

“I am delighted to recommend *How We Love* as a comprehensive guide for formation in celibate chastity. I believe this lucid and practical guide will be extremely useful in both seminaries and formation programs of religious men and women. Academicians as well as directors of initial and ongoing formation will appreciate the breath of research Brother John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, and his clear-eyed response to the contemporary challenges of preparing those called by the Lord to the commitment of celibacy. This book will help priests and religious continue to offer a joyful and mature witness to a life of celibacy as a free and generous self-gift to God and others.”

—Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, CSsR
Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey

“*How We Love* provides significant insights for vocation and formation directors responsible for assessing candidates to religious life as well as readers who want to enhance their understanding of living vowed celibacy with integrity. Written with incredible depth, this essential resource focuses on answering two fundamental questions: ‘How well-formed do we expect someone to be before entering our programs?’ and ‘Where do we expect them to be just before final profession or ordination?’ Because vocation directors assess the personal characteristics of applicants for the capacity to learn the skills needed for vowed communal life, I highly recommend this book. It provides helpful and concise information for identifying the skills needed for cultivating healthy vowed celibacy.”

—Deborah Marie Borneman, SSCM
Director of Member Relations and Services,
National Religious Vocation Conference

“This timely work will prove to be an invaluable resource for human formation directors and for the seminarians with whom they work. A methodologically precise, well-researched, faith-filled and profoundly helpful process that maps the journey from self-knowledge to self-acceptance and into that inner freedom in Christ which alone allows the celibate to live dynamically and joyfully as self-gift for the sake of the Kingdom.”

—Tomás Surlis
Pro-Rector of Saint Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Ireland

“Celibate chastity, like any other virtue, requires careful formation. *How We Love* offers young men and women a guide for pursuing this desire and is an excellent resource for formators, vocation directors, and spiritual directors to ensure the quality of Catholic vocations today.”

—David Songy, OFM Cap
President of Saint Luke Institute

“Brother John Mark has created a model of formation that pulls together all the varied pieces needed to prepare someone for a life of celibacy. From his experience in working with numerous religious communities and in the seminary, he gives practical advice for addressing the full gamut of challenges to celibate living. His material is equally useful for both men and women celibates.”

—Sr. Jane Becker, OSB, PhD
Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, Indiana

“Br. John Mark’s treatment is timely and grounded in his experience of doing celibacy formation. It is theologically balanced, psychologically up-to-date, and practical. A comprehensive guide for those involved in the ministry of formation as well as for those preparing to live a celibate life. Each chapter contains gems of wisdom.”

—Donald Goergen, OP, author of *The Sexual Celibate*

“With his book, *How We Love*, Brother John Mark infuses the choice of a life of celibacy with new understanding and motivation. In addition to a welcome approach to how celibates can—and must—live an emotionally stable life in witness to the Gospel, he also provides the necessary framework for formators in religious communities and in seminaries to put their programs on a firm and measurable foundation. This book is a real service to the church in time of need.”

—Justin DuVall, OSB
Vice-Rector of Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary

How We Love

A Formation for the Celibate Life

John Mark Falkenhain, OSB



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SECTION I

**A NEW APPROACH
TO CELIBACY FORMATION**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This book is a response to the need I have experienced in my own work for a careful and comprehensive book about formation for celibate chastity. I have spent the last fifteen years of my religious life involved in celibacy formation for diocesan seminarians and men and women religious. My formation for celibate chastity was fairly limited, partially because our community, like many men's communities, at the time relied on the seminary to carry out the task of celibacy formation. This left me, as a non-ordained monk, with relatively little preparation for what many would consider one of the most challenging aspects of the lives of consecrated religious or priests.

Aside from the obvious fact that not all consecrated religious attend seminary, there are additional important reasons why celibacy formation should be implemented with equal intentionality and skill in both religious formation programs and seminaries. The primary argument is that the celibate life of a religious man or woman differs in some important ways in theology, experience, and context from the celibate life of a diocesan priest. This insight is certainly important for religious men and women to consider, but it is also helpful for diocesan candidates to understand. An appreciation of the relative uniqueness of religious celibacy can help diocesan candidates to further articulate for themselves the charism of clerical celibacy.

