



## **DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS**

### **HANDBOOK FOR SEMINARIANS**

We offer this **Handbook for Seminarians** for all seminarians and candidates seeking priestly ministry in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Montana.

Men of God...seek after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness and gently spirit. Fight for the good fight of faith. Take firm hold on the everlasting life to which you were called.

*1 Timothy 6:11-12*

St. Paul's letter to Timothy expresses the care and concern the Bishop and the people of the diocese have for the formation of all our seminarians. To assist our seminarians in their education and formation for the ordained priesthood, the diocese references its procedures in this handbook. Our Bishop hopes it will give clarity to all seminarians and candidates as to how the Vocation Office can be helpful to the seminarians, candidates, and their families during seminary training.

The Bishop entrusts the implementation of this handbook to the Diocesan Vocation Office personnel to be used for the good of the seminarians and prospective candidates.

We solicit the prayers of the clergy and of all the faithful for those in discernment along with our candidates who are studying for the priesthood in seminaries.

**HANDBOOK FOR SEMINARIANS  
OF THE  
DIOCESE GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Introduction -----  | 3    |
| Roles of Directors -----  | 4    |
| Qualities of a Candidate for Priesthood -----                       | 5    |
| How to Become a Seminarian -----                                    | 7    |
| Acceptance as a Candidate -----                                     | 8    |
| Timeline -----  | 8    |
| Program of Priestly Formation (6 <sup>th</sup> Edition) Notes ----- | 8    |
| General Financial Information -----                                 | 9    |
| Diocesan Financial Support for Seminarians -----                    | 10   |
| Diocesan Loan Program -----   | 10   |
| Other Considerations -----  | 11   |
| Privacy Policy -----  | 11   |
| Seminary Attendance Policy -----                                    | 12   |
| Transferring into the Diocese -----                                 | 12   |
| Transferring out of the Diocese -----                               | 13   |
| Dismissal Policy -----  | 13   |
| Leave of Absence Policy -----                                       | 14   |
| Parish Placement Policy -----                                       | 15   |
| Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) -----                             | 16   |
| Statement of Acceptance and Agreement-----                          | 17   |
| -   |      |

## INTRODUCTION

This handbook is to be a source text of the various requirements and policies of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings for those who are pursuing seminary studies for the Roman Catholic priesthood. These policies are aimed at providing consistent and equitable procedures for dealing with all the candidates for seminary, and with all the seminarians of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings.

The Bishop of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings has appointed the Director of Vocations to implement and carry out these policies.

This policy statement is a diocesan application of the “Program of Priestly Formation in the United States of America: Sixth Edition (PPF: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition).”

Questions regarding the material in this document can be directed to:

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## THE ROLES OF THE DIRECTORS

Each member of the Church has a duty to help promote and foster vocations. All seminarians are sponsored by either a diocese or a religious order. Among his primary duties, the Bishops of the Church are entrusted with the responsibility to promote and foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life and to assure that the pastoral and sacramental needs of the Church are met. In the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings the Vocations Office has a *Director of Vocations*, a *Director of Second Vocations* and a *Director of Seminarian Formation*; they are a direct extension of this special ministry of the Bishop. Their ministry is to see to it that this most important work of the Church is carried out.

The responsibilities of the *Director of Vocations* are:

- to develop and promote programs which may help priests and people alike be more aware of the need for priests and religious in our diocese;
- to help guide discernment of the priestly call to serve as priests or religious;
- to help inquirers to pursue possible entrance into the seminary, to help them discern and clarify the Lord's call in their lives through vocation counseling, reflective listening, spiritual direction and guidance;
- to screen candidates who, if found acceptable for seminary studies, and to work with the candidate for entrance into a formal seminary program;
- to assemble the application portfolio and submit it in a timely fashion in collaboration with the candidate.
- A *Director of Second Vocations* may be appointed by the Bishop.
  - This position includes seeking out, assisting, promoting, and recruiting "second career" men (usually over the age of 30) to a priestly vocation.
  - The duties of the Director of Second Vocations include assisting the Director of Vocations with sponsor visits for older candidates, preparing and researching applications, and serving as liaison, as needed, with the seminaries.
  - While this is an active role in the formation process, the final decisions and actions regarding second career candidates are referred to the Director of Seminarians, the Director of Seminarian Formation and the Bishop.

