other voice, only the voice of the Lord himself. So, meditation is my time to date God." – P3

"Apart from our regular meditation, I also have a personal one. By just having a silence I considered it as a meditation

because I listen to nothing but the voice of the Lord in the beating of my heart. It helped me develop my spirituality because in silence I saw and felt the Lord more.” – P8

“After my personal prayer, I will meditate for a while about what I did that day. Through this I can realize what works should be continued and what should not be continued. So, I can't listen to my conscience and guilt feelings, in which the Lord made me feel.” - P1

Through meditation, seminarians are able to turn their attention inward, inducing a state of relaxation and creating a space for deeper spiritual connection (Fabiny, 2014). Personal meditation plays a significant role in nurturing spirituality, offering an essential means for individuals to tap into the depths of their hearts. The more one remains in silence, the more attuned they become to hearing the voice of God. Silence itself becomes a form of connection to the Divine, a practice that invites spiritual depth. In a world filled with constant distraction and noise, the importance of silence cannot be overstated. For, as Scripture reminds us, God does not speak in the chaos of the world but in the stillness, as "the Lord is heard in a gentle breeze" (1 Kings 19:12-14, KJV).

Spiritual Journal Writing and Reflection.

Two participants shared their belief that journaling and reflection significantly contributed to nurturing their spirituality. They viewed journaling as one of the most effective practices for deepening their spiritual lives and strengthening their relationship with God. Through writing,

they felt inspired by the divine presence within them, using their journals as a means of expressing their thoughts, emotions, and reflections. This practice allowed them to connect with God in a personal and profound way. As the participants shared:

“After my personal prayer, I would reflect for a while about my religious experiences and have written it in my journal notebook. Through this I think of the words I could have to offer to God.” – P1

“Spiritual journal writing is one of which I considered as my spiritual practices that helped me a lot in strengthening my relationship to God. Every time I am writing my journal I feel like I am also writing a letter for God. In my journal, I could express my thanksgiving and requests to God.” – P4

The formator also gave insight into the seminarians' importance of keeping spiritual journals. He said that:

“This task is actually made up of two tasks rather than just one. By putting down their ideas, they can improve their connection with God by keeping a journal. Moreover, it also allows them to reflect on what to write. It develops both their capacity for introspection and their piety toward God.” – F1

Spiritual journal writing and reflection have proven to be essential practices in the spiritual growth of seminarians. Through this practice, they foster a deeper connection with themselves while

cultivating a more profound relationship with the divine (Soft Skills Team, n.d.). Unlike the daily diaries that students outside the seminary might keep, spiritual journaling involves a more intentional reflection on personal experiences through the lens of faith. It is not merely about documenting events; rather, it is about connecting those events to one's spiritual journey and relationship with God. The seminarians' experiences clearly demonstrate that journaling has strengthened their bond with God, offering them a tangible way to perceive His presence. As Wise (2016) suggests, spiritual journal writing and reflection help individuals hear and see God in a more meaningful way.

Ways Spiritual Formation Contributes to the Intellectual, Human, and Pastoral Formation of Seminarians

The participants had given their responses about the ways and spiritual practices that spiritual formation helped their intellectual, human, and pastoral formation. The common categories are Personal Prayer and Devotion, Personal Meditation, Spiritual Journal Writing and Reflection, Reading Spiritual Books, Serving in the Church, and Leading Prayers and BEC/GSK. Below are the discussions for each category.

Personal Prayer and Devotion. Spirituality plays a significant role in the intellectual formation of seminarians, as it is closely intertwined with their academic and theological development. As part of their spiritual practices and strategies, seminarians engage in personal prayer and devotions to foster a deeper understanding

of their studies. Among the twenty-six participants, five shared how personal prayer and devotion have contributed to enhancing their intellectual formation. These practices not only strengthen their relationship with God but also provide a spiritual foundation that supports their academic growth and theological reflection.