If religious and seminary formation directors are a bit at a loss for how to proceed with formation for celibate chastity, it is not for lack of a good reason or even several reasons. None of us were trained for celibacy by our parents (although we might be able to look to our parents for training

in chastity and fidelity), and most men and women charged with celibacy formation were themselves formed by religious and priests who experienced very little, if any, celibacy formation. Just as young parents often fall back on the methods and strategies for parenting they were raised with, formators also tend to rely primarily on their own formation experience in deciding how to go about their work. For the most part, this ensures a healthy sense of continuity and tradition within communities and presbyterates; however, just as we tend to pass on the wisdom, traditions, and successful methods for living the priestly and religious life, we also risk passing on limitations, ineffective strategies, and blind spots.

This book aims to offer a thorough, practical, and easily implemented program for celibacy formation—one that is adaptable to both seminary settings and formation programs in men's and women's religious communities. The background I bring to this work is that of a Benedictine monk, a clinical psychologist (including several years of experience working in the field of pediatric psychology), a researcher in the areas of clergy sexual offense and perseverance in religious life, and a lifelong Catholic. While my clinical background in pediatrics may seem a little disconnected from my research interests in clergy sexual offense and religious and priestly formation, both of these aspects of my professional life have come together nicely in the work of promoting celibacy formation.

A Developmental Perspective

Psychologists working with children and adolescents typically adopt a developmental perspective when approaching their work. A developmental perspective views individuals as moving along a particular trajectory of growth. Understanding how individuals have developed to their current point of maturity (or immaturity) is helpful in charting a path moving forward. This approach helps the psychologist establish short- and long-term goals for growth and helps identify a plan or path for moving in that direction.

“Formation” is a developmental word. Like pediatricians, psychologists, and other developmental professionals, formation directors must consider whether a candidate's current state of religious, spiritual, and psychosocial maturity is appropriate for his or her age and life experience, and whether the rate of maturing is adequate for the amount of formation

the person has received and sufficient for reaching long-term goals. A developmentally informed approach to priestly and religious formation is guided by certain questions:

1. Where should young men or women be in their human and spiritual development before coming to the celibate life?
2. Where do we expect them to be by the end of initial formation?
3. What are the benchmarks that indicate the desired progress?
4. What will they need in order to continue growing in the celibate life once the period of initial formation is complete?

The Importance of Appropriate Development

The research on clergy sexual offense underscores the need for a strong developmental perspective when approaching celibacy formation. In an empirical analysis of child sexual offenders among clergy and religious brothers, the largest single group or subtype of offenders identified was one not marked by acute psychiatric disturbance or even chronic personality disorder, but rather poor psychosexual development.¹ Clergy offenders tended to score within the normal limits on measures of psychopathology (41%); however, examination of these subjects' subclinical profiles and collateral data indicated significant delays in their social, emotional, and sexual development. These men were described as being emotionally and sexually underdeveloped.

Avoiding the risk of clergy sexual offense, however, is not the only reason to pay close attention to the developmental progress of men and women in formation for celibate chastity. Poor emotional, social, and psychosexual development more often results in less criminal, but still problematic behaviors among priests and religious—behaviors and attitudes that ultimately affect parish and community life.

In a 2015 survey conducted in preparation for a national conference on celibacy formation, seminary and religious formation directors were

1. Marc A. Falkenhain and others, "Cluster Analysis of Child Sexual Offenders: A Validation with Roman Catholic Priests and Brothers," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 6, no. 3 (1999): 317–36.

asked to identify behaviors associated with unhealthy celibacy among priests or religious.² The most frequent responses included social isolationism (more typical among men); forming exclusive friendships or “coupling” (more typical among women religious); inability to relate to members of the opposite sex; denial of self as a sexual being; discomfort with self; inability to set appropriate boundaries; addictions; and immature and attention-seeking behaviors.

