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PARISHIONER FEEDBACK ON SEMINARIAN PREACHING

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This thesis is dedicated to
the Blessed Virgin Mary,
who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord
would be fulfilled.

The homily can actually be an intense and happy experience of the Spirit,
a consoling encounter with God's word, a constant source of renewal and growth.
—Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium,* 135

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ABSTRACT

PARISHIONER FEEDBACK ON SEMINARIAN PREACHING

Mowry, David H., M.Div., S.T.L., D.Min. Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2023.

This thesis project develops and evaluates a model for preaching feedback that engages parishioners in the homiletic formation of candidates for ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Chapter One explores the distance between the formation and the vocation of parish priests. The chapter presents the context of the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary as uniquely suited to the aims of the thesis project: developing the Affective Feedback model which relies upon the spiritual experience of the parishioner-listener as the source of feedback to the seminarian-preacher.

Chapter Two presents the central metaphor of a bridge to explain the theoretical frameworks of the Affective Feedback model. The chapter establishes three theological pillars for this bridge: the pneumatology of the Gift of God, the *sensus fidei*, and Ignatian affective discernment.

Chapter Three explains how listener-oriented preaching serves as the homiletic suspension cables of the Affective Feedback bridge. The practical ecclesiology of Pope Francis, the inductive preaching homiletic of Fred Craddock, and insights into listener relevance from Karla Bellinger manifest the tensile strength that feedback requires.

Chapter Four introduces interdisciplinary wisdom from communication studies in the business world to establish the deck of the Affective Feedback bridge. In conversation with Douglas Stone, Sheila Heen, and Therese Huston, the chapter lays out the practical theology of effective feedback conversations.

Chapter Five details the Affective Feedback model, this thesis project's ministerial intervention. The chapter gives thick descriptions of the institutional context, participants, structure, and evaluation of the ministerial intervention.

Chapter Six analyzes the limitations and data of the intervention. The analysis examines seminarian interviews and parishioner questionnaires to demonstrate how parishioners moved toward basing their feedback on affective impact and how seminarians grew in appreciation for parishioner's praise. The chapter concludes by suggesting the next steps for Affective Feedback's improvement and application.

Chapter One

The Distance Between Formation and Vocation: Connecting Seminarian and Parishioner

> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off.
>
> Acts of the Apostles 13:2-3[1]

Introduction

A homiletics professor wanted to improve the preaching at the Catholic seminary where he taught. He designed a feedback form and gave it to his fellow professors. He told them to use it to evaluate the fourth-year students who had just begun preaching. He also wanted his colleagues to offer feedback on the homilies given by the priests of the seminary. When he finished explaining, one of his fellow professors stood up to speak. He too was a Catholic, a layman. "Who am I to offer feedback on homilies?" he said. "I am only a member of the laity. I know nothing about homilies!"

At a different Catholic seminary, a student sat in the office of the director of pastoral formation. He was soon to finish his seminary formation and begin ministry as a parish priest. The director asked about the seminarian's experience at his field education assignment at a local parish. She wanted to know whether any of the parishioners had been mentors to him. The student frowned and said, "How can parishioners be mentors? How can they guide me if they know nothing about seminary formation?"

[1] All Scripture citations in this thesis project are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition.

The claim of ignorance in both stories beggars belief. How could a Catholic so dedicated to his faith as to serve as a seminary professor know nothing about homilies? His years of experience listening to homilies Sunday after Sunday give him ample material to form a basis for comparison—to say nothing of his formal theological education. True, he may not be a homiletician, but he is a member of the baptized. He has received the Holy Spirit who speaks within the worshiping community.

As for the seminarian, he stands on the threshold of a life of parish ministry. Any parish to which he is sent will not be surprised by his priesthood. The people of that community will have seen many priests come and go. True, the parishioners may not be well versed in the latest edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, the language of *Pastores dabo vobis*, or the formal principles of seminary formation. They will, however, know priests. They have lived with them, prayed with them, and served with them. The seminarian who thinks that such experience has nothing to offer his own formation closes his ears to the voice of the Spirit who calls him.

These all-too-common attitudes of parishioner and seminarian alike reveal the distance between the formation and vocation of parish priests. The implementation and perception of the program of priestly formation in the United States has created the impression that lay parishioners—those among whom the priest lives out his vocation—have little or nothing to do with the formation of that priest. Such an impression runs contrary to how the Church understands the discernment and fulfillment of the priestly vocation. The local community aids the initial discernment of a priestly vocation and gives the context for its final fulfillment. Between initial discernment and final fulfillment, however, something goes amiss. The seminary system, while necessary for

the work of priestly formation, nonetheless separates the candidate for ordination from the local community. Furthermore, this separation leads to difficulties with homiletic formation, creating distance between parishioner and seminarian in a ministry that ought to reveal a pastor's closeness to the people.

Let us consider the arc of a priestly vocation and see how the middle of that arc ends up so far away from its starting and ending points in the local community.

Beginning in the Local Community

The vocation of parish priests begins within the community of faith. To say otherwise threatens to reduce the priesthood to a personal project. The Congregation for the Clergy warns against this tendency in the 2016 document governing the formation of Catholic priests, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*:

> [T]he vocation to the priesthood is a gift that God gives to the Church and to the world, a path to sanctify oneself and others that should not be followed in an individualistic manner, but must always have as its point of reference a specific portion of the People of God. Such a vocation is discovered and accepted within a community.[2]

A man experiences within himself the gift of a priestly vocation. His heart may be attracted to the pastoral charity he sees in the ministry of priests. He may desire to preside at Mass or offer the sacrament of Reconciliation to the faithful. The holy lives and faithful witness of priests may stir him to live the same kind of life within the Church. These interior experiences, which seem at first glance individualistic, arise from a man's participation in the community of faith. Charity, sacraments, personal holiness—these gifts are only intelligible within a community of disciples. That community assists the

[2] Congregation for the Clergy, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (*The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*) (Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 2016), Introduction 3.

man in discovering and accepting his vocation. The parish runs a soup kitchen for the poor in the neighborhood, and a man encounters the face of Christ in the least of his brothers and sisters. The elderly parishioner sees a young man praying after daily Mass and tells him he should be a priest. The compassionate priest preaches a homily that stirs a young man's heart, offering wisdom gathered through spiritual discipline. Such has been the relationship between the Church and the individual from the first days of the faith. Consider the citation from the Acts of the Apostles at the start of this chapter. Barnabas and Saul hear the call to evangelize originating within the prayer experience of the Antiochene community. The Spirit speaks to the community to make known the vocation of two of its members. The community of disciples, open to the call of the Spirit, teaches the man discerning the priesthood how to listen for his own vocation.

Ending in the Local Community

Once heard and followed, that vocation to the priesthood will lead a man back to a specific portion of the People of God. The *Ratio fundamentalis* calls for priests to form a self-understanding as "missionary disciples who are 'in love' with the Master, shepherds 'with the smell of the sheep,' who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them."[3] This instruction follows from the teaching of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium:* "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples."[4] Lay and ordained share in a common mission. The Lord Jesus sends all as missionaries to proclaim the Good News and to make disciples of

[3] *Ratio fundamentalis*, Introduction 3.

[4] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (November 24, 2013) (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 120.

every nation.[5] Through the sacramental character that God imparts at ordination, clergy manifest the words and deeds of Jesus, Head of the Body and Shepherd of the Church, in a distinct way within the community of the faithful. When they exercise the offices of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, they do so not to make their authority over others felt, but rather to follow the example of Jesus who is among us as the one who serves.[6] The priest makes his own the words that St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ."[7] The priest exists for the sake of the mission of Jesus, and that mission results in the flourishing of faith within the community the priest serves.

How can the Church see the fruits of a priest's mission? Francis, with an insight we will return to throughout this thesis project, points to the practical theology of preaching as the key interpretive lens: "The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people."[8] The homily, after all, is "a dialogue between God and his people…. The homily takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people."[9] The dialogue exists before the homilist rises to preach because the Spirit has already formed a people belonging to the Father through the reconciling ministry of the Son. The mission precedes the missionary.

Furthermore, priests are not only missionaries. With all the baptized, priests are at the same time disciples, "constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a

[5] Cf. Mt 28:19.

[6] Cf. Mt 20:25; Lk 22:27.

[7] 1 Cor 11:1.

[8] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 135.

[9] Ibid., 137.

continuous configuration to Christ."[10] A man does not hermetically seal his heart and mind on the day of his ordination to the priesthood. He grows, learns, converts from sin, and deepens in love—not in spite of his priesthood but because of it. Priesthood does not exist in isolation. The community that the priest serves provides the context for his growth in priestly discipleship. St. John Paul II articulates the essentially communitarian nature of a priest's ongoing formation in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*:

> [T]he very exercise of the pastoral ministry leads to a constant and fruitful mutual exchange between the priest's life of faith and that of the laity. Indeed the very relationship and sharing of life between the priest and the community, if it is wisely conducted and made use of, will be a fundamental contribution to permanent formation, which cannot be reduced to isolated episodes or initiatives, but covers the whole ministry and life of the priest.[11]

Ministry itself becomes formation. As a man exercises the gift of his priesthood, he grows in his way of thinking and being—provided he is attentive to the faith life of the people. Once again, preaching reveals the depths of a priest's discipleship. Francis encourages this attitude of common discipleship in the preachers of the Church so that the faith of others may teach and feed them:

> A preacher has to contemplate the word, but he also has to contemplate his people. In this way he learns "of the aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering," while paying attention "to actual people, to using their language, their signs and symbols, to answering the questions they ask."[12]

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[10] *Ratio fundamentalis,* Introduction 3.

[11] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (March 25, 1992), 78, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.

[12] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 154, citing Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 63: *AAS* 68 (1976), 53.

Preaching deepens the discipleship of preacher and listener as the Spirit draws both into contemplation of the Word constantly addressed to the entire Body of Christ.

Removed from the Local Community

A man discerns a call to the priesthood within a community. A priest fulfills his vocation in service to a community. In the *Program of Priestly Formation* (hereafter PPF), the bishops of the United States speak of the local community as part of the "formative community," which "refers broadly to the larger community within the Church that is involved in varied ways in the discernment and initial formation of men preparing for the priesthood."[13] A diocesan bishop and his priests, members of the seminary community, supervisors at pastoral placements, family, members of a man's home parish—all these constitute the formative community.

But the arc of a man's formation for ordained ministry takes him away from the local community and into a different experience of community: the seminary. The PPF clarifies the difference between the seminary and the rest of the formative community: "The term 'seminary community' is narrower in meaning and refers specifically to the community of seminarians, priest formators, professors, specialists, and other seminary staff."[14] A man's vocation to the priesthood is "discerned and nurtured within the seminary community" before he becomes "part of the 'family' of the presbyterate, at the service of a particular community."[15]

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[13] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Program of Priestly Formation in the United States of America*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022), 8.

[14] *Program of Priestly Formation*, 8.

[15] Ibid., 13.

This seminary community bears many of the same characteristics as the parish and family: charity, sacraments, personal holiness. Now, however, these elements of the Christian life become subject to institutional and systematic evaluation. The seminarian must display charity through observable skills of pastoral counseling. Sacraments become a matter of classroom study and practiced liturgical presidency. Formators judge a candidate's personal holiness by his participation in the Liturgy of the Hours or his habit of daily prayer. Since formators are the primary preachers in the seminary, homily topics can narrow to focus on pushing the seminarians closer to ordination rather than introducing the wide horizon of lifelong discipleship. The PPF lays out the benchmarks that candidates for priesthood must meet to advance in the various stages of formation.[16] All this is to say that the nature of formation changes once a man enters seminary. Initial formation in faith happens organically and unsystematically among family, friends, and fellow disciples in the communities of a man's origin. Within the seminary, however, the Church desires clarity, necessitating an evaluative lens.

Such clarity demands that seminary formators and staff be clearly qualified. The Church expects the members of the seminary community to possess the needed expertise to make accurate evaluations of candidates for ordination. The rector should be a priest "distinguished by prudence, wisdom and balance, someone highly competent."[17] Formators "need a specific preparation and generous dedication to this task [of

[16] For instance, before beginning the configuration stage—the stage of formation immediately preceding ordination to the diaconate—the bishops instruct formators to evaluate a man's self-knowledge: "His transition to the configuration stage is marked by a level of self-knowledge that permits ongoing growth, especially in his relationships with others." Cf. *Program of Priestly Formation*, 197.

[17] *Ratio fundamentalis*, 134.

formation]."[18] Specialists such as the academic dean or the business manager need excellent "human qualities and competence in their field."[19] Faculty, meanwhile, "should have advanced, preferably terminal, degrees in their teaching areas. Professors in the sacred sciences, as well as philosophy, should possess a doctorate or licentiate from a university or institution recognized by the Holy See."[20] The bishops of the Church diligently seek competence, professionalism, and high moral character among those tasked with forming men for the Catholic priesthood.

These traits are vital. At the same time, they create a distinction between the seminary community and the broader formative community. What terminal degree does one need to become a parent of a seminarian? Parishioners in a priest's first assignment do not need specific preparation in ongoing priestly formation. The expertise of formators and staff, crucial for the success of a candidate's formation, sets the seminary community apart both from the first community that encouraged a man's entrance into formation and from the local community that benefits from a priest's vocational fulfillment. The arc of a priestly vocation has led a man out and away from his initial experience of discipleship in the local community. As the Church systematically forms a man for a life of preaching to a local community, he is at his farthest remove from that community. If the homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness to his people, as Francis says, why are homilists trained so far away from them?

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[18] Ibid., 49.

[19] Ibid., 146.

[20] *Program of Priestly Formation*, 467.

The Distance Between Formation and Vocation

The language of the PPF does not offer a clear answer. The seminary community constitutes only a portion of the formative community, true. However, the expertise of formators, professors, and specialists makes the seminary community seem like the totality of the formative community. Therefore, the seminarian talking with the pastoral formation director thinks that parishioners cannot be mentors since they lack expertise in seminary formation. Yet listeners of homilies know when they have heard the Word of God and when they have not. Every candidate for ordination, desiring to be as close to the people of God as the Good Shepherd, should draw close enough to hear what those people can teach him about speaking in the Shepherd's voice.

This distance between formation and vocation also causes problems within the seminary itself. The formality of seminary structures gives rise to the lay professor objecting to offering feedback on students' preaching. His expertise within the seminary community, accredited by diploma and episcopal mandate, only extends so far. His membership in the wider formative community, accredited not by diploma but by baptism, disappears in the gap between formation and vocation.

The distance between formation and vocation impoverishes seminarians. Baptized sons and daughters of God who happen not to be seminary faculty members have valuable insights gleaned from years of faithful discipleship. Do these insights receive a hearing? How often do seminarians close their ears to this wisdom because there is no "expertise" behind it? The experts of the seminary community are only part of the larger formative community. Expertise does not grant a monopoly on formation. Such expertise

was not necessary to foster a priestly vocation in the first place, nor will parishioners need it to prompt the priest's ongoing formation in the community in which he serves.

How then can the formative community close this distance? Is there a way to open seminarians to the insights of agents of formation outside the limited scope of the seminary community? Can the Church's formation process empower all the faithful to draw on their baptismal gifts to assist in the formation of priests? This thesis project attempts to answer these questions within the ministerial context of a Catholic seminary in the Archdiocese of Chicago which actively engages local parishioners as partners in the work of forming parish priests.

Ministerial Context

I serve as the Instructor of Homiletics in the Department of Biblical Studies and Homiletics at the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary, a Roman Catholic major seminary sponsored by the Archdiocese of Chicago in Illinois. The mission of Mundelein Seminary is to form parish priests, stressing the pastoral reality that the candidates for ordination will enter. In addition to classroom instruction, individual formation advising, spiritual direction, and fraternity among the seminarians, Mundelein Seminary values the parish as a place of formation for future priests, using the teaching of *Lumen gentium* on the vocation of the laity as a guiding star: "And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God."[21] Mundelein Seminary forms parish priests whose ministerial priesthood supports and

[21] Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* (November 21, 1964) in *Vatican Council II,* vol. 1, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* ed. Austin Flannery, rev. ed., Vatican Collection (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 34.

empowers the common priesthood of the baptized—priests who serve the laity who in their turn fulfill their call to consecrate the world itself to God.

The student population matches this vision focused on the consecration of the world. The student body represents a broad cross section of the world of contemporary America. Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and African students all study at Mundelein Seminary. These students come from all parts of the United States, ranging from upstate New York to central Texas to the frozen plains of Alaska. Such diverse backgrounds demand a strong vision of pastoral formation. Two parts of the pastoral formation program of Mundelein Seminary are of unique interest for this thesis project: the Tolton Teaching Parish Program[22] and the pastoral internship. In the Tolton Teaching Parish Program (hereafter TTPP), the seminary assigns each student to a parish in the Chicago area which serves as a pastoral formation site throughout his time at Mundelein Seminary. The seminarian serves in the various ministries of the parish to gain a breadth of experience in pastoral ministry. Each parish in the program has a dedicated committee of parishioners that meet with the seminarian to provide feedback on his ministry and to help facilitate discussions on pastoral ministry in the parish.

The TTPP takes place weekly during a seminarian's academic routine. The pastoral internship, on the other hand, serves as an intensive time of parish ministry and pastoral formation for the seminarian. This internship happens in the spring semester of the second year of theology studies. Seminarians from dioceses geographically close to Mundelein Seminary often spend their internship at their assigned TTPP site, providing

[22] The Tolton Teaching Parish Program takes its name from Ven. Augustus Tolton (1854-1897), a Catholic priest born into slavery in Missouri. He established a Black parish on Chicago's South Side.

continuity between these two parts of the pastoral formation program. Seminarians from other American dioceses go to their home regions to spend their internship.

Seminarians are not totally thrown into the deep end, however. In the month prior to the start of their pastoral internship, they participate in a required program of proximate preparation for their internship experience. This month includes presentations on pastoral care and counseling, fruitful engagement with internship supervisors, interacting with parish staff, and maintaining appropriate boundaries in ministry. The focus of these sessions is on the practical theology of the pastoral internship.

As part of this preparation, I lead a three-session workshop on the basics of homily preparation and delivery. The workshop begins with a session on listening to both the pastoral needs of the listeners as well as to the Word of God. The second session goes over the basics of writing and editing a homily, using Thomas Long's focus and function statements as key organizing principles.[23] The third session goes over principles of homiletic delivery: use of voice, nonverbal communication, pace, pitch, volume, and articulation. During that month before the internship, the seminarians gather in small groups to practice preaching and public speaking according to scenarios based on common opportunities at the parish: wake services, personal witness talks, catechumenate classes, and the like. These sessions afford the opportunity to apply the principles introduced in my preaching workshop.

The classroom also prepares seminarians for their pastoral work. I teach two semester-long courses of homiletic instruction for the seminarians. In the spring semester

[23] See Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 126-35.

of their first year of theology, the students take an introductory homiletics course that covers the principles of the interpretation of Scripture, teaches the core elements of rhetoric, and surveys the history of preaching in Western Christianity.

When the students return from their internship to start their third year of theology, I lead them in a homiletics practicum course. We spend the first month of the course discussing liturgical preaching, exegesis of Scripture and congregation, and homiletic method. The students then engage in writing and delivering homilies each week. They deliver six homilies meant to be preached at a Sunday Mass, then deliver two homilies each for funeral and wedding scenarios.

Present Problem and Potential Benefits

Mundelein Seminary forms seminarians to serve as parish priests in their home dioceses. In those parishes, the people who will be the primary listeners of their preaching are not homileticians or even priests. However, throughout their seminary formation, I as homiletician and priest am the only source of consistent and systematic feedback on their preaching. I have just two semesters of instruction with them, and only one of those is a practicum course in which the students regularly preach. Other avenues for feedback are not particularly robust. Even after months at a parish for their pastoral internship, the seminary only asks their supervisors—the pastors of the parish—for an evaluation of their preaching. Similarly, the 2022 handbook for the TTPP simply states that the committee of parishioners are to "critique homilies" without further explanation or rubric provided.[24] Formal evaluations of the seminarian that are filed with the

[24] During this thesis project, I was asked by the director of the TTPP to provide a rubric for feedback on preaching that was suitable for a parish setting. This addition to the evaluative structure of the program will, I hope, be reflected in future editions of the handbook.

seminary come from the teaching parish's pastor alone. The specific problem for this thesis, then, is that a seminarian does not receive regular feedback from the primary listeners of his future preaching ministry during his formation for that ministry.

Closing the distance between vocation and formation cannot wait until after ordination. This project attempts to close this distance to the benefit of both seminarian and parishioner. To do so, I developed and evaluated a framework for parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching, a model that does not require the expertise of a homiletician and that builds upon the spiritual experience of the parishioner-listener. The model uses the language of Ignatian affective discernment to provide a common vocabulary to both listener and seminarian. The project shows how this framework improves the act of giving feedback on the part of the parishioner-listener and the act of receiving feedback on the part of the seminarian-preacher.

On the one hand, parishioners improve their ability to give feedback on preaching. Closing the gap between vocation and formation means providing a shared framework of homiletic evaluation for both seminarian and parishioner. This shared model helps parishioners express their feedback in a way that will give seminarian and listener a common vocabulary in describing the reception of the preaching act. As members of one of the parishes partnering with Mundelein Seminary, these listeners interact with multiple seminarians year after year. Having a framework for giving feedback on seminarian preaching helps these listeners be better formators of the future priests of their dioceses.

On the other hand, seminarians learn how the primary listeners of their future ministry receive their preaching. Engaging in this parishioner feedback process during their pastoral internship gives them a better awareness of the pastoral context of their

future preaching as priests. They carry this awareness into their practicum course following their pastoral internship.

Scope, Assumptions, Questions, and Definitions

This thesis project examines parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching. In this investigation, the content *per se* of the seminarian's preaching is not under direct consideration. The feedback event and its quality—from the viewpoint of both seminarian and parishioner—are the main foci of this study. The content of seminarian preaching is considered insofar as it reveals how previous parishioner feedback changed the way the seminarian approached his next preaching event.

I assumed that parishioners were receptive to a new way of offering feedback to seminarians. They volunteered at the invitation of the seminarian or the pastor of the parish, which speaks to their desire to help form the next generation of priests. The seminarians similarly volunteered for this project at my personal invitation, choosing to go above and beyond the expectations of the pastoral internship program. I assumed their willingness, therefore, to test new models of feedback on preaching. Seminarians look forward to their pastoral internships as a time to begin integrating their intellectual, human, and spiritual formation into ministerial habits through pastoral formation. Seminarians go into their internship experience expecting to be stretched in their pastoral formation, making them more receptive to a ministerial intervention around preaching formation specifically. All these assumptions were borne out as accurate in the research.

An assumption for the reader concerns the use of pronouns in this thesis project. Preaching in the life of the Catholic Church is a ministry exercised by men and women alike. This thesis project, however, focuses on the homiletic formation of male candidates

for ordination to the priesthood. The presentation of Affective Feedback primarily, but not exclusively, imagines these men as the preachers under discussion. Unless otherwise noted, therefore, this thesis project uses masculine pronouns in reference to the preacher.

This thesis project tested multiple questions about parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching. First, what is the quality of the feedback these listeners are currently giving seminarians? Does a lack of a good conceptual framework for that feedback maintain the distance between formation and vocation? Questions such as these arise from a review of evaluation rubrics for the pastoral internship. Prior to 2020, only the internship supervisor—usually the pastor of the parish—would be asked for feedback on the seminarian's preaching. That evaluation consisted of questions about whether the preaching was understandable, biblical, and fit the occasion. Even if parishioner listeners answered these same questions, the focus of the questions is on the content of the homily rather than on the reception of the preaching by the listener. Do parishioners think themselves competent to answer such questions?

Second, how do seminarians receive and process feedback from parishioners? They may perceive the comments as coming from the subjective experience of the listener, and they may suspect that this experience has not been properly formed in the Tradition of the Church. This perception may lead seminarians to reject honest feedback as simply being "uninformed" or "ignorant of Church teaching." Present practice of framing feedback solely around homiletic content only exacerbates this problem. There is a need for a common vocabulary accessible to both seminarian and parishioner that reveals the impact of the preaching on the listener.

In this thesis, the terms “teaching parish committee” and “parishioner participants” refers to a group of parishioners who volunteered to assist in the formation of the seminarian assigned to their parish for a pastoral internship and who gathered to offer feedback on his preaching. Mundelein Seminary requires each parish in the TTPP to form a committee of parishioners who meet regularly over the course of a seminarian’s assignment. Sites for pastoral internships are encouraged to do the same.

The terms “seminarian” or “intern” refer interchangeably to the candidate for ordination to the Catholic priesthood in his second year of theology studies at Mundelein Seminary who was assigned to a parish for a semester-long, full-time internship.

The term “homily” in this thesis refers to the act of preaching in Catholic liturgies offered by ordained ministers. Likewise, the term “homilist” refers to those same ordained ministers. The terms “preaching” and “preacher” refer to the broader ministry of the proclamation of the Word in the life of the Church and those who practice it. In the context of the ministerial intervention of this project, “preaching” and “preacher” refer to the seminarian’s preaching ministry at his internship assignment.

Given geographical constraints, this thesis project evaluates preaching feedback given to seminarians on their pastoral internship in parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Diocese of Joliet-in-Illinois, the Diocese of Rockford, the Diocese of Peoria, and the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

That said, the investigation of parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching in the teaching parishes of Mundelein Seminary resulted in findings that are broadly applicable to any parish in the United States that participates in the formation of candidates for priestly ordination.

A Blueprint from Antioch: The Bridge of Affective Feedback

The community who gathered in prayer at Antioch heard the Spirit speak loudly and clearly. This thesis project depicts a method of enabling the same discernment in every community of faith so that all the holy ones might be equipped for ministry, especially those called to the preaching ministry. This thesis builds on the blueprint of Antioch by describing the theoretical foundations and the practical considerations of a model of parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching. Figure 1.1, below, visualizes this model as a bridge between vocation and formation called "Affective Feedback."

Chapter Two introduces principles of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and spiritual theology as the theological foundations for Affective Feedback. Ignatian discernment of spirits receives special emphasis here. Chapter Three introduces the principles of listener-oriented preaching, drawing upon the work of Pope Francis, Fred Craddock, and Karla Bellinger. Chapter Four explains feedback within communication theory, explores effective feedback communication, and discusses the communication dynamics of the seminarian-parishioner relationship. Chapter Five outlines the ministerial intervention. The chapter first introduces the Affective Feedback model, based on Ignatian discernment and used by parishioners to discuss seminarian preaching. The chapter then provides details on the research tools and evaluation methods used in the intervention. Chapter Six analyzes the qualitative data gathered from the preaching feedback sessions. Based on the analysis of that data, it suggests next steps for homiletic formation in a parish setting. Considering the new PPF, these findings have particular value for transitional deacons in their final stage of formation before ordination to the priesthood.

The Spirit calls forth ministers and equips for ministry those whom he calls. He does so by many means. As the *Ratio fundamentalis* says, "The principal agent of priestly formation is the Most Holy Trinity, who shapes every seminarian according to the plan of the Father, both through the presence of Christ in His word, in the sacraments and *in the brothers and sisters of the community*, and through the many actions of the Holy Spirit."[25] This thesis project dares to believe that included in the Holy Spirit's many actions are the responses of the brothers and sisters of the community to the preaching of seminarians. Trusting that same Spirit can bridge the distance between formation and vocation through Affective Feedback.

Figure 1.1. The Affective Feedback Bridge (Credit: Alex Austin).

[25] *Ratio fundamentalis*, 125, emphasis mine.

Chapter Two

The Holy Spirit as Gift of God: A Theological Framework

> Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit."
>
> Acts of the Apostles 2:38

Introduction

The University of St. Mary of the Lake sits on a small lake.[1] Several bridges allow the road that encircles the lake to span its inlets and bays, thereby allowing traffic to flow smoothly between the two closest points of the shore. A bridge offers a helpful image for the theoretical framework supporting Affective Feedback, this project's ministerial intervention to close the distance between preaching formation and priestly vocation. This particular bridge uses theology, homiletics, and communication theory to connect the two closest points between seminarians and listeners, allowing the traffic of formation to flow smoothly from parishioner to seminarian.

Every bridge needs strong support. This chapter establishes three theological pillars of the bridge between seminarian and parishioner. Yves Congar, who was a Dominican theologian and theological advisor to the Second Vatican Council, supplies the first in his magisterial work *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, drawing upon the language of both the Latin West and Orthodox East to present the Spirit as the Gift of God. The

[1] This, however, is not the lake from which the university derives its name. The original 1844 charter of the university was for an institution located in downtown Chicago, and so the eponymous lake is Lake Michigan.

second pillar, built from similar material as the pillar of Congar's theology, finds its foundation in the *sensus fidei*, "an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables [the faithful] to recognise and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false."[2] This sense of faith flows from the Gift of God at work in the hearts of believers, guiding the Church into all truth.[3] The third pillar relies on the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his rules for the discernment of spirits to clarify how the individual Christian discerns the work of the Spirit within personal experiences of affectivity: thoughts, feelings, and desires.

What do these pillars have to do with parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching? As noted in Chapter One, the insistence on expertise in the seminary community inclines seminarians to distrust the opinions of "untrained" people in the pews. However, all the baptized are trained by the Gift of God to be gifts themselves. By understanding the Holy Spirit as the Gift of God alive and at work in the hearts of all believers, seminarians and parishioners alike can see feedback to preaching as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Knowing the Holy Spirit as Gift makes it easier to receive the gift that we are to one another more readily. Discussion of the support a pillar provides to preaching and the Affective Feedback model follows the explanation of its theology.

Trusting in the grace of the same Holy Spirit whose mystery we are about to contemplate, let us start to bridge the gap between vocation and formation.

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[2] International Theological Commission (ITC), Sensus fidei *in the Life of the Church* (2014), 2, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html. The ITC uses British spelling conventions here and throughout.

[3] Cf. Jn 16:13.

First Theological Pillar: The Holy Spirit as Gift of God

Starting this bridge feels like taking a step into the open air.[4] The typical Catholic feels at ease speaking of the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These created graces are discreet, identifiable, and make for an excellent curriculum outline for preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Speaking of the Holy Spirit as "Gift" *per se* introduces a sense of vertigo. The Holy Spirit does not seem discreet or identifiable, the kind of thing that a person can tie up with a bow. That vertiginous feeling dissipates, however, as Yves Congar takes us by the hand, guiding us through the writings of the Church Fathers to establish us on the foundation of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. With that foundation under us, we can step into a renewed appreciation of preaching as a sign of the activity of the Trinity in the life of the Church.

The Fathers Unpack the Gift of the Spirit

The life of the Church burst forth from the seeds sown on Pentecost. As the early Church experienced the power of the Spirit in their midst, the Church Fathers meditated upon this experience to gain deeper insight into this divine agent of God's plan and work. The words of the Gospel of John had a deep impact on the theological imagination of the Greek-speaking East. Congar points out, "The fourth gospel frequently speaks of the existence of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father, and such an important factor as this 'in-existence' was bound to have a deep effect on the minds of Christians."[5]

[4] Material in this section originated as a paper entitled "The Gift of the Holy Spirit," which I wrote in completion of an elective course in Directed Reading in Pneumatology, taught by Rev. Emery de Gaál, Ph.D., during the summer of 2020 at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL.

[5] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Herder & Herder, 1983), 3:37.

John Damascene, building on the work of Maximus the Confessor and Pseudo-Cyril, gave theological definition to this revealed reality using the term *perichōrēsis*. "*Perichōrēsis* in the theology of the Trinity points to the in-existence of the Persons within each other, the fact that they are present to each other, that they contain one another and that they manifest each other."[6] This explanation of the "in-existence" of the hypostases of the Trinity allows for both terms of the Trinitarian paradox to be held in tension. On the one hand there remains one God, that is, a unity of substance, for each Person contains the others. On the other hand, each hypostasis, that is, each of the three Persons, exists in relationship to the other Persons of the Trinity, defined by a real relationship of difference. "They are in or within each other…and each one is turned toward the other and is open and given to the other."[7] The self-giving nature of the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity reveals the fittingness of speaking of the Holy Spirit as Gift. In his Person, the Holy Spirit simply is God's ability to give himself fully to himself while maintaining the unique Personhood of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The language of the Greek Fathers implies the fittingness of the Holy Spirit as Gift. Nevertheless, they did not embrace that name as wholeheartedly as the Latin Fathers did: "In the West, it was above all Augustine who developed the theme of the Spirit as Gift."[8] Meditating on the relationship between the Father and the Son, Augustine posits that the very delight that exists between the Father and Son is itself a unique Person within the life of the Trinity. "[The Holy Spirit] is not begotten, but is the sweetness of

[6] Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:37.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 3:146.

the begetter and the one begotten."[9] The Father loves, the Son is loved, and the Holy Spirit is the love between them both. This opens us humans to the fullness of the gift Jesus promises in Jn 16:15; Jesus shares his own delight in the Father with his disciples. This delight is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Augustine uses the personal name of *Donum* or *Munus* to speak of the Spirit. This name of Gift, according to Augustine, allows us to understand the Spirit within the life of God (the immanent Trinity) and in the order of salvation (the economic Trinity). In fact, the Gift of God allows us to see the interpenetration of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity.

