**CONTINUED FORMATION**

**TERMINOLOGY:**

There are various terms and vocabulary used for “continued formation.” Among the terminology are “permanent” and “on-going” formation. Since the term, “continued formation” is the one preferred today in official Church documents, including our Constitutions and Statutes and the *Ratio Formationis Generalis*, in the presentation, this is the term that will be used.

**CLARIFICATIONS:**

It is generally thought that continued formation is a stage that begins once a formand has left the initial formation system and begins his life of active ministry.

It is important to emphasize that continued formation is not a stage of formation as are the other states, for example, candidates, pre-novitiate, novitiate, formandi in temporary vows, etc., but rather a reality that actually should begin from the moment a candidate become serious about following the processes to becoming a Redemptorist until his death!!

Continued formation is more a lifestyle, a discipline, a value, a series of habits that become an integral and assimilated part of being a religious and, a Redemptorist.

**CONSTITUTIONS:**

Our Constitutions, numbers 77 and 78 state that continued formation is one of the priorities of our life:

Const. 77: *The apostolic purpose of the Congregation must inspire and penetrate the whole formation process of its members. This process includes the selection of vocations, the different periods of training, and the formation which must last throughout the whole of life.*

Const. 78: *The aim of formation for both candidates and members is to lead them to such* *a degree of human and Christian maturity that, with the help of God´s grace, they will be able to dedicate themselves intelligently, willingly and wholeheartedly to the service of the missionary Church in Redemptorist community life, in order to preach the Gospel to the poor.*

*They should learn progressively what the following of Christ demands of them, required as it is by baptismal consecration and confirmed by religious profession, and thus become true missionaries*.

**HISTORY:**

*Formation was a primary concern of St. Alphonsus, and it has always been united with the spirituality of our Institute. This is evident in examples such as the formula for Profession and the Constitution about the Rector Major (1743), the Constitutions about the officials and the simple style of preaching, and the Rules for the Missions (1747).*

*The constitutional history of the Congregation, from the time of Benedict XIV, who approved the first Rule in 1749, up to the present text of 1982, offers a rich experience of formation in which the purpose of the Institute is interwoven with the universality of its members and with its response to change. This has been clear in the last two centuries, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Formation is a historical current that binds a community around its charism and its labors as well as a service to each member*. (Cfr. article by Fr. Ignaz Dekkers, C.Ss.R. on our Constitutions, a manual for our Spirituality).

**REALITY (Examine):**

While it is true that continued formation is generally sponsored and encouraged in our Conferences and Units using Congresses, Workshops, etc., it seems that continued formation is practically non-existent in many, if not most, of our communities.

Pope Francis in speaking to the Superior Generals has been emphatic in saying that continued formation at the Unit and Conference level, while important, is not enough. Pope Francis has even gone on to say that a religious institute that does not have continued formation at the level of their communities has no right in accepting new candidates into their Institute!

In the period from the Second Vatican Council, many religious, not only from our Congregation, have deserted from Religious Life. The defections have been among professed in various stages of their Religious Life. Many, Priests and Brothers, have left and gotten married or remained single but outside of the Congregation. Also, many priests have transferred to the diocesan clergy. While the motivations and reasons are many and certainly complex, it seems to be valid to say that one of the reasons, especially among the younger confreres who have left, is the lack of community understanding, support accompanied and the lack of community continued formation in which some of their issues could have been able to be shared and resolved.

In many of our communities, there is a significant difference of persons from different generations and consequently a wide variety of felt and existential needs among the confreres. When we speak of different needs we refer not only to academic, theological themes but also the affective, human differences and needs, that is, the need of achieving “*a degree of human and Christian maturity”* (Const. 78). In some communities, there is a marked difference in models of Church and even pastoral and missionary ministry.

When speaking about continued formation, there is a tendency to think of continued formation only at the level of the Unit and Conference and express the impossibility of confronting this challenge with the most obvious reason being that many of our elder confreres cannot travel the distances or the community cannot afford the cost for the members to be present at the Unit or Conference continued formation sessions.

As time goes on, especially with the restructuring and reconfiguration processes of the Congregation, we will see communities of confreres made up of a wider and more diverse composition, for example, confreres of different mother countries and languages (and continents), different cultures, different traditions, etc. As these realities become more and more common, so more and more urgent becomes “continued formation” at the level of our communities.

**DISCERN**

While continuing with continued formation through congresses and workshops at the level of the Conferences and Units, it can be asked, what creative ways can we conceive to be used on the local, community level with regards to continued formation and which can benefit all the members of the community?

Is there a value, especially with regards to mutual support, for younger confreres to hear and dialogue about issues that touch the old confreres, and, is there a value for older confers to hear and dialogue about issues that touch the younger confreres? What are topics that go beyond the strictly academic, theological disciplines, for example, the affective and human, that can be beneficial for all?

**ACT**

There obviously must be much creativity in so far as actions and structures are concerned. Perhaps the following questions can help:

Is there a possibility of delegating the continued formation of a Conference, a Unit or the Communities to a Commission or Secretariat for Spirituality?

Is there a possibility of forming “renewal teams,” that is, teams of confreres that would be full or part-time members, for continued formation at the level of the Conference, Units, and especially Communities?

What are the themes that would be helpful and appropriate on the academic, theological, and pastoral-missionary levels?

What are themes that can transcend the generational differences and be treated on the Community level, especially in the affective and human growth levels (*human and Christian maturity*)?

Are the younger confreres sensitive and knowledgeable about the realities and needs of the older confreres, that is confreres of different generations, from different formation structures, etc.?

Are the older confreres sensitive and knowledgeable about the realities and needs of the younger confreres, their generational viewpoints and formation?