

Chapter 6

Formation of Brothers at the Post-Internal Seminary Level

Introduction

*Everything stated in the Constitutions and Statutes regarding formation applies to the training of brothers.*³⁶

Up to this stage of formation, all candidates will have received the same formation, with no distinction for which path, priesthood or brotherhood, they will take as Vincentian missionaries.³⁷ During the internal seminary, however, candidates become members of the Congregation and will have made a decision on whether to become a brother or priest. This chapter of the *Ratio* provides guidelines for the formation of brothers. It parallels the treatment of formation for priests in the major seminary in the next chapter.

SECTION 1

THE IDENTITY OF A BROTHER

A. The Identity of the Brother in the Church

To contextualize this chapter of the *Ratio* within the history of the Church, it is advantageous to point out premises which have given rise to the brotherhood and ground its identity.

1. To be a brother is to inherit the kerygmatic experience of the primitive ecclesial community that practiced fraternal charity, where all members were of *one heart and mind*.³⁸
2. The “command” of Jesus on universal brotherhood implies the equality of God’s children: *As for you, do not be called “Rabbi.” You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers.*³⁹

³⁶ *Constitutions*, 91.1.

³⁷ In some provinces, candidates choose the path of brotherhood or priesthood prior to their entrance to the internal seminary. This may affect the curriculum they follow in their university studies.

³⁸ *Acts* 2:42-47; 4:32-35.

³⁹ *Matthew* 23:8.

3. Many congregations of lay origin were established at crucial moments in the history of the Church and society: the Franciscans (the 13th century), the Brothers of Saint John of God (the 16th century), and the Christian Brothers (the 17th century). Many have opted for the poor.
4. By virtue of his baptism, the brother participates in the one priesthood of Christ.⁴⁰
5. In light of the clericalism emphasized at times in the history of the Church, the Second Vatican Council stated that lay consecrated life *is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself*.⁴¹
6. *Vita Consecrata* expresses *great esteem for the kind of consecrated life in which religious brothers provide valuable services of various kinds, inside or outside the community, participating in this way in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and bearing witness to it with charity in everyday life*.⁴²
7. The ministry of the brother has a basis in the teaching of Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (#73) which clearly gave support to lay ministries within the Church, and underscored the significance of the service of the brother in the ecclesial community.⁴³

In light of these reflections, this *Ratio* recognizes that the vocation of the brother is not rooted in, nor limited to, supporting the mission of the ordained ministers through engaging in “secular activities.”⁴⁴ Rather, it is rooted in discipleship, following Christ bringing “Good News” to others, especially the poor.

B. The Identity of the Brother in the Congregation of the Mission

To be a brother in the Congregation is an authentic Christian, consecrated and Vincentian vocation, *complete in itself, a true gift from God, with its own special content, and not a vocation which is half clerical and half lay*.⁴⁵ The brother, distinct from the clerics, is called to live his vocation-mission from the perspective of his consecration

⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, #10.

⁴¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, #10.

⁴² *Vita Consecrata*, #60.

⁴³ See also *Puebla*, #804.

⁴⁴ For some years now, the understanding of the vocation to the consecrated life has moved toward a radical “rediscovery” of the great charismatic depth of the consecrated lay person.

⁴⁵ “Brothers for the Mission”, *Vincentiana* [1989], #2, March-April, pp. 141.

as a layman.⁴⁶ The brother will be visibly both a layman and minister, and an equal collaborator of the priests in the life and ministry of the Congregation.

SECTION 2

THE SPECIFIC GOALS AND THE CONTEXT OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION OF THE BROTHER AT THE POST-INTERNAL SEMINARY LEVEL

A. Specific Goals of the Brother's Formation at the Post-Internal Seminary Level

The goals of post-internal seminary formation for the brother are: to bring the confrere to the point of making a life-long commitment to the Vincentian way of life; assist him in discerning the specific type of apostolic ministry he is called to offer as a Vincentian; and provide him with an initial level of professional competence for that ministry.

B. The Context of the Brother's Formation at the Post-Internal Seminary Level

The formation of the brother at this stage can take place in any suitable house of the province. The local community and Visitor, together with the brother's formators, will support his formation and provide him with guidance. If the province is blessed with several brothers in this stage of their formation, it would be beneficial for them to reside in the same local community which may be constituted as a house of formation.

The duration of this level of formation will coincide with the length of time which the *Constitutions* stipulate after the completion of the internal seminary and pronouncement of good purposes. It will include adequate time for the preparation and pronouncement of vows, and also for the brother's initial professional and ministerial training.

⁴⁶ The new perspectives that have been opened to the brothers do not diminish the value of the traditional domestic ministries through which they have offered valuable service to the Congregation and an extraordinary example of humility and self-sacrifice. The Congregation can never adequately express its gratitude for these services.