Augustine begins with the economic Trinity. As creatures, we more readily understand God's work within us than we do God in himself. "It is therefore on the basis of the economy that Augustine constructs his theology of the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son…that is, not as 'Father' and as 'Son,' but as 'giver.'"[10] God is as God does. God gives the Spirit of God; he is therefore both Gift and Giver. What is true of God in the order of salvation leads us into the mystery of who God is in himself, that is, the immanent Trinity. "The Spirit is sent by both [Father and Son] in time, but proceeds eternally from both as the Spirit who is common to both, as their Love and as their substantial Communion."[11] Within the Trinity, the Father and the Son give the Holy Spirit as the love shared between them.

Congar's Theological Meditation on the Third Person

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 3:85.

[11] Ibid., 3:146.

What of the created recipients of the Gift of God? If God is perfect self-giving, why does anything else exist? Does the Trinity fall into the trap of "a narcissistic structure" that remains static and closed within itself?[12] Congar argues that such a conception of God reduces divine self-giving to human terms. The Spirit, as the Gift of God, communicates the ecstatic nature of the life of God. *Ekstasis* in Greek communicates the experience of standing outside oneself. Within the life of the Trinity this *ekstasis* happens in the mode of substance: For God to be God, he is always going out from himself to give himself in an eternal communion of Persons. Congar explains, "That is why, if the Spirit is, in God, the term of the substantial communication that goes out from the Father, it is suitable, though not necessary, that this movement should continue, no longer by mode of substantial transference, but by mode of free and creative will."[13] In other words, because the Spirit is Gift within the life of God, there is also the fittingness of the Spirit becoming Gift outside the life of God. According to Congar, this ecstatic *exitus* means that "God, in other words, can exist, as it were, outside himself."[14] God freely gives himself so that he might exist as Gift within creation just as he is Gift within himself.

Creation experiences this ecstatic presence of God through the gift of grace, freely given and freely received. Indeed, God can be most himself when he is most Gift, when he can give himself to those who can do nothing to deserve that grace. "Grace makes God

[12] Ibid., 3:148.

[13] Ibid., 3:149.

[14] Ibid.

prefer what is wretched to what is sublime," says Congar.[15] Coming to the lowly and the humble allows the Spirit to be most profoundly Gift. Congar uses the image of living water to communicate the Gift's humility: "The Spirit is the water which flows towards the lowest, because he is grace, and can spring up into eternal life because he is grace from on high."[16] As rain falls to the earth and then evaporates to return to the sky, so too does the Gift go to the lowest place to lift up those he finds there.

Who stands at the lowest place? We do, in our sinfulness. The Gift of God, therefore, brings us from the lowest place to the highest. Congar brings his meditation on the Spirit as Gift to a thundering crescendo when he explains the result of that ecstatic Gift in us: "We are therefore destined to become children of God by receiving the Spirit of his Son."[17] God exists outside himself as Gift to make those who receive him like him. Congar shifts to a preaching mode, channeling Pauline urgency to communicate this truth:

> We are sons of God (1 Jn 3:1-2). We are really deified! God is God not only in himself, but also in us! He is God not only in heaven, but also on earth! The Holy Spirit, who is the term of the communication of the divine life *intra Deum*, is the principle of this communication of God outside himself and beyond himself.[18]

Thus, Congar provides the *redditus* that necessarily follows the *exitus* of the Gift of God. The Spirit comes to make human beings participants in the self-communication of God. Only when our lives are transformed by the principle of divine self-giving, causing us to go outside ourselves in the ecstasy of love for God and for neighbor do we

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 3:150.

[18] Ibid.

begin to understand what it means to live in the Spirit. "In the communication of covenant and grace, God gives himself in a new way to the creatures made in his image, through the gifts that enable them to reach him in a very real way as the reality towards which their knowledge and love are directed."[19] The life of the Church—her worship and sacraments, her service and charity, and, yes, her preaching—is not something artificial. Ecclesial realities are not created by human beings to simulate the experience of communion with God. Congar insists upon the efficacious nature of the sacramental imagination: "The divine Persons are made present by means of the gifts of grace, the effect of the invisible movements of the Word and the Spirit, as partners in a spiritual communion."[20] God gives himself in the Spirit, the Gift, in order that he might truly exist within us through the sacraments, the life of charity, and preaching: the gifts of grace. Just as each of the Persons of the Trinity fully exist for and within one another in the communion of the Holy Trinity, the Church exists for and within God.

Preaching Within the Gift of God

The life of the Church reflects the life of God. The self-giving dynamism of the Trinity spills over into the Church, making each member of the Body of Christ capable of self-donation. The Gift of God empowers us to be gifts to one another. The Church becomes the sacrament of ecstatic self-giving when she participates in the Gift of God. Therefore, we can expect to find this pattern of Trinitarian self-giving in every aspect of her life. Preaching is no exception.

[19] Ibid., 3:151.

[20] Ibid.

Admittedly, though, the standard image of one preacher addressing multiple silent listeners seems more akin to receiving marching orders than to having a loving conversation at home. Surely the Church must practice what she preaches, and what she preaches is the Gift of God poured out by the Son for the sake of communion with the Father so that all may be one.[21] The Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John's account of the Last Supper includes the Son's desire for his disciples to be the source of belief for others "through their word."[22] All the disciples are included in the desire of the Lord, not just the Twelve or their successors. Listeners are expected to become speakers and doers of the Word in their own turn. Preaching within the Gift of God requires more than one-way communication.

The Church must embrace the fullness of Trinitarian self-giving in the preaching act. Within God there is no terminal endpoint of giving, no last stop for the exchange of love. The *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity means that each Person exists within and through the others. The Father, Son, and Gift interpenetrate each other, creating an unending dynamic of active self-gift. That dynamic of self-gift manifests in the economy of salvation, where God moves into what is not God to deify creation. This same dynamic must inform the preaching life of the Church. Preaching within the Gift of God means moving beyond the one-way street of speaker-to-listener. Just as the Spirit goes out from God to return creation back to God, the preaching of the Church must follow the same pattern of *exitus* and *redditus.* What the listener receives must be given back to the

[21] Cf. Jn 17:21.

[22] Jn 17:20.

speaker to enrich the experience of preaching for both. Trinitarian self-gift provides the relational paradigm for Affective Feedback.

Furthermore, that dynamic of gift relies upon the distinct identities of giver and receiver. The Spirit is Gift because he is other than the Father and the Son. The Spirit is Gift for us because we are not God. Preaching within the Gift of God means maintaining the uniqueness of the members of the Body of Christ while at the same time respecting their fundamental unity. All are given to drink of the same Spirit, and that same Spirit manifests in a diversity of gifts in the Body, even as all the members of the Body are the recipients and givers of the Gift of God.[23] The efficacy of the Affective Feedback model depends upon this diversity of gifts exercised in Spirit-filled unity. Only someone other than the preacher can meaningfully share the effect of preaching. At the same time, preacher and listener speak to one another in the presence of the same Spirit.

How can the Spirit's presence be reliably discerned within a practice of parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching? How does the reality of God as Gift manifest in the life of the Body of Christ? Two additional pillars add support to Affective Feedback. One of these explains how the Gift of God works within the Church through the *sensus fidei*, and the other how that same Gift works in individual believers through Ignatian discernment of spirits.

Second Theological Pillar: The *Sensus Fidei*

The riches of the Second Vatican Council have yet to be fully explored. Among these is the teaching on the *sensus fidei* as found in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*. The Council Fathers wanted to explain how the whole Church

[23] Cf. 1 Cor 12:4-13.

participates in the prophetic office of Christ. The magisterium does not hold sole claim to this *munus* of the Lord: "The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one cannot err in matters of belief."[24] The formulation of *Lumen gentium* owes much to Congar's theology of the laity, first published in 1953: "The Church loving and believing, that is, the body of the faithful, is infallible in the living possession of the faith, not in a particular act or judgment."[25] Living in communion with the Holy Spirit as the Body of Christ allows the Church confidence in her profession of faith. The Gift of God grants "the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people" when the whole Church, down to the last of the faithful, manifests "a universal consent in faith and morals."[26] The International Theological Commission (hereafter ITC) summarizes this teaching of *Lumen gentium* thus: "Here, the *sensus fidei* is presented as Christ's gift to the faithful, and once again is described as an active capacity by which the faithful are able to understand, live and proclaim the truths of divine revelation."[27]

This summary introduces crucial elements of this theological mystery. The *sensus fidei* results from Christ's gift—the Holy Spirit—and not from any creaturely capacity. All the faithful possess the *sensus fidei* as the united Body of Christ, the Church. The ITC defines this ecclesial mystery as the *sensus fidei fidelium,* "the Church's own instinct of

[24] *Lumen gentium*, 12.

[25] Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Lay People*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Chapman, 1965), 289.

[26] *Lumen gentium*, 12.

[27] ITC, Sensus fidei *in the Life of the Church*, 45.

faith."[28] At the same time, the supernatural sense of the faith operates as an active capacity of discernment, allowing the children of God to be doers of the word, and not hearers only.[29] Each of the faithful possess the *sensus fidei* as baptized sons and daughters of God. Thus, the ITC defines this individual mystery as the *sensus fidei fidelis*, "the personal aptitude of the believer to make an accurate discernment in matters of faith."[30] Both the ecclesial and individual modes of the *sensus fidei* manifest the activity of the Gift of God among and within the faithful. Establishing this mystery of faith as our second pillar grounds Affective Feedback in the exercise of the *sensus fidei*. Preaching thus becomes a place where the Body of Christ and each of her members sense the presence of the Good Shepherd and rejoice in him.

Spontaneous Knowledge from Faith

What kind of sense is the *sensus fidei* in the individual believer? Rather than likening it to the physical senses, perhaps an analogy to a sense of friendship would serve better. When shopping for a gift for a friend, we can set out with one or two specific things in mind, but more often we go out equipped with only a sense of our friend. This sense arises from our familiarity with the interests, style, sense of humor, and personality of the individual. Then we find something unexpected yet perfectly suited. Unbidden, the words come to our minds, "Aha! She'll love this!" or "Oh! This is perfect for him." The discovery results from deeply held knowledge rather than scientific investigation.

[28] Ibid., 3.

[29] Cf. Jas 1:22.

[30] ITC, Sensus Fidei *in the Life of the Church*, 3.

Because we know our friend, we see things from his or her point of view, and so we know what kind of gift will be received with joy.

The *sensus fidei* operates in much this way for the believing Christian. "The *sensus fidei fidelis*," says the ITC, "is a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with apostolic faith."[31] The habit of knowing God and the lived experience of that relationship gives rise to the ability to spontaneously judge what is or is not in accord with the Gospel: "The *sensus fidei fidelis* arises, first and foremost, from the connaturality that the virtue of faith establishes between the believing subject and the authentic object of faith, namely the truth of God revealed in Christ Jesus."[32] Connaturality refers to reaching such a point of intimacy in a relationship that one shares in the natural dispositions of the other as if they were one's own.[33] This is a kind of knowledge "of a different order than objective knowledge, which proceeds by way of conceptualisation and reasoning. It is a knowledge by empathy, or a knowledge of the heart."[34] *Cor ad cor loquitur*—heart speaks to heart, as the coat of arms of St. John Henry Newman states.

For the believer to have an intimate sense of the heart of God, a profound intimacy of Creator and creature must take place. This intimacy is nothing other than the Gift of God. The pleasure of God abides in us through the Holy Spirit poured into our

[31] Ibid., 49.

[32] Ibid., 50.

[33] Cf. ibid.

[34] Ibid.

hearts. Living within the Gift of God and allowing our hearts to be formed by the transforming power of grace strengthens and deepens the *sensus fidei:*

> [I]t follows that the development of the *sensus fidei* in the spirit of the believer is particularly due to the action of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of love, who instills love in human hearts, the Holy Spirit opens to believers the possibility of a deeper and more intimate knowledge of Christ the Truth, on the basis of charity: "Showing the truth is a property of the Holy Spirit, because it is love which brings about the revelation of secrets."[35]

The *sensus fidei* depends upon the Gift of God being bestowed upon us by the Father through the Son, so that we are caught up into the Trinitarian dynamic of love. No human effort can establish relationship with God. Only God's Gift of Self to the created person can bring about the connaturality necessary for the spontaneous and natural knowledge of the *sensus fidei*. God gives his Gift so that we might know him and live within that Gift.

Living within the Gift has practical implications for the life of the Church. The ITC explains that an authentic practice of the *sensus fidei* "enables a believer to anticipate a development or an explanation of Christian practice," since the practice of the faith is reciprocally linked with the understanding of its content.[36] The believer then dialogues with the pastors and magisterium of the Church, bringing to the conversation the fruit of a faith authentically lived in the mission field of the world. This conversation can lead to developments of the Church's teaching, preaching, or practice. "That is why those who teach in the name of the Church should give full attention to the experience of believers, especially lay people, who strive to put the Church's teaching into practice in the areas of

[35] Ibid., 57, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Ioannis evangelium*, c.14, lect.4: "Manifestare autem veritatem convenit proprietati spiritus sancti. Est enim amor qui facit secretorum revelationem."

[36] Ibid., 65.

their own specific experience and competence."[37] The ITC rightly points out that "such developments are never purely private, but always ecclesial."[38] The *sensus fidei fidelis* remains in faithful conversation, both speaking and listening, with the *sensus fidei fidelium*, the Church's sense of herself and her mission.

Liturgical Preaching as the Sensus Fidei Fidelium

Where does the Church's sense of herself reside? If the *sensus fidei fidelis* flows from the individual believer's experience of faith, the *sensus fidei fidelium* similarly manifests in the entire community's experience of faith. "The whole Church, laity and hierarchy together, bears responsibility for and mediates in history the revelation which is contained in the holy Scriptures and in the living apostolic Tradition."[39] This common ecclesial responsibility was obscured by previous language of *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia discens*, that is, the teaching Church and the learning Church. Such language encourages the one-way communication model of preaching: Preaching begins and ends if one speaks and everyone else merely listens. The ITC stresses the poverty of this understanding in light of the Second Vatican Council: "The council clearly taught that the faithful are not merely passive recipients of what the hierarchy teaches and theologians explain; rather, they are living and active subjects within the Church."[40] When the Church teaches herself, she is not pouring something into otherwise empty vessels, but rather stirring up the Gift already present and active in the hearts of the faithful.

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[37] Ibid., 59.

[38] Ibid., 65.

[39] Ibid., 67.

[40] Ibid.

Therefore, preachers and teachers of the Church must respect that Gift. The ITC exhorts the magisterium of the Church to be "attentive to the *sensus fidelium,* the living voice of the people of God."[41] The modes of the *sensus fidei* are not distinguished along hierarchical lines, as if the magisterium solely held the *sensus fidelium* as a check on the lay *sensus fidelis*. Rather, these modes are two sides of the same coin: one side individual, the other side ecclesial. The entire Church—lay and ordained—possesses the *sensus fidelium*. Each member of the Body of Christ has his or her own contribution to the health of the Body according to each one's vocation and charisms. Within that Body, "the magisterium is responsible for nurturing and educating the *sensus fidelium*."[42] The hearts of believers cannot conform to the heart of God without the proclamation of the apostolic faith. This preaching vocation of the magisterium itself springs from the ecclesial *sensus fidelium*: "Of course, those who exercise the magisterium, namely the pope and the bishops, are themselves, first of all, baptised members of the people of God, who participate by that very fact in the *sensus fidelium*."[43] The Gift of God, given at baptism, unites all the members of the Body of Christ.

Where does the Body of Christ unite within the Gift of God and grow in a true sense of itself? The liturgy. As the Second Vatican Council declares in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, "[I]t is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of

[41] Ibid., 74.

[42] Ibid., 76.

[43] Ibid.

the true Church."[44] The liturgy allows the whole Church to receive anew the Gift that draws us into the life of the Trinity. Lay and ordained alike receive this refreshment. In that renewal, the Church at the same time receives a deepened sense of herself. The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all her power flows.[45]

Taking up the teaching of the council, the ITC insists on the formative power of the liturgy: "The Eucharist shapes and forms the *sensus fidelium* and contributes greatly to the formulation and refinement of verbal expressions of the faith, because it is there that the teaching of bishops and councils is ultimately 'received' by the faithful."[46] The Eucharistic liturgy consists of more than a rote reenactment of the Lord's Supper. The Liturgy of the Word forms an essential part of the Church's observance of the Eucharist. Liturgical preaching bears the responsibility of proclaiming the apostolic faith as handed on by the Church, doing so within the historical and cultural contexts of the people gathered for worship. Both the liturgical and historical contexts of the preaching of the Church serve as lenses through which the perennial light of the Gospel shines upon the lives of the faithful. By this light the believers can see themselves as living and active subjects, built up in the *sensus fidelium* and empowered to exercise the *sensus fidelis*.

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[44] Vatican Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* (December 4, 1963), in *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* ed. Austin Flannery, rev. ed., Vatican Collection (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 2

[45] See *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 10.

[46] ITC, *Sensus fidei* in the Life of the Church, 75.

Preaching with a Sense of the Faithful

Are the preachers of the Church prepared for this ministry? Do they approach their vocation within the life of the Church aware that they address living and active subjects? Pope Francis insists upon the homily as foundational to evaluating the exercise of pastoral ministry: "The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people."[47] The homily reveals a pastor's closeness by his ability to speak into the historical and cultural context in which the baptized must exercise the *sensus fidei*. Does the preacher know where the people will go once Mass ends, bearing with them the light of the Gospel destined to spread to all corners of the world? The homily also reveals a pastor's attentiveness to the *sensus fidelium*. In the homily, the pastor speaks on behalf of the Church, giving verbal expression to the faith so that those who hear might live more deeply in the Gift that God gives. Does the homily draw upon the riches of the faith, communicating to the Church the treasures of Scripture and the wisdom of Tradition? By these lights the Church comes to see herself as she is while at the same time coming to see God more clearly. Does the preaching of the Church strengthen all believers' relationship with the Gift of God, and so strengthen the *sensus fidei*?

Preachers cannot answer these questions themselves. They can only be answered fully by those who receive their preaching, reflect upon it by the power of the Gift of God, and by the *sensus fidei* follow the voice of the Good Shepherd when they hear him calling. What is needed, therefore, is a way for the faithful to articulate what they have received and to articulate it in terms of the *sensus fidei fidelis*. This requires more than

[47] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium,* 135

simple opinion polling. While the *sensus fidei* operates as a kind of spontaneous knowledge, faith is at work here. Both the context and the content of the responses of the faithful to the preaching of the Church must reflect the presence of the Spirit who is the sustainer of faith in the hearts of believers.

What better context of faith does the Church have than the liturgy? As the summit of the faith, the liturgical action of the people springs from the faith already at work by the grace of the Gift of God, that is, of God existing outside himself. At the same time, as the source of the Church's faith, the Spirit works through the liturgy to penetrate the hearts of the believers in new and transformative ways, opening new horizons of faith in action. In the liturgy, the Church of faith acts according to her true nature, as one people baptized in one Spirit worshiping one God as one Body in Christ. The liturgical preaching of the Church, therefore, serves as the best place to see the *sensus fidei* at work. The *sensus fidei fidelium* binds the Church together when the Word of God is proclaimed, preparing believers to receive the great sacrament of the Word made flesh. By the *sensus fidei fidelis*, each Christian disciple, sustained by the ecclesial bond of faith, learns how to recognize the true Gospel and its demands.

Thus, both modes of the *sensus fidei* serve the reception of preaching. On the one hand, the liturgy itself serves as the living witness of the *sensus fidelium* of the universal Church, establishing the horizon of the homily by the proper prayers of the day, Scripture selections, and the mystery of the Eucharist. On the other hand, the *sensus fidelis* of the individual believer tests everything and retains what is good. Formed by the Gift of God, the believer responds with joy to the voice of the Good Shepherd and hesitates to follow

wolves in sheep's clothing. Preachers do well to attend to both expressions of faith as they consider the fruit of their preaching ministry: the ecclesial and the individual.

But how best to taste that fruit? The *sensus fidelium* makes itself known to the preacher through the ministry of the magisterium and the liturgical life of the people. What of the fruits of the *sensus fidelis*? Most of the faithful are not in the habit of publishing encyclicals to make it known what they received from a homily. The response of an individual to liturgical preaching according to the *sensus fidelis* will accord with the nature of the *sensus fidei* as something like spontaneous, natural knowledge. At times such knowledge may be propositional, neatly articulated by systematic thinking. Often, however, such knowledge will be affective, that is, a sense or a feel.

Here we enter the mystery of the human heart and touch upon the subjectivity of the individual believer. This poses a challenge not only for preachers but for any of the baptized. If a man feels joy when hearing a homily, is this truly the *sensus fidei*? Or is he simply delighting in hearing someone who agrees with what he already thinks? Does a sense of boredom a woman feels indicate that a false gospel is being presented and her heart knows to not engage with it? Or is she simply tired? The *sensus fidei* expresses itself in the same way as the other affective movements of the interior life. How can a Christian discern where the Gift of God is at work when he or she participates in the liturgy of the Church and attends to the preachers of the faith?

Here we arrive at the third pillar of our theological framework for Affective Feedback: the rules for the discernment of spirits as taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Third Theological Pillar: Ignatian Affective Discernment

Ignatius of Loyola understood the significance of the affective movements of the heart. While convalescing from a leg injury, Ignatius noticed that thoughts about following the example of the saints left behind a feeling of satisfaction and joy.[48] By the light of the Gift of God, Ignatius was able to see that these affective movements were connected to spiritual realities. Ignatius set down rules for the discernment of spirits for those undertaking the Spiritual Exercises, a month-long regimen of prayer and one-on-one spiritual direction. The rules for the discernment of spirits aided the retreatant in knowing which spiritual reality was stirring the affectivity of the person. The discernment of spirits provides light and understanding for the ordinary spiritual experience of any person sincerely seeking God. If the Holy Spirit is God existing outside himself, we should not be surprised to find the Gift of God deifying even the innermost movements of our hearts. How else will the *sensus fidei fidelis* manifest in the hearts of the baptized than in affective movements of thought, feeling, and desire? These affective movements arise in the ordinary course of the spiritual life, not only in moments of rarified contemplative union. What could be more ordinary for a Catholic believer sincerely seeking God than listening to a homily?

As the third theological pillar of our theological framework, Ignatian affective discernment explains how the affective movements of those listening to preaching manifest not only personal preferences but also reveal the movement of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the baptized. Ignatius provides a vocabulary and method for being aware,

[48] See Ignatius of Loyola, "The Autobiography," in *The* Spiritual Exercises *and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 71.

understanding, and taking action in response to these movements. This vocabulary and method allow Affective Feedback to express the spiritual experience of any sincere seeker of God when he or she receives and responds to the preaching of the Church.

The Spiritual Movement of the Heart

Where does the discernment of spirits begin? In a terse but rich opening statement, Ignatius provides the whole method and vocabulary needed for this process of discernment: "Rules to aid us toward perceiving and then understanding, at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul: the good motions that they may be received, and the bad that they may be rejected."[49] At the core of Ignatius's method are the motions, or movements, of the heart. Timothy Gallagher, a scholar of Ignatian spirituality and popularizer of the discernment of spirits, summarizes Ignatius's understanding of affective movements: "His discernment focuses on the happy and heavy movements of our hearts and their related thoughts."[50] Spontaneous feelings give rise to thoughts that then become desires that drive our actions.

Our interior lives are full of such affective movements. Ignatius, however, does not want us to tire ourselves by interrogating every passing thought or whim. Ignatius's concern, as Gallagher puts it, is with how these movements "tend of themselves to affect *our Christian life* of faith, hope, and love."[51] Gallagher sketches a threefold distinction of the kinds of awareness in our interior life: psychological, moral, and spiritual.[52] Healthy

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[49] Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises," in *The* Spiritual Exercises *and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 201.

[50] Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V., *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 25.

[51] Ibid. Emphasis original.

[52] See ibid., 21.

psychological awareness leads to greater self-knowledge. A person may have affective movements prompted by all manner of things: relationships with family and friends, events of the day, or arising from reflection on life. This psychological category, however, contains too much material to be helpful to Ignatius' spiritual project.

Narrower still is our moral awareness: "Where do I stand in my relationship with God and neighbor? Have I been faithful to the commandments of Jesus?" The penitential rite of the Mass and the Sacrament of Penance prompt a self-reflection that depends upon a well-formed moral awareness of one's interior life. Certainly, feelings and desires arise from this kind of moral reflection, but they arise because of a deliberative process. Ignatius points us toward movements that are "caused" in us that, if good, are to be "received." Such language points to a contemplative rather than deliberative awareness.

How does spiritual awareness differ? First, this awareness opens our eyes to how our affective movements directly touch upon our life of faith. Gallagher notes the key difference: "There is an essentially *religious* dimension to this awareness; it presupposes Christian faith and a Christian understanding of God at work in the various factors which influence human interior life."[53] Such awareness, in other words, presupposes the activity of the Gift of God: God existing outside himself in what is not God. Relationship with God can only be considered analogous to the other relationships in our lives, and so awareness of our response to that relationship will be only analogous to our psychological awareness of other relationships. Spiritual awareness is awareness of the Spirit, not of the *psyche* alone.

[53] Ibid., 22. Emphasis original.

Second, spiritual awareness deals with spontaneous movements of the heart. In reflection on Ignatius's convalescence, Gallagher draws out a paradigm for understanding the distinction between moral and spiritual awareness: "Ignatius simply finds [these spontaneous affective movements] within his heart and, indeed, for a time, though they are affecting him, he is not even aware of them. Obviously, then, these are pre-moral movements; since they are spontaneous, no dimension of moral responsibility can apply to them."[54] Joy or anxiety arise in response to the experiences of life but not by active choice. Where there is no choice, there is no moral culpability. Something more than moral awareness, then, is at work in our spiritual lives.

Spiritual awareness differs in a third way from other forms of self-awareness. In spiritual awareness, affective movements are judged according to their orientation to the will of God. Good movements are those that move the person toward God's will, which is made known to the believer through the Gift of God residing in the heart of each of the baptized and uniting them to the entire Body of Christ. As Gallagher says, "If the spontaneous feeling of joy we experience in conjunction with certain thoughts indicates in fact the direction God wishes us to pursue, then this movement is spiritually good."[55] Gallagher distinguishes these good movements from the bad based on their orientation to God's desire for us: "If a different spontaneous affectivity and its accompanying thoughts would lead us away from God, then this movement is spiritually bad."[56] Bad movements are those which lead us in the opposite direction, that is, away from the Gift which is the

[54] Ibid., 22-23.

[55] Ibid., 25.

[56] Ibid.

innermost reality of a believer's heart. Affective movements, in other words, are not just movements *within* the heart but are also movements *of* the heart. The heart itself moves.

Be Aware

The discernment of spirits begins with this spiritual awareness. Since the awareness is spiritual, Ignatius addresses his rules for discernment to people actively seeking that spiritual life: those "who are earnestly purging away their sin, and who are progressing from good to better in the service of God our Lord."[57] In other words, these people have oriented their lives toward God and have him before their eyes as their origin and final goal. The language of ongoing purgation in Ignatius's text indicates that we speak here of those on the path to holiness. Gallagher says Ignatius is describing "those persons who are seeking to discern the spirits' action in their daily lives and so respond more fully to God's love and more faithfully follow his will."[58] While most in this category would not frame it in these terms, this description captures the attitude of the Sunday regulars of a typical Catholic parish. Their reception of the Eucharist constitutes their response to God's love and their attentiveness to the homily speaks to their desire to know God's will and discern the spiritual import of their daily lives.

These believers, therefore, are primed for a deeper spiritual awareness. Having answered the call of God by following the Lord Jesus in the power of his Spirit, a member of the faithful stands ready to have his or her eyes opened a little and see the Gift in new ways. This is the first step of Ignatian discernment: *be aware*. Gallagher says our goal as believers is to "seek to be sufficiently 'within' so that what is stirring spiritually

[57] Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises," 201.

[58] Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 39.

in our hearts becomes present to our consciousness."[59] Seeing God in daily life requires discipline because daily life throws so much at us all at once. A practice of interiority, of patient attention to the stirrings of our hearts, yields the fruit of contemplation no matter whether one is a monk enclosed in his monastery or a woman cloistered in an office cubicle. Those spontaneous, pre-moral affective movements in the hearts of believers are sparks left behind by the passing flame of the Spirit. Once brought to awareness, these sparks can lead to the fire of faith, felt by the *sensus fidei* and lived in union with the Gift of God.

Understand

A spark, however, needs kindling. Awareness requires understanding. The Ethiopian asked for this gift from Philip the deacon, so that his awareness of the words of Isaiah might transform into an understanding of the will of God.[60] Our spiritual awareness of our affective movements provides the raw material for our reflection. Ignatius himself pondered the meaning of the different experiences he had during his convalescence until he could see the origin and final end of each affective movement. Gallagher sees in this episode a move from awareness to understanding: "Gradually he comes to understand that one of these is of God; the other is not. This is the interpretive step in discernment, and it too, like spiritual awareness, is an invaluable spiritual aid."[61] Being aware of this spiritual experience, the believer now asks what it means.

[59] Ibid., 18.

[60] Cf. Acts 8:30-31.

[61] Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 24.

The meaning of the affective movement can be understood by two factors: its origin and final end. Where does this come from? Where does this lead? Again, here we are examining the experience of those progressing from good to better, who have awakened to the presence of the Gift in their hearts and are seeking to do the will of God. That union with God is the interpretive key to the affective movements in the hearts of earnest believers. Does this movement of the heart come from the Gift of God? If one goes where this movement is leading, will the fire of the Spirit burn brighter in the heart? Here again we see the *exitus* and *redditus* of the Holy Spirit. The Gift moves the person to come to rest in the origin of the Gift: the exchange of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Take Action

Now the Christian has a choice to make. This, says Gallagher, represents the completion of the discernment of spirits: "For Ignatius, even awareness and understanding together are not yet discernment of spirits; both are aimed toward *action*."[62] Ignatius's terse introduction of his rules for the discernment of spirits culminates in this call to action. After perceiving and then understanding the motions of the soul, we recognize those as good which lead toward God and those as bad that lead away from God: "the good motions that they may be received, and the bad that they may be rejected."[63] As Gallagher makes clear, "Insightful understanding of spiritual realities alone is not enough; the discerning person must be ready to act in accordance with what

[62] Ibid. Emphasis original.

[63] Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises," 201.

has been understood."[64] The Christian is a doer of the word, not a hearer only. Ignatius and Gallagher both point to the *sensus fidei fidelis* here. The spontaneous, natural knowledge arising in the affectivity of the human person prompts a response. To know the proper response, the Christian must be aware and understand these spontaneous movements.

Preaching to the Affectively Discerning

Be aware. Understand. Take action. The method of Ignatian affective discernment encourages both preacher and listener to engage with the Gift of God at work in those secret places of their hearts. For preachers, Ignatius's method encourages them to recognize the multiplicity of ways a homily will impact the listener. Seminarians in formation often complain of the intellectual poverty of the homilies that they heard in their youth. Preaching, however, addresses more than just the brain of the listener. The preacher must be aware that the spiritual movements the Gift stirs up involve feelings and desires as well. The preacher must understand how to speak to the whole affectivity of the listener. The Church teaches, true, but preaching must also delight and sway, as St. Augustine taught.[65] In other words, the preaching of the Church prompts thoughts by instruction, feelings by delighting, and desire by persuasion. Seminarians, wary of robbing the Gospel of its power by using human eloquence, often shy away from language that delights or sways in their preaching. This impoverished homiletic method fails to go where the Gift has already gone: into the hearts of believers. Learning to preach means learning to preach to the entire affective life of the person.

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[64] Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 25.

[65] See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117.

Listeners, too, are encouraged to be aware, understand, and take action. All the baptized are called to exercise the *sensus fidei.* Ignatian affective discernment provides a workout routine for that exercise. As the ITC rightly points out, the Council Fathers of Vatican II envisioned the faithful as "living and active subjects within the Church."[66] Listeners, as subjects, are more than passive objects who politely sit still and listen to the preaching of the Church. Ignatian affective discernment enriches the experience of the faithful by allowing them to see where the Gift of God leads them by means of affective movements. Joy or heaviness, curiosity or boredom, resolve or discouragement—all these responses to preaching can now be read as signs of the Gift at work in the hearts of believers. The Gift stirs up thoughts, feelings, and desires in response to the Word to move all to closer communion with the Trinity. Strengthened in their *sensus fidei fidelis*, the faithful can use the language of affective discernment to inform the *sensus fidei fidelium*. The Church can tell her preachers where the Gift has been at work, moving the Body of Christ toward new horizons of doctrinal expression and pastoral ministry. Judged in the light of faith in God who desires our perfection and happiness, the faithful hold more firmly to what deepens the Gift. This affords all the baptized the capacity to sense the presence of God always at work in the secret of their hearts.

