

GUIDELINES FOR SETTING FORMATION POLICY DEALING WITH ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

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In setting policy for dealing with ACOAs, I want first to recognize the policy that Mundelein Seminary has established for recovering alcoholics. The policy was printed in the 1986 Blue Book, but simply put:

One who is recovering from alcoholism is to maintain first and foremost the AA recovery program over any other formational activity. Quality sobriety is the first priority, which is not to be sacrificed for any other dimension of formation. This is stated, and it has been my experience that it is practiced to the letter. Another dimension Mundelein Seminary utilizes is the exercise of Admission Board Reviews. On these boards it is ascertained what kind of history one has had with alcohol use, either personally or in the family. In setting policy, I would like to address the administrations. It is essential that administrations create an atmosphere of openness to growth and investigation into the personal history of the students or candidates.

Secondly, administrations should not try to face these issues alone. It is important to be aware of all the resources available in one's given area and to make these known to students, so they can take advantage of these opportunities for growth. There also should be the financial assistance provided in some manner to utilize these resources.

Finally, in facing these issues it is wise to have consultants at your disposal, because ACOAs are very frustrating to work with and the formation staff members need the support and encouragement of a consultant, not to mention the expertise in each diagnostic situation. Once the administration decides to formulate policy, it must understand the recovery needs of ACOAs. I feel there are 3 basic recovery needs:

- First, one needs to be practicing a 12-step spiritual program. This is very basic and essential in every moment of recovery.
- Secondly, one needs a mentor to walk with them on this fearful journey. This mentor would preferably be either familiar or practicing a 12-step program in their own spirituality.
- Thirdly, one can benefit greatly from an experience of group counseling. This provides an appropriate atmosphere to uncover issues and practice healthy behaviors.

One does not talk about; one does it. This is especially helpful in dealing with an ACOA's need to be loved and to allow oneself to display anger. These are fundamental ACOA struggles in which group counseling can set people free or at least provide that opportunity in a safe and appropriate place. I feel that these are the three basic needs in recovery. One could probably enter into recovery without these, but I feel that the chances for quality recovery rise with the addition of each of these opportunities. We can create all the policies or programs in the world, but they will not be very effective without the three elements. I am very honored to have the privilege to speak at the NCCA.

I am entering my fourth year of theology at Mundelein Seminary, studying for the Diocese of Rockford. The NCCA has made a major impact on: my life, on Mundelein Seminary, and on the Diocese of Rockford. I have attended these conferences since 1986, which was the year that Father Richard Bartz reported 8 of the 17 ordained to priesthood that year were recovering alcoholics. My life was affected by the experience, strength, and hope shared at that conference. I knew I had some issues to face, but I also realized that I was not the only ACOA running around in seminary or priesthood. I went back to Mundelein that year and shared my story in an orientation workshop. There was instant response, so I was encouraged by a friend to meet with the Dean of Formation to bring the ACOA issue to his attention. He was very open and in three months we invited Stella Nicholson, who counsels families and educates people on the addictive family system. Her presentation drew 80-90 people on a volunteer basis out of a possible 175. The seminary gained a new awareness that night for the effect of alcoholism on the family system.

We started on-campus ACOA meetings and many seeds were planted. For myself, I realized that I had better start taking care of myself before trying to save the seminary, so I sought counseling for my own recovery. In 1987, I attended the NCCA in Jacksonville. Once again, I was touched by the sharing and encouragement people offered me. I really felt like a part of this one. This time I came after getting some help for myself and being an intern in a parish with Father Bill Clausen. I was at an all-time low emotionally, but for once I could

feel. The people of St. Peter (where I interned) made me feel loved and helped me rediscover my vocation.

This was a time when I needed a significant other to encourage me and accept me where I was. That special person was Father Bill Clausen. He called me to be courageous, professional, and true to myself. At this conference, people were curious about ACOAs and what is being done at our seminary. I felt I had something to offer, so today I hope to do that. After that conference, I returned to Mundelein with new ideas to improve our seminary program.

This past year Stella Nicholson was hired as a consultant for dealing with family issues. Mundelein Seminary has made some breakthroughs in understanding the impact family has on a candidate. These issues have been coming through in spiritual direction, so Father Tom Hickey, Director of Personal Development, and I were asked to present some ideas to the spiritual directors at Mundelein Seminary. Tom and I met in a restaurant one night and had a conversation about what we see as significant issues and ways of dealing with them. We then brought this conversation to the spiritual directors. We wanted some type of construct to get a handle on the issues, so we came up with 5 Moments in recovery. These moments are what I will present in the paper, Spiritual Direction for ACOAs.

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