“Prayer before exams and academic works: I feel that I would never excel if there is no prayer in my schooling. When I go to school, I pray a lot, so prayer is a great help in the intellectual aspect of my life. This is the moment I ask the Lord for guidance, that I may not be mentally blocked, and that I may not forget my studies.” – P7

“Honestly, one of my strategies in integrating spirituality to my intellectual formation is that having this personal prayer before and after doing academic requirements, exams, and quizzes. I really believe that prayer is a powerful weapon that conquers everything. Through personal prayer I feel like I'm guided by God. The more I pray, the more I become courageous to meet the demands of academics.” – P9

“Upon having this personal prayer, I am able to ask God for the graces I need in my study such as knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, for without prayer I will not be guided in my intellectual formation. My mind must have wandered without the

Lord's guidance that I asked for through prayer.” – P10

“Before I entered the seminary, I am actually not into prayer. But now, as I grow older in the formation, I am gradually learning how to integrate my prayer especially before having my study period. Personal prayer helped me a lot for God gives me enlightenment whenever I study, and of course I feel productive when I pray.” – P25

Upon reviewing the gathered data, it is clear that personal prayer and devotion significantly contribute to the intellectual formation of the seminarians. These spiritual practices play a pivotal role in shaping their intellect, as they offer guidance and clarity in their academic pursuits. Personal prayer and devotion not only help seminarians stay grounded in their faith but also prepare them to approach their studies with openness and discernment. There is no better way to prepare themselves for academic challenges and to remain receptive to new knowledge than by cultivating a habit of personal prayer, which strengthens both their spiritual and intellectual development.

Personal prayer is equally essential in the human formation of seminarians. To truly become the individuals they are called to be, they believe that they cannot achieve this without the guidance and strength derived from God through personal prayer. It is through this intimate connection with God that they find clarity, direction, and the courage to navigate their personal growth. Below are the insights shared by three

participants out of the twenty-six who expressed the profound impact of personal prayer on their human formation.

“Being a seminarian, I should know more Christ and I can only know him through personal prayer. In my way of knowing Christ, I discover that Christ is present even in my struggles of understanding myself. Besides, it helps my human formation because I can imitate the humility of Christ by looking at the cross every time I pray. That is why here in the formation I gradually practice the attitude of Christ by being humble and it helps me to nurture my human aspect.” – P15

“I remember when I was not yet here in the seminary. I feel that I am really detached to prayer. It is only when I entered the seminary that I experienced the importance of prayer and it is very powerful. In my prayer, I experience talking to God discussing my struggles and in my bad experience as being human including my pains and wounds. Prayer also made me realize that my pain is God's pain; my wounds are God's wounds for he is a human too. I realize that even God has experienced this but God doesn't end up losing, rather he ended up winning.” – P18

“The strategy I implemented to myself in order to develop my human formation is personal prayer. Every time I pray, I really feel that God is telling me to recall

the actions I have done within the day – which all my actions should be in lined to His. Prayer is a reminder for me that God is always looking at my actions, and God is always telling me to make all the wrong actions I made right.” – P1

Personal prayer has played a significant role in shaping the personalities and values of seminarians. They believe that prayer is not just a form of communication with God, but a means through which they are reminded of God’s humanity—the very example they are called to follow. The more they engage in prayer, the deeper their understanding of God becomes; and with that understanding, they are increasingly inspired to imitate Him in their daily lives.

Moreover, in terms of their pastoral formation, personal prayer and devotion have proven to be indispensable. One participant shared how these spiritual practices have profoundly contributed to their development in pastoral ministry.

“In doing my pastoral, of course, there are lots of negative feelings I have knowing that there are many people who expect a lot from me. Prayer has been my instrument of making myself strong enough in facing the people. Actually, I pray to God when I don’t know how to be with the parishioners. Thus, I can say that my personal prayer helps a lot in my pastoral formation for it strengthened me whenever I feel frightened in front of the parishioners.” – P1

When seminarians face moments of fear or uncertainty in their interactions with others, it is through personal prayer that they find the strength to persevere. They believe that in prayer, they can directly seek God’s intervention during times of struggle, particularly in their relationships with people. Prayer, for them, becomes a source of profound strength.

