



New approach to molding future priests

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***ADVANCE FOR SUNDAY AUG. 30** In this photo taken on Thursday, May 14, 2009, Joseph Toledo, left, and other seminarians hold a morning service at the Redemptoris Mater Archdiocesan Missionary Seminary in Denver, Colorado. (AP Photo/Joel Fischer) Photo: Joel Fischer, AP / SF*

The seminarians' wallets are empty, except for driver's licenses and insurance cards. To buy cigarettes or clothes or anything else, they must ask their superiors for money - an exercise in obedience and a reminder that material things aren't important.

They have virtually no time alone, on or off campus, and are required to travel in pairs, "two by two," like Jesus' disciples. They live in a world without cell phones or personal computers, and their evenings end promptly at 10.

No Roman Catholic seminary is a resort. But few men who study for the priesthood endure the sort of rules that govern life at the [Redemptoris Mater House of Formation](#).

Redemptoris Mater is a new experiment in molding Catholic priests who are faithful to church teaching and authority and zealous in their desire to lead other Catholics down that same road.

On the one hand, the rules are a throwback to 50 years ago, when would-be priests led regimented existences apart from the rest of the world. But Redemptoris Mater men also teach the faith at parishes and spend two years on mission trips, knocking on doors looking for Catholics in Bronx housing projects or Minneapolis suburbs.

The rules "are difficult to get used to, but it's because we come from this very individualistic society, where it's just me," says seminarian Joseph Toledo. "Those things have to be torn down. But it isn't like we're living in a bubble, either."

Toledo is the 29-year-old son of a Puerto Rican cabdriver and is one of the few American-born seminarians on the rolls in 2008-09. All told, there are 33 students from 14 countries.

In this, they reflect the changing face of the U.S. priesthood. Their greater ethnic diversity and hunger to show fidelity to the church are hallmarks of the coming generation of priests, according to a study released this month by the National Religious Vocation Conference, an organization of Catholic vocation directors.



*ANTICIPO PER DOMENICA AGOSTO ** . 30 ** In questa foto scattata il Mercoledì 22 Aprile 2009, Toledo Seminarista Giuseppe lavora in cucina presso il Seminario Arcivescovile Missionario Redemptoris Mater a Denver, Colorado. (AP Photo / Joel Fischer) Foto: Joel Fischer, AP / SF*

In other ways, Redemptoris Mater seminarians stand apart from their peers.

The seminary is not the province of a religious order or a diocese headed by priests and bishops. Instead, Redemptoris Mater seminarians and the priests who oversee them come from Neocatechumenal Way communities, groups of 20 to 50 who bond over intense study and an evangelism foreign to most Catholics.

The Way, an international movement largely run by Catholic laypeople, is controversial; some critics say it is separatist and causes division in parishes, though its defenders deny it.

The group's approach to discipline at the seminaries it operates in the United States (besides Denver, Redemptoris Mater seminaries have opened in Boston; Dallas; Newark, N.J.; and Washington, D.C.) has attracted notice in important places.

When a Vatican office summarized a 2005-06 study of U.S. seminaries seeking answers to the clergy sex abuse scandal, it recommended that seminaries make their rules more demanding so men shed a "worldly style of life" - and it suggested that Redemptoris Mater seminaries were examples worth following.

The Redemptoris Mater House of Formation sits in a leafy residential neighborhood in southeast Denver, on a Spanish mission-style campus called the [John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization](#). The campus is also home to a larger seminary - [St. John Vianney](#), or SJV - which trains men mostly from Colorado and the Midwest for the Denver archdiocese.

Seminarians from the two institutions receive the same [education](#) in the same classes, grounded in reverence for traditional Catholic teaching. Neither is an institution for questioning the church on contraception or the merits of the celibate, male-only priesthood.

But SJV mirrors contemporary seminary life. The men take notes on laptops, carry BlackBerries, live in single rooms, gather for TV watching in a common room, maintain their own blogs and spread news about snow-canceled classes on Facebook. Basically, that's the rule when it comes to contemporary Catholic seminary life in the United States.