



## **Acculturation Seminar for International Priests**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

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 speak better English?**

**A.** No, that is not the main focus, but it is one of the values promoted. 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 University offers through a semester-long clinic; 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 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 the difference between the perception of the status of women in the 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, include 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 nonthreatening environment, sessions raise awareness of expectations of international priests working in the US, as well as assists 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. How does a diocese or parish justify the cost for someone who may only stay in the United States for 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.

**Q. How does the participant access the virtual sessions?**

- A.** The seminar takes place via Zoom. Prior to each session, the participant receives a link via their email address. Each session has its own unique link. To sign on, the participant must click the link and follow prompts.

Please submit any additional questions or comments to [vccs@stjohns.edu](mailto:vccs@stjohns.edu). Thank you.