

Acculturation Seminar for International Priests

FAQ

The following questions about acculturation programs are frequently asked by bishops, priest-personnel directors, and congregational leaders:

Q. Is the main focus of the acculturation seminar to help international priests to speak better English?

A. The Acculturation Seminar offers an introductory session on accent modification, including techniques international priests can utilize so parishioners can understand them better. Accent modification is a resource St. John's offers through a semester long clinic, and all priests are welcome to participate in this skills-based clinic with individual coaching sessions and group sessions. The Acculturation Seminar goes beyond accent modification since effective interpersonal communication is a necessary skill in ministry and cultural differences can create misunderstandings and difficulties. The Acculturation Seminar presents a range of communication skills with special attention given to cultural differences in pastoral situations.

Q. Does this seminar offer an academic perspective or does the program go beyond theory into practice?

A. The program offers a sound theoretical base presented by experts in their respective fields, with a keen focus on practical application. For example, the legal framework in the US is presented with a discussion of case studies identifying legal issues facing parishes and the Catholic Church. Moreover, all of the sessions are designed to address the needs of international priests in particular.

Q. Does the seminar address difference between the perception of the status of women in US and traditional practices in many developing countries?

A. Yes, gender issues are addressed on two levels. The content of presentations - including interpersonal communications, law and counseling - addresses the issue of gender as it relates to the respective fields. In addition, the Seminar management team, as well as the faculty for the program, includes both men and women who provide a model of professional collaboration.

Q. With globalization and the increase in information about the US, is there still a need for an acculturation program?

A. While globalization has contracted the world, cultural differences persist especially in areas integral to evangelization, pastoral care and church management. Some of the more dramatic differences between cultures relate to family, work ethic, parenting, interpersonal relationships, professional boundaries, the role of women, religious practice, etc. The Seminar encourages discussions of similarities and differences among cultures. In a safe and non-threatening environment, sessions raise awareness of expectations of international priests working in the US as well as assisting priests to meet the challenge of refraining from imposing their cultural norms and perspective on others. The program emphasizes the need for ongoing self-study and offers strategies for international priests to use related to self-care.

Q. What is the advantage for priests to attend a university-run residential program like St. John's? Isn't this more a diocesan function?

A. Both are important and achieve different goals. First of all, St. John's collaborates with the Sacred Heart Institute which is a cooperative effort of the local dioceses. The University is a resource which is open to



serving the Church. We have found that when priests from several dioceses, congregations and nations come together for a week where they pray, worship, study and share recreational and educational experiences, they develop into a genuine community. Their shared priesthood creates a natural bond but the program sharing builds a culture of openness and learning is facilitated. The priests also share challenges they have met and can offer support to their peers because of this openness. They begin to see more clearly the universality of the experience of acculturation and this gives them confidence that much of what they experience is quite natural and to be expected. The intensiveness allows them to become more committed to entering into the process of acculturation actively and with personal responsibility. They also set up actual and virtual networks according to nationality, geography or interest and this is positive.

- Q. How does a diocese or parish justify the cost for someone who may only stay here three or five years?**
- A.** The majority of pastors and many international priests who have commented on this question express that cultural competency programs are a double investment with good rates of return. First, it is an investment in the individual priest's formation and development; the global priesthood gains. Second and equally important, it is an investment which yields immediate returns to the people in the parishes and institutions where the priests serve; the Church in the US benefits. There is a consensus that this program contributes to the success of the international priest as a person and as a priest. This has immediate and direct results as it impacts his evangelization efforts within our diverse communities and within the presbyterate as well.

Please submit any additional questions or comments to us at vccs@stjohns.edu. Thank you.