Conclusion

The Gift may work in secret, but he does not want to remain a secret. As the Gift of the Father and the Son, he has been given to draw us into the Trinity itself. He inspires and calls to action. He consoles and guides the Church into all truth. He empowers the *sensus fidei* of all the baptized so that we might sense the life of God as easily as we

[66] ITC, "Sensus fidei *in the Life of the Church*," 2014, 67.

sense sunlight on our skin. He works in and through the affective movements of our hearts to change us from the inside out. We enter "within" ourselves and discover the Gift already there, urging us to go deeper "within" the life of the Trinity. He is God existing in what is not God so that we might be truly deified.

The preaching of the Church holds out this promise of deification. In the liturgy, the Church is most herself, gathered at the source and summit of the faith. Enlightened by the Word and sustained by the Eucharist, the Church prays to the Father through the Son in the Spirit so that all the baptized may rest in the unfailing Gift of God. The preaching of the Church manifests the *sensus fidei* in her preachers by how they articulate the Church's sense of herself—the *sensus fidelium*—and in each of the baptized by how they respond to that preaching—the *sensus fidelis*. In that reciprocal exchange, the Spirit works to unite the hearts of all believers with the salvific will of the Father who sent the Son as the Word made flesh. The baptized, in turn, find the Incarnation continued in their own flesh, in their affectivity, as the Gift of God anoints their ordinary lives with the power that comes from God alone. Figure 2.1, below, depicts the three theological pillars established by that power of God.

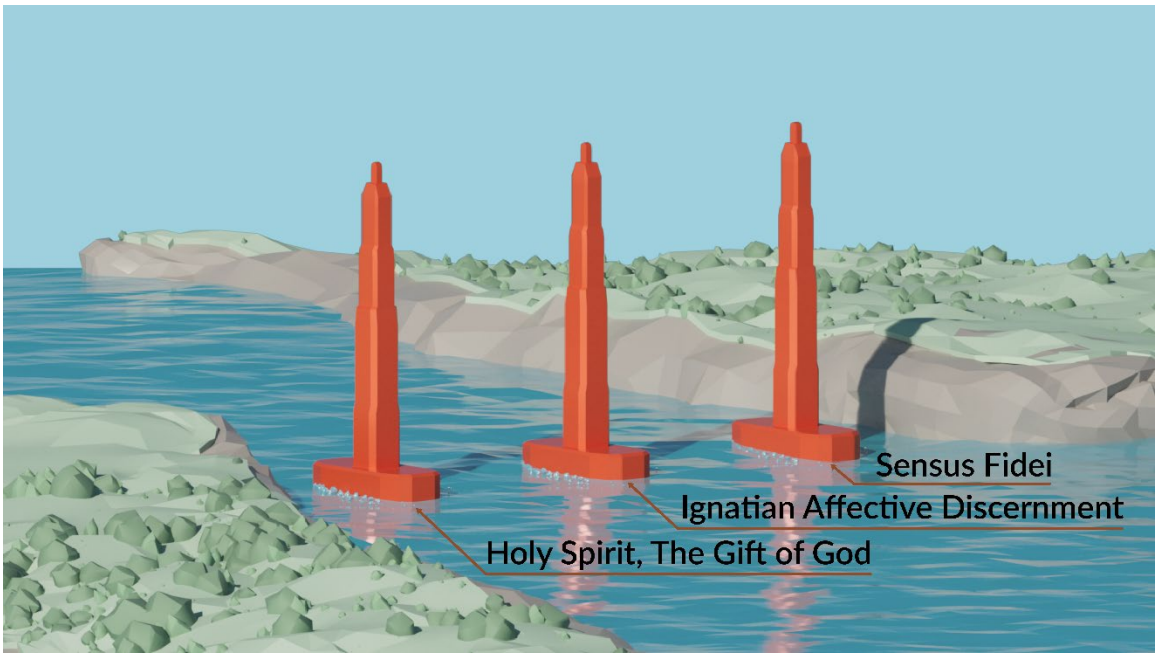

Figure 2.1. Theological Pillars of the Affective Feedback Bridge (Credit: Alex Austin).

How well does the Church depend on these strong pillars? How does the Church observe the flourishing of the life of God in the baptized? These questions, arising from our consideration of the Holy Spirit as Gift of God, prompt a specific way of looking at homiletic method. If the experience of believers reveals the activity of the Holy Spirit, and if that experience has consequences for the ecclesial practice of the faith, then the preaching of the Church cannot be indifferent to the Gift of God already at work before any preaching begins. The homiletic method of a Spirit-gifted Church cannot begin with the speaker or even the content of the homily. What the Church needs is listener-oriented preaching, which forms the homiletic framework for Affective Feedback.

Chapter Three

Beginning with the Assembly: A Homiletic Framework

> When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and, turning, said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."
>
> Luke 7:9

Introduction

Jesus defies expectations.[1] He preaches, he heals, and he works wonders. He speaks and the people marvel. He acts on his own authority and does not need to quote the rabbis when he interprets the Law. The disciple turns to Jesus as the thirsty turn to water in the desert: He is the source of faith.

Yet Jesus startles us. When we turn to him, we discover that he has already turned to us. When we come to him with our thirst, we discover his infinitely greater thirst for us. He who is the source of faith looks for our faith. The friends of the paralytic, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the centurion: All these have their faith praised by Jesus, and that faith shapes his response. Even a lack of faith, such as when the scribes and Pharisees grumble about blasphemy when Jesus forgives sins, prompts him to respond. Jesus listens to the faith—strong or weak, perfect or halting—of his listeners. Then he speaks a word that works wonders.

[1] Material in this chapter originated as a paper entitled "A Constant and Mutual Exchange: Ongoing Formation for Listener-Oriented Preaching" which I wrote toward completion of an elective course of Directed Reading in Listener-Oriented Communication taught by Dr. Karla Bellinger, D.Min., during the fall of 2021 through the Aquinas Institute of Theology in Saint Louis, MO.

This paradox of the Word who listens provides the necessary tension for the bridge we are constructing between formation and vocation. The cables of a suspension bridge transfer the weight of the traffic crossing the bridge to the pillars, and those pillars transfer that weight into the ground. The cables need tensile strength to do this, flexing as the weight of traffic changes without letting the deck of the bridge collapse. The Word who listens shows this flexibility and tensile strength. He bends in response to the faith of the person before him; that same Word then lifts and sustains the person on a journey through the open air of the Spirit.

From the example of the Word's flexibility and tensile strength, we see the need for a homiletic framework that can serve as the metaphoric suspension cables of Affective Feedback. Listener-oriented preaching trusts in the tensile strength of the Word who listens. Using this homiletic method allows our bridge to adapt to the listener while avoiding a collapse into merely confirming the listener's already held beliefs. This chapter, therefore, explores the form and model of listener-oriented preaching by drawing from the work of three people. Each demonstrates both the compassionate ear of the Word who listens and also the courageous voice of a preacher of Good News for others. First, Pope Francis names the flexible ecclesial dynamic at the heart of such preaching. Fred Craddock then anchors the cables of our homiletic framework to both listener and Word through his model of inductive preaching. Finally, Karla Bellinger shows how our homiletic framework can be put under tension without snapping by laying out a method of listener-oriented preaching, a method drawn from insights from her conversations with young Catholics and her study of motivation in listeners.

Pope Francis and Maternal Dialogue

Listener-oriented preaching serves the mission of the Church: the proclamation of the Gospel. In 2012, the Synod of Bishops met to discuss the transmission of the faith and the New Evangelization. Pope Francis gathered the insights of their conversation along with his own wisdom and penned *Evangelii gaudium*, the first apostolic exhortation of his pontificate. He devotes a substantial section to the liturgical homily, which he describes as "the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people."[2] Put another way, the liturgical homily reveals the ordained minister's awareness of the Gift of God at work in the people and his ability to lead the people to deeper awareness of that Gift.

This awareness requires an attitude of humility. Francis encourages the preacher to be humble before the Word as it speaks for itself. As a member of the religious order founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, he encourages the preacher to engage in affective discernment when reading Scripture: "In the presence of God, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: 'Lord, what does this text say *to me*?'"[3] Affective Feedback requires the interior spiritual awareness of the preacher but it does not end there. The preacher's encounter with the Word is personal but not private. The Word who listens addresses himself to the preacher so that God can reach out to others through the preacher.[4] The vocation of the preacher within the ecclesial community demands a translation of personal encounter with the Word into public witness to the

[2] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* 135.

[3] Ibid., 153.

[4] Cf. ibid., 136.

Good News. The preacher, therefore, must experience the real challenge of the Word on a personal level. Francis reminds the preachers of the Church that God does not ask for a perfect response to that challenge: "He simply asks that we sincerely look at our life and present ourselves honestly before him, and that we be willing to continue to grow, asking from him what we ourselves cannot as yet achieve."[5] Flexibility in the Church begins with the preacher's willingness to change in response to the Word of God.

After exhorting preachers to attend carefully to the Word of God, Francis turns to the need for similar attentiveness to the people: "The preacher also needs to keep his ear to the people and to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear."[6] The Gift has already been given to the hearts of believers. The pastor, as one tasked with nurturing that Gift for the good of the whole community, prepares to preach by listening to the faith of the community. As Francis says, "The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren."[7] The pastor does not speak the life of faith into being for the people. God has been addressing his people and we have been responding at times with ardor, at other times tepidly. The preacher—as one addressed by God and called to respond faithfully according to the vocation to preach—must listen to both conversation partners to hear what needs to be said. The preacher does not decide what people need to hear. He discovers that need through listening.

[5] Ibid., 153.

[6] Ibid., 154.

[7] Ibid., 137.

God knows that need perfectly. He always already addresses it "by the constant inner working of the Holy Spirit" in the people; by that work of the Holy Spirit, says Francis, the people of God "is constantly evangelizing itself."[8] The liturgical homilist does not come from outside to give the Holy Spirit to a community that does not possess it. He speaks from inside the community animated by the Gift of God. Francis draws upon the image of the Church as mother to clarify this ecclesial dynamic. If the Church is a mother, "she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved."[9] The bond of love turns the hearts of mothers toward their children and the hearts of children toward their mothers. I have watched my four-year-old niece push the envelope of her parents' rules, like using her "outside voice" at the dinner table. She peacefully takes correction from her mother because she knows she is loved. The gift of love created their relationship and motivated the acts of love that sustain that relationship. Within that milieu of love, a word of correction becomes yet another expression of that love. All the other words her mother has spoken have revealed the bond of love that constitutes the essence of the family. Why would this word be any different?

Why should the words of a preacher be any different? The Gift of God created the relationship among these members of the Body of Christ. Sharing a common baptism into the Gift, the homilist in the ambo and the listener in the pew are bonded together in divine love. The homilist's words and actions should manifest the relationship within the

[8] Ibid., 139.

[9] Ibid.

Gift he already enjoys with the listener. Therefore, Francis warns homilists to respect the liturgical nature of the homily, that is, as an act that takes place within the Church's life of worship. On the one hand, the homilist should avoid making the homily into "a form of entertainment like those presented by the media."[10] This practice reduces the life of ecclesial communion to the level of theatrical performance, dividing preacher from listener by building the proverbial fourth wall between them. On the other hand, the homily "should be brief and avoid taking on the semblance of a speech or lecture."[11] The brevity of the preaching ensures that the preacher's words do not become more important than the celebration of faith. Maintaining a conversational tone preserves the maternal dialogue of the preaching. A parent does not get far by merely speaking *at* a child. Just as a mother needs to speak to and with her child, addressing the child as a person within a relationship of love, so too listener-oriented preachers speak to and with the people, aware of the presence of the Gift constantly at work in the liturgical assembly.

A Mother's Ear

Listener-oriented preaching springs from the conviction that the Gift of God guides the Church. A good mother, says Francis, likewise knows that God guides her children. Because of that, a mother listens to the needs of her children to know how best to shepherd "everything God is bringing about in her children; she listens to their concerns and learns from them."[12] There can be no uniform mold forced upon the life of each child. Rather, a mother must learn from her children to know what they need. The

[10] Ibid., 138.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 139.

spirit of love in the family leads to a constant and mutual exchange between mother and child. In that spirit, says Francis, "they teach and learn, experience correction and grow in appreciation for what is good."[13] The mother teaches and the child learns. My little niece has been taught to use her words to express what she wants. The child teaches and the mother learns. By listening to my niece, her mother can learn her daughter's needs and meet them with love and attention.

Francis sees this maternal dialogue in the homily: "The same Spirit who inspired the Gospels and who acts in the Church also inspires the preacher to hear the faith of God's people and to find the right way to preach at each Eucharist."[14] The Gift of God inspires the faith of the people. The same Gift inspires the preacher to listen to that faith. Here we encounter the *sensus fidei* being exercised within the homilist's preparation to preach. His own *sensus fidei fidelis* becomes attuned to the movements of faith in the life of the people. He sees how the people have put their faith into action and feels the warmth of the fire of the Holy Spirit. The young priest visits the terminal cancer patient and encounters the peace that can only come from God. The deacon prepares a couple for marriage and marvels at their ability to forgive each other with Christ-like compassion. The experienced pastor mulls over the problems of the parish with the finance committee and sees how God calls forth wisdom from the people of the Church.

These are the people who come to the Eucharist looking to be fed, who want to hear the Word of God addressed directly to them. The homilist hears how the faith has already been lived and practiced, spontaneously recognizing the presence of the Gift of

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

God in the ordinary circumstances of life by virtue of the *sensus fidei*. Only then can the preacher discern what the Spirit wants said to further inspire the faith of the Church: "Christian preaching thus finds in the heart of the people and their culture a source of living water, which helps the preacher to know what must be said and how to say it."[15] The faith of the people provides refreshment to the preacher. The challenge facing listener-oriented preaching, however, lies in this act of listening to the listeners. The heart of the people and their culture contain both the seeds of the Gospel as well as the weeds sown by the enemy of our human nature. Francis's ecclesial insights must take shape in a homiletic method that allows the preacher to imitate the Word who listens—to hear clearly and then speak in love.

Fred Craddock and Inductive Preaching

How does the preacher hear and speak in love? Clearly the faith of the listeners must be accounted for before the homily even begins. Homily preparation looks different in a Church constantly evangelizing itself. Fred Craddock, who was an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and professor of preaching at Emory University, recognized this when he wrote *As One Without Authority* in 1971. Craddock argued against a pattern of deductive movement in preaching, which depends upon the traditional authority of speaker and institution to be effective. Craddock notes that in a deductive homily, the main idea is given first and then applied to daily life. This, he says, is "a most unnatural mode of communication, unless, of course, one presupposes passive listeners who accept the right or authority of the speaker to state conclusions that he then

[15] Ibid.

applies to their faith and life."[16] Here is no maternal dialogue. The Word speaks but it does not listen.

Craddock recommends turning the movement of the homily upside down through inductive preaching: "In induction, thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener's ear to a general truth or conclusion."[17] The preacher begins with the details of the life of the listener. The preaching springs from a place of shared experience between preacher and listener, rather than from the authority of the preacher as in deductive preaching.[18] William Brosend captures the enduring insight provided by this turn to the listener: "Craddock's intuition was that the real challenge for the preacher was not to have something to say that was worth hearing, but to say it in a way that it could truly be heard."[19] Craddock's concern for preachers to be truly heard opened up considerations of a sermon's form, on how the preacher says what needs to be heard. Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm points to the broad range of possible ways to judge homiletic effectiveness: "Sermons were understood as capable of making their appeal not only through rational arguments but evocation, imagination, and addressing listeners' emotional needs as well."[20] Here Craddock's method introduces a seeming paradox. To

[16] Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Revised and with New Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 46.

[17] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 47.

[18] Cf. ibid., 49.

[19] William Brosend, "Something Else is Lacking: Remembering Fred B. Craddock," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (2019), 130.

[20] Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, "New Hermeneutic, New Homiletic, and New Directions: An US-North American Perspective," *Homiletic* 35, no. 1 (2010), 21.

avoid being abstract and therefore preach to concrete people, Craddock says listener-oriented preaching must rely upon the imagination.

Imagination: Impression and Expression

Popular usage conflates imagination with fantasy. However, Craddock points back to the word "image" that lies at the root of imagination: "Problem-solving of all types, in the laboratory, in the kitchen, on a battlefield, or in the board room places a great burden on the image-making faculty of the mind."[21] The images of reality that we hang in our minds determine more of our daily living than conceptual structures do. If the homilist would speak to the real circumstances of the listener, he will need to have an accurate image of the life of the listener as it is, as well as an image of what life will be when transformed by Good News.

The imagination of listener-oriented preaching, then, has two modes. Craddock points first to impression, that is, "a sensitivity to the sights, sounds, and flavors of life about one that is not easily maintained by the minister, or by anyone else."[22] Craddock urges the preacher to avoid holding life at arm's length as a cold observer; rather "she herself *lives*…. If the imagery of her sermons is to be real, she must see life as life, not as an illustration under point two [of a homily outline]."[23] The preacher must be involved in parishioners' lives so that abstract categories—the wealthy, the old, the youth today—acquire human faces: a lonely man with only money to keep him company, the woman in

[21] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 63-64.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 66, emphasis mine. Craddock's use of feminine pronouns here and elsewhere reflects his desire to address all preachers. See pg. 17 of Chapter One for a fuller explanation of the use of pronouns in this present thesis.

the wheelchair sitting with a Bingo card in the nursing home, the awkward teen seeking self-worth by going viral on TikTok. The preacher, says Craddock, must embrace an empathetic imagination.[24] The preacher listens attentively to these human experiences to understand them from the inside. Only by entering imaginatively into real life can the preacher discover the presence of the Gift of God who labors to draw everything that is not God into the communion of divine love.

Listener-oriented preaching then needs to give expression to that divine presence. This expression is the second mode of the preacher's inductive imagination: "An empathetic imagination means, first, having the wisdom and grace to receive the images of life about us and then, second, the freedom and confidence to reflect these with appropriate expressions."[25] Craddock gives several guiding principles that determine the appropriateness of a preacher's imaginative expressions. [26] Two of these are most illustrative for our purposes: selecting and framing images.

First, the choice of images for preaching arises from the world of the listeners. "This is to say, at no time are God's people to be given the idea that they are living at the wrong time, in the wrong place, on the wrong planet, to be really genuine Christians."[27] The stories of the extraordinary and the extreme seemingly provide greater rhetorical power to the homily. Who is not moved by the martyrdom of St. Joan of Arc? Who is not inspired by the poverty of St. Francis? As powerful as these witnesses are, Craddock

[24] See ibid., 70.

[25] Ibid., 73.

[26] See ibid., 75-78, for Craddock's complete explanation of these guiding principles.

[27] Ibid., 75.

warns that if the homilist presents these heroic deeds as normative, "he will leave his most serious listeners wishing they were someone else, somewhere else. In the meantime, the Kingdom does not come to dull little towns where God's lightning never seems to strike."[28] The expression of the preacher's imagination must elevate the possibility of faith where preacher and listeners alike live and move and have their being.[29] Craddock urges the same approach in the preacher's presentation of sin: "Nothing creates hypocrisy in the average church so much as sermons that succeed in identifying sin with those headlined crimes that plague distant cities."[30] Images of grace and evil drawn from the world of the community's experience reveal the Gift of God at work in that same world. Such images reveal the maternal attentiveness of the Church to the real life of the children of God.

This real life should be framed in real terms. Craddock asks the preacher to be careful in the choice of words: "Second, as far as is possible, let the preacher use words and phrases that image specific and concrete relations and responses…. If the sermon revives the memory of the odor of burped milk on a blouse, it evokes more meaning that the most thorough analysis of 'motherhood.'"[31] Using sense-based language, the preacher demonstrates an inner understanding of the lives of the listeners. Listener-oriented preaching instructs the *sensus fidei fidelis* of the individual believer, showing how the mundane moments of life reveal the working of the Gift of God. The same goes for the

[28] Ibid.

[29] Cf. Acts 17:28.

[30] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 75.

[31] Ibid.

preacher: Building the habit of thinking and preaching in sense-based language strengthens the preacher's sensitivity to the presence of the Gift in the sensate world. The wisdom of the maternal dialogue of the Church reveals the sense-world of daily life to be a kind of sacrament of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Affective Feedback, anchored to both listener and Word by Craddock's inductive model, allows for serious homiletic engagement with the real life of the listener.

Karla Bellinger and Going Deeper

Listener-oriented preaching does not stop with the particulars of the listeners' life. Preaching that offered no new perspectives on our daily life could hardly be called Good News. How could it be news if it said nothing new? How could it be good when so much of our daily life is clearly otherwise? Preaching needs more if it is to motivate listeners to give their precious attention to preaching. Karla Bellinger, executive director of the Institute for Homiletics at the University of Dallas, tries to get to the heart of listener motivation in *Connecting Pulpit and Pew*. To find better ways to connect with young Catholics through preaching, she researched consumer marketing to find the best practices of motivating listeners to change their behavior. Her research dovetails with Craddock's presentation of inductive preaching while at the same time moving the preacher toward proclamation of Good News. Bellinger summarizes her research by saying, "Messages that motivate are: (1) consistent with the listener's values, goals and needs; and (2) a little bit risky and somewhat inconsistent with that listener's prior attitudes. In short, to motivate: tie in and then stretch."[32] A good marketing message

[32] Karla Bellinger, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew: Breaking Open the Conversation about Catholic Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 89.

identifies with the needs of the consumer and then presents a new way of living that is worth the risk of changing.

The homily, as something more than a marketing message, can do the same and more. The preacher begins within the world shared with the listeners—their hopes and dreams, their sorrows and trials, all expressed in sense-based language—and offers something more than consumer electronics or the latest soft drink. The preacher speaks to the Gift of God amid those realities. Then the proclamation of the presence of the Gift stretches the listeners, moving them, Bellinger insists, "toward divinization, to become more like God."[33] Motivation, as seen in marketing, requires both tying into listener experience and stretching that experience. Without tying into experience, preaching lacks relevance to daily life. Without stretching the listener, preaching lacks the Good News that transforms daily life. Preaching ought to communicate the Word that listens to us and speaks to us.

People want to be addressed by the Word that listens. Bellinger remarks that the young listeners in her original study wanted preachers to "go deeper." She explains the hunger behind this desire: "'Deeper' does not mean to preach a more strident stance against the moral deficiencies of the world. It means to speak to the joys and pains of everyday life."[34] Listeners want deeper homilies—not necessarily doctrinally deeper but always existentially deeper. Therefore, Bellinger wants homily preparation to begin with what the people know: "They know life."[35] The preacher ties into what the people know

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 90.

[35] Ibid.

by asking, "What will they give me?" and then moving to what stretches the people by asking, "What does Christ call them to?"[36]

Tying in through Relevance

What answer can a preacher expect to the question, "What will the people give me?" The people give the preacher a lived experience of faith, a faith shared between them thanks to the Gift of God. The preacher listening to the people discerns what makes these people *people of God*. At best, the preacher catches up to where God already is before pointing out where God wants to go from here. As Craddock says, "[I]t is theologically basic to the inductive method that…the listener not be viewed as totally alien to God and devoid of Godwardness."[37] The listener-oriented preacher takes the priesthood of all believers seriously. Each member of the Church has been anointed as priest, prophet, and king by virtue of baptism into Christ Jesus. Each member of the Church has received the Gift of the Spirit who breathes into our hearts the fragrance of holiness. Each member of the Church has been made an adopted son or daughter of the Father. The world of the listeners already contains echoes of the Word which calls us to the life of the Kingdom.

The Catholic priest hears the same call to the Kingdom as his parishioners. The commission to preach defines the service he must provide to the entire community. The preacher needs to catch and amplify these echoes of the Word in the world. To do so, the preacher needs to show that he understands the world of the listeners. The relevance of the homily establishes a continuity between the life that listeners already know and a life

[36] See ibid., 90-91.

[37] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 51.

transformed by the Gospel. Craddock's inductive preaching provides the framework needed to find that relevance. Through impression and appropriate expression, the preacher can tie into the life listeners already know. Bellinger points out that the homily does not go forth from the preacher into an empty void we call "the listener." Rather, the homily runs into everything the listeners bring with them. As Bellinger says, "The voices of the outside world run full tilt inside the minds of the listeners as they walk in the door. A thousand memories sit down each Sunday in our pews. The homily can tie into those thoughts or it can ignore that they are there."[38] The irrelevant homily tries to proclaim the Kingdom by being louder than the listener's memory of the world. The relevant homily shows the Kingdom among us and how we can move more deeply into it.

Stretching through Clarity

Homiletic relevance reveals we are already on the road to the Kingdom. Being on the road, however, means that the destination still lies ahead of us. The listener wants to know how to walk that road and live in the Kingdom. Listeners look to the homily for a clear message about what to do next. In survey after survey, scholars have heard listeners express a desire for a message they can pick up and carry with them.[39] Bellinger holds up the experience of teenage listeners as proof of how clarity helps teens mature and grow. "When the message is distilled to a core concept, the idea reminds the hearer of what is

[38] Bellinger, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew*, 87.

[39] Admittedly, the surveys cited in this section were published more than a decade before this thesis project. Extensive searches of online databases and homiletic publications resulted in few contemporary sources engaging with Craddock's inductive preaching or with listener relevance. Bellinger continues to expand on her research through her work with the Institute of Homiletics and her collaboration with Michael E. Connors in *Remembering Why We Preach: A Retreat to Renew Your Skill and Spirit* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2022). In that book, however, Bellinger and Connors rely upon some of the same sources cited in this thesis to discuss what listeners want from preaching. The author hopes this thesis project will be a contribution to the wider discussion of listener-oriented preaching.

important. Beliefs then change, which adjusts attitude and thus behavior."[40] In a survey of 434 Catholic lay people, Katherine Schmitt found that listeners in the pews want homilies that are "clear, compelling, pertinent to life and memorable."[41] David Shea found a similar desire for clarity in the pews of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.[42] Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald Allen had one respondent to their survey express a desire to hear a sermon that clearly provided a new horizon for living: "how we break out of our normal routine into the real presence of God."[43] This thesis project found that desire for clarity still alive and well in parishioners in 2023, who said: "Keep the message simple, clear, and concise. Have a clear response to the message (how can the message be lived)."[44] The listeners want to be stretched into new ways of living their life of faith.

Stretching requires clarity. The preacher might tie into the lives of the listeners but if the thread of the homily becomes tangled in poor organization, confusing jargon, and botched exegesis, then the preaching ties itself in knots. The only thing stretched is the listeners' patience. To maintain the clarity of the preaching, Bellinger encourages preachers to bring the gospel message to the listener in words that they can understand.[45] Listener-oriented preaching stretches the simple language of everyday life to fit around the life of the Kingdom. Jesus, the Word who listens, does this repeatedly in the parables.

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[40] Ibid., 101.

[41] Katherine Schmitt, "Effective Preaching: What Catholics Want—A Project of the NCEA Seminary Department," *Seminary Journal* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 26.

[42] David Shea, "Unmet Needs in Catholic Preaching: A Project of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati," *Seminary Journal* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 34, 37.

[43] Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive: Lessons from Laity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 47.

[44] See list D4 in Appendix D.

[45] See Bellinger, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew*, 91.

Families and fields, sheep and seeds, wages and weeds—these simple things tied into the real life of Jesus's listeners. Through the clarity of his preaching, his listeners were stretched toward the mystery of the Kingdom of God: a Kingdom where the lost are found, where an abundant harvest is sown, and where the last shall be first.

Listeners want to live in that Kingdom. They want to live there not just on Sunday, but throughout their entire lives. The listener wants a clear message so that the preaching can be recalled easily the following week. Mulligan and Allen found this desire at work in their survey respondents: "The desire for clarity is grounded in the belief that the sermon matters, but that it cannot matter to one's life of faith if one does not understand what the sermon intends."[46] In addition to the use of language the listener understands, the listener should also be able to clearly hear the focus of the homily. The focus of the homily causes the listener to stretch in their faith. One of Mulligan and Allen's interviewees clearly articulates this connection between clarity and being stretched: "I like sermons that come to the pulpit, and there's a focus there, and there's an idea, and it's developed. That's what I like. A sermon that causes you to think differently."[47] Once tied into the faith life of the listener with relevance, a homily presented with clarity can stretch the listener into new ways of living the life of faith.

Making the Connection

How will the homilist know when he has succeeded in being relevant and clear? Perhaps the student of listener-oriented preaching has placed himself within the maternal dialogue of the Church, seeking to listen and speak within the Gift of God. He has

[46] Mulligan and Allen, *Lessons from Laity*, 68.

[47] Ibid., 70.

exercised empathetic imagination to begin from the particulars of the listeners' world and frame his expression in images that reflect that world. He focuses his preaching on a clear, well-organized message. Perhaps he has done everything right. However, just because the homilist thinks he is relevant and clear does not make him so. Listener-oriented preaching means the final judgment of the efficacy of a preaching event remains for the listeners to give. They will know whether the homily has connected to their life.

What does connection look like? How do listeners know when it has happened? Bellinger found teens used the language of affectivity to describe when connection did and did not happen. "Most frequently cited was the element of trust…. There was an ease in the presence of the other."[48] In the preaching moment, the listener experiences connection with the Gift of God when they feel safe to just "be." The preacher affirms that safety by tying in aspects of the real life of listeners to the homily. The listener does not have to be someone else to live the life of faith since their daily life contains the possibility of grace. What else is grace besides being at ease in God?

Being at ease captures the affective experience of connection for Bellinger's young respondents. Connection with another person meant "a sense of lightness, of joy, of love—everything 'flows.'"[49] One need not be a spiritual master like Ignatius of Loyola to discern the meaning of these affective movements. These are the signs of a deepening relationship. Every person coming to hear the Word of God deserves to experience that sense of lightness and love in every homily. When everything flows for the listener, when

[48] Bellinger, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew*, 37.

[49] Ibid., 38.

everything feels connected, then the homily has been relevant and clear. Affective Feedback gives space for preacher and listener to enjoy that flow of grace together.

When that flow is blocked, however, the listener affectively feels that blockage as well. Bellinger encountered that obstacle in some of her respondents: "Rather than the deep satisfaction of connection, when folks are not united, they experience fear, frustration, and dissatisfaction. There is no comfort. There is no openness. There is no 'flow.'"[50] The affective experience of the human heart reveals when there has been a lack of connection. Bellinger cites as an example the experience of a teen feeling disconnected from Mass: "It feels like no one is really reaching out to me. I feel obligated to go to Mass."[51] The preaching has not tied into the life of this young Catholic. Without that relevance, the heaviness of obligation sets in. Likewise, Bellinger found teenagers hungry for clarity in the preaching they heard: "It makes me frustrated and confused that the preaching doesn't help me grow in my faith. I hate not being able to focus my attention on the homily."[52] This young Catholic wants more, but a lack of clarity in the preaching has frustrated that desire. The lack of clarity means the listener has not been stretched or pushed to grow in the life of the Kingdom. The connection has not been made.

Conclusion

Listener-oriented preaching strives to make that connection at every proclamation of the Word of God. The liturgical homily cooperates with the desire of the Gift of God to draw the whole of creation into the communion of the Trinity. This includes the daily

[50] Ibid., 39.

[51] Ibid., 108.

[52] Ibid.

life of the listener. The Word of God addresses the concrete realities of life, and the homilist connects the Word and the people by preaching. The homilist thus participates in the maternal dialogue of the Church: hearing the people's faith and finding the right way to preach at each Eucharist.[53] Craddock's method of inductive preaching allows the preacher to imaginatively enter the real life of the listener. There the homilist finds the images that will clothe the Word of God in garments that look and smell like the ones we wear every day. Bellinger points out that tying into the life of the listener does not complete the homiletic task; the preacher must also stretch the listener, pulling on the strings of the Gospel tied into their lives to draw everyone—the preacher included—into the life of the Kingdom. The ecclesial flexibility Francis identifies justifies Craddock's inductive connection between listener and preacher, a connection which Bellinger shows has the tensile strength to hold up the Church.

This homiletic framework of listener-oriented preaching ties into our theological pillars to strengthen the Affective Feedback bridge. Figure 3.1, below, shows the relationship between our cables and our pillars. The pillars provide stability. The tensile strength of the suspension cables provides flexibility. By learning listener-oriented preaching, the seminarian learns to flex in response to the experience the listener brings to each preaching event. He can attend to the particulars of these people in this place at this time without losing his foundation in the Gift of God at work in the ecclesial and individual faith of the Church. The seminarian can settle into the maternal dialogue of the Church, knowing himself to be one addressed in love by the preaching of the Church while at the same time being called to express that same love in his ministry. He can learn

[53] Cf. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 139.

to exercise empathetic imagination, receiving an impression of all the sights, sounds, smells, and activities of the world in which the people of God live. He sees the indispensable importance of his pastoral involvement in the life of the congregation: "When a pastor preaches, she doesn't sell patent medicine; she writes prescriptions."[54] Those prescriptions address the real needs of the people by being expressed in images familiar to the listener, not in the medical jargon learned in school. This gives the healing power of the Word of God greater potency. Listeners, hearing a relevant word with a clear message about the life of faith, more readily connect with the good things God gives us when he gives himself. The affective experiences of the listener—lightness, ease, the experience of everything flowing—are, in Bellinger's words, symptoms of connection.[55] New life has begun. A connection has been made.

