

Research Article

# The Contribution of the St John Vianney Seminary in the Training of Catholic Clergy in the Past 50 Years According to Professor Joy Brain

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## Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church made it compulsory for its priests to study both philosophy and theology in the seminary before ordination. The aim of these studies is to produce scientifically capable and professional pastors. St John Vianney Seminary was established in 1948 in Pretoria, South Africa. In 2023 the seminary celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. However, the article is on the history of different phases of the seminary for the last 50 years as described in the book authored by Brain, JB. The article explains historical documents that led to the formation of the seminary in the apartheid South Africa. The aim is to supplement the history of St John Vianney Seminary with impressions and anecdotes concerning the teaching staff and students. The researcher will reflect on some ideas regarding the seminary in the new dispensation. The research is conducted in the form of a Literature study and draws from literature on the historical book: *St John Vianney Seminary – 50 Years of Priestly Training* by Professor J. B. Brain published in 2002 as the main source. To include some elements of the contemporary activities in the seminary, the research method is based on a mixture of literature analysis, oral story-telling and interviews.

## Keywords

Catholic Church, St John Vianney Seminary, Priests, Theology, Philosophy

## 1. Introduction

In the period up to the Second World War (1939-1945) many of the young men intending to study for the priesthood were sent overseas for the formation. In his foreword to Joy Brain's history of St John Vianney Seminary, Bishop William Slattery noted that a seminary encapsulates the history of a local church [1]. The history of St John Vianney Seminary NPC, therefore, reflects some of the struggles, weaknesses and successes of the Southern African Church. We trace this back to the formative years of Apartheid in 1948 when three separate seminaries existed in the country: Pavansley,

Hammanskraal, and Waterkloof. Today, questions regarding the Church's decision to give in to the Apartheid regimes intrigues, a decision that ultimately enfeebled priestly formation and retarded the growth of the Church's own conscientisation, are still not satisfactorily answered. St John Vianney Seminary, says Bishop Slattery, has travelled a tortuous road [1].

Before 1922 no priests were trained in South Africa, but with the publication of Pope Benedict XV's Encyclical Letter *Maximum Illud* Apostolic Delegates were tasked to set up

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seminaries for the training of indigenous clergy. Pope Pius XI also issued *Ad Catholicum Sacerdotium* to this effect [1]. The task of establishing a seminary in South Africa in accordance with the two papal documents mentioned, fell in the hands of Dominican Archbishop Jordan Gijlswijk, who was the Apostolic Delegate to South Africa from 1923-1944. After his visitation of the local vicariates and prefectures, Archbishop Gijlswijk summoned all the local ordinaries and ecclesiastical superiors to Kimberley in 1924 where the issue of the training of local priests was discussed. However, the Marianhill Missionaries already had plans for the building of St Mary's Seminary at Mariathal while St Augustine's seminary had been opened by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1924 in Lesotho [1]. Fr Stanley Khoza applauded St Augustine's Seminary in Lesotho for pioneering young men such as George Qwabe, Remi Mohaladi and Rakaone (Khoza, Interview 27 February).

Archbishop Gijlswijk encouraged these works but stated that he had in mind one seminary for the whole country. When Archbishop Gijlswijk died in 1944, his successor Archbishop Martin Lucas SVD began the formation of a consultative body of bishops later to be known as the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (hereafter SACBC) while fostering the idea of a national seminary. Although Cape Town and Port Elizabeth were considered for the building of the seminary, it was Pretoria that won the day. Archbishop Martin Lucas, the then Apostolic Delegate, considered Pretoria to be ideal given the fact that the apostolic delegation had been transferred from Bloemfontein to Pretoria and because the site at Waterkloof was suitable. The current site was bought from the Sisters of Nazareth for 4000 British Pounds with Bishops Denis Hurley and O'Leary contributing substantially [1].

The seminary was to fall under the Church Interest Department of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference and Bishop Hurley acted as chairperson of this department from 1974 to 1952 [1].

### 1.1. Pioneers of St John Vianney Seminary in Queenstown

The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Martin Lucas, strongly supported the move to open a seminary to train diocesan priests in South Africa. However, due to the outbreak of the First World War in 1939 this mission became impossible. On April 14, 1948, Archbishop Lucas opened St John Vianney Seminary in temporary quarters at Queenstown because of delays in constructing the seminary in Pretoria [2]. Fr Norbert Carroll arrived in South Africa in 1948 together with Fr Isidore Maher to lecture Philosophy [1]. They were the first Franciscans to join the staff of St John Vianney Seminary, then in Queenstown [1]. Fr Norbert Carroll became the rector at St John Vianney Seminary from 1966 to 1972. He was succeeded by another Franciscan Fr Frank Doyle (1972-1977) who trained seminarians in

homiletics.