SECTION 3

THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE FORMATION OF THE BROTHER AT THE POST-INTERNAL SEMINARY LEVEL

A. The Vincentian Axis of Formation

The objectives of the Vincentian Axis of the formation for the brother at this level are twofold: to help him deepen his appreciation of the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul; and assist him to embrace that spirit, and bring what he has accomplished in the internal seminary to a more challenging and active world. He will be helped to accomplish these objectives through the following strategies:

1. He will focus his life on Jesus Christ, the “Rule of the Mission,” and make every effort to acquire *those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence.*⁴⁷
2. He will participate in some way in the life and situation of those who are poor since this will draw him closer to their reality and be a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God.
3. He will reflect frequently in prayer and in regular conversation with his formators upon the **five Vincentian virtues**. He will look for opportunities to put these virtues into practice.
4. He will appreciate more deeply the value and practice of the **evangelical counsels** which he will express in the vows of:
 - **Stability** - He will understand that only by consistency in dedicating his life to the poor and by faith-filled perseverance will he be able to deepen in his own spirit Christ’s way of love.
 - **Celibate chastity** - He will recognize more fully the loving power of celibate chastity and see that it is nourished by prayer, fraternal communion, and generous apostolic ministry, all of which entail a Gospel-centered renunciation of self.
 - **Poverty** - He will appreciate more that dependency upon God which enables him to evangelize the poor authentically and effectively, and enter into solidarity with them.⁴⁸
 - **Obedience** - Obedience will involve him in a common search for the will of God *through mutual sharing of experience, and open and responsible dialogue.*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Constitutions*, 6.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Constitutions*, #31.

⁴⁹ *Constitutions*, #37.1.

5. With a missionary spirituality, he will seek the inner freedom to be available for ministry within and beyond the geographical boundaries of his home province.
6. He will regularly reflect upon Saint Vincent's writings, biographies describing his life and mission, the history of the Congregation and of his own province, the life of Saint Louise, and the lives of other members of the Vincentian Family who are saints or beatified.

B. Human Formation

The objective of the human formation of the brother at this level is twofold: to enable him to recognize his personal assets and weaknesses; and help him invest his assets and move beyond his weaknesses in living and serving as a Vincentian. To meet these objectives, the brother, supported by formators and professional counsel as appropriate, will implement these strategies:

1. He will meet regularly with a formator skilled in human formation and his Formation Director to discuss his self-esteem, gifts, limits, and relationship to his family, and the ways these affect his life in community, his apostolic service, his decision on the particular ways he wishes to serve the poor as a Vincentian, and his professional training.
2. He will grow in his skill to develop interpersonal relationships with peers, older members of the community, and those he encounters in his apostolic assignment including supervisors, co-workers, and especially the persons he serves.
3. He will grow in his ability to share himself appropriately with his peers and with the other members of the community, but most particularly with his formators.
4. He will be attentive to, and appreciative of, the views of others as they express themselves at community meetings. He will also offer his own thoughts and opinions humbly, yet confidently, at such meetings.
5. He will grow in his appreciation of human sexuality and the ability to express his desires for intimacy, generativity, and creativity in ways that are personally meaningful and satisfying. He will appreciate more fully that, at root, sexual energy is relational energy that can lead him to true human and spiritual communion with others in respectful, transparent, and mutually cooperative patterns of life.
6. He will evaluate his dependence on material things, desire for comfort and convenience, and his use of community goods.

He will make simplicity real in his life, and develop freedom to live comfortably without accumulating material things which can rob him of time and energy that could better be used for community life and apostolic service.

7. He will reflect on his relationships with authority figures, particularly his parents, noting when and why he has been comfortable or experienced difficulty. He will share his experiences with the confrere entrusted with human formation, to discover ways they support or impede his relationships with current authority figures. He will respect and follow reasonable guidance and decisions of authority, and concurrently, speak of his desires and convictions to authority figures simply and humbly.
8. He will share his hopes and fears regarding a lifelong commitment to celibate chastity, life in community and as a missionary, and ministry to the poor.
9. He will affirm habits of caring for his physical and psychological health including: healthy eating; regular physical exercise; getting an annual physical examination; and maintaining supportive friendships.

C. Spiritual Formation

The objective of the spiritual formation of the brother at this stage of his journey is to assist him to further interiorize and live out the spiritual values and practices of the Congregation. To achieve this objective, he and his formators will employ these strategies:

1. He will deepen his appreciation of his baptismal consecration which is the foundation of a brother's lay consecration in the Congregation. He will develop a growing intimate relationship with Christ as his Teacher, Lord, and Master – considering his calling to discipleship as of prime importance.
2. In and with Christ, he will grow in intimate union with the Father, seeking to abide by the Father's will.
3. He will grow in understanding how God is active in himself, the community, and the world, transforming all through the action of his Spirit. He will be mindful of Christ's conviction of being sent forth by the Spirit to bring Good News to the poor. He will develop the practice of calling on the Spirit to bless his service for others, personal study, and tasks he undertakes for the benefit of the community.
4. He will seek to see Christ in the person of the poor. He will also develop the practice of bringing the poor and their needs to prayer.