As Villegas (2024) reflected, "the strength of prayer does not come from the one who prays, but rather from the one to whom it is addressed." In other words, prayer is not powerful because of the one who prays, but because of the God to whom the prayer is directed. There is no greater tool than prayer itself. This is why seminarians are encouraged to pray even outside the scheduled times, making prayer a personal and constant practice. A strong foundation in prayer is essential for developing an intimate relationship with God. As Pope Benedict XVI (2006) emphasized, anyone who wishes to be a true friend of Jesus and an authentic disciple must cultivate this deep, personal friendship with Him through prayer.

Personal Meditation. Personal meditation plays a crucial role in the human formation of seminarians. In fact, six participants expressed that meditation significantly contributed to their development, as it allowed them to reconnect with their true selves. Through meditation, they were able to reflect deeply, fostering greater self-awareness and inner peace. As the participants shared:

“Through personal meditation, I can really assess my inner and

outer self. It really made me realize what I really am.” – P3

“I consider silence to be a spiritual function because the Lord is always in silence. Then it helped me to realize that I don't have to stand aside in every situation because I'm not the only one who has the right to do that. Through silence, God reminds me that I need to be silent so that I can listen to others.” – P7

“Through this I will know myself better. Because in meditation, I'm learning to look back at my identity, what I really am, including my feelings and good nature, strengths and weaknesses, and my physicality.” – P8

“If I wanted to become more human, I have to go back to myself and examine it. Spirituality helped me in my human formation through this kind of spiritual practice I have applied to myself. Personal meditation allows me to think of my strengths and weaknesses, my talents and abilities, the good and bad actions I have done. Thus, by being aware of this helped me become aware of myself.” – P9

“It's not possible to do something without thinking about it, especially if it's not good. Meditation as a spiritual work has helped me in my identity because through this I can examine myself and I can remind myself of things that should and should not be

done. He helped me a lot especially in my decision-making because the consequences are heavy if I don't think about my decision beforehand.” – P6

“Spirituality helped my human formation through personal meditation, as one of the spiritual practices I have applied to myself. This allows me to reflect on my actions whether good or bad. Also, I reflect on the words of God and make it as the light of my life. And lastly, through this reflection, I have learned to correct my mistakes as a human.” – P10

The statements provided emphasize the profound significance of meditation and silence in personal spiritual practice as essential tools for self-discovery. These practices not only promote individual peace but also foster social harmony and personal growth. Personal meditation helps cultivate inner peace, which, in turn, enhances self-awareness and self-acceptance (Chao, 2019). Silence is recognized as a vital aspect of every seminarian's spiritual journey toward the priesthood, with many seeing it as the ideal time to reconnect with their true selves.

Meditation has been identified as a key practice in developing self-awareness; however, time management remains a major obstacle to incorporating this practice into daily routines (Stew, 2008). Despite the busy schedules seminarians face, the need for silence remains paramount. For them, there is no other time for personal calmness and reflection than during meditation. Thus, carving out moments of

silence becomes essential for their overall formation and spiritual growth.

Spiritual Journal Writing and Reflection. Spiritual journal writing and reflection are also vital practices that contributed to the intellectual formation of the seminarians. According to the gathered data, one participant shared that through spiritual journal writing and reflection, he was able to enhance his understanding of the fundamentals of English. He explained:

“This is one of the spiritual activities that helped my intellectual formation. What I did was not only learning to write about my religious experience, but also learning to construct sentences, formulate ideas, and especially my grammar. This helped me develop my writing skills and my English writing.” – P8

It is widely believed that the more we write, the more we learn. Learning occurs not only through speaking and listening but also through the act of writing. Spiritual journal writing has proven to be an effective tool in enhancing both the writing and critical thinking skills of seminarians. Moreover, the act of writing things down facilitates better understanding and deeper learning. This is why seminarians are encouraged to write their journals in English—an intentional practice that helps them become more proficient in the language. This approach ensures that, as future priests, they will find it easier to compose homilies and other written works. As Britton (1972) aptly stated, people understand and learn

from events "by giving them shape in language."