The temporary accommodation was donated by Bishop Rosenthal of Queenstown [2]. Fr Edward Walsh was the acting rector (1948-1950). In May 1948, the seminary began with nine seminarians and continued at Queenstown until 1950 [1]. Meanwhile the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) petitioned the Holy See to raise the inter-vicarial seminary to the status of a regional seminary and this was duly approved by a Decree of June 21, 1950. St John Vianney Seminary was declared "a regional seminary for the education of European students within the limits of the delegation" [1].

#### *Franciscans at St John Vianney Seminary*

First and foremost, a Franciscan is someone whose chosen life has been inspired by St Francis of Assisi [3]. The first Franciscans arrived in South Africa in the 1930s. The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Martin Lucas approached several teaching congregations to teach at St John Vianney Seminary without success. Through his secretary, Urban O'Sullivan, he approached the newly arrived Irish Franciscans to staff St John Vianney Seminary, Frs Isidore Maher and Norbert Carroll.

The current building of St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria was officially opened on March 1, 1951 and accommodated 150 students. The Irish Franciscan friars were to staff it [1]. Until their withdrawal in 1998, and over the decades, they were responsible for the formation and education of thousands of seminarians. Franciscan friars served as rectors and lecturers at St John Vianney Seminary [1]. They gave students at the seminary a complete training in spirituality, philosophy and theology [1].

The Franciscan seminary staff had both secular and ecclesiastical degrees and assisted the seminary to affiliate with the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome and Unisa. They introduced the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (BST) in the seminary. At that time the accreditation authority was the Urbaniana Pontifical University in Rome (Khoza, Interview 27 February).

The community of the Franciscan friars at St John Vianney Seminary influenced lay Catholics with whom they came into contact, impressing them with the depth of their knowledge and their willingness to share it. Over the years friars from the seminary have reached hundreds of Catholics through celebrating Mass and preaching at parishes around Pretoria in the absence of a parish priest; they have also preached numerous retreats all over South Africa. And they did a great deal to improve the image of the Catholic Church among Protestants, particularly in the early years when the 'Roomse gevaar' (the Roman Danger) idea prevailed in the Afrikaans speaking community [4].

They served as chaplains to many organisations and associations in the Archdiocese of Pretoria. For example, they served as chaplains to the students at the University of Pretoria [1]. In their chaplaincy, they came into contact with Catholics through the Third Order of St. Francis and through

the associations of graduates and University students. There were not many graduates in the 1940s and 1950s because the majority of Catholic families were working people who could not afford higher education for their children, except for those who had bursaries to train as teachers. There was therefore a need for intellectual stimulation, for opening the way for meaningful debate and introducing willing listeners to the writings of theologians and scholars. The Irish Franciscans were sympathetic to the black students in their concerns over events in the townships [1]. The Franciscans through their lectures to the laity, the courses and workshops they organised and the sermons they preached filled the gap of the lack of education amongst the blacks [1].

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Franciscans made themselves available to the bishops who required to make changes in Church structures and particularly in the training of priests and religious [1]. The Franciscans living in the seminary assisted the Archbishop of Pretoria over nearly fifty years, not only supplying chaplains to various organisations and to the Sisters of Nazareth, but also supplying for parish priests when necessary, running courses, holding workshops and preached retreats to groups and parishes [1]. Archbishop emeritus of Pretoria, George Daniel, depended on the Franciscans for pastoral support. Due to shortage of priests in the archdiocese Franciscans had a significant role to play (Daniel, Interview 31 January).

In 1990, the Franciscans decided that they could not continue to supply the seminary with administrative staff and communicated this decision to the SACBC [1]. The remaining Franciscan lecturing staff continued in their posts while serious efforts were made to find diocesan staff, and particularly black staff, since the majority of students were black [1].

The Irish Franciscans made St John Vianney Seminary an institution of beauty and joy for all.

## 2. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) Brought Changes

After the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, despite the enthusiasm with which most of the reforms were accepted, the Catholic Church was thrown into a state of uncertainty and disquiet [5].

The storm after Vatican II affected students, priests and religious worldwide with mass departures. A significant number of priests and religious left their ministry and the student numbers in the seminary all over the world dropped, especially in the Northern hemisphere [1]. There was a shortage of clergy everywhere in the decades after the Second Vatican Council [1]. St John Vianney Seminary was not spared, losing fifteen students in 1966. Seminarians of this period were asking for a number of reforms in the seminary. They were also affected by public discussion on celibacy and the priesthood itself, particularly in the media,

and by the publicity given to cases of priests leaving the ministry [1].

The Council had called for a full course on pastoral activities for seminarians and this came into effect at St John Vianney Seminary in 1967 after a meeting with representatives from St Peter's Seminary [2]. As a result, at the beginning of 1967, St John Vianney Seminary introduced a full course of pastoral activities for all students. It included a number of options such as: preaching, the administration of the sacraments, teaching of catechism, parish visitations, visiting the sick and aged and generally assisting in parish administration [1].

