

Accompaniment in Pre-Novitiate Formation

For CSsr Prenovitiate Formators

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From the minutes of March 31, 2022 meeting of the organizing group as shared by Fr. Ben in the Secretariat meeting last August 8, 2022:

For the one-hour talk

- Better to focus on the psychological accompaniment tools
- Better to have a general introduction and discuss a few important tools
- Present a general overview on accompaniment and focus on a couple of points for initial formation
- Focus on the concerns and struggles of the students in initial stage of formation and the usual concerns of the formators, too

Outline of the Presentation

- Concerns and Questions of pre-novices and formators
- Revisit: What is Formation
- Psychology and Formation in the Catholic Church
- The Essential Formator
- Tools for Formation

Some concerns of the pre-novices

- How do I know that it is God who is calling me?
- How can I be sure that I am called to become a priest/religious
- Does having doubts about my vocation mean that religious life/priesthood is not for me?
- What do you mean by discernment?
- What do you mean by getting to know one's nature?
- Is having difficulties in my formation a sign that I am not called to become religious?
Example: difficulty in relating with others in my community
- I find it very hard to open up to my formator. What should I do?
- When I pray I get very distracted, what is your advise?
- I have many difficulties in silence and in praying does this mean this life is not for me?

Some concerns of the pre-novices

- I get attracted to beautiful female postulants in our modular classes. Does this mean I will have a difficult time in my formation? Or does this mean that this is not my calling?
- When a man finds another male attractive, does this mean I am gay?
- What will make one say that he is gay/homosexual?
- When one has very strong sexual urges. Does this mean he should not be in the seminary?
- How come even if masturbation is a sin many still continue to engage in it? Even after confession many still continue to engage in it. If this happens to a seminarian does it mean, he is bad? that he cannot continue in the seminary?

Some concerns of the pre-novices

- I am having a hard time relating with a fellow postulant. Even if I try very hard to get along with him, I fail. What should I do?

Some concerns of the formators

- How do I accompany a candidate well as a formator?
- How do I accompany the candidates of this generation?
- How will I conduct our individual colloquium? What should we talk about?
- How do I help the formand open up himself to me? help him to disclose to me?
- What kinds of topics for common conferences will be helpful for them?
- Many candidates are assigned to my care how do I attend to them. I also have many other responsibilities (teaching, etc).
- How do I deal with challenging candidates?
- How do I know that the pre-novice is ready for the novitiate?

What is formation?

- *“Every formation project*
 - *needs to take as its fundamental and point of departure*
 - *the awareness*
 - *that behind the face of every human person*
 - *there lies something precious;*
 - *the mystery of God’s creative project for that person...*
-
- (From the Seminar on Formation paper)

What is formation?

- *It is wonderful to realize*
- *that every candidate,*
- *regardless of his social-cultural background,*
- *has great potential*
- *that would become reality,*
- ***given appropriate accompaniment***
- ***to discover***
- ***and bring to maturity***
- ***that unique gift of God***
- ***within him.”***

(From the Seminar on Formation paper)

What is formation?

The period of time

- spent by applicants/candidates to the priesthood and/or religious life
- a) to **prepare themselves for the state of life** they aspire for
- to **become familiar with the state of life** they are attracted to and be initiated to “the essential and primary requirements” of the life

What is formation?

The period of time

- b) to **experience detachment**
- from former life
- from everything not connected with the kingdom of God

What is formation?

A period of **probation**

- “to discern the **authenticity of their call** from God”
- to “**more satisfactorily test the fitness**” of applicants/candidates

What is formation?

The period of time

- to **prepare suitably** for the life they desire
- by providing the applicant/candidate with
“**favorable conditions**
for a real increase to their donation to the Lord”

What is formation?

"The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a **suitable human formation.**"

(PDV #43, 1992)

A **"clearly defined program"**,
"organized
and unified"
integral
"has physical,
moral,
intellectual
and spiritual dimension"

What is formation?

**“A process of development
which passes through
every stage of personal maturity –
from the psychological and spiritual and theological and pastoral.”**
(#65 Vita Consecrata)

What is formation?

- “to develop the seeds of vocation”
- “allow the initial grace to come to full maturity”
- to help respond to it

What is formation?

- “more than a place, a material space,
- **should be a spiritual place,**
- a way of life,
- an atmosphere
- that fosters
- and ensures
- a process of formation”

Formation and Psychology

- “Only a Christian anthropology, **enriched by the contribution of indisputable scientific data, including that of modern psychology and psychiatry, can offer a complete and thus realistic vision of humans.**”

(Pope John Paul II address to the Roman Rota, 10 February 1995).

- **The role of psychology is to assist in, not to substitute for, spiritual formation.**
- “The assistance offered by the psychological sciences must be integrated within the context of the candidate’s entire formation. It **must not obstruct**, but rather ensure, in a particular way, that the irreplaceable value of spiritual accompaniment is guaranteed.”

(John Paul II, 28 October 1998).

Formation and Psychology

(Archbishop Bruges, October 2008)

- “It is a firm principle that spiritual direction cannot, in any way,
- be interchanged with or substituted by forms of analysis or of psychological assistance.
- Moreover, **the spiritual life, by itself,**
- **favors a growth in the human virtues,**
- **if there are no barriers of a psychological nature.”**

When psychology defines vocation, emphasis on

A. Choice

combined influences of inheritance, civilization, culture, guardians, peer groups, elders, family's socioeconomic level, physical environment

First the individual knows his vocational skills, talents, abilities and values.

B. Agency

The individual examines at least areas of vocational environments (intellectual, aesthetic, conventional, realistic, and social)

Based on this self-knowledge, the person then chooses how to help himself grow in these areas as formation proceeds

There has to be goodness-of-fit between the individual and the characteristics of the vocational milieu.