Once an applicant has been accepted by the Bishop as a seminarian, the *Director of Seminarian Formation* then becomes the contact person or liaison between the diocese and seminary. His primary duties are:

- to participate actively in formal seminary evaluations and to offer recommendations for change and growth;
- to serve as a contact person for the seminarian and become responsible for his pastoral care;
- to serve as financial aid officer, academic guidance counselor, and, on occasion, as a spiritual advisor;
- to visit each seminary annually to ascertain the progress of each seminarian;
- to offer an opportunity for personal contact between the seminarian and the diocese.

The *Director of Vocations*, the *Director of Second Vocations* and the *Director of Seminarian Formation* work as a team in the Vocations Office. All are available to our seminarians throughout their formation.

## **QUALITIES OF CANDIDATES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD**

In addition to being a baptized Catholic man who is fully initiated into the Catholic Church, to be qualified for the Roman Catholic priesthood, a candidate should possess the following qualities:

**FAITH:** The candidate must be a man who is knowledgeable about his faith. His prayer life and spiritual life must reflect that he is willing to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. He must be active in the Catholic faith. Evidence of this would be exhibited by his regular attendance at Mass and his involvement in home parish activities.

**MATURITY:** The candidate must have achieved normal emotional, psychological, and intellectual growth. He must also be leading a virtuous and moral life.

**WILLINGNESS TO EMBRACE THE LIFESTYLE OF A PRIEST:** A candidate must be willing to accept the lifestyle that is required of an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church today. Therefore, the candidate must be willing to obey the leaders of the Church and accept all that the Church teaches. There must be a willingness to accept celibacy as a true and noble way of life. It is important to live a celibate lifestyle in an honest and sincere way, not only after ordination, but while preparing for ordination. There must be an understanding that the lifestyle of a priest is one of witness in today's world. To embrace a spirit of poverty or

detachment is also recognized as something noble for anyone who seeks to serve God's people.

**GOOD HEALTH:** Since the preparation for the priesthood and the lifestyle of a priest is often rigorous and demanding, it is essential that the candidate have good health in body, mind, and spirit. Physical handicaps or medical difficulties do not necessarily of themselves exclude a person from priesthood. However, care must be taken that a person who has handicaps or physical difficulties is made aware of the specific demands of the priesthood, and how these demands may affect him should he be permitted to pursue the priesthood. Emotional stability is also essential for the priesthood and ministry. Psychological disorders or problems may exclude a candidate from studying for the priesthood. Of special concern is an applicant's psycho-sexual health. See PPF: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 66-90 for greater detail and explanation.

**WILLINGNESS TO LEARN:** Good grades are not only a sign of educational ability, but also a sign of how a candidate applies himself to the task of learning. Preparation for ordination will include learning not only about God and the Church, but also about himself and how he will be able to utilize his own special abilities and talents in serving the people of God. Good academic ability is necessary since the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops requires that every candidate for the priesthood attain a Masters of Divinity degree, or the equivalent, before ordination to the priesthood.

**WILLINGNESS TO SERVE:** Service is required of anyone who chooses to follow Jesus Christ. A candidate's activity in his parish or church is a sign of his willingness to embrace a lifestyle of service to God and His people. The candidate must see the priesthood in the context of being a "minister of the ministers." The priesthood then, is about service. It is about helping people grow in Christ and leading them to serve one another following the commands of the Lord Jesus. These qualifications may be listed in idealistic terms. However, each candidate who approaches the Church seeking the possibility of serving as a priest must have these qualities. The candidate must also be willing to utilize all available aids (the Vocation Office, the Director of Vocations, Director of Seminarian Formation, seminary formation programs, spiritual direction, etc.) to help him grow not only as a candidate for the priesthood, but as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

## HOW TO BECOME A SEMINARIAN

The desire to become a priest may come at any age. This desire may be influenced by many different persons and sources. It is imperative that any prospective candidate be in contact with the Vocation Office to assist in discerning this prospective call.

