

Media Briefing November 29, 2005

Opening Remarks

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As Rector, I extend a warm welcome to Sacred Heart Major Seminary. The publication today of the Congregation for Catholic Education's Instruction has generated a great deal of interest among seminary educators and media alike. At the outset, I want to qualify some aspects of our discussion this afternoon, namely, this: the Instruction will require a careful, systematic study by every seminary rector and all formation personnel in every seminary in the country. There is a commonplace maxim in the Dominican Order that cautions theologians: "seldom affirm, never deny and always distinguish."

An important document issued by the Holy See always requires careful study, particularly since uninformed impressions may be incorrect and provide a disservice to the very people the Instruction is meant to assist—bishops, seminary rectors, formation personnel, the seminarians themselves, and by extension, the people of God whom these men in formation will one day serve—Lord willing—as priests. Therefore, I ask that you understand that we may not have definitive answers to the important questions which you will, no doubt, pose.

Secondly, I want to assure you and our Catholic people that we will study this document seriously and will critique our own admissions processes and formation policies at SHMS in accord with those findings. Clearly, such an approach will require considerable effort and time on our part—both in terms of study and implementation.

Thirdly, I understand this Instruction as growing organically out of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ("I will Give you Shepherds"), issued in March 1992. The late Holy Father emphasized what has become commonly known as

the four pillars of priestly formation in seminaries: spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and human. These various aspects of comprehensive formation are explicitly cited in the Instruction. The fourth pillar, human formation, is being specified partially in the Instruction in response to various inquiries by bishops, rectors and seminary formators.

The Instruction was “in process” during the last five years, at the very least. It would be a mistake to view it and the Apostolic Visitation of U.S. Seminaries exclusively in response to the experience of the church in the U.S. during the last several years; indeed, the Instruction itself is meant for seminaries throughout the world—in cultures quite diverse from our own. I should also add for the sake of clarity that an Apostolic Visitation of seminaries and houses of formation is scheduled in each country, every 15 or 20 years. Certainly, the church in the United States will benefit considerably from both initiatives of the Congregation. And yet, I must caution that we will require time to assess the guidance provided by the Instruction. I should also state that I am quite secure in the guidance that will be provided by Cardinal Maida, who has exercised direct, clear and very careful oversight of SHMS throughout his tenure as the Archbishop of Detroit. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have regarding the Instruction issued today.