

POLICY AND NORMS ON SEMINARIANS



ITALO-GREEK ORTHODOX HOLY METROPOLITAN
ARCHDIOCESE OF THE AMERICAS AND CANADA

October 2025



OFFICE OF THE METROPOLITAN

Beloved in Christ,

It is with profound joy and pastoral concern that I address this Policy on Seminarians of our Holy Archdiocese. The calling to the sacred priesthood is a gift from God, entrusted to the Church for discernment, formation, and guidance. In this responsibility, we are not alone: our clergy, our educators, and the faithful of our parishes share in the holy labor of nurturing those whom the Lord has called to serve at His Altar.

The sacred trust of forming seminarians requires both vigilance and compassion. We must discern the gifts and readiness of each candidate with careful attention to spiritual maturity, moral integrity, and pastoral potential. At the same time, we must foster a climate of encouragement, love, and guidance, so that those who are called may grow in holiness, knowledge, and pastoral wisdom.

It is my hope and prayer that this Policy will serve as a clear and faithful guide for all involved – candidates, clergy, educators, and committees – as we faithfully carry out the Church's responsibility to shepherd the next generation of priests.

+Stephen

Metropolitan of the Americas and Canada of the Italo-Greeks
Bishop of Utica
Primate of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church



DECREE OF PROMULGATION

As the Primate of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church and the Metropolitan of the Americas and Canada of the Italo-Greeks, I decree that this “Policy on Seminarians” is hereby promulgated as particular law and policy for the Archdiocese, effective immediately.

I further decree that this Policy on Seminarians shall also be Universal Law for the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church and shall apply to and be implemented as Particular Law for all Archdioceses, Metropolises, and Dioceses/Eparchies of the Church, effective immediately.

Given at the Chancery of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada in the God-protected City of Utica in the State of New York on this 16th day of October (the 3rd of October according to the Julian Calendar) in the Year of Our Lord 2025.

Most Reverend Archbishop STEPHEN
Primate of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church
Metropolitan of the Americas and Canada of the Italo-Greeks
Bishop of Utica



Archdiocesan Policy on Seminarians

Recruitment, Vetting, Selection, Formation, and Review

Preamble

The formation of seminarians is a sacred duty entrusted to the Church. It is both a privilege and a responsibility, requiring that those called to the Holy Priesthood be carefully discerned, diligently trained, and faithfully supported in their spiritual, academic, liturgical, and pastoral formation.

This Policy establishes the norms and procedures by which the Archdiocese identifies, evaluates, forms, and oversees seminarians under its sponsorship. It is designed to ensure that every candidate receives guidance in holiness, instruction in Orthodox Catholic theology and practice, and preparation for the pastoral responsibilities of the priesthood, while maintaining accountability, transparency, and fidelity to the teachings of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

Section 1 - Policy Scope

1. This Policy applies to all seminarians studying under the blessing or sponsorship of the Archdiocese, whether enrolled in the Archdiocesan seminary or in another Orthodox Catholic theological institution approved by the Metropolitan.

Section 2 - Recruitment and Vetting

1. Eligibility Criteria:
 - a. An Orthodox Catholic male communicant of good moral and spiritual standing.
 - b. Demonstrated involvement in parish life and evidence of a genuine vocation to the priesthood.
 - c. Sound mental and emotional health, spiritual maturity, and an exemplary moral life.
2. Required Documentation and Checks:
 - a. Formal application to the Archdiocese.
 - b. Comprehensive criminal background investigation, including state and federal records.
 - c. Comprehensive personal background screening, including education, employment, and credit history.
 - d. Psychological evaluation by an Archdiocese-approved professional.
 - e. References:

- Parish Priest
- Parish Council (formal recommendation letter)
- Spiritual Father/Confessor
- Five personal references (non-relatives) attesting to moral and social character.

