

# WORKSHOP FOR FORMATORS CPPS, JULY 5th – 17th, 2010

## PRECIOUS BLOOD SPIRITUALITY AND FORMATION

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First Reflection:

*“The Personal Reality of the Formator”*  
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“God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator *par excellence* of those who consecrate themselves to him. But in this work he makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls. Formation then is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women. Those in charge of formation must therefore be very familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be **able to accompany others on this journey**. Sensitive to the action of grace, they will also be able to point out those obstacles which are less obvious. But above all they will disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished. They will combine the illumination of spiritual wisdom with the light shed by human means, which can be a help both in discerning the call and in forming the new man or woman until they are genuinely free. **The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue**, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly and with a certain frequency.”  
(Vita consecrate, #66)

### Some Preliminary Remarks on the importance of the Formator and his place in the Formative Process

I feel privileged to be here with you for this day and a half. The ministry of formation is of vital importance in the life of a religious community. Your responsibility is enormous and expectations of you and your ministry are high. Thank you for making the time to be part of this Workshop and for being here.

What I wish to do with you today is to spend time reflecting on the person of the formator himself, since your role in the formative process of the candidates is pivotal. In this first moment we will spend some time reflecting on our personal reality since who we are and how we feel about our ministry and how we understand it, will greatly influence what we do and how we interrelate with the candidates.

The candidate is not an “object to be formed” but rather one who facilitates the formative process so that the candidate becomes the subject of his own formation. A formator is more like one who “accompanies” the other. He gently urges the candidate to assume responsibility for his growth in Christ. The candidate is the most important agent of his own formation.

The process of formation is facilitated not so much by the amount of information imparted, but by the **quality of relationship** which the candidates establish with the various agents of formation at play in the course of their formative itinerary. The process of identification seems to play a big role in forming a person. Hence **the authenticity of the life of the formator** influences the candidate much more than an excellent exposition of the vocational ideals. The beauty of a lived life is more appealing and convincing than wonderful ideals read from a document or proposed by someone without the backing of the testimony of his life. ("The world doesn't need so many teachers, but witnesses!")

We are all aware of the **various formative influences** in the life of a candidate. The formator is just one of the many agents of formation, albeit his own unique and irreplaceable role. Other formative elements that influence the whole formation process are: his peers in the formative community; the wider community in which the formator is placed; the social milieu; and the formative culture of the congregation.

Every organism in the congregation has an inbuilt formative (or counter formative) culture of its own which instils its attitudes and values in the candidates through a variety of social processes. The attitudes and customs prevalent in the congregation are easily absorbed by the candidates, even when they run contrary to what is taught in the formation period from the documents of the congregation. For example, a sense of pastoral commitment, the use of money, alcohol consumption, mutual relations, topics of community conversation, type of jokes etc., are easily imparted by the prevalent living traditions in the province. We might call this the "congregation's cultural milieu."

After learning all of the helping skills and taking courses in preparation for formation ministry, **what is most important for a formator is to be authentic in his or her personal life and be a true follower of Christ.** One's lifestyle should always show the ideal, which one professes, and thus present itself as a living sign of God, and an eloquent, although often silent proclamation of the Gospel. If we are not witnessing to the values and ideals which we have professed and which people under our care yearn to see, then we are not prophetic witnesses. We become irrelevant.

**To sum it up:** A proper formative environment requires the presence and accompaniment of an experienced adult person who has already made a certain progress in the same kind of journey.

## What can we learn from Scripture?

I would like to propose two Scriptural texts to guide us in our reflection this morning. The first is the Emmaus story in the Gospel of Luke 24: 13-35.

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"

And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."

And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.

Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

**The Emmaus Story:** walking together, sharing their stories, in the light of the Gospel.

What insights can we glean from this well-known Gospel story that might shed light on the ministry of formation?

- Called to be a **spiritual companion** who walks with the candidate and as the disciples on the road to Emmaus, share their faith stories and experiences of God.
- **Jesus listens** to the disciples who in this case are downcast and disillusioned. He **then opens the Scriptures for them** and helps them discover God's hand working in and through what they have experienced.
- Jesus re-read the events of Jerusalem in the light of the Word of God and of their experience of Jesus and His teaching. We can call this aspect **faith sharing**.
- The importance of "**breaking open the bread of our lives**" with one another and the sharing of the Eucharist. Important moments of discovery.

The second Gospel story we look at is from John 10: 1-16, the Gospel of the Good Shepherd.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers."

Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd."

➤ **Know your candidates**

It is necessary to **know the candidates**, not just by name, but to grow in your knowledge of them through dialogue, faith sharing, and common community experiences. Keep your eyes and ears open, don't be afraid to question and challenge, and also to affirm the candidates in their positive characteristics, etc.

➤ **The Sheep know his voice**

Be present to the candidates. Be with them. Be yourself. Share your life with them. Don't be afraid to admit your own mistakes and share your vocational story with them and the challenges you face in the daily following of Christ.

Communicate your own ideals and sense of mission. Build trust with the candidates by modeling authenticity, integrity and compassion.

➤ **He keeps the sheep together in the fold**

Create a "safe space" where the candidate can feel loved and accepted and where he also loves and respects his peers.

Remember that you are on "holy ground" when you enter into the life of another and share his spiritual journey. Tread lightly with love and respect.

Help the candidate to grow in love of community and to experience it as a "good place to be."

➤ **He goes after the sheep that strays**

If a candidate begins to stray, go after him, and through dialogue in the bond of charity, exercise fraternal correction and self-evaluation. Set goals for his personal growth and periodically evaluate his progress with the candidate. Help the candidate realize that failure and crisis are often necessary for further growth.

➤ **The Good Shepherd is not a mercenary**

It is important, first of all, to take up the ministry in formation as a **call** and not just a **job** that I have been asked to do. Your heart must be in it!

Communicate the ideals and charism of the congregation and help the candidates to discover where and how they might fit in.

## Questions for Personal Reflection

Since the ministry of formation is about entering into relationship with the candidates, it is important that one be aware of his own reality and his own ability to enter into relationship in a healthy way. Take some time to reflect on your own reality.

### My relationship with God

- What is MY relationship with God? Is there a “passion” in my relationship? How do I nourish my relationship with God?
- Am I comfortable with sharing my experience of God (in dialogue and in prayers) and the Word of God? We will speak from the heart ... what is in our heart, we will share!
- If I were to divide up a pie: how much are GOD and I involved together?
- How do I nurture my own vocation? What gives meaning to my own vocational life? What kind of a process of vocational growth did I undergo to reach my present stage of vocational maturity? How does my own personal experience of vocational growth help me to understand my candidates?

### Precious Blood Spirituality

- How am I living the spirituality of the Blood of Christ?
- Where/in what areas of my life am I being called to grow in order to live our spirituality?
- How do I embody our spirituality in my life? How do I communicate it?

### Healthy Relationships

- How can I walk with a person “in truth”, respecting his person and his process, and without looking to satisfy my own personal needs and prejudices and preferences?
- What must I be careful of in my relationship with the candidates with whom I walk? (The need to be aware of my shadow side, of my weaknesses, etc. so that they do not influence the accompaniment of the candidates).
- Capable of authentic friendship. Be friends, but not drinking buddies!
- How much time do I spend with the candidates? Do I spend more time in other activities or ministries which I are more fulfilling and enjoyable?

### My personal growth

- Where do I find nourishment and support for myself and my ministry?
- Where do I find my emotional support?

**Suggested Methodology:**

1. Some time for personal reflection on the questions.
2. An Emmaus Walk in which two or three people of your choice can share whatever you wish from your reflections.