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Announcement regarding Programmes of the Institute of St. Anselm To train Leaders, Formators, Vocation Directors and Pastoral Leaders

During the Holy Year of 2025 the Institute of St. Anselm celebrates its 40th Anniversary. To mark this occasion, we have decided to go back to the original programme of a one-year Diploma, integrating all the experience of 40 years into the original programme. From the many letters I have received from former participants who followed the Diploma Programme, it is clear that they profited greatly and several have commented that it had changed their lives. We have come to the conclusion that its impact is much deeper and much more rewarding than the 12 and 18 weeks programmes we had introduced due to visa problems in the UK. We have, therefore, after careful discernment and consultation, decided to discontinue the 12 and 18 week programmes in favour of the Diploma Programme.

One year Diploma Programme [Sept-May]

The Diploma Programme starts at **the end of September** and finishes at **the end of May**.

This new arrangement will be implemented immediately, starting in **September 2024**.

The traditional **second and the third year** programmes for team training remain, as to date, by invitation.

Taster Programme [7 weeks]

For current Bishops, Superior Generals, Formators on the General Councils and other members of the General Council. This taster programme of 7 weeks will also start in **September 2024**. We will be a little flexible over the ending date but not the commencement.

Why is the work of St. Anselm important for the Church?

Many questions are rightly being asked today about how well candidates are being prepared for Priesthood and Religious Life. 'Formation' is the name on the tin, but a closer look at the contents raises questions about what is meant, or what is understood, by 'Formation'. We will learn a lot about 'courses' being taught—in Philosophy, Theology, Scripture, Spirituality, Psychology—but it is not immediately clear why this is called 'Formation' rather than simply 'Education'. What's the difference?

The difference is between Teaching, which too often is predominantly academic, and a more person-centred process of preparation called Accompaniment. It has to be admitted that this latter term, and the quite different approach to the 'training' offered in Seminaries and Novitiates that it represented, has not been very well understood. It was recognised that 'Formators', as Novitiate and Seminary staff were now called, needed special training, over and above their academic qualifications to teach; but it was less clear what that training should consist in. What did it mean to say Formators were to 'accompany' candidates in the process of Formation, and how were they to learn to do this?

It was to answer this question, and to develop a programme that would 'form' Formators by introducing them to the experience of Accompaniment, that the Institute of St Anselm was founded almost 40 years ago, in 1985. What is distinctive about this programme is its focus on personal learning. Participants learn the skills necessary to accompany candidates in the process of Formation, but they do so by first being led through the experience of being accompanied themselves. They learn the skills necessary, not just by being taught what they are, but by experiencing them at first hand as they are led/accompanied on their own psycho-spiritual journey.

There are two dimensions to the training offered at St Anselm's. The first is the experience of being accompanied themselves by members of staff who offer One-to-One Counselling, and bring them together in Growth Groups where, facilitated and supervised by staff members, they share and reflect on their own experience while learning also to listen to, and accompany, other members of their Growth Group.

In addition to this, they learn about a range of skills necessary for Accompaniment and, most importantly, gain experience in their use in various Skills Groups, Community Groups, etc. Such practical learning lays a good, basic foundation for their subsequent ministry, in Formation or Leadership. But experience has shown that more time is needed, and more extensive training in the use of these skills, and this St Anselm's provides by offering a Second and Third year of further training, which takes the form of supervised accompaniment of First Year participants, while continuing to be accompanied and facilitated in their own psycho-spiritual growth.

To achieve the skills and sensitivities to do this delicate and important work we have a duty to honour our candidates, our Church and congregations by training our Vocation Directors and Formators in such a way that they are as professional in their human and spiritual accompaniment as our lecturers are in giving academic input. This will inevitably lead us to becoming a Healing Church, and this training, which is ever evolving, is the mission and work of the Institute of St. Anselm.

After long and deep reflection on our experiences of having accompanied over 7000 Priests and Religious, we have come to the conclusion that a three year's programme would be highly advisable for training Formators and Vocation Directors if they are to be able to accompany their candidates on their psycho-spiritual journey. This is what motivated me to start the Institute of St Anselm, and I am confident that it is what is needed if we are to grow as a Healing Church.

We hope this announcement will be an invitation to plan together for a healing Church and congregations, beginning with Formation. It requires vision and courage to commit to a programme such as this, but it will be a sign of great hope for the future of the Church, religious congregations and our world today.

Fr. Len Kofler MHM

Founder and Director of the Institute of St. Anselm.

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