5. He will meditate diligently on the Word of God, especially through *lectio divina*.
6. He will be exact in joining with the community in personal meditation as part of its daily prayer. He will find support in this practice from the words of St. Vincent, who expressed his conviction saying: “Give me a man of prayer and he will be able to do anything.”⁵⁰
7. He will participate regularly in the celebration of the liturgy of the hours.
8. He will live the sacramental life of the Church more deeply, especially daily celebration of the Eucharist.
9. He will honor the Virgin Mary to discover in her a most caring companion in journeying with Christ. He will celebrate her feasts in the ways specific to the culture and practices of his provincial community.
10. He will practice examination of conscience and regularly participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation. He will come to see in these the Lord calling him to continual growth and conversion, and also the grace-filled encouragement of the Spirit.
11. He will practice faith sharing for the benefit of the whole community and its individual members.
12. He will meet with a personal Spiritual Director on a monthly basis, and learn from his counsel.⁵¹
13. He will participate in monthly and annual retreats for renewing his commitment to living in communion with Christ and the members of his local community, and for deepening his missionary fervor to evangelize the poor.
14. Meeting with his Spiritual Director and other formators, he will discern the specific ways he is called to serve the poor as a Vincentian, taking note of his specific gifts as well as the multiple needs of the poor, and recognizing the importance of adequate preparation and training if he is to serve those needs competently. He will bring those considerations to prayer.
15. In accord with the needs of evangelization and after adequate discernment, the brother may receive and serve in the lay ministries of lector and acolyte.
16. Together with his Spiritual Director and Formation Director, he will prepare for his definitive commitment to the Congregation

⁵⁰ *Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents*, XI: 76.

⁵¹ Cf. *Statutes*, #50.

and the pronouncement of vows. He will be given the opportunity to make a retreat for at least three days prior to his pronouncing these vows.

D. Intellectual Formation – Theological and Professional

The objective of the intellectual formation of the brother at this level of formation is twofold: to provide him with theological background so that he might more fully and responsibly bring his faith into his life in the Congregation; and provide him with professional training so that he can serve the poor well or work competently and effectively in the formation of other ministers who seek to serve the poor. To accomplish these objectives, he will engage in the following strategies with the help of his formators:

1. He will seek formal theological education at a Catholic university, theological school or seminary,⁵² to embrace his faith with maturity and participate in the life, conversations, and the decision-making of the community with fuller ease and personal initiative.⁵³ This will help him to bring his faith more effectively to his ministry, and to discussions and planning with others engaged in ministries for the poor.⁵⁴
2. He will study the social doctrine of the Church, and reflect upon the ways it is grounded in the life and mission of Christ, guides our Vincentian life and mission, and is concretely applied.
3. He will become more aware of *the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization.*⁵⁵ He will pay careful attention to the theory and practice of systemic change, finding ways of empowering the poor to participate in their own advancement as fully integrated and equal members of society.

⁵² In this regard, it is worth noting the stipulation of *CIC* 229.2: They (lay persons) also possess the right to acquire that fuller knowledge of the sacred sciences which are taught in ecclesiastical universities and faculties or institutions of religious sciences, by attending classes there and pursuing academic degrees.

⁵³ This course of study will differ from that required for the priesthood in length of time, and number of credits and courses. Theological study for brothers is intended to provide them with a fuller, adult faith formation.

⁵⁴ Brothers and priests cooperate fully in missionary work. This ministry supposes the adequate theological formation of brothers and their ability to give witness to Christ as one engages in various secular works, catechizes, motivates people to honor God through good example, and analyzes current problems in light of the Word of God.

⁵⁵ *Constitutions*, #12.2.

4. He will read Catholic periodicals to remain conversant with theological and pastoral perspectives. This will enable him to bring his faith to the contemporary Church and world with insight, and to develop a critical awareness of reality, moving beyond what is presented in the secular media.
5. He will participate in convocations and workshops conducted by the province as it seeks to foster ongoing formation in community life and apostolic service.
6. He will be given the opportunity to participate in workshops or other programs sponsored by other societies of apostolic life that assist participants to deepen their appreciation of consecrated life and service to the poor. These can also help him grasp more fully his identity as a brother in the Congregation of the Mission, as he meets with brothers of other congregations.
7. In accord with his gifts, abilities and interests, he will have opportunity not only to take courses in technical and theological areas (including the humanities), but also to acquire a true profession. For example, he could seek professional formation as a catechist, pastoral agent, social worker, medical professional, accountant, professor, librarian, architect, civil engineer, lawyer, nurse, carpenter, musician, or chef. He will be encouraged by the fact that evangelization of the poor *does not stifle diverse talents and gifts but directs them to the service of the mission.*⁵⁶
8. He will also be given the opportunity to acquire adequate training for competent service within the Congregation as a treasurer, administrator, or formator (i.e., ministries that do not depend on Orders), if he is needed for one of these ministries.
9. In accord with the missionary character of his vocation, the brother will be given the opportunity to study missiology and learn another language.