The Vatican II Council document *Optatam Totius* stressed the question of priestly training.

*Major seminaries are necessary for priestly training. In them the whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls...They should be trained for the ministry of the Word, so that they may gain an ever increasing understanding of revealed Word of God...They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification, so that by prayer and the celebration of the sacred liturgical functions they may carry on the work of salvation through the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments...They should be trained to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to men (people)...Professors should receive a careful preparation in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods (par. 1-7).[6]*

After the Second Vatican Council, the Church began focusing on Christian unity and the meaning of the term Justice widened and this change coincided with apartheid in South Africa at its height [7]. St John Vianney Seminary's academics and lecturers widened the students' horizons on these important matters. In this light they focused on Second Vatican Council documents, namely, *Gaudium et Spes* [8], *Lumen Gentium* [6], and *Optatam Totius* [9]. Inspired a new zeal in Catholic life in thought and deed and a deeper commitment to social justice and active concern for the poor and dispossessed, to being a People of God, brothers and sisters infused with a transforming faith of hope and joy and daily renewal. *Lumen Gentium* was to point to a new way of being church, community and human together.

## 3. Black Students at St John Vianney Seminary, Waterkloof

Waterkloof is an affluent suburb located to the east of the city centre, Pretoria, South Africa. In 1939 it was established as a White residential suburb [1]. Hence, St John Vianney Seminary which is based at Waterkloof and was opened in 1951 was an all-white seminary.

In 1946 St Peter's Major Seminary was established at Hammanskraal for Africans only. St Peter's students

addressed an open letter to the bishops asking for a multi-racial seminary since St John Vianney Seminary catered for white students only [10]. However, it would take a few more years before the seminary would become non-racial. The Black Consciousness movement was a political force among the students at St Peter's Seminary [1].

Political upheaval in South Africa forced the bishops to close St Peter's Seminary in the middle of 1976 and black students were transferred to St John Vianney Seminary to complete their studies [1]. Unfortunately, these black students had to leave shortly afterwards for fear that their communities would label them as traitors. They addressed a letter to the bishops to this effect. Despite their short stint at St John Vianney Seminary, these black students had proved that the notion of a non-racial seminary was possible [2].

However, it should be noted that the admission of black students at St John Vianney Seminary in Waterkloof brought problems for them with its 'white by night' policy. They had no work or residence permits and were constantly being arrested and put in the police cells overnight. Enquiries about the student would be made at the seminary and the rector would then be required to go to the police station in the morning to bail them out. The rector then supplied each student with a signed letter explaining their position. This helped for a time although sometimes a policeman would endorse the letter "Hierdie Bantu is onwettig in die gebied" (This Bantu is unlawfully in the area). The rector then set up a special committee to examine ways of protecting students and permanently legalising their position. The efforts bore fruit and, on June 15, 1980, permission was granted to St John Vianney Seminary by the Department of Community Development to house and train seminarians from all racial groups. It became the first multi-racial tertiary institution recognised by the government [1].

In October 1989 seminarians set out to join a crowd of about 80 000 that gathered to greet African National Congress (ANC) men, led by Walter Sisulu, who had been released from Robben Island [1].

#### 4. Fr Bonaventure Hinwood OFM (1964-1998)

Fr Bonaventure Hinwood was an Afrikaans poet and the first South African to join the Franciscan Irish Province [11]. He served at St John Vianney Seminary as Professor of Theology. He was a formator, a lecturer in Systematic Theology, and Academic Dean for over 33 years. The intellectual formation fell under him as the Dean of Studies. He was trained in librarianship and used his dexterity to assist students in checking out library materials. He made sure that the library was well stocked and professionally organised.

In 1976, under the auspices of Fr Bonaventure Hinwood OFM, the seminary set up a radio studio with equipment

donated by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and a folk Mass was broadcast for the first time in May 1976 [1]. Fr Bonaventure's aim was to train staff and students in radio techniques [1]. And this idea of a TV studio was approved by the bishops. Frs Bonaventure Hinwood and Ennis Hyacinth appeared on TV, in Franciscan habit, taking part in religious debates [1].

Fr Bonaventure was the first person to take charge of the pastoral training in the seminary after the Vatican II Council [1]. He promoted priestly vocations by preaching and holding discussions in various parishes [1].

Fr Ennis Hyacinth was a great colleague of Fr Bonaventure Hinwood. He taught at the seminary for 38 years and offered moral theology.

#### 5. Amalgamation of St John Vianney and St Peter's Seminaries: Linking Theology to Apartheid Structure

St John Vianney Seminary students were very aware of the injustices of Apartheid system. Their awareness to injustice in South Africa was broadened by the rise of Liberation Theology and the encyclical letter of Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 1963 (Peace on Earth). The Papal Letter stresses human dignity and human equality [12].