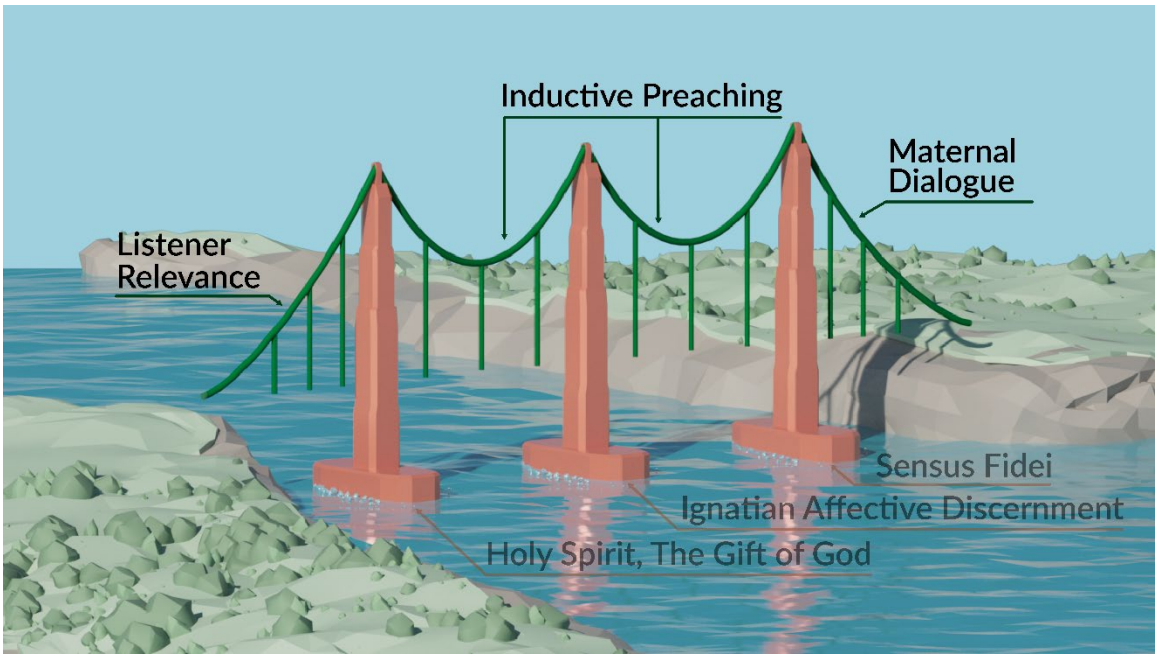

Figure 3.1. Homiletic Suspension Cables of the Affective Feedback Bridge (Credit: Alex Austin).

[54] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 67.

[55] See Bellinger, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew*, 37.

One challenge yet remains. How does the preacher know that connection has been made? How will the seminarian know that the preaching has not collapsed under the weight of poorly chosen words, ill-advised images, or bad exegesis? What the homilist needs is to hear from the listener. What the preacher needs is feedback.

Chapter Four

Parishioner Feedback: An Interdisciplinary Framework

> "You are not acting wisely," Jethro replied. "You will surely wear yourself out, and not only yourself but also these people with you. The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."
>
> Exodus 18:17-18

Introduction

Hidden among all the miracles in the Exodus story, the conversation between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro seems unremarkable. Having reunited Moses with his wife and children, Jethro stays to visit and observe this people that God has freed from Egypt. What he sees concerns him. Moses spends all day surrounded by the people as he dispenses judgment on each case brought before him. Jethro knows this practice will spell trouble in the long run for both Moses and the people. Rather than imposing his view, however, Jethro begins with a question: "What sort of thing is this that you are doing for the people?" Moses can now explain the situation from his point of view. After hearing this explanation, Jethro then begins his advice by talking about Moses's actions and the task at hand. He does not call Moses unwise but rather focuses on his actions: "The task is too heavy for you." This framing allows Jethro to suggest alternatives that allow Moses to avoid withering under the strain. A theology of God as the source of all justice supports his advice from below and the flexible bonds of relationship that unite him with Moses lift his feedback from above. All this makes possible a wonder on par with the parting of the sea: Moses receives the feedback of his father-in-law and acts on it.

This conversation between Jethro and Moses provides the blueprint for an essential part of our bridge. What good are pillars of theology and homiletic suspension cables if there is nothing to walk on? The deck of a bridge provides the surface that traffic can use to get from one side to another. Resting on the theological pillars as a foundation and supported by the tensile strength of listener-oriented preaching, effective feedback conversations form the deck of the Affective Feedback bridge.

Learning from the Corporate World

How can parishioners learn to give feedback like Jethro? How can seminarians learn to receive and act upon feedback like Moses? Answers to these questions come from a surprising source.[1] The business world has long been searching for an effective model for feedback. Two books examine the practice of giving and receiving feedback within this business context. Therese Huston, a cognitive psychologist, provides best practices for giving feedback in *Let's Talk: Make Effective Feedback Your Superpower*. Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, who are lecturers at Harvard University and experienced consultants, examine the other side of that feedback conversation in *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* to help the receiver find what is helpful—even in poorly delivered feedback. Together, these writers offer insight into three dynamics of feedback:

- the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset,
- how to move a person toward a growth mindset, and
- how to create effective feedback conversations.

[1] Material in this chapter originated as a paper entitled "Equipping for Ministry: Feedback in Seminary Formation" which I wrote in completion of an elective course of Directed Reading in Listener-Oriented Communication taught by Dr. Karla Bellinger, D.Min., during the fall of 2021 through the Aquinas Institute of Theology in Saint Louis, MO.

Using this understanding of feedback creates a smooth conversational surface that allows communication to flow between seminarians and parishioners. Parishioners cross over to work in the realm of formation. Seminarians connect with the place of their vocational fulfillment. Bridging the gap between formation and vocation becomes possible through Affective Feedback.

Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset

Good feedback does not start with the right words. Good feedback starts with the right mindset for both givers and receivers. Huston, Stone, and Heen all rely upon the work of developmental psychologist Carol Dweck to name two different mindsets: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The first mindset, Stone and Heen explain, "assumes our traits are 'fixed': Whether we are capable or bumbling, lovable or difficult, smart or dull, we aren't going to change…. Feedback reveals 'who we are,' so there's a lot at stake."[2] A growth mindset, on the other hand, assumes the possibility of change in the other person and in ourselves. "How they are now is simply how they are *now*," say Stone and Heen, emphasizing how feedback and critique offer merely a snapshot of the person and not the entire story.[3]

The type of mindset we have determines the type of story we tell ourselves *about* ourselves. This story, according to Stone and Heen, is our identity: "Identity is the story we tell ourselves about who we are and what the future holds for us, and when critical

[2] Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well (Even When It Is Off Base, Unfair, Poorly Delivered, and, Frankly, You're Not in the Mood*) (New York: Penguin, 2014), 24.

[3] Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 26.

feedback is incoming, that story is under attack."[4] This insight into identity helps reveal why seminarians might be particularly sensitive to feedback. The seminarian enters formation for the priesthood in response to a call from the Lord God, a personal invitation to a way of life that will embrace all that he has and is. He is called to *be* a priest, not simply to do priestly things during business hours. Feedback, positive or negative, can be easily perceived as an up or down vote on the man himself. If, for example, a seminarian thinks of himself as a compassionate man, a critique calling him "rigid" or "pastorally insensitive" will challenge that identity story. How the seminarian receives and processes that feedback depends upon his mindset and how he tells his own identity story. A growth mindset will open the seminarian to critique and challenge. His identity story then becomes one of growth. If he was pastorally insensitive in the moment, a growth mindset will allow him to name what he can do differently and grow into the compassionate man he wants to be.

Anyone with a fixed mindset, however, will receive such challenging feedback as an assault on his or her identity. For example, when a seminarian with a fixed mindset hears himself described negatively, his identity is called into question in a profound way. The unchangeable fact of who he is has been revealed by the words of another. Therefore, a fixed mindset can cause a seminarian to have two different reactions to critical feedback. On the one hand, every critical piece of feedback becomes one more proof that the seminarian does not have an authentic vocation to the priesthood, sending him into a spiral of doubt-filled discernment. He may dread hearing anything remotely negative from a seminary formator or parishioner because he thinks such comments

[4] Ibid., 23.

presage his dismissal from seminary or, even worse, a denial of his experience of vocation. On the other hand, a seminarian may be so personally fixed on his priestly call that any negative feedback ends up being ignored, stunting any growth necessary for fruitful ministry. This kind of response to feedback can be heard in a joke familiar to many seminarians and priests: "What do you call a priest who had a C- average in seminary? You call him 'Father.'" The poor evaluation of a man's intellectual performance does not touch upon his priestly identity and therefore that evaluation can be ignored. (The question of whether the people of God are happy to call a priest who gives C- homilies "Father," however, remains unanswered.)

Communicating the Other Person's Potential to Grow

A growth mindset is crucial for givers of feedback as well as receivers. Huston notes that feedback communicates the identity story the giver has about the receiver of feedback. If a formator or parishioner communicates a characteristic about a man as if it were an ingrained trait that cannot be changed, they communicate their own fixed mindset about that seminarian. "And when you communicated a fixed mindset, a belief that the other person can't change," writes Huston, "it's incredibly demotivating."[5] The seminarian comes away from the feedback moment thinking he has an immutable part of his character that forever stands in his way of being a worthy minister. A formator's or parishioner's fixed mindset about a seminarian communicates that, at best, there will be aspects of priestly ministry the man will always do poorly, or, at worst, that the man does

[5] Therese Huston, *Let's Talk: How to Make Feedback Your Superpower* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021), 57.

not have an authentic call to the priesthood because he does not personally measure up to the Church's standards.

Givers of feedback do well by beginning instead with a growth mindset about the other person. Huston writes, "When you have a growth mindset about someone, you believe their strengths can be developed and nurtured over time."[6] She then points to research that shows the positive impact the giver's growth mindset can have on those receiving feedback: "Employees who were being given feedback from managers with a growth mindset found the feedback more supportive than the employees who were given feedback from managers with a fixed mindset."[7] Employees then trusted their managers more, making them more open to feedback in the future. A manager's growth mindset freed employees from viewing everything as a pass or fail test with career-ending consequences. This same growth mindset, when present in those responsible for forming future priests, can free seminarians from dreading feedback as an up or down vote on their identity. Hearing a growth mindset expressed in feedback will help the seminarians trust their interlocutors more and open them to feedback in the future. A virtuous cycle starts: Giving feedback well leads to receiving feedback well. Receiving feedback well leads to seeking more feedback. A growth mindset allows the easy travel of ideas between seminarian and parishioner.

A growth mindset also communicates the truth of the Gift of God at work in the Church. Congar saw the Holy Spirit as the source of our transformation, that is, our deification: "The Holy Spirit, who is the term of the communication of the divine life

[6] Huston, *Let's Talk*, 57.

[7] Ibid.

intra Deum, is the principle of this communication of God outside himself and beyond himself."[8] The life of God interpenetrates the Persons of the Trinity because of the Holy Spirit. The baptized participate in this same life of God by the Spirit. Because we are not God by nature, however, we must grow into the divine life. The life of discipleship does not end at baptism. We habituate ourselves to the Gift of God, thereby developing the *sensus fidei* as we live and act within the Spirit shared with us by the Son which unites us to the Father. As Congar points out, God gives himself through the gifts of covenant and grace that enable us to reach him in a very real way.[9] We grow into union with God. The life of the Church, especially her preaching, ought to encourage this growth. The preachers of the Church need help developing a growth mindset about themselves, especially those called to ordained ministry.

However, parishioners face a unique challenge in communicating that growth mindset. Unlike seminary formators who live and work with candidates for ordination in the common life of the seminary, parishioners see seminarians only on occasion. Even then, parishioners and seminarians interact in ministerial settings like the liturgy or sacramental preparation classes, or in large public settings like coffee in the parish hall after Mass. They have limited time to encounter a seminarian and learn his potential to grow. In the absence of that encounter, a parishioner can default to one of two fixed mindsets about a seminarian. On the one hand, the seminarian's youth, enthusiasm, and best-foot-forward stance at the parish encourages a positive fixed mindset in a faithful Catholic: "Ordain him now!" The seminarian does not need to grow or change to be a

[8] Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:150.

[9] See ibid.

wonderful priest. Any feedback given from this mindset is unlikely to include any critiques that prompt a seminarian to change and grow. On the other hand, a lay Catholic's strongly held concern for the future of the Church, informed by an awareness of a shortage of priests, may prompt a negative fixed mindset: "I guess he'll do." Any flaws or shortcomings in the seminarian are overlooked in favor of the greater good of having new priests. A giver of feedback with such a mindset will be hesitant to challenge the seminarian to grow, lest a man be discouraged from getting ordained. As a result of a fixed mindset, whether positive or negative, communication between formation and vocation breaks down.

Moving Toward a Growth Mindset

A fixed mindset puts barriers in the way of easy travel and communication. How, then, can seminarians and those who form them get to a growth mindset? Huston, Stone, and Heen argue that properly understanding the various types of feedback is essential to developing that mindset. Stone and Heen identify three kinds of feedback: appreciation, coaching, and evaluation. They stress the positive affective impact of appreciation: "Being seen, feeling understood by others, matters deeply…. Appreciation motivates us—it gives us a bounce in our step and the energy to redouble our efforts."[10] Appreciation acknowledges the effort put forward by a person, regardless of the result.

Appreciation lays the foundation for growth. The second type of feedback, coaching, builds on that foundation. Stone and Heen see a didactic purpose to coaching: "Coaching is aimed at trying to help someone learn, grow, or change."[11] Most formation

[10] Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 31-2.

[11] Ibid., 32.

within a seminary program happens through coaching. The Church receives men who have felt a call to ministry that has arisen out of their experience in their local faith community. The Church then attempts to form men according to the model of Jesus Christ who is High Priest, Servant, and Teacher. All candidates for ordination will need coaching in one or more of the aspects of the priestly vocation.

Coaching can be hard to hear, however. The message "You can do this better" often comes mixed with the message "You are doing this poorly." In this mixed message we hear the third type of feedback: evaluation. Stone and Heen define this kind of feedback as essentially comparative: "Evaluations are always in some respect comparisons, implicitly or explicitly, against others or against a particular set of standards…. Evaluations align expectations, clarify consequences, and inform decision making."[12] Many forms of evaluation present necessary information for building our growth mentality. A seminarian's GPA, for instance, serves as a spur for academic excellence. As another example, at Mundelein Seminary, the rector asks students and faculty to evaluate whether a student should advance to the next year of formation. A student can be recommended for advancement, recommended with reservation, or not recommended. These evaluations provide important assessments for bishops eager to know how well their candidates for priestly ministry are integrating their formation.

Evaluation, however, can be packaged with judgments that go beyond the assessment itself.[13] An internship supervisor might say, "Not only did the seminarian's new Bible study at the parish have zero participants, but he was also foolish to think it

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Cf. Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 33.

would be as popular as he thought and therefore, he shows an inability to know the needs of the parish." The judgment of the seminarian's foolishness and pastoral ignorance go beyond the assessment of the Bible study and into characteristics of the man himself. This communicates the supervisor's fixed mindset. This could discourage the seminarian from attempting pastoral innovations in the future. He may come to dread any future feedback from this supervisor. Stone and Heen point to this dynamic as the root of our fear of feedback: "And it is the bullwhip of negative judgment—from ourselves or others—that produces much of our anxiety around feedback."[14] Input from myriad sources—formation advisors, teaching parish supervisors, professors, staff, and even peers—inundates a seminarian's life. When taken in a fixed mindset, this amount of feedback can be overwhelming. This anxiety extends not only to those receiving feedback, but to those giving it as well. We know how small we felt when another person judged us as coming up short, so we avoid doing the same. Evaluation can seem to do more harm than good.

Using Types of Feedback

Moving toward a growth mindset, then, will involve properly harnessing the various types of feedback. For that to happen, both giver and receiver need to be clear on what kind of feedback is being given and sought. Huston recommends explicitly laying out the three options of appreciation, coaching, and evaluation for the receiver to pick from so that the receiver "feels permission to pick the one they want most."[15] Giving coaching feedback when a person expects appreciation will result in frustration on both

[14] Ibid.

[15] Huston, *Let's Talk*, 35.

sides of the conversation. Knowing what to expect and giving what is expected makes feedback easier to hear and easier to express.

Using the Affective Feedback model well, therefore, requires knowing the distinct kinds of feedback. Prior to using the model for the first time, a workshop presentation explained to all participants the differences between appreciation, coaching, and evaluation.[16] Also, the rubric for Affective Feedback manages the expectations of seminarian and parishioner by providing a clear outline for the conversation. The rubric carefully delineates each step of the discussion so that parishioners know how to frame their comments and seminarians know what to expect. Operating from a shared outline encourages all participants to trust each other as they use the Affective Feedback bridge.

What strengthens that mutual trust fastest is appreciation. When beginning a feedback relationship, Huston argues to start with appreciation, even if some coaching or evaluation may be warranted. "By focusing on what you appreciate and by recognizing the other person's strengths, you build your relationship. That will make it easier for [the other person] to hear your coaching and evaluation down the road."[17] Constructive criticism goes farther when appreciation acknowledges the good foundation present in the feedback receiver.

This starting point in appreciation benefits both seminarians and parishioners. Seminarians know that much is expected of them as they prepare for ordained ministry, even at times holding themselves to higher standards than those of the Church. Starting with appreciation validates the effort and work they have put into their formation. They

[16] See Appendix F.

[17] Ibid.

are then more likely to apply themselves to areas of needed growth in their lives and ministry. Parishioners, on the other hand, prove themselves allies of the seminarian by their encouragement and support. As those who enjoy the Gift of God and membership in the formative community of the Church, parishioners contribute to a seminarian's homiletic formation by starting Affective Feedback with their appreciation.

How can parishioners move forward from this starting point? What is the best way to handle constructive criticism like coaching? If we look to the business world for a model, Huston envisions managers siding with their employees rather than with the problem at hand. "If the employee feels you're siding with them, if you're looking at the problem together, curious about when, why, and how it happens, then the employee is going to be much more receptive to your feedback."[18] Such a move builds upon the foundation of trust laid by appreciation. The seminarian hears the formator or parishioner acknowledge his efforts and the hard work he puts into his formation. Coaching then becomes a matter of common curiosity, standing shoulder-to-shoulder looking at the same obstacle, rather than standing face-to-face as if the feedback giver stood in the way of the seminarian's goal of ordination.

Huston recommends that a manager be clear about an employee's goals to stand shoulder-to-shoulder looking at the same problem. "Once you know the goals they hold dear, you can help them see how something they're doing or not doing is standing in their way."[19] Both sides of the feedback conversation need to be on the same page regarding the task at hand. Managers and employees can come to agreement about goals because

[18] Ibid., 60-1.

[19] Ibid., 65.

they live within the same circumscribed world of their common enterprise. They are both driven by the bottom line of the company.

What can similarly unite parishioners and seminarians in judging the goals of preaching? Here, seemingly, the language of "goals" opens a can of worms. Each of the listeners and preachers comes to the preaching task with different goals, making standing shoulder-to-shoulder impossible as everyone sets off in their own direction. Two elements of our Affective Feedback bridge provide a united direction for conversation. First, the pillar of Ignatian affective discernment describes the world that unites parishioners and seminarians. All are engaged, says Ignatius, in purging their sins, progressing from good to better in service to God, and seeking peace in God rather than created things.[20] In other words, parishioners and seminarians agree on the bottom line of discipleship. The design of Affective Feedback, therefore, encourages all participants to act as disciples during the feedback conversation. The model directs preacher and listener to discover the presence of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and in the hearts of everyone in the room.

Second, the suspension cables of listener-oriented preaching allow the preacher to bend in response to the listener. The concerns and goals of the listener occupy the mind of the homilist as he prepares to preach. The preacher attempts to get on the same page as the listener from the outset of the homiletic process. The Affective Feedback model, therefore, asks the preacher to share the experience of writing the homily to show this concern for the listener. The model also encourages the seminarian to exercise flexibility by asking follow-up questions after parishioners share their feedback. Both before and

[20] Cf. Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises," 201-2.

after the preaching, Affective Feedback seeks to unite the participants through listener-oriented preaching.

Giving Feedback in a Growth Mindset

To achieve that unity, Affective Feedback expects flexibility in the listener as well as the preacher. When assessing goals and offering an outsider's perspective on progress, the feedback giver needs to recognize his or her own framing of that feedback. Stone and Heen cite a study by Dweck that reveals how fifth graders praised for their character—"Wow, you're really smart!"—were less likely to try harder puzzles after finishing an easy one. Children praised for their effort—"Wow, you worked hard at that puzzle!"—opted for the challenge.[21] Dweck noted that half the children in the study showed a fixed mindset about themselves. Yet when these children were praised for their effort, they opted for a new challenge as readily as their growth mindset peers. Stone and Heen point out that framing the feedback this way prompted a shift in behavior, away from a fixed mindset: "by focusing on a trait that emphasized the *learning process*, these kids were just as willing to take risks and take on a challenge."[22]

There is a lesson here for seminary formation. Even seminarians who see their priestly identity as already fully formed can be prodded into a growth mindset through praise of effort rather than of character. Likewise, seminarians unsure of their worthiness of ordination can be coaxed out of their anxiety if formators and parishioners can positively identify those places where effort has resulted in progress toward set goals. To promote a growth mindset, appreciation should be given for effort rather than for

[21] See Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback,* 195.

[22] Ibid, emphasis original.

character. Parishioners can be of great value here. In limited but important ways, the seminarian exercises ministry among and on behalf of parishioners. They see the fruits of his efforts directly, whereas formators back at the seminary will only receive reports from supervisors. Huston says appreciation is best when it is immediate: "People will feel more noticed, and if there's something you want them to repeat or to change, it will still be fresh in their memory."[23] The design of Affective Feedback leans into the importance of immediacy for feedback. Preachers and listeners gather as soon as possible after the preaching for the feedback session. Also, the sharing of feedback begins with appreciation by the parishioners. They are the first and best judges of the effort a seminarian has put into his preaching. Their feedback of appreciation can do the most to encourage a seminarian's growth mindset.

Receiving Feedback in a Growth Mindset

What can the seminarian do to encourage his own growth mindset? Stone and Heen advise making a fundamental assumption about all feedback: What can be learned from this? Stone and Heen admit, "As feedback receivers, we are always sorting feedback into coaching and evaluation bins."[24] In other words, a receiver processes critical feedback as either a suggestion to improve or a comparison to an exterior standard. The problem is how those comparisons more easily trigger a threatened sense of identity: We have been measured and found wanting.

Coaching, on the other hand, can be easier to accept. Stone and Heen point out the lower risk to identity coaching presents: "You can learn without enduring the arduous

[23] Huston, *Let's Talk*, 36.

[24] Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 197-98.

task of reevaluating who you are."[25] Therefore, hearing critical feedback as coaching better maintains a growth mindset. To follow the sorting bin metaphor above, receivers should sort feedback toward the coaching bin. Stone and Heen note that such a practice reveals a person's tendencies toward the reception of feedback: "Not uncommonly people have this insight: *Wow, I oversort toward evaluation way more than I realized.*"[26] The design of Affective Feedback encourages preachers to sort feedback toward coaching by focusing the conversation on the preaching act itself, rather than comparing it to an outside standard. As when Jethro spoke to Moses, focusing on the task at hand encourages the shoulder-to-shoulder stance of coaching.

Stone and Heen suggest another paradigm shift necessary for a receiver's growth mindset: "Give up simple identity labels and cultivate complexity."[27] Identity, as the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, can serve to ground our values and priorities amid the complexity of life. Stone and Heen point out, however, that feedback challenging our simple identity labels—loving wife, good son, holy seminarian—can produce "all-or-nothing" judgments about ourselves. "That works fine with we're 'all.' But when we get feedback that we are *not* all, we hear it as feedback that we are *nothing*…. We've set ourselves up with identity stories that operate like a light switch, and even minor feedback can flip that switch."[28] A seminarian with an all-or-nothing identity about his vocation to the priesthood can easily flip between two poor responses

[25] Ibid., 198.

[26] Ibid., 199, emphasis original.

[27] Ibid., 185.

[28] Ibid., 186, emphasis original.

to feedback: "Either we can exaggerate the feedback, or we can deny it."[29] Either the seminarian catastrophizes the feedback such that he never had a call to the priesthood in the first place, or he simply rejects the feedback as completely wrong.

The way out of this false dichotomy, according to Stone and Heen, is to embrace identity nuance. To do this, Stone and Heen argue a person needs to accept three things: "You will make mistakes, you have complex intentions, and you have contributed to the problem."[30] In discerning a call to the priesthood and in formation for that ministry, seminarians should be encouraged to accept these three attitudes that Stone and Heen outline as essential to receiving feedback well. First, creating a space in the formation process that allows for mistakes means that seminarians can be disabused of the notion that any small error will sink their chances at ordination. Encouraging a seminarian to preach within parish ministry, as Affective Feedback does, allows him to step outside the walled garden of seminary. Mistakes may be more common in the "real world" of the parish, but they will be even more instructive for that reason.

Second, encouraging a seminarian's growth in self-awareness allows him to admit to the complexity of his intentions. For example, he desires the priestly life because of his love for the Lord Jesus, but perhaps he also seeks praise and recognition from others. A formator can encourage the exploration of these intentions to help the seminarian clarify his desire to serve. Both human and heavenly motives are at play in our intentions.

Finally, when presented with a moment of missing the mark, an acceptance of imperfection allows for humility that makes the seminarian more receptive to coaching.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 189.

The seminarian sets himself up for this humility by sorting all feedback toward coaching in the first place. He already assumes a growth mindset by constantly asking what more he can learn about himself and his vocation. He can then bring up those moments of imperfection with his formator rather than waiting for the formator to pounce. Similarly, owning his mistakes allows a seminarian to engage in meaningful dialogue with parishioners. Accepting his contribution to a mistake or error allows him to take ownership of his formation and work with anyone to strengthen his vocation. Post-feedback interview questions in the ministerial intervention provide space for the exploration of the intentions behind the seminarian's preaching and a forum to admit mistakes within a growth mindset.[31]

The Growth Mindset in Action: Effective Feedback Conversations

A growth mindset is only the beginning. Effective feedback conversations do not magically happen because both parties come in with the right mindset. Feedback can remain hard to hear and hard to give. Both givers and receivers need to master the skills of relational listening: listening to understand the other person rather than simply listening to know what is being said. Discernment unlocks the door to effective feedback.

Listening for Impact Versus Intentions in Feedback Conversations

Listening to feedback remains a challenge even for those with a growth mindset. Feedback reveals the impact our behavior has on others, and that impact can easily be the opposite of what we intended. Stone and Heen, framing their insights in "I-you" language, rightly say that when I consider my interactions with you, I judge it primarily on my intentions. "I have good intentions—I'm trying to help, to guide, even to coach. I

[31] For the complete list of interview questions, please consult Appendix K.

assume my good intentions lead to good impacts."[32] I think I do well because I have good intentions. "But for those around us, our impact drives their story [about our interactions with them]."[33] Though I intended to help and coach, "you feel bossed around and micromanaged…. Now you give me the feedback that I'm bossy and controlling, and I'm shocked and bewildered. I discard it because it doesn't match who I am."[34] Your feedback to me can only be based on my impact on you. My intentions as I understand them are invisible to you. The only clue you have to my intentions, in fact, is the impact I have had on you. If I, therefore, negatively impacted you, then you easily infer that my intentions were similarly negative.

Take the case of a seminarian preaching at a retreat for catechumens in the final days of Lent. The seminarian is aware of his intentions behind his preaching: his love for the Lord Jesus, his desire to draw the listener into loving relationship with the Lord, and his goal of moving hearts to convert away from sin and toward holiness in anticipation of the reception of baptism. Those intentions, however, are not what will determine the efficacy of the preaching. Listener-oriented preaching points out that the listener provides the seed and proves the flowering of the homily. What truly determines how well the homily achieves the preacher's intentions is the impact of the homily on the listener. If one listener walks away from the homily thinking the seminarian is holier than she will ever be, or if another thinks he can never be forgiven of the sins of his past life, the seminarian will be hard-pressed to defend his homily on his good intentions alone. Stone

[32] Ibid., 88.

[33] Ibid., 89.

[34] Ibid.

and Heen highlight the simultaneous operation of two standards of judging our actions: "We may judge ourselves by our intentions…while others judge us by our impacts."[35] In receiving feedback on this homily, the seminarian needs to listen for the impact of his preaching on the listener and put his intentions aside. Even better, the seminarian could articulate the gap between his intentions and the impact of his homily. He intended to move hearts toward holiness but recognizes that he failed in doing so. This articulation of the gap between intention and impact will help undo a negative judgment of him as holier-than-thou.

Stone and Heen also caution feedback givers to separate impacts and intentions. Because of the ease of moving from the experienced impact to a judgment on the other's character, a giver of feedback can make assumptions about the preacher's intentions. The dispirited listeners of the previous paragraph might well assume that the seminarian meant to create discouragement and conclude, "This guy will be a lousy priest." These kinds of assumptions make it harder for the receiver to effectively hear what's valuable about the feedback. The giver's errors about intentions lead to a story about fixed identity rather than growth identity.[36] Ignatian affective discernment provides a vocabulary of expressing feedback in terms of impact. Being aware of affective movements puts listeners' attention on their experience of the Gift of God at work within them. Feedback can then be more easily expressed in terms of affective impact rather than as a judgment of the intentions of the preacher. The design of Affective Feedback, therefore, frames the

[35] Ibid., 88.

[36] Cf. ibid., 89.

meat of the parishioners' contributions as "Impact Sharing" to encourage discernment by feedback givers.

Ask More, Tell Less

Discerning and seeking to understand strengthens both giving and receiving feedback. In one of her studies, Huston asked employees about their worst feedback experiences. One of the themes that emerged from that study is that "people want a chance to provide their side of the story."[37] Forty percent of her respondents said they would have felt better if they had a chance to discuss the feedback more fully with the feedback giver.[38] Huston therefore advises feedback givers to ask more and tell less. Even when appropriately differentiated between appreciation, coaching, and evaluation, people imagine feedback as a one-way street. Even the language of "givers" and "receivers" used throughout the books under discussion and in this chapter suggest that one-sided conversation. Such an image of feedback, however, leads to frustration and slower implementation of the behavioral changes needed for growth. One-sided communication encourages a face-off between two people rather than a shoulder-to-shoulder stance. A dialogical model of feedback, on the other hand, results in a positive feedback loop for the process itself: "Researchers find that if employees think you're a good listener, they also think you're better at giving feedback…. Employees who believe their managers give good feedback do more creative work."[39] A dialogical relationship improves the perceived quality of feedback and its effect.

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[37] Huston, *Let's Talk*, 17.

[38] See ibid.

[39] Ibid.

What would a dialogical relationship look like between parishioners and seminarians? As a negative example, recall the seminarian in Chapter One who said that parishioners knew nothing about formation and so could not be mentors. Perhaps the seminarian came to this conclusion because he never had the chance to ask about the feedback that parishioners offered. The feedback may have been delivered anonymously and presented in summary form by a supervisor or formator. No dialogical relationship existed between this seminarian and the parishioners he served. Huston's research suggests that the seminarian would have a different attitude if he thought parishioners truly heard his side of the story. His formation would have benefitted from having parishioners stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him, looking together at his vocation.

Parishioner and seminarian, then, need to come alongside one another. The question becomes: How can this be done within coaching? When engaged in coaching an employee, Huston advises a manager to begin the conversation by prompting the employee to name the problem from his or her own perspective. This allows manager and employee to easily agree on the problem to be faced together. If a formator or parishioner simply tells the seminarian what he did wrong and then launches into coaching, the seminarian could ignore all that coaching because he simply disagrees with the other's perspective. Huston says, "You need to offer the reassurances, next steps, and support that someone actually needs, not shoehorn them into what you think they need."[40] The use of follow-up questions allows the feedback giver to tease out the seminarian's perspective on what happened.

[40] Ibid., 140.

Take the above example of the seminarian preaching at a retreat. The adult faith formation director hears the participants complaining about the seminarian's preaching. She might approach the seminarian to talk with him about it, leading off with a question: "How do you think the preaching went?" This allows the seminarian to name his perception of the preaching, which allows the director to go on to name the negative impact she observed in the retreatants. She then might follow up with questions about why the listeners might be impacted the way they were, leading the seminarian to consider what he could do differently next time to avoid that impression.[41] This strategy avoids confrontational language that suggests fixed characteristics of the seminarian. Rather, supervisor and seminarian stand shoulder-to-shoulder considering the problem together, moving the seminarian toward a more effective implementation of the feedback.