The desire alone to become a priest does not constitute eligibility for priesthood. The Church has always asked that this call of the Lord be tested and found true before a person is eligible for entrance into a formal seminary formation program. In order to receive beneficial results from the discernment and admissions process, the prospective candidate must be willing to share himself, his call, his growth, and his struggles with those who have been given the responsibility of helping in this process.

As a matter of policy, the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings accepts a man as a candidate for the seminary before any formal seminary application is made. The procedure that is utilized for this acceptance is outlined below. Many documentary items that are required by this policy are also required by the seminary formation programs that the diocese utilized in the training of its priests. The applicant, assisted by the Director of Vocations, begins the process of application to the seminary.

***Included as part of the application process are the following documents to be submitted to the Director of Vocations:***

1. Complete “Application for Acceptance as a Seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings” available from the Director of Vocations
2. Criminal background and the initiation of Safe Environment training (arranged through the Vocations Office)
3. A biographical interview with the Director of Vocations
4. Baptismal and Confirmation certificates issued within last six months
5. Record of applicant’s marriage, divorce and declaration of nullity documents, or spouses’ death certification (if applicable)
6. References from five or six people, including the applicant’s Pastor
7. Two color photographs (taken in a jacket and tie)
8. A meeting with the Bishop

If the Director of Vocations and the Bishop find the Candidate acceptable up to this point, the following documents must be obtained for the file:

1. A physical examination report submitted to the Director of Vocations

2. A psychological assessment arranged through the Vocations Office (This report becomes property of the Diocese.)
3. Academic Transcripts (Official copies will be requested by the seminary after acceptance as a candidate.)

### **ACCEPTANCE AS A CANDIDATE:**

The final decision to accept an applicant is made by the Bishop and the Director of Vocations after a prayerful and careful consideration of the following:

1. The information gathered from the Application and from biographical interviews
2. The physical examination report
3. The results of the psychological assessment
4. Recommendations by persons who know the applicant
5. Review of the applicant's academic record
6. The comments from the interview with the Bishop

In each instance, the Director of Vocations will be honest and frank with the applicant about the process and its outcome. There is no intention to prevent any qualified applicant from pursuing entrance into a seminary or formation program.

### **TIMELINE:**

The Director of Vocations will notify the applicant of the final decision in writing regarding the application process in a timely manner. He will also collaborate with the seminary in assembling the application portfolio and submitting it to the admissions office of the seminary. The Bishop includes a votum (letter of support) among the documents. Seminaries generally accept applications during February and March for the upcoming academic year. If the seminary rejects the application, the Director of Vocations will contact the applicant and notify him in writing.

## **PROGRAM OF PRIESTLY FORMATION NOTES**

Due to contemporary circumstances and given the variety of backgrounds potential candidates may bring, new elements have been developed to create an adequate plan for priestly formation. The following elements of formation, which are required in order to reach ordination, are found in detail in "Program of Priestly Formation in the United States of America: Sixth Edition" of the USCCB. This sketch is meant



to be interpreted in the most general terms, but can help provide clarity concerning the timing, schedule, and basic plan of seminarian life.

**A. The Propaedeutic Stage (minimal academic credit studies)**

This first stage of preparation is directed to three major concerns:

1. The life of the Church is presented to the man interested in priesthood as a community in which excellence is nurtured;
2. It is a time to practice the daily participation in the Eucharist and to foster a love of Sacred Scripture and familiarity with the prayer of the Church (the Liturgy of the Hours);
3. There is an introduction to the basic elements of the Christian faith as the potential seminarian discerns attentively and purposefully his potential vocation to the priesthood in the presence of a supportive community of fellow seminarians and formators; this community is an ideal environment for growth in self-knowledge.

**B. The Discipleship Stage (generally, philosophy studies)**

The aim of this time is the systematic formation of the seminarian as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The seminarian:

1. Develops his principal strengths;
2. Grows to identify, acknowledge and begin to overcome his shortcomings.

**C. The Configuration Stage (generally, theology studies)**

The seminarian hones his capacity to serve and become a man for others.

