

AN EXPLORATION OF THE TRANSITORY EXPERIENCES AMONG PROPAEDEUTIC SEMINARIANS

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Abstract

This study investigates the transitory experiences of propaedeutic seminarians and their implications for vocational formation within the context of the Holy Infant Seminary in the Diocese of Pagadian. The inquiry is grounded in the significant understanding of the formative dynamics that occur during the propaedeutic stage, a period foundational to the development of priestly identity yet often underexamined in scholarly discourse. Utilizing the phenomenological approach as delineated by Moustakas (1994), the study engaged a purposive sample of sixth propaedeutic seminarians aged 18 to 23. The researchers served as the principal instruments of data collection, supported by a semi-structured interview guide. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' method of phenomenological reduction and thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that the propaedeutic seminarians' initial perceptions of seminary life were predominantly shaped by idealized perception and indirect knowledge acquired through observation of priests, hearing stories, and engaging with fellow seminarians from their parish. This observation is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals construct understanding through observation, imitation, and social interaction prior to direct experience. As the propaedeutic seminarians progressed through the propaedeutic stage, they underwent a transformative and meaningful formation process that enhanced their vocational clarity and personal identity. This transformation was facilitated not only through structured seminary programs but also through sustained interpersonal relationships with seminary formators and fellow seminarians, reinforcing the significance of social learning mechanisms. Furthermore, despite encountering various challenges such as personal challenges and adjustment to seminary life, the propaedeutic seminarians exhibited resilience by employing personal spiritual practices and relying on the seminary community for support systems. These coping strategies underscore the seminary's dual role as both a space of spiritual formation and a social learning environment. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the formative processes that underpin priestly development, emphasizing the need for integrative and relational approaches in seminary formation programs.

Keywords Transitory Experiences of Seminarians, Social Learning Theory, Phenomenological Approach, Propaedeutic Seminary Formation, Seminary Challenges and Coping Strategies.

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Introduction

The journey toward priesthood is a transformative process that requires intentional formation and discernment, especially in the initial stages of seminary life. In response to the increasing secularization of society and the complex realities facing those called to ministry, the Catholic Church has mandated a dedicated propaedeutic stage as the foundational period of priestly formation (Meloy, 2025). This stage, as outlined in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* and the *Program of Priestly Formation* (6th edition), is designed to provide seminarians with the basic groundwork they need for holistic development in human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral before advancing to more rigorous academic and ministerial preparation (USCCB, 2022).

The propaedeutic stage typically lasts at least one year and may extend up to three years, offering a structured environment that fosters intense vocational discernment, spiritual growth, and community living (Harty & Sweeney, 2023). According to the *Program of Priestly Formation*, this period seeks to withdraw men from the distractions of the world, allowing them to deepen their interior life with Christ and to discern, with clarity, whether to dedicate themselves to priestly formation or to pursue a different

path as a faithful lay Catholic (Harty & Sweeney, 2023). As Fr. Charlie Fox, vice rector of Sacred Heart Major Seminary, notes, the transition into seminary life needed special attention with this new propaedeutic year. Men are now introduced in some seminary life in a somewhat more gradual way in order to help them make what can be a difficult transition into living as a minister of Christ (Meloy, 2025).

Research on formation activities among Catholic seminarians in the United States further underscores the importance of structured programs and intentional accompaniment in supporting seminarians' growth and discernment (Hernández, 2020). The propaedeutic stage, therefore, serves as a critical period of transition, a time for seminarians to cultivate self-knowledge, spiritual maturity, and a sense of Catholic culture that will sustain them throughout their vocational journey (Harty & Sweeney, 2023).

This stage is not merely preparatory but is intended to be transformative, instilling in seminarians a firm resolution either to continue toward priesthood or to embrace another vocation within the Church (Harty & Sweeney, 2023). The *Program of Priestly Formation* highlights the integration of the four dimensions of formation and the necessity of proper accompaniment by formators, who guide seminarians as spiritual fathers and mentors (USCCB, 2022).