E. Apostolic Formation

The objective of the apostolic dimension of the brother's formation at this stage is to provide him with a concentrated experience of Vincentian ministry so that he can better discern his aptitude, personal gifts, and specific calling within Vincentian ministry. To fulfill this objective, with the support of his formators:

1. He will maintain regular contact with some local Christian community whose members are poor and/or share in the reality of

⁵⁶ *Constitutions*, #25.2.

poverty. This may involve him in serving in one or more locations and ministries.

2. He will meet with his ministry supervisor regularly to reflect upon the spiritual dimensions of his service and the practical ways he may enter into that service more fruitfully. He will share the aspects of the ministry which he may struggle with, as well as those which are easier for him and seem helpful to others.
3. Under the guidance of formators, he will participate in theological reflection on his apostolic ministry. If possible, he will also do this with a group of brothers in this level of formation and the local community.
4. He will become aware of the multiple needs of the poor and the complexities of ministering to those needs. He will allow this awareness to lead him to discern his own gifts and desires for alleviating those needs, and the ways the Lord may be calling him to give himself in professional service as a Vincentian.
5. He will be given opportunities to be in contact with the other branches and members of the Vincentian Family to learn the value of ministering with them, and the importance of being united together in order to serve the poor in a more effective manner.

F. Community Formation

The objective of community formation at this stage of the brother's journey is to assist him to relate to a wider age group of confreres with multiple apostolic experiences, sharing the different gifts they bring to community as they live and work together. To accomplish this objective, with support of his formators:

1. He will regularly review the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation* and the Provincial Norms, recognizing that he has all the rights and obligations they contain, and appreciating their significance for life in the local community.
2. He will participate in the "Order of Day" of the local community, especially by sharing in its scheduled times of prayer, and joining the confreres in daily meals and common recreation.
3. He will nourish the fraternal life of the community by sharing in conversation and informal dialogue, a practice *which promotes both personal and community development and renders the work of evangelization more effective.*⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Constitutions*, #21.2.

4. He will be expected to participate in all house meetings, appreciating the different views which other confreres express while freely and humbly expressing his own.
5. He will participate in formulating the local house's Community and Apostolic Plans as means of expressing willingness to live in community and work as a member of a team.
6. He will join in efforts to foster equality, respect, and fraternal relationships among all the members of the community in order to live in union and harmony, and *to get along as good friends*.⁵⁸ He will develop appropriate friendships with confreres without becoming exclusive or possessive.
7. He will engage generously in community labor to maintain the house, respect the goods of the community, and embrace simplicity of life.
8. He will come to know the confreres of the wider provincial community by joining in its convocations, assemblies, and celebrations of Vincentian feasts or other events, and spending some portion of his vacation time at different community houses.

SECTION 4

PROFILE OF A BROTHER COMPLETING THE STAGE OF POST-INTERNAL SEMINARY FORMATION

At the conclusion of his post-internal seminary formation, the brother will be ready for his first fulltime assignment as a definitively incorporated confrere. He should manifest the following characteristics:

1. He will be a man centered in Jesus Christ, the "Rule of the Mission."
2. He will be a man of prayer, actively rooted in the spirit and the teaching of Saint Vincent, cultivating the Vincentian virtues and the evangelical counsels accordingly.
3. He will consistently participate in the life and the decision-making of the community, offering his views when appropriate and acting with responsible and generous obedience.
4. He will relate comfortably with men and women of all ages, manifesting a generous concern for their efforts to follow Christ, and respecting appropriate boundaries in all of these relationships.

⁵⁸ *Common Rules*, VIII.2.

5. He will live simply in community and assist generously in caring for its everyday material needs.
6. He will opt for the poor with conviction that the world needs witness and signs of the universal love of God more than it needs words and theories. He will be convinced that to be in the midst of the poor is his greatest treasure and complete joy.
7. He will work effectively with others in furthering the mission of the Congregation and the Church, complementing priests in pastoral activities. He will be able to work autonomously, but in conformity with the Apostolic Plan of the province or local community.
8. He will have identified well his own gifts and the specific ways he can contribute to alleviating specific needs of the poor. He will have mastered at least an initial specialized training program which will enable him to serve those in need competently and professionally.
9. He will have acquired a sense of "being a missionary," with an openness and readiness to go wherever he is sent and to move beyond homeland, wherever the needs of the poor call him.