

Forging Young Fathers: Shoring Up Foundations

Marco Casanova and Andrew Comiskey

Best way to prevent moral collapse of pastors? Train them to grow in robust chastity.

It must be evident early on that a young man seeking the priesthood/pastorate engages with God and others consistently about his sexuality. That means that the candidate is integrating his masculine powers of life and love with his Christian commitment. Open and aware, he is allowing his passions to be ordered by the Passion of the One. You could say he lives in the convergence of two streams: the life-flow of Jesus' blood and water and his own more troublesome waterway of desire. The latter is subject to disorder, which snags or steams up the waters.

I, Marco Casanova, encountered Living Waters as a candidate of the Catholic priesthood. Now as Assistant Director of Desert Stream Ministries, I plainly see the significance of shoring up the foundations of our future "fathers." Such work is essential to the health of the Body, the Church.

Coming into the light as a seminarian is no easy task. Yet the implications liberated me. The Spirit of God set me in a flow that was inspired and new. I've been pondering Ezekiel 47. The stream from the Temple "entered the stagnant waters...making them fresh" (Ezek 47:8). Jesus' flow of blood and water stirred the stagnant call of Eden in my life, from which I had assumed exception. I felt immobilized because of same-sex attraction. I was missing something profoundly human. Heck, even the Son of God "worked with human hands...thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart." I wanted to love in a human way, that was ordered and in the flow of the Father's plan. Such a plan is written in me. It's written in all of us, according to Eden. I was just late to the garden! That's okay; the Savior came for such as these.

I have much respect for the good Rector of Kenrick-Glennon seminary, Fr. James Mason, and his human formation team member—Psychologist Dr. Susan Harvath. Their life-force of forming men rests on a simple thesis: "Reveal yourself!" For them most of the necessary prep is realizing a kind of "affective maturity": making sure these young men are alive to their development as men and show evidence of normal desire and good moral action by which they guide those "waters" well. They deliberately challenge any way young men seek to bypass the hard task of masculine integration by claiming a "spiritual" call when in truth they are just dodging the hard work of growing up. Awesome! Human formation needs to take priority over mystical or intellectual development.

Obviously, Protestant pastors differ, in that they can marry, while Catholic priests must demonstrate a healthy longing for marriage so that their renunciation of it for the Kingdom's sake is actual, not a bypass. In either case, overseers must make decisions about a pastor's readiness to be ordained based upon the evidence of growth in robust chastity—the maturity to love a woman honorably and, if necessary, to deny themselves that love for the sake of the Gospel.

Living in the light, “revealing myself,” has been the recipe to my freedom. I wanted to become a priest for most of my life. It was an aspiration I held deeply. It was a pursuit in which I undoubtedly found Jesus. When I felt a strong aversion to even question my becoming a priest, I knew something needed stirring. If I wasn’t free to let go of becoming a priest, I wasn’t free to say yes to it. Leaving the seminary is not the worst thing in the world. Forsaking human love based on a disordered exemption is indeed worse, not only for the Church, but for the man. It robs something profoundly human from him, something essential to any father, biological or spiritual. The call to celibate priesthood is a high call. Therefore, it demands a deep stirring in any future priest. Stir now. Don’t waste a day.

[1] Gaudium et Spes, no. 22.

[2] Susanne Harvath, Paul Hoelsing, Ed Hogan, and Jim Mason, *Seminary Formation and Transitory Same-Sex Attraction: A Proposal* (St. Louis: Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, 2019).

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