3. Disqualifications and Considerations:

- a. A prior criminal record shall not automatically exclude a candidate; each case will be reviewed individually.
- b. Evidence of deceit, manipulation, or concealment in the vetting process may result in automatic disqualification.

Section 3 - Selection Process

1. Review Bodies:

- a. Applications are reviewed by the Vocations Committee and the Seminarian Admission, Formation Review, and Evaluation Commission (SAFREC).
- b. The Commission evaluates each candidate's fitness for seminary life, including spiritual, psychological, academic, and pastoral readiness.

2. Interviews:

- a. Each candidate shall undergo at least one personal interview (in-person or via secure video) before the SARFC.
- b. The candidate may also be interviewed by the Metropolitan for final discernment.

3. Approval:

- a. Admission as a seminarian requires the joint recommendation of the SAFREC and approval by the Metropolitan.

Section 4 - Formation and Oversight

1. Components of Formation:

- a. Spiritual: regular participation in the Divine Services, confession, fasting, and prayer life.

- b. Academic: successful completion of theological studies according to Archdiocesan and seminary standards.
 - c. Liturgical: training in rubrics, chant, and service at the Holy Altar.
 - d. Pastoral: supervised parish assignments and fieldwork in pastoral ministry.
 - e. Administrative: exposure to parish administration, finances, and Church governance.
2. Spiritual Father/Confessor:
- a. Each seminarian must have an approved spiritual father/confessor, appointed or confirmed by the Archdiocese.
 - b. Reports and Oversight:
 - c. Biannual progress reports to the Archdiocese.
 - d. The Vocations Committee maintains regular contact with each seminarian.

Section 5 - Review, Evaluation, and Continuation

1. Annual Review:
- a. Every seminarian undergoes an annual review conducted by the SAFREC.
 - b. Grounds for Suspension, Dismissal, or Withdrawal:
 - i. Persistent academic failure.
 - ii. Moral or ethical failings inconsistent with priestly life.
 - iii. Psychological or behavioral instability.
 - iv. Sexual misconduct or abuse.
 - v. Violation of canonical norms or civil law.
 - vi. Lack of cooperation, obedience, or transparency with the Archdiocese.
2. Rehabilitation and Appeal:
- a. Suspended or dismissed seminarians may seek reconsideration at the Metropolitan's discretion.

Section 6 - Financial Support and Obligations

1. Forms of Support:
- a. Tuition assistance, stipends, or grants based on available funds and merit.
 - b. Support contingent upon continued satisfactory performance and adherence to this Policy.

2. Post-Graduation Service:

- a. Seminarians receiving Archdiocesan support are expected to serve within the Archdiocese upon ordination.

3. Accountability:

- a. Funds must be used exclusively for educational and formation-related expenses, subject to verification by the Archdiocesan Finance Office.

Section 7 - Implementation

1. This Policy is implemented under the authority of the Metropolitan and Metropolitan Council.
2. The Vocations Committee and SAFREC oversee compliance and provide recommendations for amendments.
3. The Policy shall be reviewed every five (5) years or as directed by the Metropolitan.

Introductory Rubric to the Appendices

The following Appendices (A through G) form an integral and inseparable part of the Policy for Seminarians of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada.

They are intended to provide practical, pastoral, and administrative guidance to complement the norms of the principal text and shall be interpreted in harmony with the Statutes, Canons, and Directives of the Archdiocese and the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church.

Each Appendix is to be regarded as binding upon all seminarians and formation officials under the authority of the Metropolitan and the diocesan Bishops. Amendments or revisions to these Appendices may be made only with the approval of the Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan, who alone possesses the right of promulgation and suspension.

Together, these Appendices serve to safeguard the integrity of priestly formation, ensure accountability, and promote the spiritual and moral well-being of those preparing for Holy Orders within the sacred tradition of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Church.