**D. The Vocational Synthesis Stage (diaconal year)**

The Transitional Deacon experiences a life of self-giving in a pastoral setting as he begins the transition to full-time ministry.

(See pp. 17-18, PPF: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition)

In academic terms, the seminarian begins with a college education with an emphasis on philosophy (collegiate level), and then moves to a study of theology (theology level). Each is roughly four years of study, but in each case, adjustments are made based on the applicant's academic background. Careful attention is paid in each case to the fulfillment of the goals of all four stages outlined above.

## **GENERAL FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

It is the policy of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings that no qualified seminarian candidate is turned away due to the lack of financial resources. The whole Church shares the financial responsibility for preparing those who are called to serve the community as priests. Specific responsibility falls upon the following:

1. **Personal Resources:** A student benefits personally from his educational experience and should, as part of the Church, share in funding his seminary education. Students should monitor their spending and lifestyles. Necessities should be carefully considered.
2. **Family Resources:** If a student is still legally a dependent, the parents remain the primary educators of their child and, as such, share in the responsibility for the expenses of their son's seminary education, in so far as this is possible. Seminarians under the age of 26 may be able to obtain medical insurance through a family plan.
3. **Parish Contribution:** A student's home parish plays a special role in his vocational development. Wherever possible, this role includes helping with his educational and personal expenses.
4. **Federal or State Grants**
5. **Bank Loans or Federal Loans (FAFSA awards)**
6. **Knights of Columbus:** Local and State groups have formal programs to support seminarians to a limited extent.
7. **Diocese:** Described below are diocesan policies that govern the financial support for seminarians beyond the resources listed above. School loans accrued prior to ordination to the priesthood can be addressed in the application process by the candidate, the Director of Seminarian Formation and the Diocesan Business Office. The Bishop reserves the right to arrange for formation expenses that may not fit within this policy.

## **DIOCESAN FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SEMINARIANS**

Any man who is formally accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, regardless of the stage of formation, receives a MONTHLY STIPEND to cover incidental expenses. However, this stipend is temporarily suspended if, for example, the seminarian has summer employment income during the formation period.

Unless the seminarian is on a family medical insurance plan, the Diocese also pays for his medical insurance premiums.

## ***DIOCESAN LOAN PROGRAM***

Any man who is formally accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, regardless of the stage of formation, can request of the Diocese through its incumbent Bishop, financial support through final ordination to the priesthood. If

provided, the financial support will only assist with room and board, tuition and fees, transportation to and from the seminary, books and educational supplies. The level of support will take into account and be dependent on the seminarian's other resources of available financial support, as noted in the previous section. (The monthly stipend payments received and the payments of health insurance premiums are not included as any part of this loan program.)

As to any such financial support provided by the Diocese, if the seminarian leaves prior to priesthood ordination, he will be obligated to pay back to the Diocese the funds supplied by the Diocese up to the point of departure from the program.

If the seminarian completes his formation and is ordained a priest, the diocese will write off the total sum of the financial support provided by the Diocese at the rate of ten percent (10%) per year over a ten-year period of service to the Diocese. If he should leave his ministry during the ten-year period, or changes to a different diocese or religious order, he will be legally obligated to pay back to the Diocese a pro-rated amount at the rate of ten percent (10%) per year during each year of the remaining ten-year period of required service to the Diocese. Exceptions to the repayment plan may be made in certain instances but only under the sole discretion of the Bishop.

As a condition of the payment of any financial support from the Diocese, the seminarian shall be obliged to sign the attached Statement of Acceptance and Agreement acknowledging his obligations of repayment as provided for in this "*Diocesan Loan Program*" section of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings Handbook for Seminarians.

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## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **PRIVACY POLICY:**

Any materials that are gathered during the application process or during a candidate's seminary career are kept on file in the Vocation Office. These files are considered the confidential property of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. Access to information in the files is limited to the Bishop, his legal counsel, the Director of Vocations, the Director of Seminarian Formation, the Chancellor, and, if necessary, to the Formation Team of the seminary. USCCB PPF: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition details the record-

keeping process. All of the appropriate privacy waivers must be submitted in the application process.