The years from 1972-1977 were difficult years for the Church in South Africa. The Nationalist government was well established and was implementing its apartheid policies ever more energetically [1].

The issue of the amalgamation of St John Vianney and St Peter's Seminaries was highly sensitive. Once the decision was reached to amalgamate the two major seminaries in Pretoria, and always aware of the limited resources available, the question was where was this combined seminary to be sited. St John Vianney Seminary had good buildings and facilities but was in a white suburb where black students felt insecure, St Peter's was too small. Should a completely new site, free of emotional baggage, be chosen? The Bishops and their advisers consulted experts on the Group Areas Act and other apartheid legislation to find a place where men of all race groups could live and study together legally and without interference from police. Fr Bonaventure was then mandated to keep looking for a site. Eventually it was agreed that the existing facilities at St John Vianney Seminary were the most satisfactory [1].

Fr Myles Russell (1977-1984) was appointed as a new rector of St John Vianney Seminary to assist in the integration of the black students who would be transferred from St Peter's Seminary [1]. He faced special problems in that the task of integrating the two disparate groups of students in the seminary fell to him. It was not only a question of race and colour but of widely differing cultural and educational backgrounds, and above all, of attitudes to authority and political authority in particular. Many of the



black students who had been brought up in the townships had lost respect for their teachers and for the education authorities in 1976; white students, many of whom had attended Catholic schools, had not [1]. However, it was during Fr Myles's reign as rector that the seminary became racially mixed. The seminary began with nine Coloureds, one Indian, one Chinese, twenty-two Whites in total. In 1978, twenty-one Black students were admitted to the seminary [1].

Fr Myles introduced psychological screening of students to help identify those not suitable for the priesthood. This effectively eliminated some of those with personal problems that had previously gone undetected for months or even years [1]. A spiritual year was introduced in 1983 to help develop the spirituality of the seminarians and for the first-time students were evaluated yearly [1]. Fr Myles was replaced by Fr William Slattery OFM as rector in 1984 [2].

### 5.1. Fr William Slattery OFM (1984-1991)

Fr Slattery's term of office was marked by intense racial unrest in the country. However, he continued the work of racial integration in the seminary by appointing Fr Simon Ngcobo OFM as dean of discipline who was later replaced in 1988 by Fr Bill Lovett OFM. During the tenure of Fr Slattery's rectorship, it was a highly political era in South Africa with unrest seething in the townships, many political leaders in detention or in exile and very little contact between black and white youth. So deep was the divide between township residents and the white community that the majority of whites were at best ill-informed about events as they affected the black population. Fr Slattery who had worked among Africans prior to his appointment, made considerable efforts to understand the concerns of those who were separated from the political activities of their fellows. They feared that they might be seen by their peers to have been abandoned the struggle that was raging in the townships, particularly as the rallying cry at this time was for 'liberation before education' [1]. Most of the students at St John Vianney Seminary were unhappy about the political situation in the country. Fr Noonan OFM writes that the Vaal Triangle exploded in anti-apartheid rage in the latter half of 1984 [3]. It was this uprising that signalled the beginning of the end of apartheid and led to the release of Nelson Mandela

In 1984, Fr Slattery invited Desmond Tutu to the seminary, soon after he received the Nobel Prize, to talk to students and staff on the role of the priest in a post-Apartheid South Africa [1]. In 1985, some students at the seminary marched to the Union Building to demand among other things the complete dismantling of Apartheid laws [2]. They wanted to voice out a displeasure and protested against the imposition of the State of Emergency, a march that is believed to have been partially and indirectly inspired by the visitation of the late Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu [2]. Fr Slattery arranged for the students to visit Kalafong Hospital each Sunday and they were

granted permission to visit condemned prisoners in the Maximum-Security Prison. In March 1990 twenty students were given a tour to Pretoria jails; once a month they visited lepers at Westford and old men at Mamelodi [1]. In the 1980s, the seminarians did Pastoral Work at Mamelodi and Atteridgeville even though according to apartheid laws, these townships were not part of Pretoria.

The policy of sending out groups of students to teach catechism in the suburbs and townships as part of their pastoral training which was introduced after the Vatican II Council, contributed unintentionally to the politicization of seminarians who now had regular contact with township youth. Fr Slattery opened the way for Catholic Seminarians' Movement (CASM) which helped the students to visit the Pretoria prisons where they supported many of the leaders of the freedom struggle with prayer and friendship. He arranged for students to attend the vigil service for those who had been killed by security forces at Alexandra and attended the funerals [1]. CASM became a vehicle for developing a robust debate and an engagement with themselves as seminarians of the time, the seminary and the society at large. It became a vehicle about the need for Black Theology, African Theology and black staff at the seminary.