Pope Francis has been a key advocate for a compassionate, Christlike priesthood, emphasizing "accompaniment" as a central principle in the formation process. He updated the *Ratio Fundamentalis* in 2016 to ensure that seminarians would be formed in a manner that prioritizes spiritual growth and pastoral charity before academic pursuits (Meloy, 2025). As Fr. Burr explains, Pope Francis wanted priest formators to accompany men in formation as spiritual fathers who 'would guide them

more closely to Jesus so they could, in turn, become Jesus for others' (Meloy, 2025).

Empirical studies further support the value of formation activities in fostering vocational clarity, resilience, and community among seminarians (Hernández, 2020). These activities, ranging from spiritual retreats to service projects, are integral to the propaedeutic experience, helping seminarians navigate the challenges of transition and discernment.

The propaedeutic stage seeks to provide seminarians with the basic groundwork they need for formation in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions, so that they may cooperate with God's grace in conforming their hearts as disciples of Jesus Christ to the service of the Church in pastoral charity (USCCB, 2022).

In summary, the propaedeutic stage is a vital period of transition for seminarians, marked by intentional formation, discernment, and accompaniment. It lays the groundwork for future stages of seminary life and ensures that those who continue toward the priesthood do so with clarity, maturity, and a deep sense of mission.

The stated study seeks to examine the transitional phase of propaedeutic seminarians by discussing their lived experience through the transitional face of their social identities within the first stages of their formation transition. The study aims to unpack their spiritual, emotional, and psychological dimensions with the hope of gaining insight into their spiritual experience and transitions, as well as the theological cultural atmosphere they will exist within that is shaping and influencing these transitions in seminary life. In doing so, the study hopes to develop an awareness of the necessity of experiences within maintained seminary formation systems and eventual processes, which can potentially assist with examining seminary

practices to produce a more holistic development in the seminary formation.

This study is anchored on the Social Learning Theory proposed by Bandura (1997), which posits that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observing others within their social environment. In the context of propaedeutic seminarians, this theory offers a lens to understand how formative experiences during their initial seminary stage are shaped by observation, imitation, and interaction with fellow seminarians, formators, and the broader religious community. Social Learning Theory is especially relevant in exploring the propaedeutic stage's transitional and often formative nature, where propaedeutic seminarians begin to internalize the values, behaviors, and spiritual disciplines expected in religious life. Through guided interactions, communal living, and structured routines in the seminary, propaedeutic seminarians learn not only through direct instructions but also through modeling and shared experiences.

This study was conducted to explore the transitory experiences among propaedeutic seminarians. More specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the prior knowledge of propaedeutic seminarians about seminary life?
2. How do the propaedeutic seminarians describe their seminary life during the propaedeutic stage?
3. What challenges do propaedeutic seminarians encounter during their seminary life?
4. What coping strategies do propaedeutic seminarians employ to navigate these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized qualitative research to explore the transitory experiences of propaedeutic seminarians, focusing on how they make sense of their formation journey. It specifically adopted the phenomenological approach as outlined by Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology is well-suited for examining lived experiences, as it seeks to uncover the essence and meaning behind individuals' narratives. Moustakas' model emphasizes intentional reflection, the bracketing of researcher bias, and the analysis of rich descriptive data to reveal shared themes and core meanings. By centering on the voices of the propaedeutic seminarians, this design allows for a deep, empathetic understanding of their unique and transitional experiences within the propaedeutic stage. This approach helps reveal how spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth unfolds during this formative period of their lives.

Research Environment

The research was conducted at the Holy Infant Seminary in the Diocese of Pagadian, focusing on propaedeutic seminarians. This setting was significant to the study because its participants were specifically propaedeutic seminarians from that diocese.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were from the Holy Infant Seminary in the Diocese of Pagadian. A group of sixth propaedeutic seminarians, whose ages range from 18 to 23 years old, is the main participants of this study. These participants are still in the initial stages of their priestly formation, undergoing a preparatory year before beginning their formal college formation. Coming from different parishes within the local Church

of the Diocese of Pagadian, they represent diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Research Instrument

The researchers were the main instruments used in the study, aided by an interview guide with three sections. The first section contained engaging questions, while the second included exploratory questions covering the central question, sub-questions, descriptive inquiries, and probing inquiries. The final section focused solely on probing questions. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews and then analyzed the data they collected.