Reading Spiritual Books. Spiritual reading has become a significant source of knowledge for the participants. When engaging with spiritual books such as the lives of saints, the Bible, Church documents, and other works related to God, seminarians not only find inspiration but also cultivate their intellect. These readings play a crucial role in shaping their understanding of faith, deepening their spiritual lives, and forming their intellectual capacities. Two research participants specifically highlighted the importance of reading spiritual books in their intellectual formation. They shared:

“Spiritual Reading: the spiritual reading did not only inspire me through the lives of the saints that I read and the contexts of what is in the bible, but it also increased my knowledge about grammars, vocabulary, and philosophy.” – P1

“Reading the spiritual books helped me in my intellectual formation because through that I became more familiar with English words and vocabularies. By reading the prayer book every day, I became fluent in reading English and I encountered many words that I had never encountered before.” – P6

It is evident that spiritual reading is significant in the intellectual formation of seminarians. One of the key ways spiritual books contribute to their intellectual development is by expanding their

vocabulary, both directly and indirectly. By engaging with texts such as the Bible, works on saints, and Church documents, seminarians are exposed to advanced language and ideas, which enhance their cognitive abilities and critical thinking skills. This form of reading not only broadens their vocabulary but also stimulates intellectual curiosity and deepens their understanding of theological concepts. Furthermore, just as reading to children encourages them to explore books and develop their cognitive skills, spiritual reading nurtures the seminarians' intellectual growth and helps them cultivate a lifelong passion for learning (Canoy et al., 2006).

Serving in the Church. Serving in the Church is a fundamental aspect of the seminarians' formation. As part of their monthly home visits, seminarians are tasked with serving in the Church, which they regard as their spiritual home. This responsibility is prioritized, as it reflects their commitment to embodying the values of service and devotion. Two participants shared that serving in the Church has played a crucial role in their pastoral formation, helping them to cultivate the qualities needed for effective ministry. Below are the responses from the research participants:

“Serving and participating in the activities of the church, it was a great help in my pastoral formation because I always shared the cost of people and ideas that could help in that activity. Aside from that, you can really recognize a seminarian who is prayerful because in the church

he really participates in the activities.” – P7

“Every time we get a chance to go home, I used to spend a lot of my time at the church because this is always our priority when we come back. When I joined it, I got involved with other people, especially in the church. He helped me a lot because I boosted my confidence in dealing with people.” – P8

When seminarians actively engage in the life of the Church, they become more visible to the community, allowing people to get to know them on a personal level. This interaction is crucial to their pastoral formation, as it prepares them for a future in which they will live and serve alongside the people they minister to. Serving in the Church is not merely an obligation; it is a vital practice that fosters the development of essential skills, character, and leadership qualities required for pastoral ministry. Through these experiences, seminarians learn to embody the spirit of service that will guide their future vocations. Service in the Church is not optional—it is foundational. By immersing themselves in the community, seminarians are drawn into authentic relationships that strengthen their connection to both God and the people they are called to serve.

Leading Prayers and BEC/GSK. Leading prayers and participating in BEC/GSK (Basic Ecclesial Communities/Gagmayng Simbahanong Katilingban) are vital spiritual practices that also serve as pastoral activities for seminarians. While there may not be a fixed schedule for pastoral

exposure, these activities are essential expressions of their vocation. As seminarians are called to be men of prayer, it is crucial for them to live out this calling in service and prayer. Whenever they return home, their primary responsibility is to dedicate time to prayer and service, fostering their growth as spiritual leaders. Among the twenty-six participants, five shared that leading prayers and engaging in BEC/GSK were significant in helping shape their pastoral formation. Below are the insights provided by the research participants:

“Only through this I can share what I have learned in the seminary. My closeness and relationship with them is not only for the sake that I can have someone to talk to, but this is my way of sharing my time when they are in need.” – P1

“When I go home, I will lead the GSK. This helped me in my pastoral formation because my sharing does not only give me strength, but also encouraged others and persuaded others to experience God. Speaking of pastoral, joining BEC is one of practicing and preparing myself to become a leader of a large group of people in the future.” – P6

“Every time we go home when we pray especially the rosary, I really become a leader in prayer. Even in devotions, I teach my family and other parishioners. These spiritual practices that I learned in the seminary, I applied there when