On the positive side, robust spiritual, emotional, and psychosexual development tends to predict adjustment, satisfaction, and perseverance among clergy and religious men and women. In his dissertation examining the psychological adjustment of diocesan priests, Nestor found that clergy who scored higher on measures of intimacy skills were likely to be more satisfied in their priestly vocation.³ Two more recent investigations into factors contributing to priests and male religious leaving their vocations similarly found that, at least for men, social support and connectedness were important predictive factors affecting whether a priest or religious perseveres in his vocation in the first five to ten years post-ordination or final profession.⁴

The importance of attending to the spiritual, psychosocial, and psychosexual development of celibates is perhaps articulated no more beautifully than in Pope John Paul II’s document on priestly formation, in which he writes: “[I]n order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mould his

2. “Celibacy Formation in College Seminaries and Theologates, a 2015 report to the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life & Vocations,” conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, last accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.sliconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/CARA-Survey-Summary-Report.pdf>; “2015 Survey of Religious Communities’ Celibacy Formation Programs,” John Mark Falkenhain and Beth Owen Davis, last accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.sliconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/St.-Meinrad-SLI-Survey-Summary-Report.pdf>.

3. Thomas Nestor, “Intimacy and Adjustment among Catholic Priests” (PhD diss., Loyola University, 1993).

4. Dean R. Hoge, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Catholic Priests* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 5–8; John Mark Falkenhain and Jane Becker, “The First Ten Years of Solemn Vows: Benedictine Monks on Reasons for Leaving and Remaining in Monastic Life,” *The American Benedictine Review* 59, no. 2 (June 2008): 184–97.

human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of man.”⁵

Although he is writing specifically on the topic of priestly formation in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul’s statement could just as easily be applied to religious formation—both of men and women. Our basic human development, including our social, emotional, and sexual development, is foundational to fulfilling the purpose of our religious or priestly vocations: helping others see Christ and establishing God’s kingdom in the world around us.

The Current State of Celibacy Formation in the United States

Exploration of celibacy formation programs in the United States suggests that we are making progress in our efforts to better prepare men and women for a life of celibate chastity. This is certainly evident given that many older priests and religious report having had very little or no formal training for celibacy in their years of initial formation. As recently as fifteen years ago, recently professed monks reported receiving very little formation for celibacy.⁶ Catholics are not the only group that appears to have shied away from dealing with issues of sexuality and romantic attraction in preparing for ministry in the past. A survey of accredited Christian seminaries in the United States in the late 1990s indicated that, across several denominations, information related to sexuality and sexual integration was embedded in other courses (if included at all) rather than being offered in stand-alone courses or more intentionally designed formation programs.⁷

Celibacy formation has been more strongly emphasized in seminary and religious formation programs in the United States in recent years. In our 2015 survey of seminary and religious formation directors, 75% of graduate seminaries and 57% of college seminaries reported having

5. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1999), 117.

6. Falkenhain and Becker, “The First Ten Years of Solemn Vows,” 196.

7. Sarah C. Conklin, “Seminary Sexuality Education Survey: Current Efforts, Perceived Need and Readiness in Accredited Christian Institutions,” *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy* 26, no. 4 (2001): 301–9.

celibacy formation programs that they considered “well established” (with clearly identified content and personnel), while an additional 22% and 42%, respectively, reported having programs they described as “in progress” (see Table 1). Among women’s religious communities, 35% of those responding to our survey reported having “well established” celibacy formation programs with an additional 37% reporting programs “in progress.” Men’s religious communities reported slightly higher levels of organization than their female counterparts with 39% reporting “well established” programs and 48% reporting programs “in progress.” A disappointing finding is that 3% of graduate seminaries and 28% and 13% of women’s and men’s religious communities respectively reported having “ad hoc” celibacy formation programs, or programs that have little consistency from year to year.⁸

Table 1. Organization of Initial Celibacy Formation Programs in US Seminaries and Religious Communities

“Which of the following most accurately describes your celibacy formation program?”:

	<i>“well-established”</i>	<i>“in progress”</i>	<i>“ad hoc—having little yearly consistency”</i>
Theologates	75%	22%	3%
College Seminaries	57%	43%	0%
Women’s Religious Communities	35%	37%	28%
Men’s Religious Communities	39%	48%	13%

It is not surprising that among the three groups, seminaries report the highest levels of organization and stability with respect to celibacy formation programming. This makes sense given the more highly centralized organization of diocesan life, the availability of published formation documents for priestly formation, and the heightened focus on seminary