Data Gathering Procedure

To gather the necessary data, the researchers first prepared a formal letter addressed to the seminary's rector, requesting permission to conduct the study among propaedeutic seminarians. Once approval was granted, the researchers began preparing the interview questions to align with the research objectives and to address the central research questions. Before the actual interviews, participants were provided with clear and detailed information regarding the study's purpose and scope. They were assured of the confidentiality and ethical handling of their responses. An overview of interview questions was also given in advance to help participants prepare. Verbal and written consent were obtained, including permission to audio record the interviews and take notes. After the interviews, the researchers carefully evaluated and interpreted the responses to ensure accuracy and reliability. The analyzed data were then used to draw meaningful conclusions relevant to the research topic.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed the data analysis method described by Moustakas (1994) to thoroughly examine interview

data, aiming to reveal themes and insights related to the transitory experiences of propaedeutic seminarians. Initially, they transcribed the recorded interviews word-for-word and summarized the content. Next, they executed the "horizontalization" technique, which involved treating each relevant statement from participants with equal importance. After this, the data were organized into broader themes crucial for understanding the lived experiences of the seminarians. These themes were further refined and structured to emphasize the main elements of the participants' journey through the propaedeutic phase. Throughout this process, the researchers actively reflected on their biases, following the phenomenological principle of bracketing to ensure a genuine and meaningful analysis.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers maintained ethical practices by obtaining informed consent from the study participants and the rector of the propaedeutic seminarians before starting the research. Likewise, the participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study and were guaranteed that their information would remain confidential to avoid future misuse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter illustrates, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered from selected propaedeutic seminarians. The respondents are the propaedeutic seminarians from the Holy Infant Seminary, Diocese of Pagadian. Six propaedeutic seminarians participated in this study. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was designated a code of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 to maintain confidentiality of their profiles.

Propaedeutic seminarians' prior knowledge about seminary life.

Before entering the seminary, participants had mixed expectations based on observation, advice, or misconceptions. Their understanding of seminary life was shaped by *idealized perception and indirect knowledge*.

Idealized Perception

This refers to the seminarians' preconceived notions about seminary life being purely spiritual, peaceful, or easy, which were later challenged by their actual seminary experience. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

"Before I even entered the seminary, I thought that life in the seminary was just simple prayer and studying about the church to prepare me for becoming a priest. I never expected the strong focus on personal growth and formation of a person in the seminary." P1

"I thought the seminary was peaceful and full of spiritual routines, yes, I could see it, but when I arrived inside the seminary, it involved deeper struggles, including facing personal issues and learning how to live in a community, and following strict seminary structures." P3

"Before I entered the seminary, I thought of it as a type of religious school, focused on academics and the life of prayer. However, upon entering the seminary, I did not realize how important introspection, self-awareness, and spirituality are in seminary formation." P4

"My first impression was that the seminary was only for people who were already holy or spiritually perfect. This view made me feel unworthy at first."

However, later I understood that the seminary is a place for growth and transformation, especially when I was in the formation program at the seminary.” P6

Many seminarians began their journey with an idealized and somewhat romanticized view of seminary life. Their expectations centered on spirituality, peace, prayer, and theological study—often without anticipating the emotional, interpersonal, and internal challenges they would face. One participant shared, “Before I even entered the seminary, I thought that life in the seminary was just simple prayer and studying about the church to prepare me for becoming a priest. I never expected the strong focus on personal growth and formation of a person in the seminary” (P1). Similarly, another expressed surprise at the struggles involved, noting, “I thought the seminary was peaceful and full of spiritual routines... but when I arrived... it involved deeper struggles, including facing personal issues and learning how to live in a community” (P3).