I returned to our Parish and to my family.” – P7

“Joining GSK every time we go home is helpful in living my pastoral life. This is one of the spiritual practices I used to do when we go home that helped me in my pastoral formation. Through this I am able to spread the good news to the people, and able to catechize them. This also gives me the opportunity to inspire and motivate them. By this, I can say that I am able to bring God to them.” – P9

“GSK is one of the spiritual practices that helped develop my pastoral formation. There were times also when we had our home visit, I was asked to lead the GSK and asked to share my reflection about the message of God. Having this kind of practice, I am able to prepare myself for my future ministry. I believe that you will not become someone you wanted to be in the future if you don't practice it now. That's why this kind of practice helps me in becoming a good pastor. The more I practice this, the more I become an expert in sharing my reflections when I become a priest sooner.” – P10

The formator also confirmed that the seminarians get the chance to share by leading GSK, and it greatly aids with their pastoral formation. He disclosed that:

“By simply uniting in prayer with the public, the seminarians are

enabling people to recognize the presence of God in them.” – F1

The researchers believe that the truest evidence of learning lies in its application. What one learns becomes authentic when it is put into practice. In the seminary, seminarians engage in the practice of sharing, particularly during BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) sessions. However, this practice is not confined to the seminary walls. Seminarians are encouraged to apply the lessons they have learned in sharing by teaching and leading prayers when they return home. Through this act, they share Christ with others, as leading God's people in prayer offers the opportunity to share Christ himself (Petingga, 1994).

Moreover, this practice of sharing and prayer fosters the building of meaningful relationships. As seminarians engage with others, they inspire and uplift those around them, creating stronger bonds within the community. The more they share, the greater the potential for fostering deeper connections. Leading others in prayer enhances communication and effectiveness in building these relationships. People around them begin to notice the presence of something special—a connection with God—that compels them to seek a deeper understanding (Adedeji, 2020). Through leading prayers and sharing, seminarians cultivate both their spiritual and relational growth.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research underscore the essential role of spiritual formation in the comprehensive development of

seminarians, demonstrating that it is not merely an ancillary aspect of their education but a foundational element of their growth as future priests. The integration of spiritual practices—such as communal prayer, personal meditation, and active participation in the Eucharistic celebration—enriches seminarians' relationship with God and profoundly enhances their intellectual, human, and pastoral formation. This dual approach, balancing institutional support with personal initiative, emphasizes the need for a holistic framework within seminaries that fosters spiritual growth in all its dimensions.

To further elevate spiritual formation, seminaries must prioritize the establishment of structured communal prayer schedules, recognizing the transformative impact these practices have on seminarians' spiritual journeys. By reinforcing regular communal prayer sessions and offering diverse forms of prayer, including intercessory and contemplative prayer, seminaries can foster a prayer-centered culture that deepens seminarians' spiritual lives and strengthens their communal bonds.

Moreover, personal spiritual practices, such as meditation and journal writing, have proven to be invaluable tools for individual reflection and growth. Seminaries should facilitate these practices by dedicating time and resources for personal retreat and reflection, equipping seminarians with the tools to engage in deep, meaningful meditation. By embedding personal spirituality into the formation process, seminarians will gain a heightened self-awareness and a more profound

understanding of their relationship with God.

The Eucharistic celebration emerges as a cornerstone of spiritual life for seminarians, requiring deliberate emphasis within seminary formation programs. Seminaries should cultivate a deeper theological understanding of the Eucharist by offering specialized courses, encouraging active liturgical participation, and integrating the Eucharist as a central focus in spiritual and academic life. This will ensure seminarians not only appreciate the Eucharist as a source of spiritual nourishment but also prepare them for their future roles as celebrants in their pastoral ministries.

Finally, the integration of service and prayer leadership within pastoral formation is crucial for developing seminarians as effective ministers of the Church. Opportunities for community service, prayer leadership, and involvement in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) will allow seminarians to develop pastoral skills while embodying the spirit of service that is fundamental to their vocation. These experiences will help them establish meaningful relationships and engage authentically with their faith, preparing them for impactful service in their future ministries.

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CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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