8. “Celibacy Formation in College Seminaries and Theologates,” 7, 18; “Survey of Religious Communities’ Celibacy Formation Programs,” 3.

formation (and celibacy formation in seminaries in particular) in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis. In general, seminaries also tend to enjoy greater stability with respect to staffing and, more important, with respect to numbers of young people in formation on an ongoing basis. Our research showed that, at least among women's religious communities, smaller communities and communities that did not currently have candidates in formation were less likely to report high levels of organization and stability in their celibacy formation programs. Common sense tells us that larger seminaries and larger religious communities are also more likely to have a greater pool of personnel and resources to draw from when addressing various topics within celibacy formation (i.e., theology of celibacy, sexual identity, internet pornography, addictions, etc.). With respect to ongoing formation, only 42% of men's religious communities and 14% of women's communities reported having formal ongoing formation programs for celibate chastity.

In terms of specific content of celibacy formation programs, most seminaries and religious communities reported that their programs include treatment of the following areas: theology and the meaning of chaste celibacy, affective maturity, human sexuality, dealing with loneliness, and appropriate boundaries. Graduate seminaries (75%) appear to address the issue of how to cope with the experience of falling in love more often than college seminaries (57%) and men's and women's religious communities (48% and 65%, respectively); and formation programs serving men (i.e., both seminary and men's religious communities) address issues related to internet pornography (68%–96%) much more frequently than formation programs in women's religious communities (28%). This latter finding bears some consideration in light of increasing rates of internet pornography use among women in the general population.

With respect to the different theological dimensions of celibacy emphasized in formation programs, a service-oriented theology of celibacy "for the sake of the kingdom" is by far the most popular theological dimension emphasized in seminaries and religious communities. Interestingly, seminaries were more likely also to advocate a spousal theology of celibacy (75% of graduate seminaries and 70% of college seminaries) compared to men's and women's religious communities (19% and 21%, respectively). This finding is somewhat ironic considering that the spousal theology is probably more traditionally associated with celibacy in the context

of consecrated life. It is possible that there are ideological biases at play causing this dimension to be downplayed among men and women religious. It may also be that seminary programs, by nature of being schools of theology, are able to spend more time studying (and therefore studying more broadly) the various theological dimensions of celibate chastity compared to formation programs among religious communities.

Within the content area of human sexuality, internet pornography, sexual integration, sexual orientation, and masturbation are among the most commonly addressed topics in college and graduate seminary celibacy formation programs. Among formation programs in religious congregations, sexual integration, sexual orientation, dealing with sexual attraction, and pornography (particularly in men's communities) are the most frequent topics included. The physiology of sexuality is the least commonly emphasized aspect of human sexuality, except among formation programs in women's communities, among whom 45% endorsed this as a topic covered in their programs.

Existing Models for Celibacy Formation

Despite a relative abundance of writings on the theology, history, and spirituality of celibate chastity, a recent review of the literature uncovered few concrete and implementable models for celibacy formation. The two available are targeted exclusively at priestly formation.

The *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF), fifth edition, offers a valuable list of qualities and skills recommended for candidates pursuing a life of clerical celibacy.⁹ These include affective maturity; a solid understanding of the meaning of celibacy; care for others; modesty; vigilance; self-mastery; and the capacities for friendship, appropriate self-disclosure, boundary setting, solitude, and for giving and receiving love. The *Program of Priestly Formation* goes on to identify the delivery systems to accomplish this work in the life of the seminary, including instruction; personal reflection; community life and feedback; application to the tasks of seminary life; formation advisors, mentors, and directors; spiritual direction; and psychological counseling.

9. *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006).

Based in part on the previous edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) published a resource book for the celibacy formation of diocesan priests in 1999.¹⁰ The NCEA document, written by Thomas Krenik, proposed seven guiding elements to be used in celibacy formation with graduate seminarians: internalization of presbyterial values; pattern of contemplative prayer; capacity for solitude; age-appropriate psychosexual development; capacity for intimacy in human friendships; experience of community support; and accountability to others. Although brief, the NCEA offering is helpful in recommending some specific content, resources, and guiding questions for addressing each of these guiding principles of priestly celibacy formation. No published models of celibacy formation for men and women religious were identified.