In the community life of St John Vianney Seminary, Fr Slattery had a fatherly approach to the students. He had some of his meals with them, attended their sporting events and discussed the results with them. He encouraged them to express themselves in English when conversing on general subjects such as motor cars, sport or other topics likely to interest young men [1]. He took the initiative in calling for a group of young priests to be sent overseas to Catholic Universities to be trained as future seminary staff [1].

When Fr Slattery fell ill and resigned in 1990, Fr Graham Rose marked the gradual end of the Franciscan involvement in the Seminary. Fr William Slattery was later appointed Bishop of Kokstad [2].

### 5.2. First Local Rector (1991-1997)

Fr Graham Rose was the first diocesan priest to be appointed as rector and the sixth rector of St John Vianney Seminary.

One of the highlights of Fr Graham Rose's era as rector was the visit of Pope John Paul II to South Africa in 1995, in which seminarians were involved in the Mass and ceremonies at Gosforth Park. Fr Graham Rose also continued the renewal of the curriculum and entrenched the three-fold phases of priestly formation that had been kick-started by his predecessors. An agreement was reached in 1995, among the SACBC, the Seminary and University of South Africa (Unisa), in which the seminary became involved in the post-graduate Catholic Theological studies undertaken through Unisa. In the same year, the affiliation of St John Vianney Seminary to the Urbaniana University in Rome was renewed [2]. However, the greatest challenge that Fr Graham had to

face was the shortage of teaching staff. With black students making up the majority of the student body, he pleaded for more black staff [1]. Even though the seminary experienced a chronic shortage of staff, this did not significantly derail academic programmes. The Pastoral Internship programme started during the tenure of Fr Graham Rose. He supported it and believed that pastoral internship would be able to test and nurture a man's pastoral skills during the six months spent in the student's home diocese [1]. In 1997, Fr Graham Rose returned to the Johannesburg Diocese and resumed his work as a parish priest [1]. In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI named him Bishop of Dundee Diocese in KwaZulu Natal.

## 6. The Jesuits at St John Vianney Seminary

In 1994, the SACBC signed an agreement with the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) to provide teaching staff for St John Vianney Seminary. The first to arrive was Fr Mike Lewis SJ who was appointed as lecturer in Pastoral Theology and Training. Fr Joe Murphy SJ lectured in Dogma. Fr Nick King SJ replaced Fr Bonaventure Hinwood OMI as Dean of Studies and taught Sacred Scripture. Br Graham Wilson SJ was the financial administrator. Fr John Baldovin SJ replaced Sr Madge Karecki in teaching Liturgy [2].

The post-synodal exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* [13] was published in 1992 dealing with priestly formation. Accordingly, the seminary divided the formation of the priest into four areas: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral.

In response to the post-synodal exhortation of 1992, the SACBC at the Plenary Session of 1994 resolved that the introduction of pastoral training for a period of five years, after which it would be reviewed should be introduced [1]. In 1995, St John Vianney Seminary then established a Pastoral Department under the direction of the Jesuit priest, Fr Michael Lewis. In this pastoral training, the theology students would spend their last academic years in pastoral activities. He also taught Ministerial Ethics and supervised the fourth years in preparation for their internship the following year [1]. Fr Mike Lewis assisted the seminary in introducing the Higher Diploma in Ministerial Skills to emphasise the pastoral dimension of seminary formation [1].

## 7. First Black Rector, Fr Mlungisi Dlungwane (1998-2000)

When Fr Graham Rose's term of office ended in 1997, he was succeeded by Fr Mlungisi Dlungwane, in 1998 as the first black rector and the seventh rector of St John Vianney Seminary. He faced several challenges in his rectorship: First, with the departure of the Franciscans who had staffed the seminary since 1948. Fr Mlungisi had to begin his tenure by encountering staff shortage [2].

Second, at the beginning of 1999, Archbishop Lawrence

Henry of Cape Town recalled all his students amid alleged students' ill-discipline. Fr Khoza recalls that a notice of withdrawal of students was made in less than two years by the Archdiocese of Cape Town and this had huge implications on the running of the seminary (Khoza, Interview 27 February). Third challenge, on August 4, 1999 the feast of St John Vianney, a fire broke out in the hall of the seminary in the early hours of the morning. Pews from the chapel which were stored in the hall, ready for sale or disposal, were damaged beyond repair [1]. Fourth challenge, the Kimberley students were transferred by Bishop Hecht to St Joseph's Theological Institute at Cedara, Pietermaritzburg [1]. Fifth challenge, it was not long before the Jesuits also announced that they too would be leaving in 2002.

Fr Mlungisi's epoch as rector was a very difficult one in the post-Franciscan run seminary. He saw a great need for, and concentrated on, spiritual, intellectual, human and pastoral formation.

