

GUIDE FOR FORMATION

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THE FORMATION GUIDE**A STUDY AID****Br. Bernardo Villar****A NEW APPROACH**

The 1986 General Chapter established a new policy in the Institute with regard to initial formation. This is defined in the 1987 Rule. It is left to Districts and Regions, in consultation with the Centre of the Institute, to draw up formation programmes.

As part of this new approach, there came into existence the **Secretariat for Formation**, as a consultative body, and the **Guide for Formation**, which provides a framework containing basic principles and general outlines to serve as guidelines.

HOW THE GUIDE FOR FORMATION CAME INTO EXISTENCE

The 1966 General Chapter asked for a number of Directories to be drawn up to complement the new Rule, and the Guide for Formation was included among these. In October 1988, Brother Superior and his Council asked the Secretariat for Formation to begin this work. The work of producing this text involved the following process:

– The Secretariat prepared a first draft which was sent to the whole Institute. With a view to stimulating reactions from the Institute, the text was in the form of an enquiry covering a great variety of areas related to initial formation.

Reactions were numerous and valuable, coming from both individual Brothers and Formation Commissions and District Councils. Some even expressed the feelings of certain Regions as a whole.

– A second draft was based on these reactions which had to reach Rome by the end of February 1989. It was submitted to an international commission appointed by Brother Superior, comprising Brothers Raymundo Suplido (Philippines), Dominique Samne (Burkina Faso), Paul Etienne (France), Jose Antonio Urrutia (Spain), Guilebaldo Orozco (Mexico) and Timothy Wentworth (United States). Between them, the Secretariat for Formation and this commission drew up a third draft which was then submitted to Brother Superior and his Council.

– A new draft was drawn up which now included the input of the Council. The 49 members of the CIL session on formation (held in Rome from September to December 1989) were asked to study it. The work they did on the document and the recommendations they made were very valuable because most of these Brothers were directly involved in the formation programmes of their respective Districts.

– With the help of the input from CIL, the Secretariat for Formation produced a new draft which was submitted to Brother Superior and his Council. The text was finally approved in September 1990.

We went into the history of how the text was produced, because it is an important factor if the text is to be understood. A great effort was made to ensure that the dialogue stressed by the last General Chapter took place. This, indeed, was the Founder's approach when he and the first Brothers produced such key documents as the first Rule and the Conduct of Schools.

The Guide was not produced in a laboratory nor in an office. It reflects the living experience of the Institute. Since we wanted it to be a framework for the dialogue we have to pursue, it was important it should be itself the fruit of dialogue. We should read the Guide with the attitude that it reflects what is richest in the present-day life of the Institute, listening constantly for the Spirit (R.37) who speaks and reveals himself through the Brothers.

WHAT IS THE GUIDE FOR FORMATION ?

Let us first of all say what the Guide is not. The Guide **is not a formation programme**. If the Guide were interpreted as an attempt to draw up in Rome a formation programme intended for the whole Institute, it would represent a return to pre-Council days, and nothing could be further from the mind of the General Chapter.

Formation programmes continue to be drawn up by individual Districts. It is only by looking closely at the very rich and varied life of the Institute that it is possible to adjust to the needs that come to light in various places and circumstances. The Guide is intended to be a source of help for Districts and Regions as they draw up their own formation programmes, but it is each District that has to discover how to adapt the guidelines and recommendations of the Guide to the concrete reality of its own situation.

For this reason it is important that the Guide be fully assimilated by Districts and that the programmes and structures of the various stages of initial formation should be revised and re-organised in the light of this new document. What the publication of the Guide asks us to do as a first step is to study and reflect on it at all levels: individual, community, formation commission and District Council.

The second step will involve revising structures and programmes, consultation with the Centre of the Institute, making decisions leading to the establishment of a District or Regional initial formation programme. **The Guide is a means made available to Districts and Regions to help them draw up their formation programme.**

FOR WHOM IS THE GUIDE FOR FORMATION INTENDED ?

As Brother Superior says in the introduction, the Guide is **addressed to all the Brothers**. Why should this be? For various reasons:

- Its content: It is not simply a Guide for Formation, as it might seem at first sight: it is concerned also with continuing formation.
- It is true that the subject of initial formation is of more direct concern to the formation teams and formation commissions of each District. And yet, the subject of initial formation concerns all of us. In the final analysis, we are the members of the communities which look after the young men who come to us in the course of their formation process. Our communities are a point of reference for our young men in formation. While there are formation teams that serve in the ministry of formation for our benefit, this does not do away at all with our own responsibility in this matter.
- Initial formation makes sense in the context of continuing formation which should follow on logically.

The process which our young men in formation begin and which they pursue through the successive stages of initial formation leads logically to a process of gradual maturation in the communities of our Districts. What communities hosting young Brothers are asked to do, therefore, is to ensure that, because of their lifestyle and their way of living out the spiritual, community and apostolic guidelines of the Rule, these Brothers find, on joining them, an atmosphere which will enable to continue to grow and complete the process they have begun.

– Finally, the topics treated in chapter 1 (our religious identity) and chapter 2 (the pastoral ministry of vocations) are areas that affect all of us.

STUDYING THE GUIDE

We offer here **one possible way of studying** the Guide in community. This could be done by dividing the material into three parts:

- (1) Chapters 1 and 5 help us to see our identity and our fidelity to our vocation in the context of our present stage in life.
- (2) Chapter 2: The pastoral ministry of vocations is a priority which affects us all as individuals and as communities.
- (3) Chapters 3 and 4: The nature of the formation process and the stages of formation. They are more directly the concern of formation staff, but they help us all to understand the process our young men are undergoing. Communities hosting young Brothers with temporary vows will find these chapters particularly useful.

Method

The Guide must always be studied side-by-side with the Rule. The Rule and the Guide are inseparable. The margin references to the Rule in the Guide show that the Rule is a constant factor.

Whatever sections we choose for reading, discussion, study or community prayer, they must always be considered from the double point of view of the Guide and the Rule.