

GUIDE FOR FORMATION

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**DEVELOPMENTS
IN INSTITUTE FORMATION****Brother Joseph Hendron**

The publication of the Institute Guide for Formation this year (1991) is an appropriate occasion to reflect on the evolution in Institute Formation programmes over, say, the last 50 years. This is an arbitrary time span. There are still many Brothers in the Institute who were formed before this period; but the style and content of their Formation would not have differed significantly from the Formation programmes in use up until the mid 1960s.

The first session of the second Vatican Council began on 11, October 1962 and the final session ended on 8, December 1964. The Motu Proprio "Ecclesiae Sanctae", which gave the norms for the up-to-date renewal of Religious Life according to the mind of the Council, was published on 6, August 1966. The 39th General Chapter, which took place in 1966, was extended to a second Session in 1967, in order to comply with the demands of the Council for a "Special Chapter". This Special Chapter had for purpose "to put renewal and adaptation into effect" (Ecclesiae Sanctae 3). The Council and Chapter had profound implications for all of us: in our Community Life, in our Mission, in Formation. "Perfectae Caritatis" (28, October 1965) said of the up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life that "it comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian Life and to the primitive inspiration of the institute, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our times." (PC 2). The 39th General Chapter expressed the challenge of renewal, as it affected us, in the draft Rule, and "A Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today."

Formation before 1966:

The upheaval of the 1960s shattered the Formation structures that had been in existence for a number of decades before. These decades in Formation were marked by confidence and clarity in objectives and means. Personnel and candidates alike knew exactly what was expected of them at every stage of Formation. The programmes were uniform throughout the Institute. A candidate entering would find the same time-table, prayers, conferences, spiritual reading material as in any other formation house in the Institute. With small variations the stages from juniorate to scholasticate were uniform in duration and age of candidates. Planning was in view of the smooth functioning of the group and the formation of Brothers in a certain uniform style, rather than to answer to the developmental needs of the individual. There was a high degree of centralisation; directives on formation from the Centre of the Institute and from the Church were precise, detailed and mandatory.

This is not said by way of a blanket criticism of this type of Formation. Later I will show that some aspects of this formation method have been retained or recovered in today's formation programmes. It should be said also that changes in formation, or at least in the thinking about formation, pre-dated Vatican II and the 1966 General Chapter. The General Chapter of 1956, for example, launched the programme of Lasallian research, and also initiated a revision of the Rule. These had for aim a critical study of the life of our Founder and his charism, and a up-dating of the Rule. These decisions were prophetic. They were part of that "constant return to the primitive inspiration of the institute", described by "Perfectae Caritatis" nearly ten years later. The studies on our origins and the life the Founder are now an important element in formation and they began before 1966.

Formation after 1966 (1):

The years after 1966 until the present time may be divided into two periods; but two periods which overlap. The first begins at the end of the 60s. This period was marked by a collapse of the structures noted above. Responsibility for planning formation moved from the Centre to the Districts. A restructuring of formation in all its aspects began. The former certainties were replaced by uncertainty and by a search for new plans for formation. There was divided opinion about the way to proceed; plans became more diverse and experimental throughout the Institute. Age of entry and duration of formation varied from District

to District. The number of candidates fell dramatically. In part because of this the traditional locations for

houses of formation were abandoned, and many variations on location, size of groups, apostolic engagement during formation were tried. It became increasingly difficult for each District to maintain its own houses of Formation and staff them adequately.

It must be said that the quality varied as greatly as the programmes. Some programmes retained the best elements of the former structures and blended these successfully with the new ideas coming from the Council and the General Chapters. Others tried, unsuccessfully, to retain the old structures more or less unchanged. A third group offered a superficial and inadequate programme lacking appreciation of the old or new approaches to formation.

Formation after 1966 (2):

This situation continued for some years; but little by little the independent approach by sectors to planning formation was replaced by a process of dialogue; dialogue between Districts and dialogue between the Districts and the Centre of the Institute. Co-operation and sharing increased. Dialogue took many forms: a number of Circulars were published. The General Council consulted with an international group of Formators in the writing of Circular 418. A number of CIL Sessions were held to prepare Formators and study the problems of Formation today. The Inter-Capitular and Regional meetings of Visitors with the General Council always included a consideration of Formation. Then in 1985 the Formation Secretariat was established. This was to be an instrument of dialogue between the Centre and the Regions and Districts. Initially there was one Brother in the secretariat. A second was appointed in 1986.

Our Rule, which was revised in consultation with all the Brothers of the Institute, received its final draft from the General Chapter of 1986 and was approved by the Church in 1987. The approved Rule gave clear guidelines for formation. The 1986 Chapter also asked that a fuller document on formation be provided which would expand on the Rules and Constitutions. This document, which was given the title "Guide for Formation" and went through five drafts before publication, was the outcome of a consultation between the Centre of the Institute and the Districts and Regions. Now we have a number of instruments of dialogue which were not available immediately after the Chapter of 1966-67: the Rule, the secretariat for Formation, the Guide for Formation, the Declaration, various Circulars on formation, periodic sessions of Cil or other meetings to help Brothers working in formation.

So the dialogue continues, and with it an increased Interdependence in formation. Now most houses of Formation are the shared responsibility of a number of Districts or a Region. The staffs are often international and made up of experts in different disciplines: scripture, Lasallian studies, theology, etc. In November 1991 all the Directors of novices of the Institute will assemble at the Generalate for a four week Session - to continue and deepen the dialogue between Centre and sectors. The old uniformity may have disappeared; but unity is very evident. Now there is greater clarity and certainty about what constitutes Lasallian formation today, and greater confidence in putting it into practice. We think that the Institute is in a position to implement the statement of "Perfectae Caritatis": "The up-to-date renewal of institutes depends very much on the training of members" (PC. 18, 28 October 1965). We need more personnel, well trained and willing to carry out this vital Institute apostolate, and in some sectors we must find the candidates who can benefit from the new richness of formation programmes, and become in their turn Christian formators of young people.