Affective Feedback relies on this dialogical understanding of feedback for its basic structure. The model presents feedback within the framework of a conversation between seminarian and parishioner. The seminarian begins by sharing his side of the story, relating his experience of preparing and delivering the homily. This brings parishioners to a better understanding of the intentions and effort of the preacher. Starting this way, Affective Feedback primes the seminarian to receive appreciation from those who know him at a deeper level. The Impact Sharing section of the conversation, initiated by the parishioners, allows the seminarian to know the parishioners more intimately as well. Parishioners give voice to the fruits of the *sensus fidei* generated by the Gift of God during the preaching. The material dialogue of the Church finds expression through

[41] Huston provides an excellent flowchart of follow-up questions for this kind of coaching conversation; see Huston, *Let's Talk*, 145.

Affective Feedback. Parishioners thereby exercise their membership in the formative community, contributing to the preparation of candidates for priestly ordination.

Conclusion

Encouraging a growth mindset, using the different types of feedback intelligently, treating feedback as a dialogue—Huston, Stone, and Heen gleaned these principles of effective feedback from psychological research and observations of the business world. These principles, however, are not pieces of contemporary wisdom unknown to past ages. Recall the conversation between Jethro and Moses. In that feedback conversation, Jethro relies on each of the principles explored in this chapter. He communicates his growth mindset about Moses by speaking in terms of Moses's actions rather than his character. Jethro in effect says to Moses, "You are not *acting* wisely, but you could." True, there's some evaluation happening here, but Jethro does not write his son-in-law off as a fool. Instead, he comes alongside Moses to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him to look at the problem: "The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." He sets Moses up for coaching. He wants to work with Moses to render judgment for Israel more effectively. Before he starts to coach, however, he lets Moses determine the goals of this task. He did this by beginning with a question: "What sort of thing is this that you are doing for the people?" Jethro makes this feedback moment a dialogue in which Moses gives his side of the story before Jethro launches into his feedback. Because Jethro and Moses are on the same page regarding Moses's goals—to settle matters between the Israelites and to make known to them God's decisions—Moses listens more attentively to Jethro's advice.

Considering all this, perhaps we should not wonder at Moses following Jethro's coaching. Rather, we can see that effective feedback conversations do not require

miracles. What they require is easily within reach, not only for the business world, but for the work of formation as well. Parishioners can encourage seminarians to adopt a growth mindset. Seminarians can sort feedback toward coaching. Figure 4.1, below, shows how this chapter's interdisciplinary framework connects formation and vocation. The two-way Affective Feedback bridge stands open.

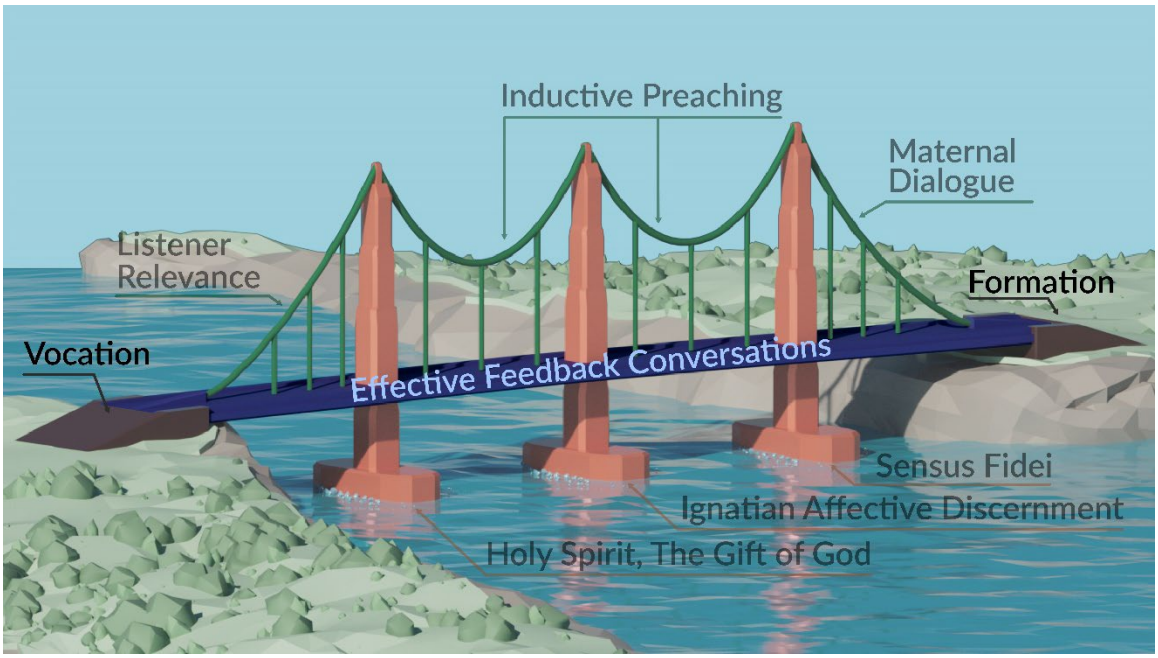

Figure 4.1. Feedback Conversation Deck of the Affective Feedback Bridge (Credit: Alex Austin).

Chapter Five

Ministerial Intervention

Unless the LORD build the house,
they labor in vain who build.
Unless the LORD guard the city,
in vain does the guard keep watch.
It is vain for you to rise early
and put off your rest at night,
To eat bread earned by hard toil—
all this God gives to his beloved in sleep.

Psalm 127:1b-2

Introduction

The Psalmist reminds all builders that the first architect of any human endeavor is the Lord God. Turning from the theoretical frameworks of the previous chapters to their practical application in Affective Feedback, the ministerial intervention described in this chapter, we do well to heed that call to humility. Closing the distance between formation and vocation remains first a work of God. The metaphorical bridge used throughout this thesis finds firm foundation in the primacy of God's grace. Figure 5.1, below, presents that bridge with all its supporting frameworks. The Gift of God, the *sensus fidei*, Ignatian affective discernment—the theological pillars of our bridge assume God's action prior to human efforts. That same humility gives strength to the homiletic suspension cables of our bridge. Listener-oriented communication allows a flexible relationship between preacher and listener, preventing the preacher from taking the weight of the entire homiletic event on his or her shoulders. Finally, communication theory from the business world provides a stable deck to allow traffic to flow from one side to another. The

principles of Huston, Stone, and Heen also depend upon humility in crafting effective feedback conversations, encouraging dialogue rather than one-way pronouncements.

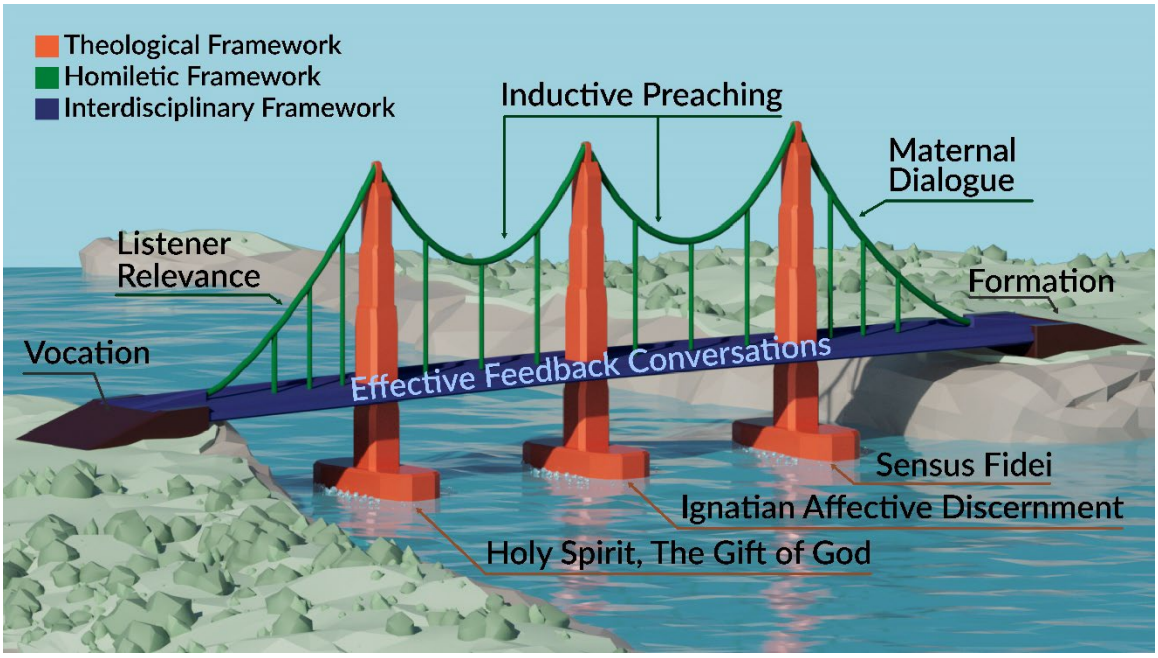

Figure 5.1. The Affective Feedback Bridge and Its Supporting Frameworks (Credit: Alex Austin).

Such is the bridge that closes the distance between formation and vocation. This bridge of Affective Feedback, however, has been only a blueprint so far. Building the bridge in the reality of parish ministry was the goal of this thesis project. Having seen the plans for the bridge in previous chapters, in this chapter we consider the site of its construction and how the bridge will take shape. The institutional context of Mundelein Seminary provides the landscape of our construction site. The context of the participants—seminarian and parishioner—informs what kind of traffic will cross this bridge. The content, structure, and evaluation of the ministerial intervention will give us the materials needed to construct the bridge between formation and vocation. Finally, the communication and timeline of the project shows how the various stakeholders and participants of the project collaborated to build on the foundation laid by the Gift of God.

Institutional Context

Formation for the Catholic priesthood requires many disciplines working in harmony. The harmony of three institutional aspects of the formation program of Mundelein Seminary are of particular importance for testing Affective Feedback: Homiletics, the Pastoral Internship, and the Tolton Teaching Parish Program.

Homiletics at Mundelein Seminary

The Department of Biblical Studies and Homiletics offers two required courses in homiletics as part of the curriculum for the Master of Divinity degree. As mentioned in Chapter One, the first course—Homiletics I—introduces students to homiletics through a study of the principles of the interpretation of Scripture, the core elements of rhetoric, and a survey of the history of preaching in Western Christianity. Most of the participants in this ministerial intervention took Homiletics I in the spring of their first year of theology studies. Some, however, transferred to Mundelein Seminary from other institutions without such an introductory course before they began pastoral internship. This will be discussed in more detail below under Participant Context.

The second course—Homiletics II—happens in the school year following the full-time internship. Students spend the first month of the course discussing the theology of preaching, exegesis of Scripture and congregation, and homiletic method. The preaching practicum, a weekly rhythm of writing and delivering homilies, then makes up most of the semester. Students deliver six homilies meant to be preached at a Sunday Mass, then deliver two homilies each for funeral and wedding scenarios. The participants in this ministerial intervention had not yet taken Homiletics II but will do so in the spring of their third year of theology studies.

Pastoral Internship

The Pastoral Internship program at Mundelein Seminary began in the 1983/1984 school year. Although it has undergone several changes, the curriculum review of 2022/2023 affects this project's intervention directly. The three-session workshop that I led formerly to prepare the interns for preaching—covering the basics of congregational analysis, homiletic method, and delivery—is no longer offered. To re-capture class time lost due to the implementation of the sixth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (hereafter PPF), Mundelein Seminary instituted a "J-term," that is, a ten-day period in January for intensive course work.[1] Due to this academic load, students going on internship in 2023 did not have the same preparatory workshops as past interns did. Therefore, I gave my homiletics workshop to my seminarian volunteers as supplementary preparation for internship and made these sessions available to any other interns who expressed interest.

The 2023 Pastoral Internship Handbook lists seven areas the program focuses on to prepare the seminarian for parochial ministry:

- prayer and interiority
- connection with the diocese
- connection with the presbyterate
- spiritual and religious leadership
- collaboration
- catholicity
- lifelong learning

[1] The *Program of Priestly Formation*, as an implementation of the *Ratio fundamentalis*, mandated a vocational synthesis stage as the final stage of priestly formation. Deacons preparing for ordination to the priesthood spend six months prior to ordination ministering in a parish. Mundelein Seminary, following one of the options presented in the PPF, completes a seminarian's course of studies after seven academic semesters, with graduation in December. This leaves the following spring available for candidates for the priesthood to spend in the vocational synthesis stage in the parish. Mundelein Seminary implemented the J-term to ensure that a seminarian's formation would be complete in seven semesters. See *Program of Priestly Formation,* 137-48.

How the seminarian will pursue these goals comes out of a collaborative process. The seminarian and the supervising pastor of the internship parish craft a learning agreement together that lists the seminarian's ministerial responsibilities while at the parish. The rubrics for the learning agreement allow for the seminarian's involvement in any area of parish ministry. The seminarian's personal goals in conjunction with the needs and opportunities of the parish serve as the guiding lights for the learning agreement. Weekly meetings between the intern and supervising pastor provide an accountability structure for following the agreement. The midterm and final evaluations, completed by both the intern and the supervising pastor, rely on this learning agreement to judge the intern's experience at the parish.

Other members of the parish also evaluate the intern. Staff members and parishioners provide a summary of their involvement with the seminarian at the conclusion of the internship. They describe the intern's ministerial strengths and areas of needed growth. These evaluations ask the parishioner and staff member to imagine the seminarian as their associate pastor, specifically requiring an affective response: "How would you feel if he were the associate pastor of your parish?" The evaluation thus provides space for a holistic response to the seminarian's presence that goes beyond the evaluation of tasks.

This collaborative and affectively sensitive process provides an excellent context for Affective Feedback. Interns and supervisors already expect the participation of parish staff and parishioners in the work of formation during the internship. While Affective Feedback represents an intervention above and beyond the usual evaluative instruments, the model is of a piece with the program's vision for the seminarian's evaluation.

The Pastoral Internship Program has been an essential part of the pastoral formation of seminarians at Mundelein Seminary for the last forty years. The program has maintained a sustained pedagogical focus on preparing men for parish ministry. Parishioners form strong bonds with their seminarian intern, often coming to his ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood to show their support for his vocation. Seminarians look forward to their time in the parish and return for their final years of formation oriented toward the parish as the fulfillment of their priestly vocation.

Tolton Teaching Parish Program

The Tolton Teaching Parish Program (hereafter TTPP) places seminarians in long-term parish assignments to become immersed in the pastoral needs of local communities. The program aims to foster a seminarian's growth as a shepherd and teacher of the people of God. The program thus serves as a place for seminarians to integrate all four dimensions of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Parishioners serve as part of the formative community of the Church by nurturing the human qualities, pastoral sensitivities, and practical skills of seminarians. The program began in the 2017/2018 school year and was intended as an expansion of the seminary's pastoral formation program. The TTPP did not replace the Pastoral Internship or other full-time pastoral immersions as required by various dioceses.

The parishes that partner with the seminary in the TTPP are referred to as Teaching Parishes. Seminarians begin their long-term assignments in these Teaching Parishes in either their first year of theology studies or their second year of pre-theology studies. Once assigned, the TTPP expects a seminarian to remain at that same assignment for the remainder of his years at Mundelein. Through weekly service in a stable

assignment, the seminarian builds important and life-giving ministerial relationships. Seminarians for the Archdiocese of Chicago, moreover, serve their Pastoral Internship at their Teaching Parish; seminarians of other nearby dioceses such as Joliet do the same.

The seminarian creates a learning agreement with the pastor of the Teaching Parish that records the student's concrete ministry involvement as well as the formation goals he hopes to achieve by participation in parish ministry. The 2022/2023 TTPP Handbook provides three broad categories of learning objectives organized by the traditional *triplex munera* of Jesus: teaching, sanctifying, and governing. Fourth-year students, as transitional deacons, are presented with different learning objectives aimed at configuration to Christ as Servant, Shepherd, Priest, and Head. The student's learning agreement, formed collaboratively with the pastor and parishioners, serves as the touchstone for his ministry at the parish for the academic year.

The pastor of each Teaching Parish recruits active parish members to be on a Teaching Parish Committee which will assist in mentoring the seminarian. Mundelein Seminary encourages Teaching Parishes to have committees of five to ten members. These members discern their continued participation at the end of each academic year. The parishioners should meet twice a semester with the seminarians assigned to the parish. These meetings are not mere updates on the seminarians' ministry. The TTPP presents this group as part of a seminarian's formation, charged with helping the seminarian explore his ministerial encounters and offering mentoring in a climate of open dialogue. The committee members receive a copy of the student's learning agreement. This makes them partners with the pastor and the seminary faculty in holding the seminarian accountable to the goals he has set for himself. The TTPP Handbook provides

detailed examples of mentoring questions parishioners can ask of seminarians during their meetings. The Handbook points out the open-ended nature of these questions which creates a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship between seminarian and parishioner. This atmosphere engenders feedback conversations marked by appreciation and coaching rather than an emphasis on evaluation.

The Handbook makes this separation of mentoring from evaluation explicit. Seminarians receive evaluations from their pastors only. The TTPP office at the seminary keeps a record of these evaluations. The Handbook mandates that the pastor give this evaluation in full to the seminarian in the form of feedback and discussion. The TTPP encourages a growth mindset even during the evaluative moment itself.

The TTPP fosters a formative relationship between seminarians and their Teaching Parish committees. This program sets up the seminarian participants in this thesis project for a similar relationship with their parishioner feedback groups. Parishioners with experience in the TTPP have practiced the kind of dialogical feedback models laid out in Chapter Four of this thesis. Affective Feedback benefits from the groundwork laid by the TTPP in both the seminarian and the parishioner.

The Tolton Teaching Parish Program remains in its early stages of implementation in the pastoral formation program of Mundelein Seminary. However, the program represents a significant step toward bridging the distance between formation and vocation. The active involvement of parishioners in the TTPP provides a rich manifestation of the entire Church as a formative community for her priests.

Participant Context

Mundelein Seminarians

During the timeline of this project in the 2022/2023 academic year, 117 seminarians from twenty-seven dioceses across the United States were in formation at Mundelein Seminary. The student population was predominantly Caucasian—eighty-four students—with a strong Hispanic population of eighteen students. African and Asian students studying for dioceses in the United States numbered thirteen. There were also two seminarians of Indian background preparing for ministry in the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago, which has jurisdiction over Syro-Malabar Catholics in the entire United States. Most of the American students came from the dioceses of Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan. The seminary also hosted men from San Jose, Atlanta, and Fairbanks. The student body thus represents a broad cross section of American society.

The Class of 2025 had thirteen students, six of whom volunteered to participate. In the following material and in Chapter Six, I refer to the participants by pseudonym: Ambrose, Bernardine, Charles, Dominic, Edmund, and Fulton. These volunteers were from dioceses located in close geographic proximity to Mundelein Seminary: the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Archdiocese of Dubuque, the Diocese of Joliet-in-Illinois, the Diocese of Peoria, and the Diocese of Rockford. These students were approached as candidates for the thesis project because of the similarities between their TTPP assignments and eventual pastoral internship placements. For TTPP, these seminarians were placed in large and active parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago or neighboring

dioceses in Illinois. Their internship assignments would similarly be large and active parishes in the Midwest region of the United States.

Of the volunteers, four were Caucasian, one was Hispanic, and one Asian. All the participants are cradle Catholics. Ambrose, Edmund, and Fulton earned an undergraduate degree before beginning philosophy studies and seminary formation. Bernardine, Charles, and Dominic, on the other hand, participated in college seminary formation, earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy before arriving at Mundelein Seminary. The group ranged in age from 23 to 31, with a median age of 24.

Homiletically, not all the seminarian participants had the same background. Bernardine, Charles, and Edmund transferred to Mundelein Seminary from another seminary program in the fall of 2022. Their previous year of theology studies had not included any instruction in homiletics. Ambrose, Dominic, and Fulton, on the other hand, had taken Homiletics I in the fall of 2021. All six participants attended workshops in homiletics offered in January 2023 in preparation for their pastoral internship experience. Figure 5.2, below, offers a snapshot of this data.

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Undergraduate Degree	Years in Seminary Formation (as of 2023)	Completed Introductory Homiletics Course?
Ambrose	27	Hispanic	Molecular Biology	4	Yes
Bernardine	23	Caucasian	Philosophy	5	No
Charles	23	Caucasian	Philosophy	6	No
Dominic	24	Caucasian	Philosophy	6	Yes
Edmund	26	Caucasian	Architecture	4	No
Fulton	31	Asian	Religious Studies	4	Yes

Figure 5.2. Summary of Seminarian Participant Data.

Parishioners

I asked the interns' supervising pastors to follow the recommendation of the Pastoral Internship Handbook and put together a committee of parishioners who would

serve in a capacity like the TTPP parish committee. The parishioners should be active in the parish and trusted to engage with the formation of a seminarian with charity. The goal here was coaching and appreciation in feedback, not necessarily evaluation. These parishioners were surveyed anonymously after each feedback session to capture their assessment of the conversation. Overall, twenty-nine parishioners from five parishes participated. The committees ranged in size from four to eight members, with the median size being five. Chapter Six presents more demographic information about the parishioner participants.

Structure, Content, and Evaluation of the Ministerial Intervention

Parishioner feedback on seminarian preaching can close the distance between vocation and formation. The ministerial intervention of this thesis project, therefore, tested a model of feedback designed for use in the parish, requiring no previous expertise to apply it to seminarian preaching formation. Following the tradition of Ignatian spirituality and the discernment of affective movements, I have named this intervention "Affective Feedback."

Basic Format of the Intervention

The ministerial intervention followed a basic pattern: preaching, feedback, and evaluation. The seminarian first preached within the parish context. This preaching could be in any setting and in whatever capacity permitted by the pastor. Participants most often preached at prayer services specially organized for this ministerial intervention, in which the seminarian acted as both presider and preacher in a liturgy of the Word. Seminarians also preached during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament or at Morning Prayer during the Easter Triduum. One seminarian was permitted to preach during the

daily Mass at his internship parish. What mattered more than the setting of the preaching was that parishioners were able to hear the proclamation of the Word. This happened in person most often, but at times, the preaching was recorded and distributed to parishioners later.

Following the seminarian's preaching and the parishioners' reception of it, the seminarian and the parishioners gathered for a feedback session. A parishioner facilitated the feedback conversation. Two rubrics for the feedback session were used: a control rubric and the Affective Feedback rubric, both of which will be explained below.

After the session, I engaged in separate modes of evaluation of the feedback conversation. First, I had one-on-one interviews with the seminarians to capture their reactions to what went well and what went poorly in the session with parishioners. I had these conversations with each seminarian after each of his preaching opportunities in the ministerial intervention. Second, I provided anonymous questionnaires to the parishioners who participated in the feedback session. The questionnaire asked similar questions to those put to the seminarian but with an emphasis on the parishioner's experience as a listener of homilies. The findings from seminarian interviews and parishioner surveys will be summarized and analyzed in Chapter Six.

Preaching, feedback, evaluation—these constitute the basic pattern of the ministerial intervention. I asked seminarians and parishioners to complete this pattern three times during the intern's assignment from January 28, 2023, to May 7, 2023, with Figure 5.3, below, illustrating the process.

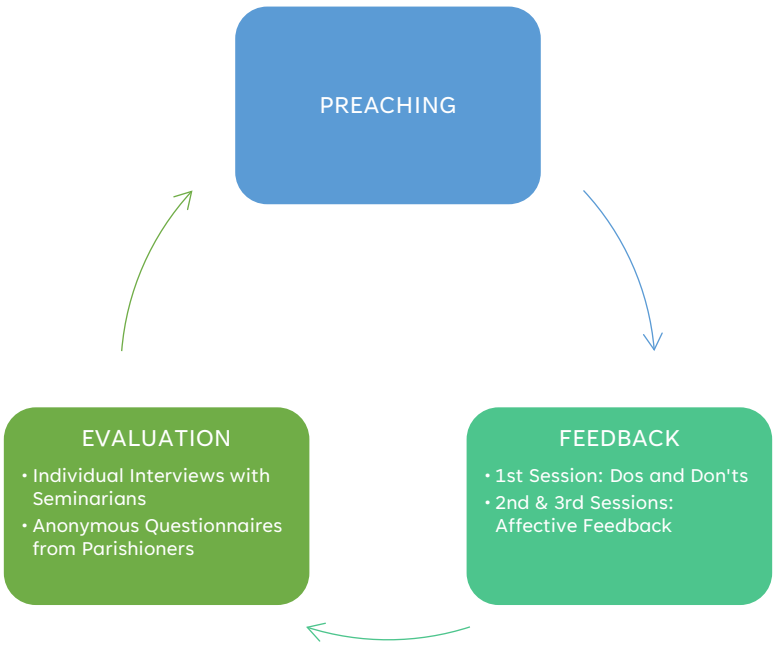

Figure 5.3. Basic Cycle of Ministerial Intervention.

Rubrics for Feedback Sessions

Evaluating the Affective Feedback model required a basis for comparison. Therefore, the first feedback session used a rubric other than Affective Feedback. Each seminarian worked with parishioners in his Teaching Parish or internship assignment to develop a rubric called "The Dos and Don'ts of Preaching."[2] Seminarians and parishioners reflected on better and worse examples of preaching they had heard. Based on those reflections, the group would develop a list of five to seven elements that should be in every homily—the Dos of Preaching. Likewise, the group drew up a list of five to seven elements that should not be in any homily—the Don'ts of Preaching. These two lists served as the rubric and guidance for the first feedback session parishioners would

[2] The name and method of development for this feedback rubric was suggested by Sr. Sara Fairbanks, O.P.

have with a seminarian who preached at his internship assignment.[3] This exercise established two foundations. First, it provided a baseline of homiletic evaluation against which the Affective Feedback model could be compared. Second, the rubric revealed the foundational preaching goals of a local parish community.

After the first pattern of preaching, feedback, and evaluation, I introduced the Affective Feedback model to the seminarians and parishioners. To do so, I organized two workshops on the campus of Mundelein Seminary, with the option for remote participation or asynchronous viewing.[4] The first workshop's goal was to introduce Ignatian affective discernment: its history, vocabulary, and method. The second workshop applied the principles of Ignatian affective discernment to the act of listening to homilies. The goal of these workshops was to remove as many potential barriers to feedback communication as possible by grounding all participants in the vocabulary and method of Ignatian spirituality. In the second workshop especially, I emphasized the benefit of this method to listeners, framing the application of Ignatian affective discernment as a kind of active listening that deepens the reception of the homily. After the second workshop, I gave the seminarian participants two rubrics for the Affective Feedback model: one rubric for seminarians and another for parishioners. I asked the seminarians to distribute the parishioner rubrics to their feedback groups for use at their next two sessions. The second two patterns of preaching, feedback, and evaluation tested the Affective Feedback model.

[3] For the full instructions given to seminarians and parishioners for this exercise, please consult Appendix C.

[4] Outlines of these presentations can be found in Appendices E and F.

Affective Feedback Model

The Affective Feedback model is the concrete application of the theoretical bridge discussed in Chapters Two through Four. The model has four main parts: (1) an opening prayer, (2) a time for each individual to review the affective impact the preaching made, (3) a facilitated feedback conversation, and (4) a closing prayer. The rubrics as provided to the project's participants can be found in Appendices G and H. The comments on the content and process of the model that follow demonstrate how each part of the model serves to bridge the distance between seminarian formation and parish ministry vocation.

1. Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit

   As established in Chapter Two, the Holy Spirit is the Gift of God, that is, God existing outside himself. Knowing the Holy Spirit as Gift makes it easier to receive the gift fellow Christians are to each other more readily. The opening prayer to the Holy Spirit opens the feedback conversation to the unending dynamic of self-gift that defines the inner life of the Trinity, a dynamic that the Father shares with the Church by the Gift given through the Son. The prayer also opens all the participants of the feedback conversation – seminarian and parishioner – to the ecclesial dynamic of the *sensus fidei fidelium*. Bound together by the common Gift, the participants ask the Holy Spirit to move their conversation toward unity in the Word proclaimed in our midst.

2. Review of Homily[5]

Participants take time to review their experience of the preaching. Following upon the experience of the communal *sensus fidei fidelium* in the opening prayer, this time of review begins a participant's exercise of the individual *sensus fidei fidelis* which seeks the voice of the Good Shepherd in all things. The principles of Ignatian affective discernment guide the participant through three reflection questions.

a. *What happened to me during the homily? How did it go with me?*

This question primes the spiritual awareness of the participant. He or she examines interior affective movements to discover among them what pertains to the life of faith, hope, and charity. In a word, the participant must "be aware." The outline provided to the participants prompts them to reflect on thoughts (insights, enlightenment, new clarity around the life of faith), feelings (joy, strength, peace; sadness, discomfort, confusion), and desires (new plans, confirmation of hope, motivation to act). The rubric concludes this section by prompting reflection on any knowledge, consolation, desolation, or any greater spiritual feeling arising from the preaching event.

b. *What struck me most forcefully? What stands out?*

[5] The Affective Feedback model uses the term "homily" to refer to the preaching act under consideration. The use of the term "preaching" in the rubric risked putting too much focus on the activity of the preacher and obscuring the affective response of the listener as part of the preaching event. The term "homily," it is hoped, better preserves the sense of the total event that embraces both preacher and listener.

Having gathered his or her affective movements, the rubric focuses the participant on the strongest movements. Ignatian affective discernment gives primacy to those affective movements that continue to resonate within the believer even after the affective movement itself has passed. Ignatian discernment takes the fruitfulness of the affective movement as a sign of the Gift of God. Affective Feedback frames fruitfulness in terms of consolation (i.e., generally affirming) or challenging (i.e., generally contrary to expectations). In a word, the rubric asks participants to "understand" their interior life.

c. *What is the invitation from the Holy Spirit? Where am I being led?*

Understanding the affective movements arising from the preaching event comes to completion with this third question. The participant here considers the origin and final end of the affective movements. If the movements have the good spirit as their origin, they lead to peace, joy, and union with God; otherwise, to anxiety, sadness, and alienation. The framing of this question empowers the participant to "take action," that is, to accept or reject the affective movement.

A parishioner from the group facilitates everyone's movement through the Affective Feedback model. I provided guidelines to those facilitators to assist them.[6] Those guidelines suggested allowing participants ten minutes at most for the Review of Homily. The guidelines encourage the facilitator to ensure all

[6] For the full text of the facilitator guides, please consult Appendices I and J.

participants were ready to move onto the next section of the rubric before proceeding.

3. Feedback Conversation

The feedback conversation of Affective Feedback draws together the homiletic framework of listener-oriented preaching and the interdisciplinary framework of effective feedback conversations. Having a parishioner serve as facilitator establishes the listener-oriented nature of this communication event and opens the maternal dialogue envisioned by Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium*. The facilitator invites the seminarian to begin by sharing how the preaching went for him. This follows the advice of Huston, Stone, and Heen, in which the recipient of feedback will be more open to that feedback if he is given space to tell his side of the story.

The facilitator then asks parishioners to share appreciation for the homily. The emphasis here is on acknowledging the efforts of the seminarian rather than improperly praising an otherwise poor performance. While brief, these remarks establish the rapport between seminarian and parishioner needed to make the rest of the feedback effective.

Next, the facilitator opens a discussion on the impact of the homily on the listeners. Here the parishioners are encouraged to frame their comments in affective terms: *I was [consoled/challenged] by [thought/feeling/desire] when I heard [detail from homily].* This framing accomplishes two hallmarks of effective feedback. First, the feedback focuses on the impact of the seminarian's action. Feedback often falters when a person tries to guess the intentions of another's

mind. This tends to result in a fixed identity being communicated to that person. Impacts, however, are external and changeable. Conversation around the impact of actions opens the possibility for moving toward a growth mindset. Second, with this focus on the impact of the preaching, parishioner and seminarian stand shoulder-to-shoulder by looking at the preaching event together. A negative impact, if any, arises because of the interaction between the preacher and the listener. Neither one is wholly the cause. Therefore, the impact of the preaching can be held at arm's length from both participants and examined with charity.

During this time, the seminarian takes an active role. Following Stone and Heen, the seminarian sorts the feedback toward coaching. That is, he listens with a growth mindset about himself, even if the feedback does not necessarily communicate such a mindset. He sorts toward coaching by engaging in active listening: asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing the parishioner's view, and acknowledging the expressed feelings in the feedback. The Affective Feedback rubric also encourages him to be assertive in the discussion. He shares what is left out in the feedback when doing so will better inform the listener's response. He can advocate for his own choices and express his own emotional response to the conversation. The key here, as Stone and Heen say, is to assert what is otherwise left out of the feedback: "your [the recipient's] data, your interpretations, and your feelings."[7] The rubric encourages all participants in the feedback conversation to be living and active subjects within the maternal dialogue of the Church.

[7] Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 242.