These responses highlight the stark contrast between the initial perception of the seminary as a spiritual retreat and the reality of it being a transformative, formative environment. The discrepancy aligns with broader findings in the literature. For instance, Sajdak (2017) emphasizes that seminary is not only about acquiring theological knowledge but also about identity formation and spiritual development through emotional, social, and practical challenges (Sajdak, 2017). Similarly, Tasker’s (2001) study shows that spiritual formation in seminary often includes unanticipated demands on honesty, self-awareness, and inner transformation, facilitated by structured spiritual disciplines and accountability groups (Tasker, 2001).

Participant P4 added, “I did not realize how important introspection, self-awareness, and spirituality are in seminary

formation,” which echoes insights from Jalandoni et al. (2024) who found that seminary life instills values extending beyond the religious to moral and personal growth—often in ways that surprise those entering with limited expectations (Jalandoni et al., 2024). The seminary thus acts as a place not of spiritual perfection, as P6 mistakenly believed, but of “growth and transformation.” These insights show how confronting and correcting idealized perceptions is a key step in seminarians’ holistic formation.

Indirect Knowledge

This includes the seminarians’ understanding, which was based on second-hand sources like priests, formators, and peers rather than through direct seminary experience. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

“Before, I heard about the seminary from the priests and seminarians in our parish. I thought it would be a peaceful and spiritual environment, but I was not prepared for the emotional and relational dynamics of seminary formation. P2

“My knowledge about the seminary comes from interacting with the seminarians during church activities and youth gatherings. I thought seminary life would be a gentle and preparatory phase for the priesthood, but I did not expect it would give me so much personal challenge and pressure.” P5

Many seminarians entered formation with a second-hand understanding of what seminary life entails. Their knowledge was formed through conversations with priests, parishioners, or peers, rather than direct exposure. Participant P2 noted, “I heard about the seminary from the priests and seminarians in our parish. I thought it would be a peaceful and spiritual environment, but I was not prepared for the emotional and

relational dynamics.” Similarly, P5 shared, “My knowledge... came from interacting with seminarians during church activities and youth gatherings... I did not expect it would give me so much personal challenge and pressure”.

This theme reveals how indirect exposure to seminary life can create misconceptions that are only dispelled through firsthand experience. The literature supports this pattern. DeGroat (2008) highlights that seminarians often feel a disconnect between their educational expectations, formed outside the seminary, and the actual demands of formation, which include leadership preparation, pastoral responsibility, and psychological resilience (DeGroat, 2008). Also, Paglinawan (2018) identified that while seminarians are typically well-prepared in spiritual formation activities, their human formation covering interpersonal maturity and emotional health was often underestimated prior to entry. The study found that these internal aspects had the most substantial impact on seminarians’ decisions to stay or leave (Paglinawan, 2018). This mirrors participant testimonies about the emotional and relational demands that caught them off guard.

Fr. Joseph’s (2019) phenomenological research similarly concluded that seminarians often long for more human and psychological support, which is frequently overlooked by those who rely on an external, spiritualized understanding of seminary training (Joseph, 2019).

Propaedeutic Seminarians describe seminary life during the propaedeutic stage.

The propaedeutic seminarians described the propaedeutic stage as a time of refinement and spiritual depth. It was a period marked by *transformative formation and meaningful formation* that deepened their sense of vocation.

