



JUNE 2026

# RECTOR'S SEMESTER AT A GLANCE

## PROGRAM UPDATE

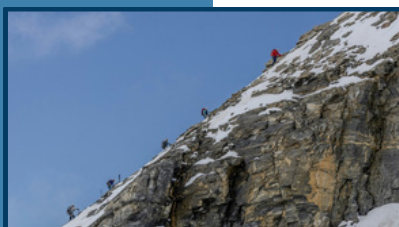
Thank you for entrusting your seminarians to SJV. We are honored to support your efforts in forming Men in Christ, Men of the Church, and Men for Others.

We are projecting a Fall '26 new-man class of 35-40 (while tracking 41 applicants) and a total enrollment of 116-121, which is at the top end of our optimum enrollment of 110-120.

### FORMATION UPDATE

In addition to our mission trips and in-house jobs, our seminarians once again this year spent several thousand hours volunteering in the Archdiocese, teaching religious education in Catholic schools, taking communion to the homebound, and engaging in peer ministry on the St. Thomas Campus.

Additionally, this past fall, our staff psychologist, Dr. Chris Burke and the formation team began a partnership with Joe Masek, co-founder of The Freedom Group and a St. Thomas Catholic Studies alumnus, to develop a program to help seminarians build chaste habits and resilience amid the many cultural challenges they face today. Masek assisted our team with the Propaedeutic class in the fall and, in December, launched a Freedom Group tailored specifically to our seminarians' needs.



Learn more about  
**The Freedom Group**  
in your latest issue of  
[Vianney News](#).

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*Living for God isn't complicated. It's written into who we are, and God's calling us to give him who we are today. That's where holiness starts, not in some grand plans.*

Dominic Scott, graduating senior

\*See a full list of quotes from seniors in the latest issue of [Vianney News](#).



Pictured: 2026 graduates and priest staff

## 2026 BY THE NUMBERS

**21 men** are graduating this year  
17 of our graduating men will continue formation and attend four configuration-stage seminaries this year, including Mundelein, North American College, St. Francis de Sales, and The Saint Paul Seminary.

**14 alumni** are projected to be ordained across nine dioceses.

Our men maintained strong academic performance, with the overall seminary **GPA of 3.64 (median=3.75)**

- Senior class GPA (median=3.80)
- New man GPA (median=3.69)

We welcomed all **18 vocation directors** and **11 bishops** this year, including newly installed Archbishop Rivotuso of Mobile, Alabama!



## College seminary enrollment remains robust nationwide

Fewer children were born during and after the financial crisis of 2008 (2008-12), so there are fewer students reaching college age. As a result, early forecasts predicted a 15% drop in the number of college-age individuals in the foreseeable future, referred to as the "Cliff of 2026." Seminary enrollment nationwide has been bucking this trend, not only remaining steady but increasing. At the NACS summer conference, there was discussion of some college seminaries embarking on new building projects to address the robust demand.

## ST. THOMAS CAMPUS IMPACT

Seminarians have a unique opportunity to evangelize and influence their peers on St. Thomas campus. They serve on the "Tommie Catholic" leadership team, represent SJV in student government, and help form new Catholics through the St. Thomas OCIA program, which was the largest group of students entering the Church since the 1970s!

## SPRING HOLY QURBANA



In March, we honored the liturgical tradition of our Syro-Malabar seminarians by celebrating a Holy Qurbana in our chapel with Fr. Robin Chako, the pastor of the Syro-Malabar Saint Alphonsa parish in St. Paul.

## PASTORAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fr. Kelly and Fr. Olofson (SJV Vice-Rector) attended this year's NACS summer conference, which is exploring the topic "**The Ongoing Evaluation Process and Final Recommendation of College Seminarians.**"

**Fr. Olofson** completed a certificate from the Seminary Formation Council in February, and **Fr. Nolan** is in his second and final year of the program. **Fr. Forner** and **Fr. Westermann** are both in their second year of the 3-year Institute for Priestly Formation program in spiritual direction.

# STAFF UPDATES

- **Fr. Cy Whitaker, SJ**, will join the SJV formation team beginning in June 2026, coming from Sacred Heart Seminary, where he served as a spiritual director for the past nine years. Fr. Whitaker's experience as a high school teacher and as a professor at Xavier University makes him particularly well-suited for college seminary spiritual direction, and we are honored to have him join our team.
- We are grateful to Archbishop Hedba for assigning **Fr. Sam Gilbertson** of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis to the SJV formation team beginning July 2026. Fr. Gilbertson is currently serving at St. Ambrose of Woodbury as parochial vicar.
- **Fr. Jeff Norfolk** will return to the Diocese of Sioux Falls at the end of the year. He has made a significant contribution to our team, and we are grateful to Board Member Bishop DeGrood for assigning him to SJV for the last four years.
- In late 2025 and early 2026, we welcomed **Derek Waldbillig** as **Director of Development** and **Jessica Aleman** as **Director of Marketing and Communications** to SJV, respectively. Derek joined SJV with a proven track record of more than a decade of fundraising success in the Catholic space, primarily with Saint Paul's Outreach. Jessica joined SJV from 5 Stones, a national Catholic marketing firm, and has served as the Communications Director for the Minnesota Catholic Conference of Bishops, among other roles.
- In March, we welcomed **Suzanne Sterr** as our new Administrative Associate. Suzanne spent over 20 years as a Neonatal ICU nurse before switching gears to managing the front office at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Denver, Colorado. Her son, Jack, is an SJV alumnus.
- Dede Leininger, our Events Coordinator, retired after 19 years of dedicated service. **Ben Bitzer** joined the team in June to replace Dede and expand the role to include benefactor data management and relationship cultivation strategy. Ben is a seasoned professional who recently decided to transition into the Catholic space. We are grateful to have him land at SJV. He has been a valuable member of SJV's **Virtuous Business Leadership** program for the past few years.



FR. CY WHITAKER



FR. SAM GILBERTSON