During Fr Mlungisi's tenure the seminary began issuing a Higher Diploma in Ministerial Skills to emphasise the pastoral dimension of seminary formation. The Higher Diploma was awarded for the first time in 1999 and was later recognised by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). The then deputy minister of education, Fr Smangalis Mkhathshwa, awarded the Higher Diploma to the first graduates. In June 2000 it was announced that Fr Mlungisi had been appointed auxiliary Bishop of Marianhill and during the plenary session of the SACBC, Fr Sithembele Sipuka was named as the new rector. With Fr Sithembele completing his doctorate, Fr Mike Lewis was asked to be the acting rector for the second semester of 2000 [1].

### 7.1. Fr Sithembele Sipuka (2000-2008)

Fr Sithembele Sipuka was the eighth to be appointed rector of St John Vianney Seminary. In 2008, Fr Sipuka was to oversee the long-anticipated unification of both the St Peter's seminary that had taught only philosophy with the St John Vianney Seminary that taught theology. Henceforth, philosophy and theology students of all races were to reside in one seminary [2]. He had an enormous task of developing and maintaining the enthusiasm of all the students arriving from St Peter's. He also had to find a way of creating stability among the staff and thus develop a support system for himself and for all staff members [1]. In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Fr Sithembele Sipuka as Bishop of Mthata Diocese.

### 7.2. Fr Parry Enrico (2008-2011)

Following his appointment as Bishop of the Diocese of Mthata in February of 2008, Fr Sithembele Sipuka was succeeded by Fr Enrico Parry.

Fr Enrico and his staff had to face the practical implications of the merger. Together with the staff they got the South African

Qualification Authority (SAQA) to recognise the Bachelor of Theology, and the Bachelor of Ministry Degrees that the seminary offered. One of the main challenges that Fr Enrico had to face was to cater for an enlarged academic institution a new library which was built on the west side of the main building, and the newly built library, named St Peter's library was blessed and opened by Bishop Sipuka on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

During his tenure, in October 2009, the first Graduation ceremony was held where BA (Phil); BMin and B. Th Degrees were conferred. It must be clarified that it was the first official graduation ceremony, but degrees had been offered previously without an official graduation (Skhosana, Interview 07 February). St John Vianney Seminary registered with the South African Department of Higher Education and Training as a Private Higher Education Institute (St John Vianney Seminary NPC – Non-Profit Company) and therefore incorporates the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 2008.

Fr Parry left the seminary at the end of his term as president in mid-2011, and Fr Molewe Machingoane (2011-2015), then Vice-President, was appointed as President at the end of that year. In addition to consolidating the existing programmes of the seminary, he presided over the expansion of St John Vianney Seminary NPC to cater for the growing numbers entering the seminary. In May 2013 the SACBC approved the construction of a new residential block to accommodate an additional 30 residential students. On 9 June 2014, less than a year construction commenced, Bishop Dabula Mpako, the then chairman of the Seminary Commission, blessed and opened the new building, which was named St John XXIII Residence. Fr Molewe Machingoane was succeeded by Fr Masilo Selemela.

### 7.3. Fr Masilo Selemela (2019-2022)

The challenging episode in the rectorship of Fr Selemela was the fatal car accident that cost the life of two senior lecturers and formators, Frs Sibusiso Zulu and Owen Wilcock. In the same accident himself and a fellow lecturer sustained very serious injuries. The pandemic of Covid-19 during the tenure of Fr Selemela brought about unprecedented challenges and fears for the seminary including the scarcity of resources. The students studied through online facilities to continue with the seminary intellectual aspect of formation (Selemela, Interview 15 March). Fr Masilo Selemela was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Pretoria by Pope Francis in 2022.

#### 7.3.1. Chain of Succession at St John Vianney Seminary

The following individuals filled the leadership or rectorship positions at St John Vianney Seminary in the last 75 years: Fr Edward Walsh, Queenstown (1948-1950). Fr Fergus Barret, OFM 1950-1966. Fr Norbert Carroll, OFM 1966-1972. Fr Frank Doyle, OFM 1972-1977. Fr Myles Russell, OFM 1977-1984. Fr William Slattery 1984-1991.

Fr Graham Rose 1991-1997. Fr Pius Mlungisi 1998-2000. Fr Sithembele Sipuka 2000-2008. Fr Parry Enrico 2008-2011. Fr Molewe Machingoane 2011-2015. Fr Paul Mancini 2016-2018. Fr Masilo Selemela 2019-2022. The current rector is Fr Ncedo Siwundla (2023-).

Their leadership was developed through time at St John Vianney Seminary.

#### 7.3.2. Religious Women in the Seminary

Religious women played a pivotal role in the running of the seminary from its inception and in its intellectual formation. The Schoenstatt sisters worked in the seminary for many years. They ran the domestic side of the seminary, viz, catering and laundry and the secretariat until 1977 [1]. They worked hard for the material comfort of all in the seminary. They were succeeded by the Sisters of St Paul of Selly Park, Birmingham. However, when one of the sisters, Sr Carmel Collins, was killed in a motor accident and Sr Anne, who had worked in the seminary kitchen for eleven years, was injured, there was no sister available to replace Sr Carmel and they withdrew from the seminary at the end of 1989 [1].