Transformative Formation

This refers to how seminarians experienced change in their mindset, attitude, and habits as they embraced the process of formation. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

“This propaedeutic stage is like returning to the beginning with God. I went to the seminary with the fear that I was not good enough, but through experiences of spiritual direction, silence, and prayer, I realized that God accepted me in my being. This stage helped me grow in the spiritual and emotional aspects.” P1

“For me, this stage is a cleansing and reorientation phase because I was attached to worldly distractions before entering, but the structured environment of the seminary allowed me to regain my purpose and realign my life with God’s calling. This inner transformation marks the beginning of true recognition of me.” P3

“I named this stage the mirror stage. I emphasized how it helped me confront the personal weaknesses I had previously ignored. Through the support of my formators and opportunities for solitude, I reached a deeper understanding of myself, laying the foundation for true personal transformation.” P5

“This preparatory stage I describe as a process of healing. Entering the seminary allowed me to reflect on unresolved wounds and grow in self-acceptance. The atmosphere of the propaedeutic stage encouraged me to shed my burdens and let God’s grace transform me from within.” P6

During the propaedeutic stage of seminary formation, seminarians described profound internal changes that shaped their spiritual, emotional, and personal identities. Participant 1 reflected on this phase as a return to the beginning with God, noting that through silence, prayer, and spiritual direction, he came to realize his acceptance by God, fostering growth in both spiritual and emotional dimensions. Similarly, Participant 3 saw the stage as a cleansing and reorientation process that helped him detach from worldly distractions and regain a sense of divine purpose. Participant 5 referred to this period as the “mirror stage,” emphasizing that it allowed him to confront personal weaknesses previously ignored. The supportive environment and moments of solitude contributed to his deeper self-understanding. Lastly, Participant 6 described it as a healing process, where unresolved wounds were reflected upon and transformed through God’s grace, leading to greater self-acceptance.

These responses illustrate that the propaedeutic stage is not merely preparatory in an academic sense but rather an immersive environment that fosters transformation at the core of one's being. The experiences of seminarians align with Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, which involves a shift in one’s frame of reference through reflection, critical discourse, and action. This kind of transformation is well-documented in theological education. For example, Emslie (2016) highlights how transformative learning in ministry formation engages the whole person—identity, vocation, and spirituality—enabling seminarians to become critically reflective learners and better ministers of the Church (Emslie, 2016). Similarly, Marmon (2010) supports the notion that formation experiences, especially those in cross-cultural settings, lead to transformation by challenging existing worldviews and fostering emotional and spiritual maturity (Marmon,

2010). These findings underscore that transformative formation is essential in developing seminarians who are emotionally grounded, spiritually aware, and vocationally committed.

Meaningful Formation

This involves how the structured seminary routines and seminary community life contributed to the depth and purpose of their formation. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

“This stage of propaedeutic is difficult at the beginning. Adjusting to a disciplined schedule, leaving behind old habits, and adapting to life in a seminary community is very challenging. However, over time, I have begun to see its value in shaping my discipline, humility, and character.” P2

“For me, this stage is strict but also necessary. Coming from a very active background, at first, I found it hard to accept the silence and structure of the seminary. However, later I recognized how it provided me with space to think and grow. It was at this stage that I began to see the importance of internal preparation for my vocation.” P4

Meaningful formation emerged through the seminarians’ descriptions of structured seminary life and communal discipline. Participant 2 shared that the initial challenge of adjusting to a disciplined schedule and community life eventually fostered discipline, humility, and character. Participant 4 echoed this by stating that while the silence and structure were initially difficult to embrace, especially coming from an active background, these elements became essential in allowing space for reflection, internal growth, and preparation for vocation.

These testimonies emphasize how structured formation, though difficult at first, became instrumental in building essential virtues for future ministry. Meaningful formation here is closely tied to the seminary's ability to instill enduring habits, a sense of responsibility, and openness to communal living. According to Sumampong et al. (2024), seminarians recognized human formation, particularly aspects of community life and vocational discipline, as crucial to their development. The study concluded that these aspects contributed significantly to seminarians' faithfulness and readiness for vocation (Sumampong et al., 2024). Paglinawan (2018) similarly found that while spiritual formation ranked highest in perceived effectiveness, human and academic formation also played vital roles in sustaining the seminarian's decision to remain and persevere in the seminary.

Furthermore, Winkelmes (2004) argues that the seminary classroom itself, when designed intentionally, becomes a space of meaningful formation that respects various learning styles and supports the integration of discipline, community life, and personal reflection (Winkelmes, 2004). This aligns with the participants' experiences, suggesting that the routines and expectations of seminary life contribute not only to spiritual growth but also to character formation and vocational clarity.