How We Love: Formation for the Celibate Life

This book aims to offer a comprehensive guide for formation in celibate chastity, usable in both seminary and religious formation programs (both men's and women's). The proposed program is comprised of objective, research-based recommendations drawn from a wide variety of sources, including Catholic Church teaching; official documents on priestly and religious formation; research on the state of celibacy formation in the US; research on factors contributing to perseverance in priesthood and religious life; research on factors contributing to clergy sexual offense; and thorough reviews of the scientific literature on issues related to sexuality and sexual identity. A particular contribution of this volume will be to provide formation directors and candidates with thorough, well-researched, and ideologically neutral information on issues related to human sexuality and sexual identity—an area in which formation directors often find themselves least prepared to offer instruction and guidance.

Because most of what has been written in the area of celibate chastity has focused on clerical celibacy and has been written primarily by men for men, this work also attempts to be sensitive to the needs and perspectives of consecrated religious and of women. It is my firm conviction that

10. Thomas W. Krenik, *Formation for Priestly Celibacy: A Resource Book* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Education Association, 1999).

by developing an approach that explores areas of overlap and distinction between men and women and between diocesan priesthood and various forms of consecrated life in the church, all groups are best served.

With this in mind, a number of heuristic values underlie the model upon which this text is built. They include

- ◆ providing a framework from which to begin constructing or continue organizing a program for celibacy formation
- ◆ providing a framework that is adaptable to both clerical and religious formation
- ◆ providing a framework that is consistent with the directives provided in the main formation documents for priestly formation—i.e., *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (John Paul II, 1996) and the *Program of Priestly Formation*, fifth edition (2006)
- ◆ providing a framework that can be used in both men’s and women’s communities
- ◆ providing a framework that accounts for individual differences among candidates
- ◆ providing a framework that helps inform screening of candidates and ongoing formation

This book may be used in a number of ways and in a variety of settings. One obvious application is the utilization of this volume as a guide for organizing a formal semester- or year-long course on celibacy formation within a larger seminary or religious formation program. This book can also be used on an individual basis. Men and women in formation undertaking some directed reading or self-study about celibacy formation are likely find this an excellent resource.

Newly appointed formation directors faced with the task of constructing a celibacy formation program from the ground up, or who simply wish to increase the level of structure and consistency in an existing program, are likely to find this a helpful resource for both program organization and content. Chapter 14, “Putting It Together,” aims specifically to assist formation directors in identifying benchmarks and establishing a schedule of formation goals in each of the major content areas covered in this book.

Finally, directors of ongoing formation or already ordained and professed individuals engaging in their own ongoing formation in the area of celibate chastity will surely find this text rewarding and perhaps even challenging. Some sections will be worth returning to at many intervals in the lifespan of a vocation, as living the celibate life often reveals to us more of who we are as emotional, sexual, relational, and spiritual creatures over time.

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISHING THE MODEL

In my work with men and women in formation for celibate chastity, I always begin by suggesting that when we make a promise or a vow of celibacy, we place ourselves in a box. Some react by suggesting that this seems confining, and I agree with them—it *is* confining. Celibacy is meant to limit us in important ways; however, we choose these limits and impose them on ourselves in order to gain certain freedoms and give a particular witness to the church and to the world.

Once we have placed ourselves in the “celibacy box,” we encounter a bit of a paradox. On the one hand, the parameters of celibacy are very clear and apply universally to everyone who makes the vow of celibacy: we will refrain from marriage or exclusivity in relationships, and we will refrain from genital sexual expression. On the other hand, the actual experience of *living* celibacy varies greatly from person to person. Just as no two people will have the exact same experience of being married or of parenting, the experience of living a celibate life will differ from person to person. What accounts for these differences? And how do we prepare men and women for a life that will turn out to be unique to each person?

The experience of living the celibate life is unique to each individual due to a number of personal factors. Four stand out in particular: one’s motives for choosing celibacy; one’s theological understanding of celibacy and how he or she uses that theological understanding to inform and direct life as a celibate; one’s sexual identity; and, finally, whatever skills (and limitations) one brings to and is able to acquire for living the celibate life.