In the intellectual formation some of the religious women congregations made a substantial contribution to the seminary. Sr Müller Theodula promoted the theory and practice of catechetics. Sr Madge Karechi taught Liturgy. The Dominican sisters also joined the seminary to teach. Sr Patricia Fresen OP offered Spiritual Theology [5]. Sr Paula Van der Walt OP taught Scripture and Public Speaking. Sr Immaculata Ngubane OP taught Pastoral ministry and Spirituality and Sr Jennifer Slater OP taught Systematic Theology [1]. She became the Dean of Studies, the first and the last woman to hold this position in 75 years (Skhosana, Interview 17 February 2024). Ms Madeleine van Biljon, a well-known journalist and writer taught an entertaining Afrikaans class [1]. In the spiritual formation the religious sisters from the Dominican and Loretto convents provided spiritual direction to the seminarians (2002, 98).

In the human formation, the Holy Cross sisters donated new basketball posts to the seminary to encourage students to play outdoor sports [1]. The seminary also registered lay women to study theology, the first female student, Frances Dumme-Duval was registered in 1970. She attended lectures at the seminary but lived out [1]. In 1996, Mrs Yolande Trainor, enrolled for the full degree course in theology and graduated in 2000 [1].

#### *Lecturers from other Congregations and Societies*

##### The SMA Fathers

The *Societas Missionum ad Afros* (hereafter SMA) are missionaries who come from around the world and are dedicated to the spread of the Gospel in Africa and among African people.

Fr Kevin O'Gorman SMA taught Moral Theology and Christology from 1994-1999. Fr Con Murphy SMA taught Dogma and was the Spiritual Director from 1991-1996.



## 8. Affiliation with Other Institutions of Higher Learning

Regarding education, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) said: “We urge that the literary and scientific education of future priests be at least not inferior to that of laymen who take similar courses of study. In this way not only will a sound intellectual training be assured but the choice of subjects also will be made more easily” [1].

This animated the first rector of St John Vianney Seminary, Fr Barret Fergus (1950-1966), who was passionate about education especially higher or tertiary education. He never saw the seminary as merely a place to train priests. He felt that students should also be involved with other universities and encouraged them to do degrees [14].

During Fr Fergus’s time new subjects were constantly introduced, for example, Afrikaans from 1951, voice production and public speaking in 1954. Also, supplementary subjects such as liturgical music, literature and Latin even practical courses in parish bookkeeping were offered [1]. In 1977 a delegation from the Urbaniana University in Rome visited St John Vianney Seminary to examine the curriculum and the standards set. They were well pleased with what they saw [1].

In addition to the normal seminary curriculum, Fr Fergus encouraged the students to enrol with other institutions in order to study for external degrees [1]. He contacted two universities in Pretoria, namely, University of Pretoria (UP) and University of South Africa (Unisa). He negotiated with Unisa whose rector at that time was Dr Samuel Pauw. In 1956 Unisa agreed to grant degrees to St John Vianney Seminary students based on subjects taught at the seminary with the addition of history and one other subject which could be medieval philosophy, medieval history or literature [1].

Again, in 1995 a new agreement was signed between the SACBC, St John Vianney and Unisa in terms of which the seminary became involved in the post-graduate Catholic theological studies undertaken through Unisa [2]. In the same year the affiliation of St John Vianney Seminary to the Urbaniana University in Rome was renewed [1]. However, in 2000 the seminary disaffiliated from Urbaniana University because of lack of lecturers with ecclesiastical qualifications (Skhosana, Interview 07 February 2024).

## 9. St John Vianney Seminary in the New Dispensation

The seminary is loyal to the two documents on priestly formation, titled *Pastores dabo vobis* to the bishops, clergy and faithful on the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day published by John Paul II in 1992 [13], and *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* [15]. The *Gift of the Priestly Vocation*) published by the Congregation

for the Clergy in 2016 as models of priestly formation. The document of the Church, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* [15] regards the four pillars of formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral) as one and integral part of the seminary’s formation and curriculum.

### i. Curriculum Development

Among many other courses offered at St John Vianney Seminary; students are taught: Latin, Biblical Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Philosophy, Logic, Ethics, Metaphysics, Church History, Psychology, Sacred Liturgy, Fundamental Moral Theology, Biblical Archaeology, Sacramentology, Canon Law (solely taught by Mgr Marc De Muelenaere for 35 years), Sacred Scripture, Theological Anthropology, Spirituality, Missiology, Ecumenism, World Religions and so forth.