If a seminarian disaffiliates himself from the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and transfers to another diocese, a copy of the material in his file will be sent to the new diocese. The original will be retained permanently by the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings.

When a seminarian leaves the seminary of his own accord, is asked to leave by the seminary officials or disaffiliates himself from the Diocese of Great Falls - Billings, his file is placed in the archival files of the Vocation Office.

A seminarian of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings may visit the Vocation Office to view his personal file. However, the Director of Vocations must be notified beforehand, and the file may not be removed from the Vocation Office.

When a seminarian has been ordained a deacon, the care and maintenance of his file is the responsibility of the Chancellor.

### **SEMINARY ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, through the Director of Vocations, selects certain seminaries for the education of its candidates. In striving to provide the best educational opportunities available for its candidates, the Diocese of Great Falls - Billings reserves the right to choose each seminarian's seminary.

After an applicant has been accepted for study in a seminary formation program, the candidate and the Director of Vocations examine the individual's academic and formational needs to determine the place where the candidate will apply for seminary studies. Each seminary has its own unique application process.

It is the final decision of the Bishop to assign a place of study. Each student is then obliged to follow the directives of the Director of Vocations when that decision has been made.

### **TRANSFERRING INTO THE DIOCESE:**

If any applicant or seminarian from another diocese is actively seeking to become a candidate or seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, the following procedure is generally used:

1. The inquirer is to be referred back to his home diocese. This initial reference assures a spirit of concord between bishops or superiors. A document from the home diocese releasing the inquirer must be filed with the Director of Vocations.
2. The inquirer is required to live in the Diocese and be an active parishioner for a significant amount of time at the discretion of the Director of Vocations and/or the Bishop in order to become familiar with life in eastern Montana and the local church.
3. If it is determined and documented that the inquirer is permitted, he may submit the Application.

If an applicant has been dismissed from a program of priestly formation or from an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, no subsequent application will be considered in the two years following such a dismissal. If the departure was other than a dismissal, sufficient time should be allotted to evaluate carefully his application and background. All documentation must be submitted regarding the departure. (See USCCB *Norms concerning reapplication for priestly formation*)

### **TRANSFERRING OUT OF THE DIOCESE:**

When a seminarian of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings wishes to transfer to another diocese, he should first express his desire in writing to the Bishop of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings before he makes contact with the proposed new diocese. His letter should outline his reasons for requesting the transfer and copies of this letter must be sent to the Director of Vocations and the Director of Seminarian Formation. All relevant information and assessments on file will be shared with the new diocese/order. Financial obligations continue to be in place.

### **DISMISSAL POLICY:**

At times, the seminary, the Bishop, or the Director of Seminarian Formation, or the Director of Vocations may discover a just cause for dismissing a seminarian from the seminary. Possible grounds for dismissal shall include, but shall not be limited to:

1. Direct disobedience to authority
2. Failure to comply with authorized policies
3. Refusal to follow the teachings of the Church
4. Discovery of falsified information in the application process to the diocese and/or seminary
5. Any questionable behavior in human or sexual relationships

6. Any substance abuse issues for which the candidate refuses to get treatment
7. Credible evidence for, or admission of, frequently accessing pornography or pornography addiction for which the candidate refuses to get treatment
8. Discovery of canonical impediments or irregularities

When grounds for dismissal have occurred, the seminarian will be notified in writing by the Director of Seminarian Formation. Upon receipt of the letter, the student is no longer considered a seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and loses all privileges and rights of a seminarian. If there are any, he will be legally required to take care of his financial obligations to the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings.

Should a dismissed student choose to pursue a seminary program for another diocese, he should be aware that the new diocese will contact his former diocese to conduct an inquiry into the reasons for his dismissal.

If a student feels that he has been dismissed for unjust reasons, he may present his case, in writing, to the Bishop of the diocese.