The facilitator must judge when to bring the feedback conversation to a close. The rubric for Affective Feedback suggests a range of twenty to thirty minutes, but facilitators brought conversations to a close when the participants had nothing more or nothing new to say. The feedback conversation ends with the seminarian summarizing the conversation. He articulates the ideas he has generated for how he will preach in the future. The rubric encourages him to frame these ideas with reference to the affective movements named in the conversation. If he has difficulty summarizing in this way, the rubric provides two questions he can put to the parishioners: *What is one thing you see me doing that gets in my way?* and *What is one thing I could change that would make a difference to you?* These questions demonstrate the growth mindset of the seminarian and maintain the conversation's focus on the experience of the listener as a source of formation for the seminarian.

4. Closing Prayer to the Holy Spirit

The Affective Feedback model ends as it began: with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. The participants join in calling down the power of the Spirit upon the fruits of their conversation, manifesting a faith in the Spirit as the source of every good gift in the Church since he is the Gift of God himself. The closing prayer expresses awareness of the *redditus* of our Christian faith: All we do returns to God and finds fulfillment in union with the Trinity of perfect love.

Communication and Timeline

Communication

Communication with the various stakeholders involved in testing Affective Feedback began on August 25, 2021. I met with Rev. Dennis Spies and Sr. Nadiya Levchenko, SSPS—the directors of the Pastoral Internship and the TTPP, respectively, at Mundelein Seminary—to explain the impact my ministerial intervention would have on the seminarian participants. Both were supportive of my project and made helpful suggestions for how to ask for volunteers from the Class of 2025.

In April of 2022, I introduced the project to members of the Class of 2025 who were sponsored by the dioceses geographically close to Mundelein Seminary. This informational presentation simply introduced my project to them before they left for summer break. In the fall of 2022, I made a formal invitation to nine members of the Class of 2025, some of whom were newly enrolled at Mundelein Seminary. I met with eight students for an informational lunch meeting on September 16, 2022. In that meeting, I made it clear that their response to my invitation would in no way affect their evaluation as candidates for ordination. By the beginning of October, seven seminarians had volunteered to participate.

In November of 2022, I called the vocation directors of the seminarian volunteers.[8] I explained the goals and expectations of the ministerial intervention as well as the benefits my project would bring to both seminarian and internship parish. All the vocation directors gave their support to their seminarians' involvement in the

[8] A vocation director is a diocesan official responsible for overseeing the formation of the candidates for ordination in a particular diocese. In this case, all the vocation directors were priests.

intervention. They also provided the names of the supervising pastors of the internship parish assignments.

In January of 2023, I talked with the supervising pastors responsible for guiding the seminarians' internship experience in the parish. I did this in person when the pastors came to Mundelein Seminary for two days of preparatory workshops led by the director of the Pastoral Internship. I explained the overall timeline of the intervention and the expectations of the parish. I laid out the expectations for the parishioner participants and third-party observers to the feedback sessions. [9] The pastors were supportive of my project, though not all the supervising pastors were in attendance, as Chapter Six will detail.

I kept lines of communication open with the seminarians, vocation directors, and supervising pastors throughout the intervention. I was available by both email and cell phone. When circumstances warranted an in-depth conversation, we used Microsoft Teams for video calls. When possible, I met in person with the seminarians to interview them about the feedback sessions with parishioners. I had individual meetings with all the seminarian participants when they returned to Mundelein Seminary for the Pastoral Internship Midterm Workshop from March 21-24, 2023.

Project Timeline

Figure 5.4 below presents a concise timeline of the ministerial intervention for this thesis project.

[9] The ministerial intervention design envisioned third-party observers of all the feedback sessions who would provide a third perspective on the data. Chapter Six details how this vision failed to materialize in the execution of the intervention.

September 16, 2022	Invitation to participate to seminarians of Class of 2025
October 2022 – January 2023	Seminarians develop “Dos and Don’ts of Preaching” rubric with TTPP parishioners or internship site parishioners
January 18-19, 2023	Internship Supervisor Workshop at Mundelein Seminary
January 19, 26, & 27, 2023	Seminarians participate in preparatory homiletics workshops
January 28, 2023	Pastoral Internship begins
March 2023	First cycle of preaching, feedback, and evaluation using “Dos and Don’ts of Preaching” rubric
March 2 & 9, 2023	Affective Feedback Workshops
March 21-24, 2023	Individual meetings with seminarian participants during Internship Midterm Workshop at Mundelein Seminary
March & April 2023	Second cycle of preaching, feedback, and evaluation, using Affective Feedback rubric
April & May 2023	Third cycle of preaching, feedback, and evaluation, using Affective Feedback rubric
May 5, 2023	Pastoral Internship ends

Figure 5.4. Ministerial Intervention Timeline Summary.

Looking Ahead

The theological pillars are set. The homiletic suspension cables are hung. The deck of feedback conversations stands ready. How well does this Affective Feedback bridge handle actual traffic? What was revealed about closing the distance between formation and vocation when seminarians and parishioners gathered for reflections on the proclaimed Word of God? Chapter Six presents the results of this ministerial intervention and offers suggestions for how well this bridge can handle other kinds of communication, such as that between parishioners and newly ordained deacons in their final stage of formation for the priesthood.

Chapter Six

Findings and Next Steps

> The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly.
>
> Acts of the Apostles 6:5-7a

Introduction

The apostolic Church faced the challenging distance between formation and vocation. In a community divided along Greek and Hebrew ethnic lines, the Twelve recognized that their formation in the word of God did not prepare them to serve at table as the vocation of the Church demanded. The Twelve bridged that gap through the maternal dialogue of the Church: They heard the pastoral needs of the People of God, spoke to that need, and the whole community found the solution acceptable. Not only was the crisis of starving widows resolved, but also the apostolic task of proclaiming the word of God flourished in Jerusalem and beyond. New formation benefitted every vocation lived out by the People of God. The spread of the Church manifested the fruits of the effective feedback conversation between the Christian community and the Twelve.

Do we find similar flourishing when Affective Feedback bridges the distance between seminarian formation and parish ministry vocation? Are listeners edified and preachers encouraged? Does the word of God spread more widely and freely when the baptized exercise the *sensus fidei* in a formative feedback conversation? The findings

from the ministerial intervention of this thesis project point tentatively to affirmative answers to these questions. Questionnaire surveys of parishioners and interviews with seminarians revealed that the Gift of God manifested himself in preaching feedback conversations. While nowhere near the dramatic explosion of grace seen after the Twelve laid hands on the seven new ministers, the small signs of practical grace during the ministerial intervention show the value of Affective Feedback as a model for post-preaching conversations. The bridge spanning the distance between formation and vocation held up, allowing communication between both sides. Parishioners grew in their ability to base their feedback on the affective impact that preaching had on them. Seminarians came away better equipped to receive appreciation for their preaching. This chapter presents these and other findings drawn from the data collected in the spring of 2023, organized around each of the three feedback sessions between parishioners and seminarian interns. The chapter concludes by suggesting next steps for the Affective Feedback model and for homiletic formation for all preachers in the Catholic Church.

Limitations

These findings and next steps, however, require qualification. Building the bridge according to the blueprint of the previous chapter did not go perfectly. The ministerial intervention contended with certain limitations which must be acknowledged before we can truly appreciate the practical experiences that participants had of receiving the Gift of God within the Church. The limitations of this ministerial intervention can be grouped under four headings: seminarian participants, parishioner participants, internship pastors, and third-party observers.

Seminarian Participants

The Class of 2025 at Mundelein Seminary only had thirteen students enrolled in the 2022/2023 school year. This did not present a large pool of candidates to draw upon at the outset of the project.[1] Moreover, the intervention focused on seminarians from dioceses in close geographic proximity to Mundelein Seminary, narrowing the pool of potential candidates to only nine. Of those nine, seven volunteered and five completed the entire ministerial intervention.

One seminarian volunteer announced at the end of January 2023 that he was withdrawing from Mundelein Seminary and from formation for the priesthood. This announcement happened mere days before the parish internship began. He is therefore not accounted for in Chapter Five's description of the seminarian participants.

Parishioner Participants

One seminarian volunteer, identified as Fulton in Chapter Five, informed me via email on March 19, 2023, that he would be unable to complete the project. After several parishioners had been enlisted by the priests of the parish, Fulton showed them the informed consent form detailing the project's expectations.[2] The parishioners then decided the workload would be too much for them to handle and so declined to participate. Therefore, Fulton withdrew from the project. Hence, he and parishioners from his internship parish are not included in the findings presented in this chapter.

[1] The design of the ministerial intervention required seminarian participants who were engaged in the full-time pastoral internship. The design, therefore, locked the timeframe of the project to the spring semester of the academic year at Mundelein Seminary.

[2] For the informed consent form for parishioner participants, please consult Appendix B.

Another issue for parishioners concerned the presentation of the fundamentals of the Affective Feedback model. As laid out in Chapter Five, I gave two presentations on using Ignatian affective discernment for preaching feedback. Parishioners and seminarians were asked to either attend via online seminars or view the recordings of the presentations at a more convenient time. While I invited parishioners and seminarians to gather at Mundelein Seminary to attend the presentations in person, geography and logistics proved too high a barrier. Seminarians in interviews disclosed that not all their parishioner partners had viewed the presentations. This disclosure matched my experience of presenting: Only one parishioner attended both sessions synchronously. The limited engagement with the presentations led to conversations using the model among people who were not fully familiar with its underlying concepts.

Also, the number of parishioner participants fell somewhat short of the project's hopes. Asked to form groups of five to ten parishioners each, the five seminarians should therefore have collected twenty-five informed consent forms. The final total of collected forms was twenty-nine, just over the minimum. As a result, seminarians often met with a group of four parishioner partners for the feedback sessions. Scheduling conflicts often prevented all parishioner participants from gathering for the conversations.

Last, I asked seminarians to have one parishioner participant serve as the facilitator of the feedback discussions. Doing so would free the seminarian to participate fully in the conversation as a receiver of feedback. Not all the seminarians were able to find someone to act in this role. Even when they did, their formation for leadership got the better of them at times. Charles, for instance, admitted that in his second feedback session he "ultimately took over" when interpersonal tension arose between the facilitator

and another member of the group.[3] Edmund chose not to implement a facilitator and led the feedback conversations himself. However, the quality of Edmund's reflections on the feedback session were no worse for lacking a facilitator when compared to the other seminarian participants.

Internship Pastors

On January 19, 2023, I met with five of the parish pastors who served as internship supervisors. I outlined the ministerial intervention for them, explained the volunteer nature of the project, and gave them information on the expectations of the project. I asked for their help enlisting parishioners for the feedback group as well as finding a third-party observer for the sessions. I suggested that a parish staff member or even one of the priests of the parish could act as an observer. Of those five supervisors present, one was the pastor of the seminarian who discerned out of seminary formation. Thus, only four of five pastors supervising seminarian participants heard my explanation of the project.

The supervising pastor for Ambrose's internship parish did not attend my presentation. This absence caused some difficulties. Ambrose told me during our midterm check-in meeting that his pastor was not only against the idea of having Ambrose preach at Mass in any capacity, but he also made clear to Ambrose that he would have to complete the project on his own time. Ambrose rose to the challenge but was not able to begin receiving feedback from parishioners until late April. This pastor's

[3] Charles, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 18, 2023. Quotes from seminarian interviews in this chapter have been edited for clarity.

distance from the project stands in contrast to the generally favorable reception among the other supervising pastors at the January meeting.

Overall, the pastors of the seminarian participants were not personally involved in the ministerial intervention. Three pastors mentioned in their final evaluations of their intern how the seminarian received preaching feedback from parishioners. None of the pastors, however, said anything specific about the ministerial intervention as a project above and beyond the pastoral internship program.

Third-Party Observers

I asked the seminarian participants and their pastors to find an observer or notetaker for the feedback sessions. The hope was to have a third source of data about the conversations between seminarians and parishioners. However, none of the seminarians reported success in finding someone for this role. Therefore, unfortunately, the interviews with the seminarians and the anonymous questionnaires from the parishioners comprise the totality of the data collected from the ministerial intervention.

Detailed Ministerial Intervention Timeline

The actual implementation timeline took longer than the original plan. The diffused timeline of the ministerial intervention presented its own challenge. While many interviews happened soon after feedback sessions, at times weeks would go by until the seminarian and I were able to connect. Similarly, the spread of time between feedback sessions meant participants were asked to recall conversations which may have started to fade from memory. Figure 6.1, below, shows the detailed breakdown of when feedback sessions were held, when I interviewed seminarians, and the range of time during which parishioner surveys were collected.

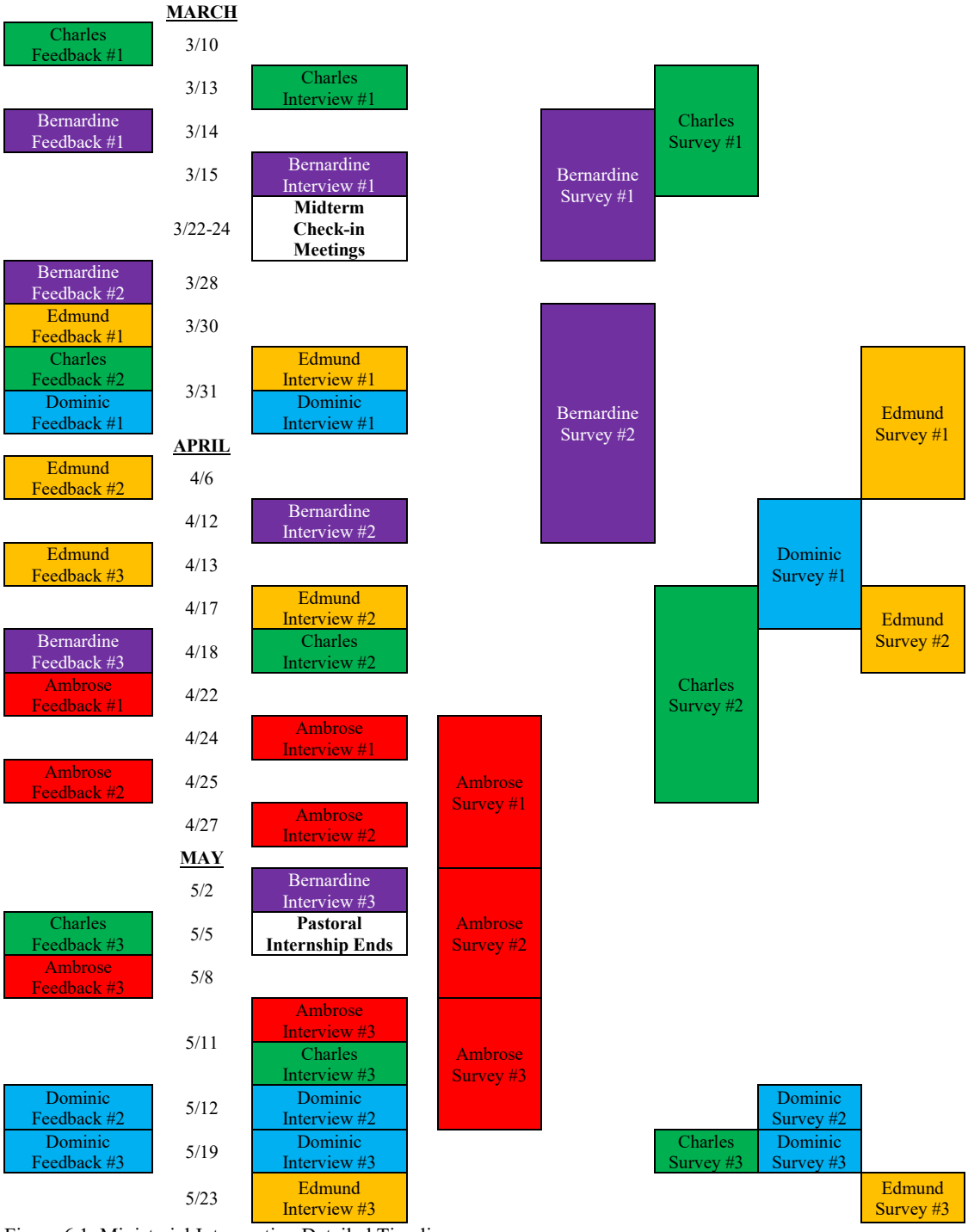

Figure 6.1. Ministerial Intervention Detailed Timeline.

Despite these daunting limitations, the intervention produced data and the Affective Feedback bridge stood strong. After all, we are not working with fragile materials like steel or pavement, but with the resilient foundation of the Church: charity.

The strength of that charity shows up in the responses of the parishioners and in interviews with the seminarians. The following sections present the main themes evident in these two sources of data from each of the feedback sessions.

The reality of the ministerial intervention has consequences for the present chapter, however. Given the diffused timeline of the project and the limitations it faced, quantitative data analysis would be an inappropriate way to examine the findings. Importantly, then, the following data interpretation relies heavily on narrative rather than calculated analysis. The narrative brings out the qualitative data collected during the ministerial intervention and interprets that data within the theological, homiletical, and interdisciplinary frameworks of Affective Feedback. This affords us the opportunity to dig deeply into the available responses.

First Feedback Session: Using the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching

The first feedback session provided a baseline experience. Parishioners and seminarians together generated "The Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" rubrics, as described in Chapter Five.[4] These rubrics captured basic assumptions about preaching and preaching feedback which parishioners and seminarians held prior to the introduction of Affective Feedback. Those assumptions revolve primarily around the content of the preaching and its delivery.[5]

Feedback conversations using these lists, then, focus on the external experience of the preaching act. Certain of these lists do point to the affective experience of the listener,

[4] See pg. 114 of Chapter Five.

[5] For example, one rubric lists as a DO: "Homilies should be knowledgeable about scripture, theology, and modern-day culture." The same rubric lists as a DON'T: "Homilies should not be given in a monotone or unengaged tone." Please consult Appendix D for all the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching rubrics.

but in the main the lists do not require any interior spiritual awareness on the part of the listener. This distinguishes the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching from the Affective Feedback model's reliance on Ignatian affective discernment. A further difference between these models comes down to the homiletic frameworks supporting them. The emphasis on the content and delivery of the preaching in these lists means the success of the homily rests more on the activity of the preacher rather than on the reception of the listener. Unlike in Affective Feedback, listener-oriented preaching is not the homiletic framework of the Dos and Don'ts. Finally, the lists present themselves as evaluative rubrics: Did the preacher do the DOs? Did the preacher avoid the DON'Ts? The Dos and Don'ts of Preaching by themselves do not encourage dialogical feedback like Affective Feedback.

Parishioner Surveys After the First Feedback Session

Although a total of twenty-nine parishioners agreed to participate, only seventeen gave responses to the first survey. All respondents identified as Caucasian, all but three were women, and all were primarily between the ages of 35 and 64.

Overall, in the content of their feedback, parishioners praised the preaching and the seminarian. All the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I told the seminarian what he did well." Only a small number of respondents thought they criticized the preaching (three agreeing) or the seminarian (one agreeing). However, nine respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I told the seminarian what he could do better." Some parishioners, then, saw their suggestions for improvement as something other than critique. This viewpoint informs the gap between the feedback parishioners gave and the feedback seminarians wanted, which will be explored below. For now, this perception of the parishioners raises the question of how

best to frame feedback. Trusting the maternal dialogue of the Church, framing feedback as coaching and aiding the preacher rather than as critique might prove more fruitful. Likewise, Huston would encourage a coaching approach in giving feedback, an approach parishioners seem more disposed to use than that of evaluative critique.

The tenor of the discussion during the feedback session, according to the parishioners, was positive. Respondents reported being engaged throughout the whole of the conversation. All were equal conversation partners with no one person dominating the conversation. The parishioners all agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I felt at peace during the conversation." Feelings of disquiet or anger were rare, with only one person reporting a feeling of anxiety during the conversation. Almost all the respondents came away from the feedback session feeling energized.

The questionnaire asked parishioners about their motivations behind their feedback. The aim was to reveal which kind of feedback parishioners wanted to give: appreciation, coaching, or evaluation. The respondents unanimously agreed with the statement "I wanted to acknowledge the seminarian's effort that went into this homily." There was widespread agreement on the need for appreciation. There was less so for coaching. While the majority agreed with wanting to help the seminarian improve his preaching, five neither agreed nor disagreed. The ambivalence increased when parishioners were asked about evaluation. Eight disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The seminarian needed to hear how he compares with other preachers and homilies." Six of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "I wanted to tell the seminarian how he compared to other preachers and homilies I have heard," and five more disagreed. Parishioners similarly balked at the idea that they based

their feedback on the seminarian's character with only four respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Instead, most respondents reported basing their feedback on the impact the homily made on them.

In addition to the content of the session, the survey asked parishioners about the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching model itself. Fifteen respondents found the model an improvement over an unguided conversation, and twelve said the model was useful. The most interesting results of this section, however, came from questions about using this model with the priests of the respondents' parishes. Five respondents disagreed with the statement "I thought this model would be helpful for my parish priest to get feedback about his preaching." Despite generally finding the model useful and well-suited to giving feedback, using it with their parish priest was not something these parishioners imagined going well. Does this express a concern about the Dos and Don'ts specifically, or does it touch on the broader question of giving feedback to priests in the first place? We will return to this question below when considering the use of Affective Feedback.

As for this first feedback session, parishioners reported positive experiences. They engaged well with the seminarian and with the Dos and Don'ts model. Their perception of the content of their feedback raises the possibility of a bias against framing feedback as criticism. The respondents were more likely to give coaching without seeing that as criticism. The affective experience of the conversation as one marked by peace and joy gives hope that the Gift of God was in their midst. The question remains as to how aware the parishioners were of the presence of that Gift. The additional comments some of the parishioners left on their questionnaires, while positive, suggest their awareness remained on the external experience of the conversation:

- "The seminarian delivered a wonderful homily. We didn't have many ways in which he needed to improve, but [he] was very open to the group's feedback and wanted to learn how to improve."
- "Our seminarian exhibits a great strength in presentation and content (obviously infused by the Holy Spirit). It was very difficult to find fault in any aspect."
- "The effort to improve the homilies, and make sure they are as efficacious as possible to those receiving the homily, by incorporating feedback from the receivers, is a grace that will bring fruit; and much appreciated."

Seminarian Interviews After the First Feedback Session

The parishioners came away with a positive impression of the first feedback session. The seminarians, on the other hand, were frustrated. In interviews, they expressed impatience with the affirmation and appreciation they heard from parishioners. Bernardine reported wanting constructive feedback since he has not done much public speaking. When describing the session, he said, "There wasn't actual feedback more than, 'Real good. Wonderful.' I was curious to hear actual feedback."[6] The appreciation and affirmation Bernardine heard was not the feedback he wanted. Ambrose, Charles, and Dominic all echoed this desire to hear how they could improve. Charles framed this desire within a growth mindset: "I'm pretty convinced at twenty-three that I'm not the best preacher I'll ever be, or at least I hope not."[7] This admirable attitude does not find fulfillment in the affirmation he received from his parishioner partners. He understood from their feedback that the listeners were engaged in his preaching, but, as he said, "I don't know why they are engaged."[8] Several of the seminarians echoed this frustration with receiving affirmation without the underlying reason.

[6] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, March 15, 2023.

[7] Charles, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, March 13, 2023.

[8] Ibid.

The Dos and Don'ts of Preaching model may have contributed to this frustration. The seminarians were nuanced in their evaluation of the model. Charles and Edmund, for instance, liked the way the model allowed parishioners to discuss the characteristics of good and bad preaching. The final list of Dos and Don'ts, however, was not as useful to them as having the discussion in the first place. The seminarians saw their feedback conversations move away from specific references to the parishioner-created rubric. Ambrose noted that parishioners were more comfortable basing their feedback on what emotions the homily stirred within them rather than the list of Dos and Don'ts. This preference for affective language hints at the suitability of the Affective Feedback model for feedback conversations.

In Dominic's case, he would rather not have had the Dos and Don'ts at all, due to the nature of his group of parishioners. Dominic had a high opinion of his conversation partners, calling them "far more engaged and spiritually deep than they let on initially."[9] He had the advantage of spending his pastoral internship at his Teaching Parish assignment and therefore had grown to trust these parishioners. Because of his familiarity with the committed discipleship of these parishioners, Dominic would have preferred an organic and unstructured feedback conversation. Bernardine likewise voiced a dislike for the Dos and Don'ts format. The list that he and his parishioners worked with had more to do with public speaking generally than with preaching. It was, however, "better than nothing."[10]

[9] Dominic, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, March 31, 2023.

[10] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft teams, March 15, 2023.

Edmund, on the other hand, liked having the framework of the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching. He saw it as a way for parishioners to share tough feedback they might not otherwise voice. The benefits of the feedback structure were not only for the parishioners, however. Edmund said, "I can tell this is already making me better. It's good to hear this."[11] Edmund's positive evaluation of the feedback process was something of a surprise to hear given how his session started. The first two pieces of feedback he received were critiques. "It was like a bombshell," said Edmund.[12] However, he demonstrated Stone and Heen's skills of sorting toward coaching. In recounting his reaction to these first pieces of feedback, Edmund was able to recognize that what the people said was correct: "I knew there were two things I needed to improve on."[13] Edmund admirably exercised a growth mindset about himself, allowing him to humbly absorb the blow of that bombshell, and come away positive about the overall experience.

Second Feedback Session: Introducing the Affective Feedback Model

The next feedback session saw the Affective Feedback model used for the first time. Presentations on Ignatian spirituality and applying affective discernment to preaching were given in advance of using the Affective Feedback model. I sent rubrics for seminarians and parishioners to use in their conversations.[14] I also provided instructions for facilitators to help guide the feedback session.[15]

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[11] Edmund, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, March 31, 2023.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] For the parishioner rubric, please consult Appendix G. For the seminarian rubric, please consult Appendix H.

[15] Facilitator guides for all feedback sessions can be found in Appendices I and J.

Parishioner Surveys After the Second Feedback Session

Sixteen parishioners gave responses to the second survey, down from seventeen. The demographic proportions were nearly identical to the first survey: all Caucasian, all but two were women, and predominantly middle-aged.

As in the first session, most parishioners reported praising both the seminarian and the preaching. The theme of a bias against criticism and toward coaching also remained evident. Only one respondent agreed to criticizing the preaching and three to criticizing the seminarian. In fact, most respondents strongly disagreed that they criticized either. However, six parishioners agreed they told the seminarian what he could do better. This underlines the preference some parishioners have toward framing constructive feedback as coaching rather than as criticism.

Indeed, parishioners in this second survey had a different attitude toward coaching than in the first survey. Fourteen parishioners agreed that they wanted to help the seminarian improve for his next preaching. However, when presented with the statement "The seminarian needed to hear how to improve his preaching," only four respondents agreed. The gap between these responses poses a question about how the parishioners understood this second statement. Does the seminarian not need to hear coaching *from parishioners* because he will receive it elsewhere? Or could it be that the format of Affective Feedback, with its emphasis on the preaching's impact on the hearer, took the focus of the feedback away from addressing the seminarian's need to hear how to improve? Perhaps the framing of this feedback model shifted parishioners' attention to communicating something else to the preacher.

When looking at the basis for parishioners' feedback, that shift in focus becomes evident. Fourteen respondents agreed that they based their feedback on the impact the homily had on them; only one person neither agreed nor disagreed.[16] Comparatively, there were more ambivalent responses to the same question after using the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching. The shift here is minor but suggests the Affective Feedback model made a difference in how parishioners formulated their feedback to the seminarian. One parishioner's comment captures this shift well: "This has been a great help in understanding the laity's roll [*sic*] in living the gospel message in the homily." The framing of Affective Feedback allowed this parishioner to see the importance of the response of the listener to preaching, reflecting the aims of listener-oriented preaching.

This is not the only sign that the new feedback model was well-received. Respondents to the second survey overwhelmingly found the model useful and well-suited to giving feedback on preaching. When compared to an unguided conversation, eleven respondents preferred the Affective Feedback model. Eight respondents preferred Affective Feedback over the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching. This positive response is encouraging considering six parishioners reported that terms other than those in the Affective Feedback model guided the conversation. The lack of consistent vocabulary may be due to parishioners not viewing the presentations on Ignatian affective discernment. However, even though the execution of the new model was not perfect, most parishioners said they were comfortable using the language of the guide.

[16] One respondent completed only the first half of the second survey, leaving questions about the motivation for feedback and about evaluating the Affective Feedback model blank.

Interestingly, parishioners more easily saw themselves using Affective Feedback with their parish priests. While some doubted being able to use the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching this way, no such doubts surfaced in this second survey. No one disagreed with the idea of using Affective Feedback with their local priests. What makes Affective Feedback easier for parishioners to imagine using? Perhaps the model offers a better relational framework between priest and parishioner: A parishioner might imagine it easier to share the impact of the homily from her affective experience rather than framing the conversation along the lines of the preacher-focused Dos and Don'ts of Preaching. This suggests a broader application for Affective Feedback beyond seminary formation.

Within this project's application of the model, however, the real conversations the parishioners had with the seminarians was a practical success. Parishioners reported a sense of peace and joy during the feedback session, even as they used a new model for giving feedback.

Seminarian Interviews After the Second Feedback Session

That sense of joy and peace was not limited to the parishioners. Two of the seminarians mentioned a different atmosphere during the second feedback session. "The whole thing was a prayer," said Edmund, "You could sense the presence of God in the room."[17] Bernardine noted his appreciation for the focus on the Holy Spirit provided by the opening prayer and in the prompting questions in the conversation guide. That focus opened Bernardine to wider possibilities for responding to the preaching of the Church: "You can have a preacher that's awful, but the Spirit can still use that. You can be struck by the Holy Spirit by the worst preacher in the world if he so wills to use it and you're

[17] Edmund, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 17, 2023.

paying attention."[18] He was quick to assure me that he did not plan to be an awful preacher, a plan made evident by his deeper appreciation for the action of the Gift of God in listeners of preaching.

Indeed, all the seminarians came away from this second feedback session with a deeper awareness for what the Holy Spirit was doing in both listener and preacher. Charles and Dominic shared that once again most of the feedback they received was praise and appreciation. This time, however, they said they could hear the reasons behind that appreciation. As Charles put it, "This time I actually felt affirmed because it wasn't just, 'Oh, you did a good job,' but it was, 'Here's what hit me, and here's how it's impacting me and how it's actually making a change in my heart.'"[19] Connecting praise with the impact made by his preaching allowed Charles to feel more fully affirmed by the people of God.

Ambrose, meanwhile, discovered that there was a difference between what he thought was going on with his listeners and what was happening in their hearts. While preaching, Ambrose thought the parishioners looked bored. He was surprised, therefore, when they shared the deep impact his preaching made. The feedback changed the way Ambrose thought about his preaching: "This *was* pastoral!"[20] Framing the feedback in terms of affective impact revealed the work of grace hidden during the preaching.

The seminarians all reported having fruitful conversations that flowed well. Grounding the conversation in affective language made it easier for one person to pick up

[18] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 12, 2023.

[19] Charles, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 18, 2023.

[20] Ambrose, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 27, 2023.

where another had left off. Bernardine mentioned how much better the conversation went in the second feedback session. When asked how much of that was due to having the same group gathered again and how much was due to the Affective Feedback model, he replied, "80 percent feedback rubric, 20 percent the fact they are with the same group."[21] Granted, Bernardine was not enthusiastic about the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching model. However, his positive comments about the conversation in this second session point to Bellinger's signs of connection: an organic flow to the conversation, an ease in talking with each other, and a sense of joy coming out of the session. The other seminarians mentioned these elements of connection when they talked about the tenor of their conversations.

This uplifting experience did not negate a concern Bernardine shared with several other seminarians. Introducing the Affective Feedback model in future parish ministry would be hard work. Bernardine thought that parishioners would need good groundwork as disciples before being able to fruitfully engage with this feedback model. Ambrose and Edmund both thought that members of a parishioner feedback group would need to be carefully discerned. Edmund's concern about this is particularly surprising given the nature of his feedback group. He had an open invitation to the parish, inviting anyone interested to be part of the group. He secured a core team who were present each week but had additional participants in each of his sessions. Little discernment of the choice of the attendees took place, but the lack of discernment was no obstacle to fruitful feedback. Edmund reported how the Affective Feedback model created space for charity and put

[21] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, April 12, 2023.

people in the mindset of coaching rather than criticizing. His concern, therefore, does not seem to arise from the positive experience of a group gathered by a wide invitation.

Indeed, all the seminarians reported having fruitful, flowing conversations grounded in affective language. They all benefitted from hearing the impact their preaching had on their listeners. Where then does the concern about future feedback partners come from? Does it reflect an unspoken recognition that these groups of parishioners are made up of people interested in giving feedback on preaching and in helping a seminarian prepare for ordination? [22] Will future parishioners share that interest? The Gift of God provides the necessary qualification for giving good feedback. A parishioner's interest in aiding the formation of the clergy, however, provides the channel through which the Gift of God can enliven the Church.

Out of this second round of feedback sessions, no one experienced that liveliness of the Gift of God more than Dominic. In truth, the session was more a conversation prompted by and in response to Dominic's preaching than a time of sharing what parishioners thought he did well. After preaching about friendship with Jesus, Dominic discovered the parishioners wanted to have a deep conversation about friendship, especially spousal friendship. They shared in affective terms what it meant to lose their spouses. They pointed to the rhetorical questions Dominic asked in the preaching as inspiration for their reflection.

