



# **Introductory Report for The High Calling Program Episcopal Advisory Board**

Prepared for: High Calling Program Episcopal Advisory Board

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and the Initiative for Priestly Renewal with Saint Patrick's  
Seminary

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**Purpose and Content of Report:** This initial report aims to familiarize you with the different facets of our work within the High Calling Program and the Initiative for Priestly Renewal. This report not only provides a comprehensive overview of our mission, growth, and ongoing initiatives, but also serves as a space to address any outstanding questions and gather your valuable insights.

**Opening Statement:** The High Calling Program is dedicated to guiding men through various stages of priestly discernment while also supporting priests who seek a deeper interior life and wish to be formed in the art of spiritual direction. At its core, the program focuses on forming the heart, ensuring that all who participate are better prepared to answer God's call—whether as discerners, seminarians, or priests. The priestly formation is in collaboration with the Initiative for Priestly Renewal with Saint Patrick's Seminary.

The High Calling Program is structured around four key components: Vocational Development Outreach, Discernment Formation, Propaedeutic Formation, and Formator Formation.

## **1- Vocational Development Outreach**

In response to the question “How can we encourage men to thoughtfully consider a potential vocation to the priesthood amidst the challenges of today's society”, we formed a program that enables the Avila Foundation to “fish” for men who may be called to the priesthood through contemporary marketing platforms. We have discovered that men who are interested in learning more about their calling are cautious about contacting a vocation director and/or may not be ready for that contact for various reasons. So this outreach is meant to be a middle man, or meeting point, to connect with these men and then walk with them to a vocation director.

- Since 2023, Instagram has played a key role in connecting individuals to the High Calling Program. That year, four serious conversations led to four men enrolling.
- In 2024, the platform facilitated 13 meaningful discussions, resulting in six new men to the High Calling Program.
- Now, in 2025, as of this day in May, 19 conversations are actively ongoing, with two men already committed to commence this fall.



## 2- High Calling Program Discernment Formation (Pre-Propaedeutic)

The High Calling Program is an online program for men discerning a call to the priesthood designed to accommodate their lives as students and working professionals before or during the application process. In live, online, synchronous instruction, men receive content on discernment formation and spiritual accompaniment from world class instructors and mentors. Together, the men encounter Christ in an exploration of the interior life, the meaning of human existence, self-mastery, the mystery of spiritual fatherhood and missionary discipleship. This online experience of fellowship has been invaluable to the nurturing and encouragement of vocational discernment.

- ***Dioceses and Men's Progression:*** Established in 2017 with a single diocese and 9 men, the High Calling Program has expanded significantly, having served 93 dioceses and formed 536 men discerning a vocation to the priesthood.
- ***Phone Detox:*** Two years ago, in collaboration with Humanality—an apostolate dedicated to promoting healthy smartphone use—we launched a program addressing the impact of smartphones on spiritual life. This initiative helps men recognize and overcome potential smartphone addictions that may hinder their relationship with God.
- ***Small Groups:*** This year, we introduced a Small Group initiative within the High Calling Program to foster community and discussion among discerners, especially those from the same or nearby dioceses. Through regular meetings led by an Avila mentor, these groups encourage men to reflect on God's work in their lives and share their experiences in the discernment process.

### ***Events Past and Upcoming:***

- *National Eucharistic Congress:* July 17-21, 2024 (Indianapolis, IN)
- *SEEK:* January 1-5, 2025 (Salt Lake City, UT)
- *Spiritual Direction Symposium:* June 19-21, 2025 (Latrobe, PA)
- *Saint Therese of Lisieux on the Night of Faith and Dawn of Hope Symposium:* August 1-3, 2025 (Long Island, NY)
- *NCDVD:* August 22-28, 2025 (Huntington, NY)
- *SEEK:* January 1-5, 2026 (Columbus, OH)



### **3- Propaedeutic Year / Seminaries**

In 2023, the High Calling Program broadened its reach to Mount St. Mary's Seminary, providing first-year seminarians with additional content to enrich their interior life alongside their formal formation. Initially supporting 29 seminarians across 10 dioceses, the program expanded in 2024 to include St. Joseph's Seminary, where participation grew to over 40 seminarians.

### **4- Spiritual Direction Program for Priests (Initiative for Priestly Renewal)**

In collaboration with St. Patrick's Seminary's Initiative for Priestly Renewal, we introduced a spiritual direction program for priests in 2022, equipping them with the skills to guide those discerning the priesthood. The program initially launched with 18 priests from 10 dioceses and has since grown significantly, serving 55 priests across more than 25 dioceses over its three-year span. For the 2025-2026 cycle, we are already at full capacity and will be forming 26 priests in 14 dioceses nationwide.

#### ***Events Past and Upcoming:***

- *Marian Pilgrimage, Medjugorje:* May 11-22, 2025
- *Confessor's Institute:* June 23-27, 2025 (Santa Cruz, CA)
- *Spiritual Direction Symposium:* June 19-21 2025 (Latrobe, PA)
- *SDPP Pilgrimage and Retreat:* October 8-17, 2025 (Siena, Assisi, Loretto, and Rome, IT)

#### **Upcoming Reports:**

- Second Report: September 15, 2025. Fall enrollment updates will be included.
- Live Zoom meeting with all members: January 26, 2026.