

**HOMILY OF THE MOST REVEREND CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE BLESSING AND DEDICATION OF THE NEW WING OF
SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT SEMINARY
SEWARD, NEBRASKA
APRIL 22, 2018**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I want to offer the heartfelt congratulations of Pope Francis on this memorable occasion in the life of this seminary community of St. Gregory the Great and the Diocese of Lincoln, as it celebrates the twentieth anniversary of this seminary and dedicates this new wing, which has become necessary due to an abundance of vocations and the need to form priests for the new evangelization.

My predecessor, Archbishop Montalvo, had the privilege to dedicate and bless the Immaculate Conception Chapel, the Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Library, and classrooms and offices during the Year 2000. It is an honor to be with you today, and I thank Bishop Conley and Father Eickhoff for their kind invitation. I also want to thank the faculty and to offer you encouragement in the difficult but important work of seminary formation. You are shaping our future priests and contributing something vital to the future of the Church. I also thank the seminarians and priests gathered here for the gift of themselves. Finally, I thank the many benefactors gathered here who have made this possible with their many prayers and sacrifices.

Today, the Church is called to be a visible sign of the closeness of God to His people. Whether it is a parish church or the dedication of a new wing of a seminary, the physical building is a reminder of God's presence among us – of his desire to be close to us. Part of the Church's mission is to help people experience the tenderness of God. Pope Francis has emphasized mercy to remind people that God is close to them; that He cares for them; that He loves them. As it says in the Book of Revelation: *He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people*. He promises that *he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more*.

The priests that are formed here will bring the consolation and joy of the Lord to His people, and that it is what this seminary represents. It is not just another school. Rather, it is a reminder that God provides shepherds for his Church, shepherds who mediate the love of the Heart of Christ to the People of God. God never ceases to gaze upon His people in their need. *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion upon them, because they were distressed and discouraged, like sheep without a shepherd*. This building should inspire gratitude to God for His loving gaze, and, at the same time, it should invite all of us to continue to *ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for the harvest*.

Certainly, this diocese and the sending dioceses have been blessed with priestly vocations. Today, this seminary – with its 50 seminarians – begins a new phase of its formation of missionary disciples, who, God-willing, will serve as priests. The new guidelines on priestly formation say:

“The fundamental idea is that Seminaries should form missionary disciples who are ‘in love’ with the Master, shepherds ‘with the smell of the sheep’, who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence, every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation,

understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.” (Congregation for Clergy, “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation,” 8 December 2016, Introduction, 3).

College seminaries, like Saint Gregory the Great, are concerned not only with right-thinking through rigorous and truly Catholic philosophy, but also with helping seminarians realize that they are called to “stay with the Lord”, to follow Him, and to become a missionary of the Gospel. This following is not undertaken alone; rather, the seminarian journeys with others – his brother seminarians and his formators.

Seminary formators ought to have a paternal relationship with seminarians, and seminarians ought to have a healthy, fraternal relationship among themselves. In this way, the dominant patterns of individualism in society today can be overcome gradually and communally, as happens in family life. A healthy model of fatherhood and fraternity can generate an atmosphere for continuous learning in the seminary. Thus, future priests can better understand the dynamics of the families entrusted to their care and can be true fathers to them.

As Saint Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians: *You are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*, mindful that the Church is *built upon the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the capstone*. With the dedication of this wing, it is my hope and prayer that men will be formed here for years to come who can be true brothers to one another and true fathers to the children of God in the one household of God.