Here was an experience of the maternal dialogue of the Church in which parishioners felt free to express deep needs to someone they clearly respected as a

[22] The example of Fulton, the seminarian who had to drop out of the project due to a lack of parishioner interest, serves as a case study here (see pg. 127 of the present chapter).

preacher, despite his youth. Dominic was affirmed by one parishioner for "having an insight that reaches people," which is something a person can say only if she has been reached.[23] Dominic showed how listener-oriented preaching opens a rich space for conversation and sharing. The preaching also presented an example of Bellinger's modes of tying in with the experience of the listener and stretching them toward life in the Kingdom. One parishioner shared in the conversation that he had lost his wife years ago. He did not know how to express the impact of the homily except to say, in Dominic's words, "reflecting on friendship with Jesus is motivation to allow him to continually pick up the pieces of his past life, to hold on to the memories of what was good and allow that to motivate him, and allow the Lord to enter in there."[24] Dominic's preaching tied into this man's experience of both spousal friendship and friendship with Jesus. The preaching then stretched the man toward welcoming Jesus into that place of loss through gratitude for the blessings of his past.

Dominic's session was not without challenges. His parishioners struggled with the language of the model—affective movements, consolation, and the rest of the vocabulary of Ignatian spirituality. However, Dominic insisted that the group had an intuitive sense of discernment, "despite what you [Fr. Mowry] said about it" in the recorded presentations.[25] Leaving aside my wounded pride as a teacher, Dominic's parishioners clearly embodied the *sensus fidei fidelis*, the spontaneous way of knowing God. Here are people who fit the description Ignatius envisioned in the second rule for discernment of

[23] Dominic, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 12, 2023.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

spirits: Christian disciples seeking to purge themselves of their sins and grow in union with their Lord and Creator. Their intuitive understanding of discernment owes more to their friendship with the Gift of God than to a recorded lecture.

Considering the experience of the seminarians overall in this second feedback session, a clearly positive assessment of the Affective Feedback model emerges. The affective framework in which listeners shared the impact of preaching enriched the experience of receiving feedback. The seminarians fruitfully received the affirmation of the parishioners. There were fewer concerns about getting critiques as "actual feedback." The seminarians came to know their listeners better and thought they were better known in turn since they shared the impact that preparing the preaching had on them.

Third Feedback Session: Returning to the Affective Feedback Model

The last feedback session of the ministerial intervention saw the seminarians and parishioner returning to the Affective Feedback model. These feedback sessions came during the final weeks of Mundelein Seminary's official schedule for the pastoral internship. Several seminarians, however, were staying on for the summer months at their parishes, giving them, their parishioner partners, and the researcher a little extra time to schedule the final cycle of feedback sessions and data collection.

Parishioner Surveys After the Third Feedback Session

Eleven parishioners submitted responses to the third survey, down from sixteen in the second survey. The demographics of the respondents remains consistent with the previous two surveys: all Caucasian, all but one were women, and all older adults. One of the questions on the survey asked the respondents the time and date of the feedback session. Unfortunately, none of the respondents reported a date that matched the date of

Bernardine's final feedback session. Most likely, therefore, the third survey does not include responses from Bernardine's parishioners.

Those feedback sessions covered by the survey saw many of the same trends identified in previous surveys. Parishioners continued to praise the preaching and the preacher in their feedback sessions. Unlike respondents in previous surveys, however, there was less of a difference between offering criticism and coaching in the feedback session. Only one parishioner criticized the preaching and the seminarian. Three parishioners, on the other hand, agreed they told the seminarian what he could do better with another three neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Another part of the survey sheds light on this ambivalence toward coaching. When presented with the statement "I wanted to help the seminarian improve his preaching," eight respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. However, when presented with the statement "The seminarian needed to hear how to improve his preaching," only one parishioner agreed. The difference here suggests that this group of parishioners came into this feedback session with a growth mindset about the seminarian, but after hearing the seminarian preach, the parishioners did not see any needed areas for improvement. Another possible explanation for this lack of criticism and coaching springs from the nature of the Affective Feedback model. Focusing on the affective movements caused by the Holy Spirit moves attention off the activity of the preacher, making the categories of "criticism" and "coaching" less applicable to this conversation.

This possibility finds further support in the parishioners' motivation for their feedback. All the respondents in this third survey either agreed or strongly agreed that they based their feedback on their perception of how the homily impacted them. Only one

parishioner definitively based feedback on a perception of the seminarian's character. The overwhelming consensus around basing feedback on the homily's impact speaks to the success of the Affective Feedback model. The model encourages feedback conversations that prioritize sharing the impact of preaching. This emphasis makes it more difficult to give feedback based on perceived character or identity labels, as described in Chapter Four. The parishioners' ambivalence around basing feedback on the seminarian's character suggests they approached the conversation with a growth mindset. The desire of most parishioners to help the seminarian improve further supports the existence of such a growth mindset during the conversation.

The tenor of the conversation in the third feedback session reflected the emphasis on the Gift of God. The parishioners overwhelmingly reported having a positive experience. Only one of the eleven respondents did not feel at peace during the session. No one felt angry, anxious, or drained after the conclusion of the conversation. These affective responses to the feedback conversation suggest the presence of the Gift of God in the dialogue between parishioner and seminarian. One parishioner left an additional comment on this third survey that catches a glimmer of the Spirit's spark: "Sessions were enlightening for both the attendees and the seminarian. Thank you." When Ignatius of Loyola's eyes were opened a little, he saw his affective life more clearly by the light of the Holy Spirit. This parishioner caught a glimpse of the same enlightenment.

Seeing that light during these feedback conversations speaks well of the Affective Feedback model. The ministerial intervention tested the value of the model by having the participants use it in two consecutive feedback sessions. Would the parishioners change their opinion about the usefulness of the model after repeated use? The answer, happily,

was: “No.” All eleven of the respondents thought the model was still well-suited to giving feedback on preaching and all but two agreed on its usefulness. Nine people agreed with the statement “I thought using Affective Feedback was an improvement over an unguided conversation.” The positive reception of the model after its second use suggests a persistent value of Affective Feedback in repeated conversations.

To further gauge the long-term use of the model, the survey again asked questions about using Affective Feedback with the priests in local parishes. Two respondents disagreed the model would be helpful for their local priest. The first wrote in the space for additional comments, “There are never any negative comments about the homilies given by my parish priest!” The second wrote something similar, “My parish priest receives only positive feedback from his homilies.” Both responses indicate a certain way of thinking about structured feedback conversations: They are only needed when things are going badly! As the seminarians saw after the second feedback session, however, the Affective Feedback model deepened their experience of receiving appreciation for their preaching. One hopes that these parishioners will at least offer their appreciation to their priests, even if they do not use affective language to describe the preaching’s impact.

In the feedback conversations the parishioners had with the seminarian preachers, however, all demonstrated their willingness to share their appreciation for the preacher’s efforts as well as the impact the preaching had on them. The prevailing sense of peace and joy that accompanied those conversations, likewise present in the previous two feedback sessions, offers hope that the Gift of God expressed itself through the *sensus fidei* of the baptized who were gathered to build up the preaching ministry of the Church.

Seminarian Interviews After the Third Feedback Session

The seminarians did indeed feel built up after the third feedback session with parishioners. They had not lost sight of the reasons behind the parishioner's affirmation due to how the parishioners shared the affective impact the preaching had on them. In fact, Bernardine, who was eager for "actual feedback" in the first session, admitted that going into the third feedback session he wanted some affirmation: "Part of me wants some of that, you know?"[26] He still wanted to hear critique, however, because he had a growth mindset about himself, or as he put it, "Because I am young, naïve, and need to learn a little more."[27] Ambrose also shared this desire for other forms of feedback. He reported wanting some evaluation feedback of his third preaching because he had not used the kind of detailed text that had guided his previous two preachings. He acknowledged with gratitude the appreciation he received from the parishioners. He noted, however, that parishioners were not as clear in giving coaching or evaluation. He wondered if parishioners feared damaging their relationship with him by offering more critical feedback. Ambrose and Bernardine's concerns here highlight the wisdom of Huston's advice to begin feedback conversations by asking what kind of feedback the receiver wants to hear.

Hearing different kinds of feedback was not the only difficulty the seminarians encountered in this third feedback session. Dominic, for instance, reported being dissatisfied with his preaching even before the feedback session began. Normally when writing, he names what he wants the listener to walk away with after hearing his preaching, what Thomas Long would call the function statement of the sermon. "But this

[26] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 2, 2023.

[27] Ibid.

homily," said Dominic, "I could not tell you what I wanted them to walk away with."[28] The lack of clarity in the preaching meant a lack of motivation in the listener, confirming Bellinger's homiletic method. Dominic contrasted this experience with the rich conversation of the previous week: "This week it was not much of a conversation. It was four different people sharing four different viewpoints."[29] He recognized how he wrote his preaching differently and saw how the lack of a clearly defined function meant a less unified impact on the listeners. Stone and Heen say that effective feedback conversations reveal the interaction between intention and impact.[30] Dominic's experience shows that an uncertain impact in the listener reveals an uncertain intention in the preacher. The quality of the feedback conversation, and not just its content, can be taken as a point of consideration for a preacher.

Other seminarians struggled with consistently following the Affective Feedback model. Both Bernardine and Charles said they and their parishioner participants omitted the Review of Homily portion of the model. "Bad move," said Charles, who wrote that note to himself during the session once the feedback comments started.[31] He noticed that without the Review of Homily the conversation diminished to a task to get through and an exercise in hoop-jumping. Gone was the flowing nature of the discussion in his previous session. According to Charles, parishioners shared the impact that the preaching had on them "for all of thirty seconds."[32] Without the Review of Homily, designed to

[28] Dominic, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 22, 2023.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Stone and Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*, 88-89.

[31] Charles, interview with author, Mundelein Seminary, May 11, 2023.

[32] Ibid.

increase the listener's spiritual awareness of the affective movements of the Holy Spirit, impact sharing of any greater depth would have required a movement of the Holy Spirit in itself.

Bernardine also noticed how omitting the Review of Homily changed the quality of feedback the parishioners were able to give. The facilitator in his feedback session launched into giving feedback comments without touching base on whether everyone had a chance to do a Review of Homily on their own. Bernardine imagined that if even a brief time had been allotted for reflection on affective movements, there would have been "a better articulation and confidence behind what [the parishioners] say."[33] He noted how well the previous feedback session had gone when the Affective Feedback model was followed more closely.

Edmund also struggled with following the model. He came to the third feedback session without copies of the parishioner guide for the Affective Feedback model. After his preaching, he instead led the parishioners through the model's rubric from memory. He reported that the lack of shared structure and common understanding of the feedback model resulted in a session that "wasn't as powerful" as the previous conversation.[34] Edmund led the discussion well enough but lamented not having the Prayer to the Holy Spirit to frame the conversation within an awareness of the Gift of God at work in the room. The lack of preparation meant a diminishment of the prayerful spirit he so relished in his second feedback session.

[33] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 2, 2023.

[34] Edmund, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 23, 2023.

The seminarians were also thinking about prayerfulness in a wider sense. The seminarians again discussed the need to discern their future parishioner feedback partners. Could this concern show that seminarians are biased toward expertise due to their time in the expert-heavy seminary community? In conversation, however, they presented a more nuanced view. Charles, for instance, related an experience of receiving feedback from a parishioner who was not part of his group. This man was a consultant by trade who offered both appreciation and coaching to Charles. The parishioner certainly had expertise that gave depth to his feedback. Charles also noted, however, that this man "knows he is helping someone grow."[35] This growth mentality in the feedback giver was just as important to Charles as his expertise.

With other seminarians, the expertise they looked for was not of the technical or certified variety. Ambrose, Bernardine, and Dominic said they would discern feedback partners based on the practice of those people's discipleship within the parish. This suggests the seminarian's own *sensus fidei fidelis*. They know the voice of the Good Shepherd when he speaks through those united to him. Dedication to prayer, engagement with the faith community, a life of practical charity—these were the expert qualifications seminarians would primarily look for when putting together future feedback groups.

To end with these comments by the seminarians, however, would not do justice to their experience in the ministerial intervention. In the final interview, I asked each seminarian what takeaways or lessons they drew from their participation in the project. Each of their comments reveals how the Gift of God has touched the hearts of men who, God willing, will one day serve the community of the baptized as ordained priests.

[35] Charles, interview with author, Mundelein Seminary, May 11, 2023.

- *Ambrose*: “Thank you for this. I put this on my [final self-evaluation for the internship program] that I think this should be mandatory [for the internship]. When you get people in there to tell you how they were affected, then on one side, you’re like ‘I'm not the greatest preacher.’ On the other side, you're just like, ‘Oh! People are getting something from what I'm preaching.’”[36]

- *Bernardine*: “Honestly, talking to parishioners about feedback is pretty novel. But I think it's good in the initial stages of preaching to get greater feedback on how to preach well from them, because they're the first recipients and not other priests that teach us.”[37]

- *Charles*: A lot has changed for me regarding feedback. The biggest change after doing this project is “that I think about feedback at all.”[38]

- *Dominic*: “The most helpful [part of the project] was ultimately when I sat down with the group. Once they started to talk, then it’s like ‘OK, now we’re in helpful territory.’”[39]

- *Edmund*: “It was very positive, very Spirit-driven. You gave me as the speaker and them as the listeners [a chance] to really engage in this together and to work on doing something better for the whole parish. Which is no surprise because that’s who the Holy Spirit is.”[40]

Summary of Findings

That is who the Holy Spirit is: The Gift of God at work in the Body of Christ who brings the different members of the Church together to further the proclamation of the Gospel. The Church experienced that outpouring of the Spirit when parishioners gathered to hear seminarians proclaim the Word of God and then shared with the preacher the impact of that proclamation. Parishioners proved themselves to be eager participants in the work of formation. They struggled with lengthy presentations of Ignatian spirituality

[36] Ambrose, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 12, 2023.

[37] Bernardine, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 2, 2023.

[38] Charles, interview with author, Mundelein Seminary, May 11, 2023.

[39] Dominic, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 22, 2023.

[40] Edmund, interview with author via Microsoft Teams, May 23, 2023.

but nevertheless demonstrated an intuitive sense of affective discernment. They responded to the preaching of seminarians out of the *sensus fidei* that guided their discernment. Parishioners were quick to offer appreciation for the seminarian's efforts and praise for the preaching they heard. While less unanimous in offering coaching or evaluation, parishioners came to the feedback sessions with a desire to help the seminarian improve. They communicated a growth mindset about the seminarian, knowing that the work of feedback conversations would bear fruit in his future ministry.

In Chapter One, the improvement of parishioners' ability to give feedback was one of the stated aims of the project. The Affective Feedback model, according to parishioners, was an improvement over an unguided feedback conversation. When compared with the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching, Affective Feedback was more successful in allowing parishioners to give feedback. Both parishioners and seminarians give evidence of this success. Parishioners stated a preference for Affective Feedback over the Dos and Don'ts. Seminarians testified that parishioners were more likely to share feedback based on their affective movements even before the introduction of the Ignatian-inspired model. Affective Feedback, therefore, more closely accords with the *sensus fidei fidelis*, the spontaneous way in which the baptized respond to the presence or absence of the Lord God.

Seminarians, too, saw the seeds of good fruit throughout this project, but not without acknowledging the challenges of feedback conversations with parishioners. In the first session, they struggled with hearing that feedback from parishioners. They came with a desire to hear coaching but received appreciation instead. Their growth mindset about themselves was not satisfied with simply hearing how good they already were.

They liked the relational results of the Dos and Don'ts of Preaching more than the rubric generated in conversation with parishioners.

The second feedback session, however, opened them to deeper relationship with and among the parishioners through the invocation of the Gift of God. One of the most striking results of the introduction of Affective Feedback was the increased value that appreciation feedback had for the seminarians once they could hear the affective reasons behind parishioners' praise. Perhaps because of this increased awareness of the Holy Spirit, seminarians began to express a desire to discern who would join them as conversation partners in future feedback conversations. Perhaps this concern was motivated by a desire to preserve the sacred and intimate space created by the Gift of God among them and their parishioners.

Their experience of the third feedback conversation showed just how much work is needed to preserve that intimate space of spiritual sharing. Omitting time for reflection and inadequately defining the function of the homily both had negative impacts on the quality of the final feedback conversations. The need for discipline in affective discernment and homiletic method shows that Ignatius of Loyola aptly named his program of meditation "Spiritual Exercises." These struggles, however, did not tarnish the grace-filled experience of the ministerial intervention for the seminarians. Their final evaluation of what they have learned gives hope that they will carry forward the principles of listener-oriented preaching into their ministry and engage in the maternal dialogue of the Church within their local faith community.

To state such hope with confidence speaks to the success of the Affective Feedback model among the seminarian participants. The seminarians exceeded

expectations, showing themselves more than willing to receive feedback from parishioners despite their lack of membership among the professors of Mundelein Seminary. In fact, the seminarians were so eager for feedback that they were disappointed not to receive more coaching and critique from parishioners at first. The introduction of Affective Feedback, therefore, solved a problem not foreseen at the outset. Seminarians learned to receive appreciation for their preaching more fruitfully, and at the same time, they began to see how appreciation results from the deep movements of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. When the Affective Feedback sessions went well, the presence of the Gift of God was palpable not only in the formal prayers of the model, but in the conversation itself. God, as it were, existing outside himself as Gift, manifested his divine word of grace in human words of feedback.

Next Steps

The Affective Feedback bridge held. Both seminarians and parishioners crossed the distance between vocation and formation. The challenge now lies in translating the positive experience of a handful of seminarians and the parishioners who walked with them into something that can benefit the wider Church. What improvements can be made to the bridge? What other distances can Affective Feedback span? Below are a series of next steps forward, beginning with improvements to the model and its evaluation, and then moving to wider spheres of application of the Affective Feedback model.

Improvements

The core of the Affective Feedback model—prayer to the Holy Spirit, seminarian sharing, parishioner sharing—proved a fruitful framework for feedback conversations.

Some of the learnings from this study suggest two specific improvements that would improve the efficacy of the model.

The first of these concerns the preparatory presentations on Ignatian spirituality. The reports from seminarians that parishioners did not watch the lectures are a cause for reflection. At a total of ninety minutes each, the presentations are too long for reasonable asynchronous engagement. A single presentation could cover the necessary material, focusing more on the model itself without going into detail about the Ignatian spirituality undergirding the feedback conversation. Parishioners thought a demonstration of the Affective Feedback model was the most helpful part of the presentations. Prioritizing that practical demonstration would improve participants' engagement with the presentations.

Second, seminarians were consistently slow to answer my interview questions about what they would do differently considering the feedback they received. The Affective Feedback model envisions the conversation concluding with a summary by the seminarian in which he shares what he has gained from the parishioners. The difficulty seminarians had in answering my question implies that this summary did not happen. Perhaps facilitators failed to move the feedback conversation in that direction, or maybe the discussion of the homily's impact proved so fruitful that there was a perceived lack of time for such questions. In either case, future iterations should emphasize the summary of feedback as essential for the preacher to grow in the ministry of the Word.

Changes to the model are not the only way to help homiletic formation. Improvements to the model's evaluation will also benefit those who invoke the Holy Spirit to reveal the fruits of the Church's preaching. Having third-party observers in the feedback sessions will surface better insights into how preachers and listeners engaged in

the maternal dialogue of the Church. The parishioner surveys can be refined by asking questions about the spiritual experience of the conversation, clarifying the meaning of "critique," and asking for examples of the feedback offered to the preacher. Collecting surveys from parishioners who used Affective Feedback with their parish priests would also show the differences in feedback, if any, offered to ordained clergy rather than candidates for ordination.

Use at Mundelein Seminary

Mundelein Seminary commits itself to forming priests for parish ministry. The Tolton Teaching Parish Program (hereafter TTPP) and the pastoral internship are ideal places for the implementation of the Affective Feedback model. Both programs create the conditions for the long-term relationships necessary for sharing the affective impact of preaching in a group setting. At the start of the 2023/2024 school year, the TTPP incorporated learnings from this thesis project into its model of preaching feedback conversations. I will be making a presentation to those responsible for the pastoral internship program about including Affective Feedback as a standard part of the internship experience.

In my capacity as a homiletics instructor, I have started incorporating Affective Feedback in my classroom pedagogy. While the ministerial intervention was in process in the spring of 2023, I presented a worksheet to seminarians in my homiletics practicum class based on Affective Feedback. The worksheet provided space for a Review of Homily as groundwork for appreciation feedback and sharing the impact of their classmates' preaching. The artificiality of preaching in a classroom setting to an audience of student-peers and priest-professor presents an obstacle to the kind of flowing

conversations the interns experienced while using the model outside the classroom. I can refine this worksheet and more systematically evaluate its use in the classroom.

Use in Vocational Synthesis Stage

As of the writing of this thesis, the dioceses of the United States are implementing the sixth edition of the Program for Priestly Formation. This new edition calls for a new stage of formation for candidates for the priesthood. After ordination to the diaconate but before ordination to the priesthood, men go through the vocational synthesis stage. The PPF describes the unique character and goal of this stage of formation:

> It is intended primarily as a time not of evaluation, but of integration and transition. Based on the principle of gradualism as found in the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, the vocational synthesis stage is a gradual realization of the cleric's responsibility for the care of souls while he resides full time in a pastoral setting, usually the parish.[41]

The Affective Feedback model seems well-suited to the stated aims of the vocational synthesis stage. Residing full time in a pastoral setting, the deacon preparing for priestly ordination now lives among the first recipients of his preaching. The pastor is meant to be the primary formator during this time, but the people of the parish remain part of the formative community of the Church.[42] The use of Affective Feedback can ensure that the voice of the wider formative community collaborates with the pastor in the work of finishing a man's preparation for priestly ordination.

The material in Chapters Two through Five, compiled in a shorter publication that outlines the principles and method of Affective Feedback within the context of the vocational synthesis stage of priestly formation, would make a useful workbook. A pastor

[41] *Program of Priestly Formation*, no. 137.

[42] Cf. ibid., nos. 140, 8.

and his parishioners could implement the Affective Feedback model with the newly ordained deacon at their parish, allowing the frequent preaching and homiletic opportunities for the deacon to be experiences of formation.

Use in Ongoing Formation of Preachers

The ongoing formation of the preachers of the Gospel needs greater emphasis in the life of the Church. Programs such as the Institute for Homiletics in Dallas and the Marten Program at the University of Notre Dame have contributed much to this important work. A fully developed Affective Feedback process could assist these programs and others like them in the task of ongoing formation. Another workbook, similar in broad strokes to the one destined for use in the vocational synthesis stage, would implement the Affective Feedback model for use with seasoned preachers with a focus on developing their growth mindset amid an established preaching life.[43]

This workbook, and other next steps taken, would concretize the vision of ongoing formation that John Paul II articulated in *Pastores dabo vobis.* Cited in Chapter One, I repeat it here with a slight alteration to bring it into line with the expansive horizon hoped for in this project*: "*[T]he very exercise of pastoral ministry leads to a constant and mutual exchange between the priest's [and preacher's] life of faith and that of the laity [and all listeners]."[44] The Church flourishes wherever that exchange of faith happens.

[43] As mentioned in Chapter One, while presented in this thesis project with reference to male candidates for the Catholic priesthood, Affective Feedback can benefit both ordained and lay preachers. Developing a growth mindset, hearing good feedback, and deepening an awareness of the Gift of God enrich every preacher.

[44] John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 78. Bracketed text mine.

Conclusion

Trusting a new bridge takes courage. We would prefer to see someone else go first—just in case. In bridging the distance between seminary formation and parish ministry vocation, someone else has indeed gone first to show how solid the bridge is for us. Before the first feedback session met, before the first seminarian volunteered, before the first concept of this ministerial intervention was conceived, the Gift of God went before us. Breathed out by Jesus Christ, the Spirit bridges every distance. The Gift of God brings creation to the Creator, the lost back home, and the dead to life. Assured of the Spirit's presence, the early Church set out to bridge the distance between the covenant community of Israel and the wider Gentile world. The Gift of God allowed the power of the Word to be heard in every language and tongue and by every people and nation. The Holy Spirit goes before us.

Compared with all this, the distance between the seminary and the parish seems small in comparison. Yet a small bridge saves hours of difficult travel and greatly enriches life on both sides of the divide. The Affective Feedback model proves to be just such a bridge: grounded in the Spirit at work in the Church, enriching the experience of preachers and listeners, and opening lines of communication that would be otherwise lost. The Gift of God makes gifts of us all. The Spirit enlivens our faith for just this purpose: that we all build bridges to the Kingdom of God.

Figure 6.2. The Affective Feedback Bridge (Credit: Alex Austin).

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Seminarian Participants

Rev. David Mowry, S.T.L.
1000 E Maple Ave
Mundelein, IL 60060
(847) 970-4893
dmowry@usml.edu

Parishioner Feedback on Seminarian Preaching
A thesis project in completion of the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching
Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, MO

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to study giving and receiving feedback on preaching within the context of a seminarian's pastoral internship in a parish. By studying this feedback dynamic, I want to find a way to bring the homiletic formation of the seminarians of Mundelein Seminary closer to the reality of their future ordained ministry in a diocesan parish.

Description of Study and Participant's Role
If you consent, you agree to participate in the following research plan:

You will meet with parishioners from your teaching parish assignment in the fall of 2022 to develop a "Dos and Don'ts of Good Preaching" preaching rubric. I will provide discussion questions to guide the development of this list.

You will give three sermons (homilies, reflections, spiritual conferences, etc.) over the course of your pastoral internship in the spring of 2023.

You will participate in three feedback sessions in which parishioners will provide you with their feedback on your preaching. The first of these sessions will use the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" as the rubric for the feedback. The second and third of these sessions will use a rubric I will provide. These sessions will be recorded and/or have a notetaker, and I will review and maintain those records.

You will participate in two workshop sessions on Ignatian affective discernment and its application to feedback on preaching.

You will take part in three oral interviews over the course of your pastoral internship in the spring of 2023. In each interview, you will be asked several questions about your experience of preaching feedback sessions with parishioners of your internship parish. The interviews will take place either in person at your internship parish

or via Microsoft Teams. I will make a digital audio recording of each interview. Each interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, at any point during the study, you may revoke your permission and leave the study.

Risk

Risk to those who will participate in this study is low. Participants may find that they feel distress during the feedback sessions with parishioners. Likewise, participants may feel distress during the interviews. If this happens in either case, please inform me at once.

Benefits

Participants may benefit from this study by gaining insight into how their preaching has been received by their listeners. Through the interviews, participants may understand the feedback given during the sessions better. They may also gain a better awareness of the pastoral context of their preaching that will enrich their participation in BH 515 Homiletics II during the spring of 2024.

INFORMED CONSENT

By my signature, I agree to allow Rev. David Mowry to:

- provide discussion questions that will guide me and members of my teaching parish in the development of a "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" preaching rubric,
- expect my participation in the development of that preaching rubric,
- expect my participation in the two sessions of the workshop on Ignatian affective discernment and its application to feedback on preaching,
- expect my delivery of three sermons (or equivalent) over the course of my pastoral internship in the spring of 2023,
- expect my participation in three feedback sessions on those sermons (or equivalent) with parishioners from my pastoral internship parish,
- review a recording and/or written summary of those feedback sessions and maintain copies of that audio and/or summary for research purposes only,
- conduct three oral interviews with me about those feedback sessions, and
- record our oral interviews and maintain a copy of that audio for research purposes only.

In agreeing to participate in this study, I understand and agree to the following:

1. That Rev. David Mowry will lead this research project and reflect on my participation in it for the purposes of analysis in his Doctor of Ministry program at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO.

2. That Rev. David Mowry will protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants in this study. He will use pseudonyms for all participants, unless I specify in writing that I wish to be identified by name.

3. That, if I reveal information to or in the presence of other study participants, Rev. David Mowry is not responsible for any breaches of confidentiality by those other participants.
4. That my participation is voluntary and, at any point during the study, I may revoke my permission and leave the study.
5. That Rev. David Mowry may end my participation in the study at any time.
6. That I am invited to remain in communication with Rev. David Mowry following the study or events therein for his reflection upon it, and I may at any time also contact Rev. Greg Heille, OP, the director of the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program at the Aquinas Institute of Theology (314-256-8881) with any questions or concerns.
7. That I may receive a copy of the narrative report of the research data and conclusions drawn as a result of this study unless I waive my right below.

_____ I would like to receive the relevant chapter(s) that reports the collected data and analysis, research conclusions, and contributions.

_____ I <u>waive</u> my right to view a copy of the relevant chapter(s) that reports the collected data and analysis, research conclusions, and contributions.

_____
Printed name of research study participant

_____ _____
Signature of study participant Date

_____ _____
Signature of researcher Date

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Parishioner Participants

Rev. David Mowry, S.T.L.
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Description of Study and Participant's Role
If you consent, you agree to participate in the following research plan:

You will listen to three sermons (homilies, reflections, spiritual conferences, etc.) given by the seminarian intern over the course of his pastoral internship in the spring of 2023.

You will participate in three feedback sessions in which you will provide the seminarian with feedback on his preaching. The first of these sessions will use the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching," a feedback format collaboratively developed by the seminarian intern and parishioners. The second and third of these sessions will use a rubric I will provide. These sessions will have a notetaker, and I will review and maintain those records.

You will participate in two presentations on Ignatian affective discernment and its application to feedback on preaching.

You will complete a questionnaire after each feedback session with the seminarian intern. In each questionnaire, you will be asked several questions about your experience of the feedback sessions. The questionnaires will be anonymous but will ask for basic demographic information (for example, age, sex, and length of time in the parish). Each questionnaire can be completed online using a link to be provided. The

questionnaires can also be completed with paper and pen upon request. The questionnaires will take 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, at any point during the study, you may revoke your permission and leave the study.

Risk

Risk to those who will participate in this study is low. Participants may find that they feel distress during the feedback sessions with seminarians. If this happens, please inform me at once.

Benefits

Participants may benefit from this study by gaining insight into how they respond to a particular sermon and to preaching in general. Through the questionnaires, participants may understand the feedback given during the sessions better. They may also understand how seminarians receive feedback in a parish context. Participants may learn better methods of giving feedback that will benefit interactions with future seminarian interns at their parish.

INFORMED CONSENT

By my signature, I agree to allow Rev. David Mowry to:

- expect my participation in the development of that "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list if not already completed,
- expect my participation in the two presentations on Ignatian affective discernment and its application to feedback on preaching,
- expect me to listen to three sermons (or equivalent) over the course of the seminarian intern's pastoral internship in the spring of 2023,
- expect my participation in three feedback sessions on those sermons (or equivalent) with the seminarian,
- expect me to complete three questionnaires about those feedback sessions, and
- expect me to complete and return that questionnaire to him in a timely manner.

In agreeing to participate in this study, I understand and agree to the following:

1. That Rev. David Mowry will lead this research project and reflect on my participation in it for the purposes of analysis in his Doctor of Ministry program at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO.

2. That Rev. David Mowry will protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants in this study. He will use pseudonyms for all participants, unless I specify in writing that I wish to be identified by name.

3. That, if I reveal information to or in the presence of other study participants, Rev. David Mowry is not responsible for any breaches of confidentiality by those other participants.

4. That my participation is voluntary and, at any point during the study, I may revoke my permission and leave the study.
5. That Rev. David Mowry may end my participation in the study at any time.
6. That I am invited to remain in communication with Rev. David Mowry following the study or events therein for his reflection upon it, and I may at any time also contact Rev. Greg Heille, OP, the director of the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program at the Aquinas Institute of Theology (314-256-8881) with any questions or concerns.
7. That I may receive a copy of the narrative report of the research data and conclusions drawn as a result of this study unless I waive my right below.

_____ I would like to receive the relevant chapter(s) that reports the collected data and analysis, research conclusions, and contributions.

_____ I waive my right to view a copy of the relevant chapter(s) that reports the collected data and analysis, research conclusions, and contributions.

_____
Printed name of research study participant

_____ _____
Signature of study participant Date

_____ _____
Signature of researcher Date

Appendix C

"Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" Discussion Questions and Worksheet

Dos and Don'ts of Preaching

"Good homily, Father." How often have we said that coming out of Mass? We experienced something during the preaching, and we want the priest to know we appreciated what he said. But what makes a "good" homily? How was it different from the homily that didn't have any impact on us? And how was it different from a homily we didn't think was good at all?

In Part One of this exercise, you are invited to reflect on how we determine the quality of a homily. What makes a homily good? What keeps a homily from reaching that bar? After reflecting on how we determine the quality of a homily, in Part Two you will be invited to develop a list of "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching." These will guide your future conversations about preaching with the seminarian at your parish.

Have someone take notes on the conversation during Part One. **The questions in Part One need not be answered in order.** They are meant to prompt your discussion.