In the illustration of celibacy as lived experience below, the solid outline represents the basic expectations that help to define the life of celibate chastity (i.e., refraining from marriage and refraining from genital sexual

expression), and the factors within the box account for each person's unique experience of living out the celibate commitment.

Refrain from Marriage/Refrain from Genital Sexual Expression

- ◆ Motives for Celibacy
- ◆ Theological Dimensions
- ◆ Sexual Identity
- ◆ Skills and Limitations for Living the Celibate Life

Because these factors—motives, theological dimensions, sexual identity, and skills for living the celibate life—significantly influence the individual's lived experience of celibacy, we will designate these as the four main content areas around which to structure a celibacy formation program. This allows us to take individual differences into account while forming men and women for a common witness in the church. Now that the major content areas are established, it will be helpful to add one more overarching theme to our emerging model: self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

In the fifth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF), one of the church's primary documents on the formation of men for priesthood, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops articulated a keen and helpful insight that can help us direct all of our efforts toward forming free and healthy celibates, for both priesthood and religious life. In the section of the PPF on human formation—which includes formation for celibacy—the bishops suggest the following: “In general, human formation happens in a three-fold process of *self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-gift*—and all of this in faith” (emphases added).¹ This statement is well worth examining in detail.

If we were to attempt to summarize the goal of any Christian vocation (including the celibate vocation), we could probably do no better than to say that the goal of any Christian life is self-gift. The gospels remind us

1. *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 33.

that if we wish to save our lives, we must lose them, or as Christ himself admonishes us, we must lay down our lives for others in imitation of him. This is what it means to love.

As a specific approach to the Christian life, celibacy must also have self-gift as its ultimate goal. In fact, one could safely say that celibacy, like poverty and obedience, is pointless unless it steers us in the direction of self-gift: of being more loving, more capable of laying our life down for others. We will explore this notion of love as the theological end of celibacy in greater depth when we discuss the theological dimensions of celibate chastity; but for now, let it suffice to say that if celibacy takes as its aim self-gift, then let us follow the bishops' counsel and agree that it must be preceded by self-knowledge and self-acceptance. But, why?

We might better understand the importance self-knowledge and self-acceptance as precursors to self-gift if we first ask what kinds of things people must know and accept about themselves before making a final commitment to celibate chastity. If we return for a moment to the four main content areas of our emerging model for celibacy formation, we will quickly see that self-knowledge and self-acceptance in each of these major content areas results in greater freedom of choice. Individuals must have a clear understanding and acceptance of what is motivating them to adopt celibacy, for example, for their decision to be adequately discerned. An honest and accurate knowledge and acceptance of one's motives help reveal whether one is choosing to be celibate for healthy reasons and for reasons that are consistent with the church's vision for celibate men and women. Along the same lines, those embarking on the celibate life should also be knowledgeable of the theological underpinnings of celibate chastity and be able to accept and adopt for themselves strong theological and spiritual motives for pursuing celibacy as a way of life. Before making a final gift of oneself to celibate chastity, candidates must be able to say that they not only share but are inspired by the church's theological vision for their life as people who will forego marriage and genital sexual expression for the sake of the kingdom of God.

With respect to sexual identity, anyone who has given even minimal thought to the importance of psychosexual development relative to celibate chastity will recognize that candidates must have adequate and ongoing knowledge and acceptance of themselves as sexual individuals on the way to making a free and final choice of celibacy. If, as St. Thomas Aquinas suggests, "Grace builds on nature," then the grace of celibacy builds on our nature as sexual people. Consequently, people must approach the en-

terprise of the celibate life with an accurate understanding and an honest acceptance of who they are as sexual and romantic individuals so that their choice is not made on false pretenses or without adequate information.

Finally, given that persevering in a life of celibacy requires certain skills and the development of particular virtues, candidates must know and be able to accept whether or not they have or can develop the necessary skills for living the celibate life in ways that fulfill the church's vision for celibacy. As we will point out, some of these skills will have to be in place before a person approaches formation, while others may be taught, fostered, and facilitated by the formation process.

