

GUIDE FOR FORMATION

- 2 -

**"SOME INTRODUCTORY
COMMENTS TO ASSIST
IN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE INSTITUTE'S
GUIDE FOR FORMATION"**

Brother William Mann

The **Guide for Formation** is intended as an instrument to assist in an ongoing dialogue between the various Districts and the Center of the Institute. It is not my intention here to provide an analysis of the content of the **Guide**. Probably, a careful reading and study of the document by the Brothers themselves is its best introduction. Rather, I would like to share with you some ideas or principles which form the document's **fundamental orientation**. Hopefully, this will make for a more informed reading and a more clear understanding on the part of all concerned.

1. Ours is fundamentally a **gospel-based and apostolically oriented spirituality**. The gospel is at the center of our formation programs. The integration of ministry and prayer is essential in every stage of formation. Of course, however, formation needs to have a Lasallian flavor.

2. Initial formation is to **our vocation and our identity** in the Church and not just to some generic model or to some privately determined model of religious life, as though all religious

families in the Church were homogenized or the same (as has sometimes mistakenly been the case in recent history).

3. Ours is clearly a formation in the tradition and spirit of **Vatican II**. Fundamental to understanding formation today is the principle that:

– **a. Vocation** is understood as something that happens to a person within his own personal history; therefore, no two young Brothers are exactly the same. God calls a person as a **unique** individual.

– **b.** Secondly, "vocations" do not happen in a vacuum. It is in the concrete events and needs of the people of today that God's Spirit **evokes, calls forth, and raises up** Brothers of the Christian Schools to do God's work.

– **c.** Therefore, formation must always remain sensitive to the unique individuality of each Brother and must never be divorced from the concrete events and needs of the people of today.

4. This perspective has required a basic shift in the manner in which formation is attempted. For example,

– **a.** The environment in which formation takes place is the **marketplace instead of the monastery**.

– **b.** The approach to the individual in formation is **more concerned with the person than with the program**.

– **c.** The nature of formation programs involves a **process of progressive incorporation** into religious life and not a **procedure to be completed and certainly not a trial to be endured** once and for all. It involves a formation of the "heart" that affects the attitudes and preferences by which the Brother sets priorities and makes decisions.

– **d.** Formation involves **discernment** of the workings of God within the life of an individual and is not just the matter of simple decision making. The pace of individuals is variable; vocation is an **evolving reality** within the human development of a person. Formation takes a lifetime (hence, the fifth chapter of the **Guide** on "Continuing Formation"). All of this is the context for why the question of the **accompaniment** of the young Brothers is such a major concern today.

I would also like to highlight the **key aspect of vocation promotion programs** as presented in the second chapter of the **Guide** on "The Pastoral Ministry of Vocations."

5. The **Guide** addresses the issue of where the ministry of vocation promotion fits into the larger question of each District's pastoral ministry to youth. The essential question here concerns the work we do in the Church and how we see **vocation promotion as an integral and inseparable dimension of every aspect of true Christian education**. The **Guide** suggests that nothing less than a rather courageous and bold reexamination of the very nature of the Christian ministry we perform is capable of addressing the question of **our declining numbers** and work for the promotion of vocations.

6. The question of "mission" is the key to vocation promotion. "What is our mission in the 1990s"? Who and what is determining our mission at the present time? Is it being determined by local governments, by our predecessors and their success, by our "old boys," by our paralysis, fear, and insecurity, by the real abilities and desires of the young Brothers who are going to be carrying these commitments into the future, or by

the gospel and the needs of the young, the poor, and their families today? This question of mission is the key to the work of vocation promotion and initial formation. **To what do we invite? For what do we form?**

7. The question is not one of "getting" new Brothers; the primary question is the nurturing of faith among the young within the cultures where we minister. The **Guide** proposes that this is the context in which **authentic vocation promotion** makes sense and gathers life and momentum. **The re-vitalization** of our vocation promotion programs requires nothing less than a complete re-animation of our ministry.

Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Azevedo, Rev. Marcello. *Vocation for Mission: The Challenge of Religious Life Today*. (Available in Brazil 1977, Italy 1984, Spain 1985, France 1985, and USA 1988).

Giallanza, Brother Joel. "Evolving Religious Formation," *Human Development*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall 1990), 14-14. (Excellent development of point 4).

Johnston, Brother John. *Pastoral Letter: "Irrevocably Committed" to Follow Christ Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. Rome, 1991.