Likewise, have someone write your answers to Part Two on the provided worksheet. When you have completed that worksheet, have the seminarian return it to Fr. David Mowry at Mundelein Seminary (dmowry@usml.edu).

IMPORTANT: Speak in general terms when speaking honestly about any weak preaching you have heard.

PART ONE

- What is the strongest memory you have about a homily—positive or negative? What about that homily sticks with you?
- What are your homiletic pet peeves? What is most likely to annoy you if you hear or see it in a homily? Why do those things irritate you?
- When were you most energized by a homily? What did the homily do to cause that experience?
- Imagine we are at Mass and the Gospel has just finished. The priest is about to start the homily. What do you hope will happen? What do you want from the homily?

- When was the last time you heard a “bad” homily? What was it about the preaching that made listening to it a negative experience?
- What was the best homily you have ever heard? What made that homily stand out to you?
- If you have ever sent someone a link to a recording of a homily, why? What made that homily worth sharing?

PART TWO

- Based on your conversation in Part One, list 5 to 7 qualities that, generally speaking, should not be in any homily. (Try to limit the list to 7 at the maximum. This will make it easier for everyone to remember!) List these under the DON’Ts column of the worksheet.
- Based on your conversation in Part One, list 5 to 7 qualities that, generally speaking, everyone would want to see in every homily. (Likewise, keep this list at a maximum of 7 qualities.) List these under the DOs column of the worksheet.

DOs	DON'Ts

Appendix D

Completed "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" Rubrics

Below are copies or transcriptions of the completed "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" rubrics completed by the parishioner and seminarian participants. Some groups submitted a single list that summarized the points of conversation. Other groups submitted the individual contributions of the parishioners. In either case, these rubrics guided the first feedback conversation of the ministerial intervention.

D1

DOs	**DON'Ts**
• Homilist should have a clear point he wants to convey • Homilist should use personal stories • Homilies should be connected to the readings (at least one) • The homilist's tone and body language should communicate engagement with the people, confidence, and humility • Homilies should be knowledgeable about scripture, theology, and modern-day culture	• The homily should not go on unnecessarily (no time minimum or maximum was given, it was agreed upon that the homily should be as long or short as it needs to be to make the homilist's point) • Homilist should not make assumptions or bring up sensitive topics haphazardly if he is not going to treat them well • Homilies should not be repetitive • Homilies should not be given in a monotone or unengaged tone • Homilist should not come off as condescending or prideful

D2 DOs

- Be Real (No abstract theologizing)
- Repeat the high points or quotes of the homily (some quotes bear repeating).
- Share Personal Impact by using personal stories
- Be specific with application (Use phrase, "For instance…")
- Homily should always give a message of hope.
- Know your audience
- Stick to one theme throughout the entire homily.

DON'Ts

- Be abstract (keep things concrete)
- Be repetitive with the Gospel (people just heard it)
- Show off intellectual gifts
- Give too many ideas (this can be confusing)

D3 DOs

- Discuss the readings and the Gospel
- Relate the readings and the Gospel to our daily lives
- Humor and personal stories are welcome
- Be prepared and use good speaking/delivery techniques
- Give us a task or action for the week

DON'Ts

- Don't assume the people know a lot about the Bible readings
- Don't talk more than 10 minutes
- Don't direct comments at one group (such as parents of noisy children, or late-arrivers)
- Don't get political
- Don't be repetitive

D4

DOs

- Be Authentic
- Keep the message simple, clear, and concise
- Use stories and relatable images
- Be compassionate, especially around sensitive topics
- Know who you are speaking to
- Make sure the presentation hangs together; everything is there for a reason
- Incorporate substantial catechesis, aware that for many this is their only opportunity to be spiritually nourished
- Have a clear response to the message (how can the message be lived)

DON'Ts

- Make too many points or have multiple messages
- Use unrelated or non-substantial stories
- Be political or ideological; your agenda is Christ, not politics
- Avoid difficult topics
- Be critical of those in the pews without including yourself
- Use filler words (uh, um, etc.)
- Feel the need to unnecessarily entertain
- Forget to preach the Gospel and preach something other than Christ

D5

DOs

- Share personal experiences when they relate to the readings
- Be willing to provide a challenge in the homily
- Make sure people walk away with something—the more focused the homily, the better. People want to be fed!
- Have good eye-contact, speak clearly, and engage with the congregation (like a conversation)
- Be willing to engage other readings, or preach on the liturgical celebration of the day—there is a reason the Church chose the particular prayers and readings for each day, so utilize them
- Make sure the homily is practical and logical: it should be easy to follow

DON'Ts

- Do not repeat the Gospel in the homily—we have already heard it
- Do not lifelessly read a homily to the congregation
- Do not make jokes for the sake of making jokes
- Do not avoid talking about Church teaching / do not water down the message
- Do not be harsh or condescending
- Do not be overly complicated or overly theological—if the homily lacks relatability and practicality, it will not be very good

D6

DOs

- Be totally prepared
- Relate to the readings
- Use vocabulary folks will understand
- Give examples
- Give a plan of action on the message in Scripture

DON'Ts

- Preach too long
- Use stories that are too long

D7

DOs

- Share personal stories
- Use humor
- Explain historical info to better understand what is happening at the time of the Gospel reading
- Keep it shorter than 10 min

DON'Ts

- Discuss politics
- Shame those who might not follow Catholic doctrine to the letter
- Harp on Right-to-life or make it appear it's the only platform they believe in
- Use the entire homily to ask for money during the "money asking" time of the Church—please also preach on the Gospel

D8 DOs

- Passion + conviction, amazement
- Interactive a bit
- Relatable to Scripture, culture, personally
- Theological teaching to continue catechesis of sheep
- Inspirational + applicable story; evoke the imagination
- Final charge to mission
- Like the Marine Corps, "Catholic Corps" 😊
  "break down to build up"

DON'Ts

- Lack of passion
- Monotone
- Not well-formed, well-rehearsed
- All fluffy
- Left flat + without charge to mission

D9 DOs

- Personal story, experience
- Notes OK
- Limit time to no more than 20 minutes, less is better if you cover topic, lesson
- Walk into audience or use body language to make us feel connection—make eye contact
- Use humor occasionally
- Relate Gospel, readings to personal story or how we can relate it
- Teach a lesson or clarify message

DON'Ts

- Read directly
- Go longer than 20 minutes
- Discuss details of finance or numbers (and I am a math teacher + love numbers!) or too many dates
- Talk fast

D10 **DOs**

- Humor—we love a bit of humor!
- Personal stories—we love to get to know our priest "the person"
- OK to show your own struggles → makes you relatable, "He's just like us!"
- Always leave me with something to think about
- Challenge me!
- Talk about the saints + their struggles. It helps us to feel like we are not hopeless if "even that guy made it to heaven!"
- Demonstrate how we can impact the world while pursuing Heaven

DON'Ts

- Anything that can be disturbing/upsetting to children!!!
- POLITICS! You can still address hot topic but don't get political
- Sadness—we look to our shepherds for HOPE!

D11 **DOs**

- Result of prayer + reflection on the Scriptures
- Have a takeaway
- Use humor or an everyday story that people can relate to
- Have energy
- Issue a challenge
- Take risks

DON'Ts

- Bore people
- Be disorganized
- Have low energy
- Drone on

Appendix E

Outline of First Presentation on Affective Feedback for Preaching

Presentation 1 – Ignatian Affective Discernment – March 2, 2023

I. Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit

II. Brief Personal Introduction

III. Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality
   a. Brief Biography of St. Ignatius of Loyola
      i. Recuperation in 1521 from shattered leg
      ii. Thoughts of worldly honor left him dry
      iii. Thoughts of imitating the saints continued to lift him up
      iv. His eyes opened a little and he understood himself better
   b. Use of Imagination in Prayer
   c. Paying Attention to My Response

IV. Listening to God: Use of Spiritual Senses
   a. Letting Scripture Set the Scene: Composition of Place
   b. Being Bold in Prayer: Naming What I Want
   c. Letting the Holy Spirit Direct the Action: Meditation
   d. Telling Jesus What You Heard: Colloquy
   e. Thanking the Father for What He Gave You: Our Father

V. Listening to Yourself: Affective Discernment
   a. Affective Movements
      i. Interior responses to meditation
      ii. Thoughts
      iii. Feelings
      iv. Desires
   b. Movements Lead You Somewhere
      i. Closer to God = Consolation
         1. Experience of peace, joy, richness, connection with God and neighbor
         2. Can come from positive or negative affective movements
            a. Thought of God's love leads to experience of that love

            b. Feeling of sadness over sin leads to experience God's mercy
        ii. Farther from God = Desolation
            1. Experience of anxiety, despair, dryness, disconnection with God and neighbor
            2. Can come from positive or negative affective movements
                a. Desire to convert the country leads to unshakeable anger
                b. Thought of favorite sin leads to sense of shame
    c. Listening to Yourself Opens You to How God Listens to You
        i. Self-knowledge = seeing yourself as God sees you
        ii. Living with desire of God for your fullness of life in Christ
        iii. Deeper awareness of presence of God throughout daily life

VI. Small Group Discussion

VII. Closing Prayer
    d. Scripture Reading—Matthew 17:1-8
    e. Ignatian Meditation—Affective Discernment
        i. Preparatory Prayer
        ii. Composition of Place
        iii. Naming What I Want
        iv. Guided Meditation
            1. Naming Affective Movements
                a. Thoughts
                b. Feelings
                c. Desires
            2. Naming Where Those Movements Lead
                a. Toward God – consolation
                b. Away from God – desolation
        v. Colloquy
        vi. Our Father

Appendix F

Outline of Second Presentation on Affective Feedback for Preaching

Presentation 2 – Affective Feedback on Preaching – March 9, 2023

I. Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit

II. Review of First Presentation
   a. Listening to God → Dialogue with God
   b. Listening to Yourself → God Listens to You

III. Listening to Preaching
   a. Homily as Part of Liturgy of the Word
   b. Homily Aimed at Communion of God and His People
   c. Using the Spiritual Senses
      i. Composition of Place: Imagining the Homily in Daily Life
      ii. Naming What I Want: Where Do I Need God
   d. Affective Discernment
      i. Noticing Affective Movements: Thoughts, Feelings, Desires
      ii. Discerning The Impact of Those Movements
         1. Consolation—affirmation of relationship with God and with others
         2. Desolation/Challenge—contrary to expectations for the homily; movement away from God and others
      iii. Discovering the Invitation from the Holy Spirit
         1. Origin and destination—*exitus* and *redditus* of the Gift of God means that grace comes from and leads back to God
         2. Likewise, if origin is not in God, it will not lead to God

IV. Kinds of Feedback
   a. Appreciation—acknowledgment of effort; allowing the other person to share their side of the story
   b. Coaching—shoulder-to-shoulder conversation; looking at problem together and figuring out how to solve it
   c. Evaluation—comparison against others or against set of standards; align expectations, clarify consequences, inform decision making

V. Preaching and Feedback
    a. Pre-recorded Homily
    b. Ignatian Meditation—Listening to Preaching
        i. Preparatory Prayer
        ii. Composition of Place
        iii. Naming What I Want
        iv. Silent Meditation
            1. Naming Affective Movements
                a. Thoughts
                b. Feelings
                c. Desires
            2. Naming the Impact of the Affective Movements
                a. Where was I consoled? What thought, feeling, or desire affirmed me in my relationship with God and with others?
                b. Where was I challenged? What thought, feeling or desire went against my expectations for the homily?
            3. Naming the Invitation from the Holy Spirit
                a. Where does the consolation come from? Where does the consolation take me?
                b. Where does the challenge come from? How does the challenge change me?
        v. Group Discussion—Impact Sharing
        vi. Colloquy
        vii. Our Father

Appendix G

Parishioner Guide for Affective Feedback for Preaching

Affective Feedback

A Guide for Prayer and Feedback on Preaching
PARISHIONER GUIDE

Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of love
that is the life of the Trinity.
Unite us with yourself
as you unite the Father and the Son
for all eternity.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of faith
that sustains the Church.
Unite us with one another
as you united the Apostles
on Pentecost morning.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of hope
that opens us to the Word of God today.
Unite us with Jesus the Word
as you united humanity and divinity
in the womb of Mary.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Review of Homily

In the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God, recall the homily you have heard. Answer the following questions as best you can. Trust that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will guide you into all truth.

1. What happened to me during the homily? How did it go with me?
    - What thoughts did I have? Any insights or enlightenment? Any new clarity around my life of faith?
    - What feelings did I have? Any joy, strength, or peace? Any sadness, discomfort, or confusion?
    - What desires did I have? Any new plans? Any confirmation of hope? Any motivation to act?

2. What struck me most forcefully? What stands out?
    - Where was I consoled? What thought, feeling, or desire affirmed me in my relationship with God and with others?
    - Where was I challenged? What thought, feeling or desire went against my expectations for the homily?

3. What is the invitation from the Holy Spirit? Where am I being led?
    - Where does the consolation come from? Or the challenge?
    - Where does the consolation take me? How does this challenge change me?

Feedback Conversation

Preacher and listener are invited to share their experience of the homily to discover the presence of the Holy Spirit: in the preaching and in the hearts of everyone in the room.

- Seminarian Sharing – *The seminarian begins by sharing how the homily went for him.*

- Appreciation Sharing – *As you feel moved to do so, in a few words share with the seminarian any appreciation you have for the homily.*
    - What did the seminarian do well in preparing this homily?
    - What evidence can you see of the effort the seminarian put into preparing this homily?

(*continued on next page*)

- Impact Sharing – *As you feel moved to do so, share the impact the preaching had on you. Rely upon the insights into your thoughts, feelings, and desires you gained from the Review of Homily above.*
    - *Example*: "I felt consoled by the feeling of the Father's love for me when I heard how God wants to welcome us home just like the prodigal son was welcomed home."
    - *Note: The seminarian may ask clarifying questions about what you share so that he can better understand the impact of the homily from your point of view.*

- Summary – *The seminarian summarizes the ideas he has gained from the conversation for how he will preach in the future.*

Closing Prayer to the Holy Spirit
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, Gift of God,
poured into our hearts
through the love of Jesus,
anoint our conversation today.

Bring wisdom where there is error,
understanding where there is confusion,
fortitude where there is fear,
knowledge where there is darkness,
piety where there is neglect,
and awe where there is apathy.

As we seek your presence in all things, Gift of God,
make of us a gift like you.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Appendix H

Seminarian Guide for Affective Feedback for Preaching

Affective Feedback

A Guide for Prayer and Feedback on Preaching
SEMINARIAN GUIDE

Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of love
that is the life of the Trinity.
Unite us with yourself
as you unite the Father and the Son
for all eternity.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of faith
that sustains the Church.
Unite us with one another
as you united the Apostles
on Pentecost morning.

Come, Holy Spirit, O Gift of God,
and give us the gift of hope
that opens us to the Word of God today.
Unite us with Jesus the Word
as you united humanity and divinity
in the womb of Mary.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Review of Homily

In the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God, recall the homily you have given. Answer the following questions as best you can. Trust that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will guide you into all truth.

1. What happened to me during the homily? How did it go with me?
    - What thoughts did I have? Any insights or enlightenment? Any new clarity around my life of faith?
    - What feelings did I have? Any joy, strength, or peace? Any sadness, discomfort, or confusion?
    - What desires did I have? Any new plans? Any confirmation of hope? Any motivation to act?

2. What struck me most forcefully? What stands out?
    - Where was I consoled? What thought, feeling, or desire affirmed me in my relationship with God and with others?
    - Where was I challenged? What thought, feeling or desire went against my expectations for the homily?

3. What is the invitation from the Holy Spirit? Where am I being led?
    - Where does the consolation come from? Or the challenge?
    - Where does the consolation take me? How does this challenge change me?

Feedback Conversation

Preacher and listener are invited to share their experience of the homily to discover the presence of the Holy Spirit: in the preaching and in the hearts of everyone in the room.

- Seminarian Sharing – *Begin the feedback conversation by sharing how the homily went for you. The following questions may be helpful in organizing your thoughts:*
    - How was the writing process for this homily?
    - How well did the delivery of the homily go?
    - What was the invitation from the Holy Spirit for you as you preached?

- Appreciation Sharing – *Parishioners share in a few words any appreciation they have for the homily.*

(*continued on next page*)

- Impact Sharing – *Parishioners then share the impact the preaching had on them.*
    - *You should ask clarifying questions about what parishioners share so that you can better understand the parishioner's point of view. The following example questions may be helpful:*
        - "Can you give me an example?"
        - "What did that mean to you?"
        - "How did that impact you?"

- Summary – *The seminarian summarizes the ideas he has gained from the conversation for how he will preach in the future. The following categories and questions may be helpful for organizing your thoughts:*
    - Action Plans – What, if anything, are you going to change or work on?
    - New Strategies – What ideas have you come up with for how to prepare your next homily?
    - Find What Matters – What is one thing you can change that will make a difference to these listeners?

Closing Prayer to the Holy Spirit
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, Gift of God,
poured into our hearts
through the love of Jesus,
anoint our conversation today.

Bring wisdom where there is error,
understanding where there is confusion,
fortitude where there is fear,
knowledge where there is darkness,
piety where there is neglect,
and awe where there is apathy.

As we seek your presence in all things, Gift of God,
make of us a gift like you.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Appendix I

Feedback Facilitator Guide for First Feedback Session

Feedback Facilitator Guide

Parishioner Feedback on Seminarian Preaching

The peace of Christ be with you!

Thank you for volunteering as a facilitator for the feedback sessions with the seminarian intern at your parish. The primary goal of these sessions is to help the seminarian grow as a preacher. The only way he will learn how well he is preaching is if he hears from the people who heard him. Your role in these sessions is to keep the focus on helping the seminarian improve. You can do this by keeping the conversation on track, encouraging talkative people to let others have a chance to share, inviting quiet people to share their thoughts, and to give the seminarian time to respond to what he has heard. Below is a guide to help you navigate your role as facilitator.

May the Lord Jesus reward you for the generous gift of time you are making to the formation of the future priests of the Church!

Your brother in Christ,

Fr. David Mowry
Instructor of Homiletics
Mundelein Seminary

Feedback Session #1 – "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching"

Before the Feedback Session

- Confirm date, time, and location with seminarian intern.
- Confirm seminarian intern has communicated session details with parishioner participants.
- Confirm the details of when the seminarian preached (for example, "at daily Mass on Tuesday the 10th" or "at a Holy Hour last Saturday").

- Have enough copies of the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list for all participants.
- Review the recording of the seminarian's homily (if there is one).
- Pray for the Holy Spirit for the graces of charity and wisdom for everyone participating.
- Arrive 10 minutes before start of feedback session.

Running the Feedback Session

1. Have everyone introduce themselves. Ask people to share how long they have been parishioners.

2. Ask the seminarian intern to lead the group in a short prayer.

3. Share the details of the preaching you are giving feedback on.
    - For example: "Today we're talking about the reflection John gave after Communion this past Sunday."
    - This will ensure that everyone is on the same page and is prepared to talk about the same preaching.

4. Tell people how long you have to discuss the preaching. 30 minutes is a good time limit to aim for because it will keep the conversation focused but still allow people to share freely. If you need more or less time, work that out with the seminarian beforehand.

5. Invite people to comment on the homily using the "Dos and Don'ts" list as a guide.
    - For example: "We've got this list of 'Dos and Don'ts of Preaching' which John put together with parishioners. The list will guide us on what to give feedback on. So, what from this list did you hear in John's preaching?"
    - Be comfortable with silence! Give people a chance to collect their thoughts before speaking.
    - At the same time, be prepared to start the conversation if a long time goes by without anyone speaking.

6. After someone has shared, if no one immediately jumps in, prompt another response by asking, "Thanks for that. Anyone else?"

7. During the conversation, pay attention to the following:
    - **Too Much Time on One Topic** – If the conversation has spent a lot of time on one point, encourage the group to move on. The best way to do this is to ask about another item on the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list. For example: "We've talked a lot about using jokes in the homily. What about the way John delivered the reflection?"
    - **One Person Doing All the Talking** – Sometimes one person has a lot to say. That's good, but the more perspectives the seminarian intern can hear, the better. Invite people who haven't said much to chime in.
    - **Off-Topic Conversation** – Make sure the conversation stays focused on the seminarian intern's preaching. The conversation can easily start drifting into a discussion about homilies and preaching in general. If you hear the conversation starting to do that, ask a question connecting back to the seminarian intern's preaching. For example: "I agree it's important for a priest to be warm and personable when he preaches. Did John preach that way in this homily?"

8. Keep an eye on the clock. Let everyone know when you've reached the time limit.

9. Conclude by asking the seminarian intern what he found helpful about the conversation.

10. Ask about scheduling the next feedback session. This will depend upon when the seminarian intern is preaching next. Take advantage of everyone being in the same place to schedule the next session!

11. Remind everyone to fill out the survey about the feedback session. The seminarian intern will be able to provide the link to the survey web page.

12. Ask the seminarian intern to close the feedback session with prayer.

After the Feedback Session

- Confirm with the seminarian intern that he has provided the link to the survey web page.

- Confirm the date of the next feedback session with the seminarian intern.
- Complete the survey about the feedback session.

Appendix J

Feedback Facilitator Guide for the Second and Third Feedback Sessions

Feedback Facilitator Guide

Parishioner Feedback on Seminarian Preaching

The peace of Christ be with you!

Thank you for volunteering as a facilitator for the feedback sessions with the seminarian intern at your parish. The primary goal of these sessions is to help the seminarian grow as a preacher. The only way he will learn how well he is preaching is if he hears from the people who heard him. Your role in these sessions is to keep the focus on helping the seminarian improve. You can do this by keeping the conversation on track, encouraging talkative people to let others have a chance to share, inviting quiet people to share their thoughts, and to give the seminarian time to respond to what he has heard. Below is a guide to help you navigate your role as facilitator.

May the Lord Jesus reward you for the generous gift of time you are making to the formation of the future priests of the Church!

Your brother in Christ,

Fr. David Mowry
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Feedback Sessions #2 and #3 – "Affective Feedback"

Before the Feedback Session

- Confirm date, time, and location with seminarian intern.
- Confirm seminarian intern has communicated session details with parishioner participants.
- Confirm the details of when the seminarian preached (for example, "at daily Mass on Tuesday the 10th" or "at a Holy Hour last Saturday").

- Have enough copies of the "Affective Feedback" guide for all participants.
- [Suggested] Provide paper and pens/pencils for participants to use to write down their insights during the Review of Homily section of the feedback process.
- Review the recording of the seminarian's homily (if there is one).
- Pray for the Holy Spirit for the graces of charity and wisdom for everyone participating.
- Arrive 10 minutes before start of feedback session.

Running the Feedback Session

1. [If new people have joined the group] Have everyone introduce themselves. Ask people to share how long they have been parishioners.

2. Ask everyone to join you in praying the **Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit**.

3. Share the details of the preaching you are giving feedback on.
    - For example: "Today we're talking about the reflection John gave after Communion this past Sunday."
    - This will ensure that everyone is on the same page and is prepared to talk about the same preaching.

4. Tell people how long the feedback session will be. 45 minutes is a good time limit to aim for because it will keep the conversation focused but still allow people to share freely. If you need more or less time, work that out with the seminarian beforehand.

5. Invite people to silently reflect on the questions in the **Review of Homily** section. Tell them how long they will have to reflect. 10 minutes is the suggested time limit for this portion. Be sure to check if anyone needs more time before moving on to the next section.

6. To start the **Feedback Conversation** section, invite the seminarian to share how the preaching went for him.

7. After the seminarian has had a chance to share, open the conversation for any words of appreciation for the homily. Point out the suggested questions on the feedback guide as a jumping off point for this part.

- Listen for any comments that say more about the impact of the preaching or offer advice on how to improve the preaching. If this happens, guide the conversation by saying, "It sounds like we're ready to move on to sharing the impact the homily had on us. Does anyone have any other words of appreciation before we move on?"

8. Once everyone has had a chance to share words of appreciation, move the conversation to the impact the homily had on everyone.
    - The parishioners should be encouraged to draw on the insights they gained from the **Review of Homily** section. When needed, ask parishioners to connect their comments with the thoughts, feelings, and/or desires that came to them during the preaching.
    - The seminarian should be encouraged to ask clarifying questions. When needed, ask the seminarian if there is any piece of feedback he wants more detail on.

9. After someone has shared, if no one immediately jumps in, prompt another response by asking, "Thanks for that. Anyone else?"

10. During the conversation, pay attention to the following:
    - **Too Much Time on One Topic** – If the conversation has spent a lot of time on one point, encourage the group to move on. The best way to do this is to ask about a specific part of the **Review of Homily** section. For example: "We've talked a lot about the insights we gained. What about any feelings that were stirred up by John's reflection?"
    - **One Person Doing All the Talking** – Sometimes one person has a lot to say. That's good, but the more perspectives the seminarian intern can hear, the better. Invite people who haven't said much to chime in.
    - **Off-Topic Conversation** – Make sure the conversation stays focused on the seminarian intern's preaching. The conversation can easily start drifting into a discussion about homilies and preaching in general. If you hear the conversation starting to do that, ask a question connecting back to the seminarian intern's preaching. For example: "I agree it's important for a priest to be warm and personable when he preaches. Did John preach that way in this homily? How could

you tell?"

11. Keep an eye on the clock. Let everyone know when you've reached the time limit.

12. When the conversation about the impact of the homily has wound down, or you have reached your time limit, invite the seminarian to summarize what ideas he has gained from the conversation for how he will preach in the future.

13. [If needed] Ask about scheduling the next feedback session. This will depend upon when the seminarian intern is preaching next. Take advantage of everyone being in the same place to schedule the next session!

14. Remind everyone to fill out the survey about the feedback session. The seminarian intern will be able to provide the link to the survey web page.

15. Ask everyone to join you in praying the **Closing Prayer to the Holy Spirit**.

After the Feedback Session

- Confirm with the seminarian intern that he has provided the link to the survey web page.
- [If needed] Confirm the date of the next feedback session with the seminarian intern.
- Complete the survey about the feedback session.

Appendix K

Questions for Post-Feedback Interviews with Seminarians

General Information

1. After the first feedback session:
    a. Preferred pseudonym?
    b. Age
    c. Racial Background
    d. Faith Background (baptized Catholic as infant, adult convert, reversion after lapse in practice, etc.)
    e. Life Prior to Seminary (high school student, college student, full-time employee, etc.)
    f. Years in Formation

2. What was the pastoral context of your preaching? Who was your audience?

3. What was the liturgical context of your preaching? What were the Scripture readings? What was the liturgy being celebrated that day? Were you the presider of the liturgy or was another minister presiding?

4. When and where did the preaching take place?

5. [If researcher was not present for feedback session] When did the feedback session take place? How long after the preaching did it happen? Was the session in person, online, or a combination of both?

6. How many were present for the feedback session? What was the age range of the people involved? What was the racial makeup of the group? What was the dominant demographic group represented in the group (age, race, economic status, etc.)?

Content of Feedback

7. What were the main points of feedback you heard during the feedback session?

8. What did the parishioners praise about the homily?

9. What did the parishioners say could make the homily better?

10. What did the parishioners say about the content of the homily?

11. What did the parishioners say about the delivery of the homily?

12. Which received more attention in the feedback session: the content of the homily or the preacher's delivery?

Tenor of Discussion

13. How did you feel before the feedback session started?

14. What was the mood in the room during the feedback session: calm, angry, enthusiastic, disinterested, lively, tired, etc.?

15. How did you observe that mood: words, actions, body language, etc.?

16. How did you feel after the feedback session ended?

Reception of Feedback

17. What was the biggest affirmation about your preaching from the feedback session? Why?

18. What was the biggest surprise you heard about your preaching during the feedback session? Why?

19. What was the best point made during the feedback session? Why?

20. What points did you disagree with? Why?

21. What type of feedback was most common in this session: appreciation, coaching, or evaluation?

22. Was there a type of feedback you wanted to hear? Which one and why?

23. After hearing the feedback from this session, how would you summarize the impact your preaching had on your listeners?

24. Was that the impact you intended to have on your listeners? Why or why not?

25. What, if anything, will you do differently the next time you preach? Was there a piece of feedback from this session that influenced that change? If so, why? If not, why will you make that change?

Value of Feedback Rubric

26. How did people reference the feedback rubric: printed handout, notes on a whiteboard, PowerPoint slide, memory recall alone, etc.?

27. After the first feedback session:
    a. How useful was the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list?
    b. How well does it reflect your own criteria of homily effectiveness?
    c. How well did the language of the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list guide the conversation? Were other terms and concepts introduced? What were they?
    d. Was everyone using the same terms in the same way? Why or why not?
    e. Would you want the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list as a rubric for a feedback discussion or would you rather have no rubric? Why?
    f. Would you introduce this list to parishioners in your first assignment as a priest to get feedback on your preaching? Why or why not?

28. After the second and third feedback sessions:
    a. How useful was the Ignatian feedback model?
    b. How comfortable are you with the language of the model (affective movements, consolation, desolation, discernment of spirits, etc.)?
    c. How well did the language of the Ignatian feedback model guide the conversation? Were other terms and concepts introduced? What were they?
    d. Was everyone using the same terms in the same way? Why or why not?
    e. Would you want the Ignatian feedback model as a rubric for a feedback discussion or would you rather have the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" as a rubric? Why?
    f. Would you introduce this model to parishioners in your first assignment as a priest to get feedback on your preaching? Why or why not?

<u>Review of Project (final interview)</u>

29. What are the takeaways from the project for you?

30. How has this project changed the way you think about preaching and feedback?

31. What was most helpful? What was the biggest obstacle?

32. Thank you!

Appendix L

Survey Questions for Parishioner Participants

Demographic Information

Please share some basic information about yourself.

1. Sex
    - Female
    - Male

2. Age
    - Under 18 years old
    - 18 – 24 years old
    - 25 – 34 years old
    - 35 – 44 years old
    - 45 – 54 years old
    - 55 – 64 years old
    - 65 – 74 years old
    - 75 years old or older

3. Racial Background
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Black or African American
    - Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
    - Middle Eastern or North African
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - White
    - Other (please specify): _____

4. Feedback Session
    - Date: _____
    - Time: _____

Content of Feedback

The following questions ask you to review the content of the feedback you offered to the seminarian. In other words, what did you talk about in your feedback?

5. During the feedback session, in the **content of my feedback…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I praised the homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I criticized the homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I praised the seminarian.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I criticized the seminarian.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I talked about what the seminarian said in the homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I talked about how the seminarian gave the homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I told the seminarian what he did well.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I told the seminarian what he could do better.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I had the same feedback as other people in the group.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I wanted more time to discuss the homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Additional Comments:

Tenor of Discussion

The following questions ask you to review the tenor of the conversation during the feedback session. In other words, what was it like to be in the room?

6. During the feedback session, during the **conversation itself…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I was engaged in the conversation the whole time.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
The seminarian was engaged in the conversation the whole time.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Everyone was able to speak and participate as equal conversation partners.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
One or more people dominated the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

6. During the feedback session, during the **conversation itself…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I felt a sense of joy during the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt angry during the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt at peace during the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt anxious during the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt energized after the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt drained after the conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Additional Comments:

Giving Feedback

The following questions ask you to review how you thought about the feedback you gave. In other words, what was important for the feedback conversation to go well?

7. During the feedback session, when I was **giving feedback…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I had something I wanted to communicate to the seminarian during this feedback session.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I thought I communicated what I wanted to say well.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I wanted to acknowledge the seminarian's effort that went into this homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I wanted to help the seminarian improve his preaching for his next homily.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I wanted to tell the seminarian how he compared to other preachers or homilies I have heard.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

7. During the feedback session, when I was **giving feedback…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The seminarian needed to hear appreciation for his effort and hard work.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
The seminarian needed to hear how to improve his preaching.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
The seminarian needed to hear how he compares with other preachers or homilies.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I based my feedback on my perception of the seminarian's character.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I based by feedback on my perception of how the homily impacted me.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Additional Comments:

Value of Feedback Model

The following questions ask you to review the feedback model used. In other words, did the guidelines for the conversation help or hinder giving the seminarian feedback?

8. While using **this feedback model…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the model useful.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I felt comfortable using the language of the model.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
The conversation used the vocabulary of the model.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Everyone in the conversation used the same terms in the same way.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I or others used terms other than those in the model to express our feedback.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I thought the model was well-suited to giving feedback on preaching.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I thought using the model was an improvement over an unguided conversation.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

8. While using **this feedback model…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
[*For the first feedback session only*] I thought using the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list was an improvement over other models of feedback I have used.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
[*For the second feedback session only*] I thought using Affective Feedback was an improvement over the "Dos and Don'ts of Preaching" list.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
[*For the second and third feedback sessions only*] I thought using Affective Feedback was an improvement over other models of feedback I have used.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I thought this model would be helpful for my parish priest to get feedback about his preaching.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I thought this model would be helpful for other parishes to use to provide feedback on preaching.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Additional Comments:

Additional Comments

Please feel free to share anything else about your experience of giving feedback on the seminarian's preaching.

9. Please share any other comments you have below:

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