### **LEAVE OF ABSENCE POLICY:**

When a seminary requests that a seminarian for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings take a leave of absence from seminary studies and formation, or the student himself feels a need to take some time to assess and evaluate his progress in a seminary program, the following policy of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings is to be observed:

1. There must be an open discussion between the seminarian and the Director of Seminarian Formation about the leave of absence.
2. With the Director of Seminarian Formation, the following topics will be discussed and the agreement between the Director and the seminarian which will be placed in writing. The signatures of both the seminarian and the Director of Seminarian Formation will be included and both will receive a copy of this written document:
  - a. Reason for the leave of absence
  - b. Projected length of the leave
  - c. Residence during the leave
  - d. Type of employment during the leave

- e. Meeting with Director of Seminarian Formation during leave
  - f. Spiritual direction/guidance during leave
  - g. Financial obligation to the Diocese
3. During the leave of absence, the student will be considered a seminarian for the diocese and will be invited to participate in all events and activities as a seminarian.
  4. The request to be reinstated in a seminary program, or to terminate one's seminarian status with the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings is to be made in writing to the Director of Formation.
  5. If it is the seminarian's decision to terminate seminarian status, the seminarian is obliged to fulfill the obligations listed in the financial aid policy.

### **PARISH PLACEMENT POLICY:**

There may be a time when a seminarian or candidate should be placed in a parish for a summer or longer. This would provide an opportunity for him to gain knowledge about parish life and his own personal growth. To this end, the Vocation Office will work to provide that experience if it is requested. Parish placements must be arranged through the Vocations Office. The request for parish placement is to be made in writing either by the candidate or seminarian or seminary to the Director of Seminarian Formation by mid-April. This is to allow ample time for the Director of Seminarian Formation to review the request and make preparations.

Near the end of the placement period evaluation forms will be sent to the seminarian or candidate and the pastor of the parish. Each party will assess the placement experience as well as point out areas for further growth. The pastor and student are to share their reflections with each other and copies of the evaluations are to be shared with the Director of Vocations. The evaluation forms are then placed in the permanent files of the Vocation Office.

Because college seminarians are responsible for their own school expenses, college seminarians are encouraged to spend their summers in gainful employment. With the approval of the Director of Seminarian Formation, a college seminarian may serve in a parish/institution for a pastoral assignment.

Although parish placements sometimes include a stipend, a parish placement does not necessarily include financial support from the diocese above the usual seminarian stipend.

## **CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION (CPE)**

During the course of seminary studies, the seminary or the Diocese may either recommend or require a seminarian to undertake a semester or more of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE is a very intense and specialized program during which a student learns as much about himself in ministry as he does about ministry itself. The program is very structured and supervised. There are certain times set aside for evaluation and reflection on the progress one is making in the program.

When preparing to enter CPE, the seminarian is to inform the Director of Seminarian Formation about this in writing. When exact CPE placements and costs have been established, the seminarian is to inform, in writing, the Director of Seminarian Formation about the placement and the costs so that financial arrangements can be made in advance of the actual CPE Unit. A copy of the letter of acceptance into a CPE program must also be included in the request.

Approved August 25, 2023  
Bishop Jeffrey M. Fleming



**STATEMENT OF ACCEPTANCE and AGREEMENT**

**DIOCESAN POLICIES  
FOR SEMINARIANS**

By signing this statement, I affirm that I am in agreement with and will comply with the

**DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS  
HANDBOOK FOR SEMINARIANS.**

and that I understand the obligations, rights and responsibilities described therein.

By my signature hereto, I further specifically understand and agree to the lending policies surrounding the Diocesan Loan Program for Seminarians as set forth herein, including the contractual requirements and obligations regarding the repayment of any financial support provided by the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings should I decide to leave the seminary or active Catholic priesthood, or am instructed by the Bishop to do so. I further agree that should I fail to abide by these contractual requirements and obligations and default in the repayment of any sums owed to the Diocese of Great Falls, the Diocese under the name of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Great Falls, Montana, a Corporation Sole may pursue a lawsuit seeking the enforcement of these obligations and the collection of the sums owed, together with any other available legal remedies, and in doing so may further collect its attorney fees and costs together with statutory legal interest from the date of default on the total sums owed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, Director of Vocations  
Or  
Signature, Director of Second Vocations