Appendix A – Seminary Formation Agreement

Each seminarian of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada shall, before admission to any seminary program, execute a Seminary Formation Agreement with the Archdiocese. This agreement shall outline:

- a. The seminarian's acceptance of the authority of the Metropolitan and of his Bishop, and their right to direct and oversee every aspect of his formation.
- b. The understanding that continued sponsorship and financial assistance (if applicable) are contingent upon satisfactory spiritual, academic, and pastoral progress.
- c. The seminarian's obligation to live according to the moral, ethical, and canonical standards of the Orthodox Church.
- d. The seminarian's agreement to comply fully with all rules and expectations established by the seminary, the Archdiocese, and his Bishop.
- e. The commitment to discernment in humility, accepting that ordination is neither a right nor an entitlement, but a sacred calling confirmed by the Church.

The Seminary Formation Agreement may be viewed in Appendix G of this Policy.

Appendix B – Code of Personal Conduct for Seminarians

The following standards shall govern the personal life and behavior of all seminarians of the Archdiocese:

1. Seminarians are to maintain a life of prayer, chastity, sobriety, and simplicity consistent with the Gospel and the Orthodox way of life.
2. Participation in the full liturgical life of the Church and regular confession and spiritual direction are required.
3. Seminarians shall refrain from any conduct that brings scandal or harm to the Church or diminishes the dignity of their vocation.
4. The use of alcohol shall be moderate and never unbecoming; the use of drugs, pornography, or any illicit substances is strictly forbidden.
5. Seminarians are expected to exercise prudence and modesty in speech, dress, and social media presence, remembering that they represent the Church publicly even when not in clerical attire.
6. Any romantic or sexual relationship, or behavior inconsistent with celibate or married life discipline during formation, shall be reported immediately to the Bishop and may constitute grounds for dismissal.
7. The seminarian shall respect all faculty, staff, and peers, avoiding all forms of harassment, gossip, or divisive behavior.
8. Confidentiality, integrity, and honesty shall characterize every aspect of his personal and ministerial life.

Appendix C – Financial Assistance and Stewardship Guidelines

1. Financial support from the Archdiocese, metropolises, dioceses/eparchies, or parishes is a privilege, not a right, and is always contingent upon satisfactory progress and conduct.
2. Seminarians receiving such support shall demonstrate gratitude and good stewardship, including written acknowledgment of assistance received.
3. Seminarians shall not incur unnecessary debt and shall consult their Bishop or financial advisor before taking on significant financial obligations.
4. Seminarians are encouraged to live simply, avoiding luxury, waste, or ostentation.
5. Upon completion of studies, a full accounting of financial support received shall be provided to the Archdiocese.

Appendix D – Spiritual and Psychological Evaluation Protocol

1. All seminarians must undergo an initial psychological assessment and, as deemed necessary, periodic re-evaluation to ensure emotional and spiritual maturity suitable for ordained ministry.
2. Psychiatric and/or psychological evaluations shall be conducted by professionals approved by the Archdiocese and shall remain confidential.
3. The seminarian's continued formation and eligibility for ordination shall be contingent upon satisfactory evaluations.
4. Refusal to participate in such evaluations, or interference with the process, may result in suspension or dismissal from the formation program.

Appendix E – Withdrawal, Dismissal, and Reinstatement Procedures

1. A seminarian may voluntarily withdraw from the program after consultation with his Bishop and the Metropolitan.
2. Dismissal may occur for moral, disciplinary, academic, or psychological reasons, or for failure to comply with the standards outlined in this Policy.
3. In the event of dismissal, the seminarian shall receive a written statement from the Bishop or Metropolitan explaining the reason for the action.
4. A seminarian who seeks reinstatement must submit a written petition to his Bishop, who will review it in consultation with the Metropolitan and formation faculty.
5. Reinstatement, if granted, shall be considered probationary and subject to additional conditions of accountability.

Appendix F – Sample Daily Rule of Prayer and Study for Seminarians

This Rule is offered as a guide to assist seminarians in cultivating a life of prayer, discipline, and reflection suited to the sacred vocation of the priesthood. It may be adapted with the blessing of one's spiritual father or Bishop, but the pattern of daily prayer and study must never be neglected.