Students also undergo a pastoral module run by the Head of the Pastoral Department. It includes Fundamental Pastoral Theology I and II, catechesis and homiletics. Students do the pastoral modules in their second year of Theology before interrupting their studies for Pastoral Internship programme in their respective dioceses or religious congregation. The Pastoral Internship was introduced in 1995. The student spent six months in their home diocese sharpening their pastoral skills. In 2023, there was a change of name from Pastoral Internship to Work Integrated Learnership (WIL). Prior to the WIL experience, the students are thoroughly prepared for it and are required to sign a Learning Agreement between themselves and their supervisors.

During the tenure of the rector, Fr Paul Mancini (2016-2018), from 2016, the license to teach and confer Philosophy Degree was not renewed by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the process of preparing a new programme started and was eventually accepted (Siwundla, Interview 08 February 2024). During the tenure of Fr Masilo Selemela (2019-2022), the new Philosophy programme was finalised. At the same period, the seminary began working on the new degree in Theology which was also subsequently accredited. The two degrees are now accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Council on Higher Education (Selemela, Interview 15 March 2024). In 2022, the Academic Committee inaugurated a new sub-committee called Research and Publishing Officer. The Research and Publishing Officer conducts research for the institution and publish articles with the reputable academic journals.

The curriculum at St John Vianney Seminary allows time for personal research especially in the final year. Elective courses have also been introduced, widening the choices available and allowing students to specialise in topics that interest them [1]. St John Vianney Seminary is now open to private students (Skhosana, Interview 04 March 2024).

### ii. Spiritual Formation Dimension

The spiritual life in the seminary receives careful attention and encouragement by the formators. There is an emphasis on prayer and spiritual life. The spiritual house father sees that every seminarian has a spiritual director and they have their monthly meeting with them. The spiritual house father is readily



available for confession on the campus. There is daily Mass, Morning Prayer (Lauds) and Evening prayer (Vespers) are said in common in the main chapel or in their formation groups. Every Tuesday evening there is Benediction in the seminary. This is in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, 1965:

Spiritual formation should be closely associated with doctrinal and pastoral formation, and, with the assistance of the spiritual director in particular, should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit... The students should learn, rather, to live according to the standard of the Gospel, to be firmly established in faith, hope and charity, so that the practice of these virtues may develop in them a spirit of prayer [10].

#### iii. Human Formation at St John Vianney Seminary

It was during the tenure of Fr Masilo Selemela (2019-2022) that the seminary successfully implemented the Human Formation Document of the SACBC. The seminary introduced the cooking programme and thus allowed students to take effective responsibility for their well-being even in other areas of their human lives. However, the dwindling number of vocations in the Conference area is a serious challenge to the formation dimension at St John Vianney Seminary (Selemela, Interview 15 March 2024). In human formation, seminarians are taught to appreciate life, develop a healthy self-image and acknowledge their personal gifts.

#### iv. Social Life at St John Vianney Seminary

Sports, indoor games and outdoor games contribute to the development of seminary life. The tennis court has a nice setting even though few students play the game. Fr Tebello Moeti often takes a group of seminarians for hiking in the hills of Waterkloof Ridge and Hennops Hiking Trail (Moeti, Interview 07 March 2024). More students are often seen in the gymnasium taking more physical exercise.

A wide variety of indoor games are played but chess remains the favourite. Students play soccer on Wednesdays and do manual work on Thursdays. On sports day swimming and soccer are popular sports among the students.

There is an active Student Council in the institution and it has more say in making decisions on matters directly concerning the students. They help in the system of sharing the house duties amongst the students. Students live together as a community and share and participate in various communal activities, for example, they pray, study, recreate, and prepare the liturgy in groups.

## 10. Conclusion

The Franciscans who laboured at St John Vianney for over fifty years, formed and educated hundreds of seminarians. They were dedicated to their work, worked hard and were loyal to the seminary. The seminary has now moved to the hands of the diocesan priests.

From 1948 to date, St John Vianney Seminary is proud to

have nurtured men from all walks of life among whom are: Deacons, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals, thousands of priests and lay professionals in all spheres of life. Many priests trained at St John Vianney are serving in parishes throughout the Conference area. The institution trained priests for all situations.

St John Vianney is the seeding place of values and an education for life, where individuals are taught to be independent thinkers and think critically and have a good understanding of the human psyche and the human condition.

## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BST	Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology
CASM	Catholic Seminarians Movement
NQF	National Qualification Framework
SACBC	South African Catholic Bishops Conference
SABC	South African Broadcasting Cooperation
SMA	Societies Missionum ad Afros
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
WIL	Work Integrated Learnership

## Author Contributions

Mofokeng William Dikotsi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was not required.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Research Fields

**Mofokeng William Dikotsi:** Church History and Theology, conduct participant observation in a remote parish to understand mission, Field research method to learn the behaviour of evangelizers, Interaction with the participants – Qualitative interviews.