Effective Formators

Compassionate

- Confidence in God's on-going work of transformation with himself and the candidate
- Trust in their goodness and of the candidates'
- Respectful of candidates (ethical behavior): safe environment
- Tries his best to understand the candidates' situation
- Balance of affirmation and challenge towards the candidates' maturity

Competent

- Grounded in Christian anthropology
- Psychologically-minded
- Basic knowledge of formation and skills in accompaniment
- On-going growth and development as a formative companion
- Capable of working in a team

Focus of the formator:

- Assess formability of the candidate
- Develop capacities to help him cooperate with formation
- Accompany candidate towards maturity: inner freedom, discernment
- Permit the formand to first discover, later assimilate and deepen that in which religious identity consists
- **Sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation**, understood as a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity — from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral.
- The commitment to formation never ends. It starts at initial formation.

Competence of the Formator

Knowledge

- Fundamentals of Christian Human Formation
- Stages of Human Development
- Stages of Psycho-Sexual Growth
- Emotional Literacy
- Internet Use and Social Media

Skills

- Manage a Formation Program
- Accompaniment: Individual and Communal
- Assessment: Initial, On-going (assessment tools: psych tests, vocational assessment tools, interview schedule, observation)

Manage the formation program

❖ Design formation program

- Goals
- Areas to be covered – human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral
- Content - knowledge, skills, dispositions
- Means, tools – structures, practices, experiences, processes, courses

❖ Implement

❖ Evaluate

Tools/Means of Formative Accompaniment: Individual Consultations/Colloquia

- Done on a regular basis (e.g. start and end of the formation year)
- Done by the formator with the formand
- To communicate feedback of the formator to the formand
- Together with the formand, assess the formative growth of the formand in the different dimensions (studies, community life, apostolate, prayer)
- To make formative recommendations to formand: areas for growth, helpful interventions
- Assist the formand in formulation of personal formation plan (areas, goals, means to reach the goals, other formative helps)
- Assess person's formative growth vis-à-vis personal formation plans
- Formulate a new personal formation plan after assessment of previous one
- Formator needs to listen to **ALL** dimensions of formand's life, to assess the person's growth, to make the necessary recommendations

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Processing

- **Deepened, expanded reflection**
 - not exactly aimed at problem solving
- **Interactive –**
 - but towards gaining new insight/meaning,
 - leading to new behavior
- a skilled individual helps another in arriving at
- an expanded perspective,
- deepened understanding,
- greater acceptance and
- owning of a significant experience

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Processing

GOAL OF PROCESSING

- Empowerment of persons for greater participation in their own formation towards
- freedom from unhealthy attitudes and behavior patterns
- openness to others
- openness to God
- availability for formation/mission/service and commitment

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Spiritual Direction

- enables the person
 - to pay attention
 - to God's personal communication to him/her,
 - to respond to this personally communicating God,
 - to grow in intimacy with God,
 - and to live out the consequences of this relationship.
- Issues of faith and spirituality are the explicit focus of the relationship between the director and the directee

Tools/Means of Formative Accompaniment: Counseling

- A formal process of helping (Egan, 1998)
- Those being helped are usually referred to as “clients”
- 2 basic goals:
 - Helping clients
 - manage their problems
 - live more effectively
 - develop unused or underused opportunities more fully
 - Help clients become better at helping themselves in their everyday lives
- Clients viewed as poor problem-solvers or whose ability to solve problems tends to disappear during times of crisis (Egan, 1998)
- Insight and healing takes place through relationship and dialogue between counselor and client (Conroy)

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Psychotherapy

- Goal: the client will become free from hindering and disturbing unconscious dynamics so that he can form his identity in a healthy and creative way.
- Deals with fantasy, intrapsychic conflicts and unconscious personality disturbances
- For more troubled people.
- Deals with dysfunctionality, on-going display of impulsive behavior (disturbing relationships and work, serious self-esteem issues,) neurosis (serious, stable, or worsening mood disturbances), psychosis (cognitive or perceptual difficulties e.g. hallucinations, distortions)
- Focus is mental health, freedom from psychic difficulties – healing of self and detrimental ways of dealing with others

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Formative Reading

- Spiritual reading” is different from the reading most of us are accustomed to doing.
- contrast between “reading for information,” and “reading for formation.” (Shaped by the Word, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.)
- Most of the time we read for information. Ordinarily when we read, we seek to master a body of material that can be used by us for a certain purpose.
- The concern of this type of reading is not just to gather information (like reading a newspaper).
- It is to listen for how God is being revealed to us as we read.
- When we read with an eye toward being formed by God, we may spend a long time with a single verse of scripture or with one sentence of a devotional book. We may read just a few words several times, listening for the Word that is being revealed to us from God.

Tools/Mean of Formative Accompaniment: Formative Film Viewing

- Film viewing as a way of developing the person's reflective and contemplative ability
- Help to develop one's interior life: getting in touch with how one is affected by what he is watching.
- A way of finding God in the films: finding God in the dark
- The formator chooses the film to be viewed and then asks the candidates to reflect with the help of guide questions

Guidelines on the Use of Psychology ... (June 2008)

Conclusion

17. Let all those who, according to their different responsibilities, are involved in formation offer their convinced co-operation, in respecting the specific competencies of each, so that the discernment and vocational accompaniment of the candidates may be sufficient, thus

**“bringing to the priesthood only those who have been called,
and to bring them adequately trained, namely,
with a *conscious and free response of adherence*
and involvement of their whole person with Jesus Christ,
who calls them to intimacy of life with him and to share in his mission of
salvation.”**