Returning, then, to the bishops' assertion that self-gift must be preceded by self-knowledge and self-acceptance, we can see that by increasing our self-knowledge and by growing in acceptance of ourselves as we truly are, the choice and the gift that is the celibate life is made freely. Freedom is the necessary condition promoted by growth in self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Note that when we speak of freedom in this context, we are not speaking of a freedom that involves having unlimited options or unbounded self-determination, but rather a condition that results from knowing who one is and what one is choosing for one's life. It is not the slavery of ignorance or naiveté, but the liberty to knowingly lay down one's life without fear of later regrets or the too-late discovery of things one should have known about oneself at the time of commitment.

If we superimpose these goals of growing in self-knowledge and self-acceptance onto our four major content areas of motives, theological dimensions, sexual identity, and skills for celibacy, our final model for initial and ongoing formation for celibacy emerges:

Refrain from Marriage/Refrain from Genital Sexual Expression

- ◆ Motives for Celibacy
- ◆ Theological Dimensions
- ◆ Sexual Identity
- ◆ Skills and Limitations for Living the Celibate Life

Self-Knowledge • Self-Acceptance • Self-Gift

Over the course of this book, our ultimate goal will be to grow in self-knowledge and self-acceptance in these four major areas on the way to making a permanent and free gift of self to a life of celibate chastity. Each chapter sets forth a conceptual framework and establishes a common vocabulary with which candidates can better understand their own experience and communicate who they are to those who will assist and join them in their formation for the celibate life: formation personnel, spiritual directors, peers in formation, counselors, and close friends.

An “Elegant” Model

In the fields of science and social science, a research or intervention model is considered “elegant” to the extent that it is able to explain much while remaining fairly simple. My aim has been to establish a similarly elegant model for celibacy formation. As we will discover, the proposed model is simple enough to be easily implemented and internalized, but comprehensive enough to be applied to a variety of formation settings. Consideration of the various theological dimensions to celibacy, for example, recognizes the differences between formation for religious life and diocesan priesthood. The inclusion of sexual identity—including the specific constructs of sex, gender, sexual orientation, history of sexual experiences, and attitudes and values regarding sexuality—is not only essential, but broadens its applicability to men and women as well as to individuals entering formation with a wide variety of romantic and sexual experiences, personality traits, and cultural influences. Because growth in self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and, above all, self-gift is a never-ending endeavor, this model is useful not only for initial formation, but also for ongoing formation programs in celibate chastity.

In the sections and chapters that follow, we will explore each of the four major content areas, articulate specific formation goals for each area, and begin to identify who is responsible for the work to be done. Chapters 3 and 4 will look at motives for the celibate life and underscore the importance of clarifying and evaluating motives in terms of how healthy and sustainable they are for a lifetime of fruitful celibate chastity consistent with the church’s vision for this particular witness.

Chapters 5 and 6 will explore the various theological facets supporting celibacy in the contexts of diocesan life, apostolic religious life, mo-

nastic and contemplative life, and the missionary experience. A model for pursuing theological reflection on the celibate life as an important means of transformation, conversion, and perseverance is introduced and elaborated upon in chapter 6.

Chapter 7 provides a thorough and careful exploration of sexual identity as an important consideration for formation for the celibate life. Adhering both to the teaching of the Catholic Church and the scientific research literature, I will propose a multifaceted model for sexual identity that includes our sex, gender, sexual orientation, history of sexual experiences, and the values and attitudes we hold regarding sexuality. Chapter 8 will use this model to explore three ways of approaching what it means to integrate one's sexuality into one's larger identity as a celibate man or woman.

Finally, chapters 9 through 13 explore five major skills necessary for living the celibate life: affective maturity, the establishment and maintenance of effective boundaries, community as a source of support and accountability, coping with romantic and sexual attraction, and the capacity for solitude.

The last two chapters of the book are directed more specifically to formation personnel and cover the special topics of structuring a formation program and addressing the need for ongoing formation. While these chapters are primarily written with formation directors and leadership in mind, they are likely to be helpful to men and women in initial formation as well, especially the chapter on ongoing formation. Chapter 15 will also be of interest to already ordained priests and professed religious who are utilizing this volume for the purpose of ongoing formation.

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