Challenges of propaedeutic seminarians in seminary life

The propaedeutic seminarians encountered various challenges, such as *personal challenges and adjustment to seminary life*, that tested their emotions, faith, and ability to adapt. These difficulties were part of their initial purification and personal growth in seminary life.

Personal Challenges

This refers to the inner struggles faced by propaedeutic seminarians, such as self-doubt, fear, emotional instability, and spiritual dryness that challenged their identity and purpose in seminary formation. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

"My biggest challenge is facing the wounds of the past and learning to trust the healing process. Life in the seminary has brought my inner wounds to the surface, and confronting them daily through prayer and contemplation has become emotionally exhausting for me." P2

"My challenge is with my inner detachment. I started, even though I entered the seminary full of enthusiasm, it was tough to truly let go of worldly things like gadgets and outside noise. Silence in the seminary revealed my distractions, and it took time for me to overcome them." P3

"I expressed a deep internal battle against my pride and self-perception. It is tough for me to be transparent because I fear judgment from the formators and fellow seminarians. Humility is needed to accept correction and recognize my limitations in seminary formation." P4

"I have struggled with the doubts about my worthiness. I always compare myself to others who I think are more spiritually mature than I am, which brings me to a moment of insecurity. Overcoming these thoughts and accepting my own pace of growth is a challenge that I am gradually facing." P5

Personal challenges reflect the inner struggles that seminarians confront in their

journey of self-discovery and healing. Participant P2 shared, “My biggest challenge is facing the wounds of the past and learning to trust the healing process,” emphasizing the emotional weight of confronting unresolved issues. P3 noted how difficult it was to detach from external distractions, such as gadgets, when silence brought inner turmoil to the surface. Similarly, P4 confessed a fear of judgment and resistance to correction due to pride and self-image. P5 added that doubts about self-worth and constant comparison to others caused insecurity and hesitation in accepting his pace of growth.

These reflections illustrate that seminary life is not merely about theological instruction but is also an invitation to deep personal purification. The internal trials mentioned echo what Jalandoni et al. (2024) describe in their phenomenological study: seminarians develop moral and personal competencies not in ease, but through hardship and introspection. The wounds, doubts, and fears they face become opportunities for maturity and virtue formation when guided appropriately (Jalandoni et al., 2024).

Moreover, McShane (2024) explains that the propaedeutic stage is purposefully structured to help seminarians develop self-awareness and emotional resilience. Through tools like community support and spiritual direction, seminarians are guided to process their psychological and spiritual wounds in a safe, formative environment. This stage is essential in cultivating the kind of maturity required for pastoral ministry (McShane, 2024).

Adjustment to Seminary Life

This involves the external and practical struggles of adapting to the seminary’s lifestyle, such as seminary routines, seminary community living, and seminary strict schedules. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

“Following the strict daily schedule in the seminary is a challenge for me. Waking up early, the structured prayers, and the limited leisure of time are very different from my previous lifestyle outside the seminary. Adjusting to this discipline has tested my patience and consistency in the seminary formation.” P1

“It is tough for me to live in a seminary community. With the different personalities of the seminarians, there are times when there are mistakes and shortcomings. Learning how to relate with humility and communicate openly is something I need to work on every day as a seminarian.” P6

Beyond the inner challenges, seminarians also face practical difficulties in adapting to seminary life. Participant P1 admitted struggling with the strict schedule, especially early mornings, structured prayers, and limited free time. For P6, it was the challenge of community life—living with diverse personalities, managing interpersonal conflicts, and learning humility in relationships.

These experiences are not isolated. Paglinawan’s (2018) evaluation of diocesan seminary programs in the Philippines revealed that many seminarians found the transition to structured community life to be among the most complex adjustments. While spiritual practices were well-embraced, human formation aspects, like dealing with others and maintaining discipline, were less developed. The study emphasized that seminary success depends heavily on one’s ability to adapt socially and emotionally, not just spiritually (Paglinawan, 2018).