1. Morning Rule

- Upon rising, make the Sign of the Cross and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of life and the new day.
- Recite the Morning Prayers as found in the Prayer Book or Horologion.
- Attend and participate in Matins and Divine Liturgy, if scheduled.
- Read a short passage from Holy Scripture (preferably the appointed Epistle or Gospel for the day).
- Offer personal petitions for one's Bishop, family, spiritual father, and those entrusted to one's prayers.
- Observe a brief period of silence before beginning the day's labors.

2. Midday Discipline

- At midday, pause for the Sixth Hour or a brief intercession, recollecting the presence of God amid study and work.
- Take meals in moderation, giving thanks before and after eating, and keeping a spirit of temperance and gratitude.

3. Evening Devotion

- Conclude the day with the communal celebration of the Ninth Hour and Vespers, followed by reflection on one's actions and thoughts throughout the day.
- Make a brief confession of faults before God, asking forgiveness and renewal of heart.
- Read a passage from the writings of the Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, or a spiritual classic approved by the Bishop or spiritual father.
- End with the Prayer to the Theotokos and the Trisagion Prayers before retiring for rest.

4. Weekly and Monthly Observances

- Confession and spiritual direction at least once monthly, or more frequently as needed.
- Fasting according to the traditional Orthodox Catholic fasts and the seminary's rule.

- Regular attendance at all liturgical services, particularly on Sundays and major feasts.
- One day each week, set aside at least two hours for spiritual reading, silence, and rest from unnecessary activity.
- Participation in acts of charity or community service as part of pastoral formation.

5. Interior Disposition

- Maintain humility and watchfulness over the heart, guarding against judgment, pride, or distraction.
- Cultivate gratitude for the vocation of service and the privilege of formation.
- Remember that knowledge without prayer breeds vanity, while prayer with study leads to illumination and wisdom.

Appendix G – Seminarian Formation Agreement

The Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada

Preamble

This Seminarian Formation Agreement is a covenant between the Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada (hereinafter “the Archdiocese”), acting through its canonical hierarch, and the undersigned seminarian (hereinafter “the Candidate”), who freely petitions to enter into ecclesiastical formation toward possible ordination in the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church.

This Agreement affirms that the call to Holy Orders is not a personal right or career path, but a sacred vocation discerned and confirmed within the life of the Church under obedience to her bishops and the tradition handed down by the holy fathers.

I. Ecclesial Oversight and Authority

- i. The Candidate acknowledges that his formation, conduct, and readiness for ministry are subject to the spiritual and canonical authority of his Bishop and ultimately the Metropolitan.
- ii. The Candidate agrees to accept and obey all directives given by his Bishop, the Metropolitan, and their appointed representatives in matters pertaining to formation, discipline, or ministry.
- iii. The Archdiocese retains the right to withdraw sponsorship or dismiss the Candidate from formation for reasons of doctrine, conduct, academic performance, or pastoral suitability.
- iv. The Candidate shall recognize that ordination, if it is to occur, is conferred only at the discretion of the Bishop and cannot be demanded, presumed, or expected as a consequence of formation.

II. Spiritual and Moral Life

- i. The Candidate shall maintain a disciplined life of prayer, fasting, confession, and participation in the Divine Services of the Church.
- ii. He shall live according to the moral and ethical standards of the Orthodox Christian faith, bearing witness to Christ by purity of heart, humility, and charity.
- iii. The Candidate shall avoid scandal or conduct unbecoming of a future cleric, including inappropriate relationships, misuse of social media, or behavior contrary to chastity and sobriety.

- iv. He shall be under the regular spiritual guidance of an approved spiritual father and shall confess frequently and sincerely.
- v. Failure to maintain a stable and upright spiritual life may result in suspension or removal from the formation program.

