

Spiritual Formation: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Senior High Seminarists in the New Normal Education

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Abstract

The study was conducted at St. Pius X Seminary, Lawaan, Roxas City to evaluate the Spiritual formation activities involvement of Senior High Seminarists in the new normal education, the challenges encountered in their participation on Spiritual formation activities and the coping mechanisms with the challenges faced. The study is a qualitative design using phenomenology as a methodology. Data for this study were gathered using a researcher-made interview schedule and questionnaire for the focus group discussion (FGD). Ten participants, senior High School seminarists, were chosen through purposive sampling. The result shows that most seminarists attended the Mass and praying novena and holy rosary as part of their spiritual formation activities. Seminarists spend their time playing online mobile games and are addicted to social media, leading them to lack focus and motivation. Finally, seminarists resort to prayer, self-disciplining through avoidance or limitation in using gadgets and social media, and effective and proper to cope with these challenges. It is recommended that the seminary conduct online seminars or training on how to combat challenges seminarists face and provide a venue for open discussion and feedback so they may have the chance to voice their sentiments and concerns.

Keywords: *Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, New normal education, phenomenology*

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Introduction

St. Pius X Seminary as a formative community, SPXS aims at nurturing minor seminarians where natural human virtues, basic religious values, Christian behavior patterns, sound study habits, community life orientation, and appreciation for the priesthood are initially inculcated (SPXS Handbook, 2020). Spiritual formation is the core of the seminary formation program because it gives meaning and it animates the acting of seminarians. It stresses the importance of communal and personal prayers, sacramental and para-liturgical celebrations and devotions, and other activities that could deepen the personal commitment of seminarians to the person and mission of Jesus Christ.²

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, spiritual formation activities in St. Pius X Seminary are hampered. The shift from face-to-face modalities to remote modalities in an institution has impacted these activities. Priest formators have had to switch from traditional in-seminary settings to various forms of distance formation and develop methods to stay in touch with seminarians. For seminarians, the lack of structured in-seminary formation settings may have required more self-regulation and self-motivation towards spiritual growth. Priest formators initiated varied spiritual activities via Facebook live and other online platforms just to reach out to the seminarians and the public. However, there is always an unavoidable circumstance that arises for different reasons in which sometimes only a few seminarians are joining and participating in this kind of online spiritual activity.

This present phenomenon needs to be given attention as spiritual formation plays a vital role in the life of seminarians. Understanding the plight and challenges of these seminarians can be a source of actions and plans that will help them cope with their endeavors. Studies on the experiences of the spiritual formation of seminarians in the new normal need to be explored, hence, this study.

This research study determined and understood the spiritual formation activities, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms of Senior High Seminarians in the New Normal Education.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What are the Spiritual formation activities involvement of Senior High Seminarians in the new normal education?
2. What are the challenges encountered in their participation in Spiritual formation activities?
3. What are the coping mechanisms with the challenges encountered by the Senior High Seminarians in participating in the spiritual formation activities?

Methodology

The study is a qualitative design using phenomenology to answer the research questions on challenges and coping mechanisms of Senior High Seminarians in the New Normal Education. Its main feature is to give meaningful and more profound explanations of social activities. Creswell stated that qualitative research was intended to explore more importantly on, social phenomena by immersing into the situations.¹ This study will understand and explore the lived experiences of Senior High Seminarians in the New Normal Education.

The participants of the study were identified using a purposive sampling method based on the following criteria: (a) currently enrolled in St. Pius X Seminary, AY 2021:2022; (b) Senior High Seminarian; c) willing to participate in the study as confirmed by their signatures in the Informed Consent Forms (ICFs). There were ten participants in the study. Data was gathered from interviews and focus group discussions of the participants under study.

Findings and Discussion

Praying and Attending to Daily Masses (Online)

The Catholic Church has allowed followers to attend Mass online while maintaining social distancing. St. Pius X Seminary and several churches and parishes in the Philippines have been live streaming the Holy Mass through social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. Most seminarians attended the Mass and prayed novena and holy rosary as part of their spiritual formation activities. As one participant states, “*Attending the mass and the liturgy of the hours and the rosary.*” This shows that the seminarians are still offering and attending Eucharistic celebrations despite the pandemic.

Limited or no face-to-face activities

With diligence, creativity, and grace to persevere amid incredibly challenging circumstances and take the necessary measures to keep one another safe with grace, adaptability, love of neighbor, and faith in God. One participant shared, *"It's very hard in today's situation, but my will to pray never stops and makes me deeper in terms of praying, especially because of the pandemic."* This shows that even though seminarians are inside their homes, they instill in their minds that spiritual formation will never end as long as they are a seminarian and human beings with faith and trust in God.

The Challenges Encountered in their spiritual formation activities.

Spiritual formation activities shifted online, and seminarians' way of life and spiritual development changed so radically in response to the global public health crisis. The researcher has come up with the theme of Social media and mobile games addiction since most participants shared that this is the most challenging activity, they encounter in their spiritual formation activity in the new normal.

Social Media & mobile games Addiction. The result shows that seminarians spend their time playing online mobile games and are tempted to use their gadgets or mobile phones since they have no other activities to do inside their houses after attending their classes online. Since they play mobile games, sometimes they forget to attend or hear the Mass online.

Less focus and less motivated. Theme 2 shows the seminarians' feelings towards the challenges they encountered. Results revealed that seminarians were less focused and unmotivated because most of the spiritual formation activities they attend are done online. With this, they found it less interactive.

Coping Mechanisms of the Students on the Challenges encountered

Prayer. The seminarians revealed that to cope with the challenges they encountered in participating in spiritual formation activities, they resort to prayer and asking for guidance from God.

Avoidance of gadgets/Minimizes using gadgets. Another coping mechanism, according to seminarians, is their personal desire to avoid using gadgets such as mobile phones.

Proper time management. The respondents also revealed that proper and effective time management could help them cope with these challenges. They revealed that if one can manage time properly and effectively, giving proper time for every activity, they can also manage to participate actively in spiritual formation activities.

Conclusion

There were limited spiritual formation activities offered and participated by seminarians. Given the distance learning and health crisis, seminarians could still join in some formation activities. Some of these were the usual activities at home, like praying the holy rosary and novena and attending Mass. With the new technology and advent of social media, seminarians could participate in holy Mass online.

Given the scenario that seminarians, especially minors, are not allowed to go out and attend mass gatherings in church, seminary, or public places, they were still confronted with other challenges and factors that hampered their participation in spiritual formation activities. Aside from their academics, various factors contributed to their participation, which greatly affected their focus and motivation to participate and involvement in the said formation activities.

Although seminarians were confronted with the challenges, they also find ways to cope with them and still participated in these activities. Seminarians exerted effort to combat those challenges that have affected their willingness and motivation to participate and be involved in the activities

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