Likewise, Fr. Joseph (2019) found that seminarians often express the need for more support in areas of human and psychological formation. In his research,

seminarians felt that while theology and prayer were central, they lacked tools to manage stress, conflict, and self-understanding—elements crucial for thriving in seminary life (Joseph, 2019).

In a broader context, Wang et al. (2023) highlight that while seminaries increasingly acknowledge the value of personal and spiritual formation, many institutions still lack a consistent framework. Where implemented well, human formation fosters not only academic excellence but also interpersonal empathy and psychological balance—exactly the traits P1 and P6 were learning to develop (Wang et al., 2023).

Propaedeutic seminarians' coping strategies to navigate challenges.

Propaedeutic seminarians shared that they relied on *personal spiritual practices* and *support from the seminary community* to respond to the difficulties they encountered. Their strategies reflect their desire to persevere in seminary formation despite diverse challenges.

Personal Spiritual Practices

This involves relying on prayer, the sacraments, and personal reflection to remain grounded in seminary formation. The propaedeutic seminarians turned to spiritual disciplines to strengthen their faith. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

“For me, my coping strategies when I faced the challenges I experienced in this propaedeutic stage were through the power of silent prayer and journaling. During times when I suffered emotional distress, I liked to stay in the chapel or write down my thoughts as a way of releasing them. This helped me process my feelings and recognize God's work in my life.” P2

“My coping strategy involves immediately turning to

spiritual direction as a lifeline. Open conversations with my spiritual director allow me to understand my struggles better and recognize where God is leading me. This has helped realign my heart within the seminary formation process.” P3

“My coping strategies in facing challenges in seminary formation are that I always rely heavily on the Eucharist mass and confession. Regularly receiving the sacraments gives me the grace and courage to continue, especially during times of doubt and loss of hope in seminary formation. I see the sacraments as a refuge and a source of renewal.” P4

“In my experience during the propaedeutic stage, my coping strategies for facing challenges are meditative prayer and Lectio Divina, which I always use as strategies. Reflecting on the Scriptures has helped me find peace, especially in letting go of worldly habits. These practices have deepened my trust in God and sustained my discernment, especially in my seminary formation process.” P5

One of the most significant coping mechanisms reported by seminarians was the practice of deep, consistent spirituality. P2 found relief in silent prayer and journaling, particularly during emotional distress, using these methods to process feelings and reflect on God's presence. P3 turned to spiritual direction as a guiding tool, emphasizing how candid dialogue with a spiritual mentor helped realign his path in seminary life. Meanwhile, P4 noted that frequent participation in the Eucharist and the sacrament of confession provided courage during periods of doubt. P5 also leaned on meditative prayer and Lectio

Divina, finding in these Scripture-based practices a means to deepen his trust in God and release worldly attachments.

These experiences demonstrate how seminarians employ structured spiritual disciplines to maintain inner resilience and faith during periods of uncertainty and formation stress. According to Lim et al. (2023), former seminarians who stayed committed to priestly formation often did so through intrinsic coping strategies such as prayer, spiritual journaling, and reflection practices that nurtured emotional balance and vocational focus (Lim et al., 2023). Similarly, Ocbena et al. (2023) observed that even during the disruptions of the pandemic, seminarians leaned heavily on the Eucharist, rosary, and personal prayer to remain grounded amid emotional and spiritual fatigue (Ocbena et al., 2023).

Canoy et al. (2023) affirm that spiritual practices are more than personal habits; they are embedded strategies within the seminary's formation framework that actively nurture perseverance and self-awareness. Their research among propaedeutic seminarians found that such practices help students draw strength from sacraments and meditative traditions during periods of discernment and internal struggle (Canoy et al., 2023).