III. Academic and Pastoral Formation

- i. The Candidate shall complete all academic requirements prescribed by the seminary and the Archdiocese in a spirit of diligence, honesty, and excellence.
- ii. He shall engage in pastoral training, field education, and service opportunities as assigned, always showing humility and respect for those he serves.
- iii. The Candidate shall cooperate fully with seminary faculty, staff, and administrators, avoiding divisive or disrespectful behavior.
- iv. He shall promptly report any personal difficulties, health concerns, or disciplinary issues that may affect his studies or ministry to his Bishop or designated formation supervisor.

IV. Financial Stewardship

- i. The Candidate accepts personal responsibility for the prudent management of his financial affairs and shall not incur unnecessary or excessive debt.
- ii. If financial assistance is provided by the Archdiocese, diocese, parish, or other Church institutions, the Candidate agrees to use such funds solely for educational and living expenses related to formation.
- iii. The Candidate shall provide an annual accounting of financial support received and maintain transparency regarding any external sources of aid or employment.
- iv. Should the Candidate withdraw or be dismissed, all financial matters shall be settled in good faith with the sponsoring authority.

V. Psychological and Medical Evaluation

- i. The Candidate consents to initial and, if required, subsequent psychological or medical evaluations deemed necessary by the Archdiocese to assess readiness for ordained ministry.

- ii. Such evaluations shall remain confidential but may be shared with the Bishop and formation personnel as necessary for pastoral and canonical discernment.
- iii. Refusal to participate in required evaluations shall be considered grounds for suspension or dismissal from formation.

VI. Confidentiality and Conduct

- i. The Candidate shall maintain confidentiality regarding pastoral matters, seminary life, and personal communications shared in trust.
- ii. Academic integrity, honesty, and personal discretion are essential to the life of the seminarian and to the integrity of the Church.
- iii. Any breach of confidentiality, academic dishonesty, or conduct harmful to the reputation of the Church shall be cause for disciplinary review.

VII. Withdrawal, Dismissal, and Reinstatement

- i. The Candidate may voluntarily withdraw from formation after consultation with his Bishop and spiritual father.
- ii. Dismissal may occur for reasons of doctrine, moral failure, persistent disobedience, academic deficiency, or personal unsuitability for ordained life.
- iii. In such cases, written notice of dismissal shall be issued by the Bishop or Metropolitan, stating the reasons for the decision.
- iv. A dismissed Candidate may petition for reinstatement, subject to review and the fulfillment of specific conditions established by the Bishop and the Archdiocese.

VIII. Duration and Renewal

- i. This Agreement shall remain in effect throughout the Candidate's period of formation and shall be reviewed annually by the Bishop or his delegate.
- ii. Renewal or continuation of sponsorship shall depend upon satisfactory progress in all areas of formation and continued good standing in the Church.

IX. Declaration and Signatures

By signing this Agreement, the Candidate affirms that he has read, understood, and freely consents to all provisions herein. He recognizes that his participation in formation is a sacred trust between himself, his Bishop, and the Holy Church of God.

Signed this ___ day of _____, 20, in the presence of witnesses.

The Candidate:

(Signature) _____

Printed Name _____

Date _____

The Bishop or Metropolitan:

(Signature) _____

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

Witness (if required):

(Signature) _____

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

Certification and Archival Statement

This Seminarian Formation Agreement is to be executed in duplicate originals, one to be retained by the seminarian and the other by the Chancery of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada.

Each executed copy shall bear the seal of the Archdiocese and the signature of the Metropolitan or his appointed delegate, signifying its authenticity and canonical force.

The document shall remain in effect for the duration of the seminarian's approved period of formation. It shall be preserved permanently in the official archival record of the Archdiocese as testimony of his pledge of obedience, fidelity, and commitment to the service of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church.

(Seal of the Archdiocese to be affixed here)

Witnessed and Certified by the Chancery of the Archdiocese

Date of Certification: _____

Signature of Chancellor or Secretary: _____

Printed Name: _____

Title/Office: _____