Seminary Community Support

This refers to the help received from co-seminarians and formators through companionship and shared experiences. Propaedeutic seminarians felt strengthened by being part of a seminary community that listens, supports, and walks with them. The research participants in the study expressed the following:

"In my experience, my coping strategy to face the challenges within the seminary is to build a fraternal relationship with my fellow seminarians, which helps ease my adjustment in the seminary formation. Having someone to talk to who has gone

through similar experiences assures me that I am not alone in the difficulties." P1

"I have discovered the strength in the community activities of the seminary and the spiritual conferences at the seminary. Actively participating in the formation sessions and group sharing has helped me become more open and reflective. These moments remind me that growth happens together, not in isolation, especially in the seminary settings." P6

Seminarians also relied heavily on the seminary community for emotional and fraternal support. P1 highlighted the importance of fraternal bonds with fellow seminarians, which helped ease his adjustment into formation life. P6 shared that active engagement in spiritual conferences and group reflections fostered openness and reminded him that growth in formation is a communal journey.

The importance of community is deeply echoed in McShane's (2024) study, which emphasizes that the seminary must act not merely as an institution but as a "home and school of communion." Attachment theory, she argues, helps explain how healthy relationships within the seminary community support emotional security and psychological integration, both crucial for effective priestly formation (McShane, 2024). Furthermore, Naparan et al. (2022) found that seminarians enduring temptations and struggles, such as isolation or spiritual dryness, often managed these difficulties by fostering deep interpersonal connections and participating in community-based spiritual activities. These peer relationships served as vital buffers against the emotional toll of forming life (Naparan et al., 2022).

Canoy et al. (2023) also reinforce this, concluding that seminaries succeed when community life is intentionally

structured to encourage shared reflection, empathy, and accompaniment. Their findings highlight how communal settings, formation programs, and mutual support among seminarians foster resilience and motivate individuals to stay rooted in their vocation.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

This study explored the transitory experiences of propaedeutic seminarians in relation to their prior understanding, present formation, challenges, and coping strategies within seminary life. The findings revealed that their initial perceptions of seminary life were shaped by idealized perception and indirect knowledge. This aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which suggests that individuals acquire understanding through observation, imitation, and the social environment even before direct experience occurs. The seminarians' early views were formed by observing priests, hearing stories, and engaging with fellow seminarians in their parish.

As they progressed through the propaedeutic stage, they underwent a profoundly transformative and meaningful formation process that strengthened their sense of vocation and identity. This transformation was influenced not only by structured formation but also by their interactions with formators, fellow seminarians, and the overall seminary environment, illustrating the impact of observational learning and social reinforcement, central to Bandura's theory.

Despite facing significant personal and emotional challenges, particularly in adjusting to seminary life, the propaedeutic seminarians demonstrated resilience. They coped through personal spiritual practices and support from the seminary community, reinforcing the importance of learning through social interaction and modeling behavior in a supportive environment.

Hence, the seminary functions not only as an academic and spiritual formation space but also as a social learning environment where seminarians grow through example, encouragement, and shared experience.

This study's recommendations aim to support a holistic, responsive, and grounded approach to the seminary formation process, ensuring that propaedeutic seminarians are well-accompanied and formed both spiritually and humanly.

Strengthen Seminary Orientation Programs: Provide realistic and comprehensive orientation sessions that include testimonies from current and alumnus seminarians to help new entrants develop grounded expectations about seminary life.

Enhance Mentorship and Accompaniment: Assign personal mentors or spiritual directors to each propaedeutic seminarian for regular guidance, helping them navigate challenges and affirm their vocational journey.

Promote Community-Building Activities: Encourage structured bonding activities and peer-support systems to foster a strong sense of fraternity and emotional safety among propaedeutic seminarians.

Provide Psycho-Spiritual Support Services: Incorporate programs that support emotional well-being and mental health, such as counseling, stress management workshops, and group processing.

Conduct Regular Evaluation and Feedback Sessions: Allow propaedeutic seminarians to express their experiences and concerns through regular feedback mechanisms, so formation programs can be adjusted to meet their evolving needs.

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