

Chapter 8

Ongoing Formation

SECTION 1

NATURE, GOALS, AND CONTEXTS OF ONGOING FORMATION

A. Nature of Ongoing Formation

With the pronouncement of vows (for brothers), or presbyteral ordination (for priests), the confrere completes initial formation and is ready for fulltime ministry. He has reached the maturity, like the full grown tree, to bear fruit. His life now requires greater initiative, autonomy, competence, and responsibility. Ongoing formation refers to the system of relationships and programs which assist adult confreres humanly, spiritually, intellectually, apostolically, and communally – fostering among them Vincentian perspectives, ideals, patterns of living, and ways to advance in communion with the Lord.

B. Contexts of Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation extends possibly five times longer than initial formation, and has varied contexts. One can consider a confrere's first assignment, his changes of assignments, his taking on the responsibility of being a superior, his moving through "middle age," and his living his "senior years," as different contexts and progressive "stages" of ongoing formation. Each presents new challenges and calls us to live more deeply our Vincentian commitment to: service of the poor, celibate chastity, poverty, obedience and working cooperatively with authority, and to living simply, humbly, gently, selflessly, and zealously.

C. Goal of Ongoing Formation

The goal of ongoing formation is to support the confrere in his Vincentian journey from his final commitment and/or ordination in the Community, to his entrance into eternal life.

SECTION 2

THE AGENTS OF ONGOING FORMATION

A. The Individual Confrere

The primary human agent of ongoing formation is the confrere himself. It is his responsibility to work toward integrating his needs and gifts as he finds Christ in prayer, community, and in his mission to the poor.

B. The Visitor

The Visitor has central responsibility for animating and supporting ongoing formation in the province. He will gather confreres as a province at least annually (in a meeting, convocation, or provincially assembly), to share their lives, aspirations, struggles, and vision of the province and its manner of living in community for the mission today. He will lead the confreres in formulating a Provincial Plan to enable them to work together creatively in their community life and in their ministry to the poor and to those in formation. He will appoint a confrere as Director of Ongoing Formation and establish a committee for ongoing formation so that it is fostered and facilitated. Finally, he should know the gifts, competencies, needs, and desires of each confrere to offer him avenues for personal growth in following Christ in community and ministry.

C. The Director of Ongoing Formation

Each province will have a Director of Ongoing Formation who will know the resources for ongoing formation which are available to the confreres. These include programs having an apostolic orientation, such as the formation of formators, and the formation of missionaries "ad gentes," and programs for effectively meeting the needs of the poor, such as training in systemic change. These will also include programs focused on renewal: sabbaticals, retreats, and workshops dealing with personal growth issues. They will include programs of formal education: advanced study and/or post-graduate degrees. The Director of Ongoing Formation assists each confrere as he pursues ongoing formation, offering him information he has gathered on available programs, including their strengths, foci, length, and the type of commitments they require.

D. The Local Superior and the Local Community

The local superior mirrors the Visitor as the animator of the local community and in supporting, fostering and guiding the ongoing formation and growth of each confrere. He should understand each con-

frere's needs, strivings, hopes, and successes, as he seeks to develop his life in Christ and in the community, and renew his dedication to the mission. It is also the superior's responsibility to guide the local community in its formulation and periodic evaluation of the House Plan, and an order of day.

E. The Spiritual Director

Unlike initial formation, ongoing formation does not include a distinct person who serves as Spiritual Director as part of a formation team. The confrere himself seeks spiritual accompaniment through a person he names as his Spiritual Director or an intimate, honest, and wise friend with whom he can share openly.

F. The Director of Apostolic Formation

Similarly, ongoing formation does not include a distinct person who serves as Director of Apostolic Formation as part of a formation team. Nevertheless, there are important supports for deepening the apostolic dimension of a confrere's life. The local superior and the members of the ministerial team with whom the confrere serves provide him with opportunities for sharing theological and pastoral reflection. In a way, those to whom a confrere is accountable in ministry serve as apostolic supervisors and/or mentors.

SECTION 3

THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF ONGOING FORMATION

We are never fully formed; all seasons of a Vincentian's life have formational issues. We are also called in our ongoing formation to continual conversion, both as individual missionaries and as a Congregation.⁸⁴

A. The Vincentian Axis

The objective of the Vincentian dimension of ongoing formation is to help and encourage the confrere to shape and integrate his entire life in becoming a living expression of Christ, evangelizing the poor today. The following strategies will help meet this objective:

⁸⁴ This is clear from our *Constitutions*, article 12.6, where we are bid "to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation..."

1. He will read the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation* annually, and share inspirations and challenges from his reading with a Spiritual Director and/or local community in common reflection.
2. He will assist the local community in forming a House Plan and assiduously live according to it.
3. He will respond to the proposals and decisions enacted by the General Assembly, the Superior General and his Council, and provincial assemblies, seeing these as valuable means for enabling the Congregation and confreres to live the Vincentian charism more fully in the world today.
4. He will reflect regularly upon the goals and strategies of his own ministry to relate them explicitly to the Gospel and to the way of Vincent, drawing inspiration from these sources for personal renewal.
5. He, together with the local community, will reflect upon the lives of Vincentian saints and beati, particularly by taking care to celebrate Vincentian feasts liturgically.
6. Together with the local community, he will strive to create a Vincentian focus for morning or evening prayer at least once a week.

B. Spiritual Formation

The objective of the spiritual dimension of ongoing formation is to foster the confrere's ever-deepening union with Christ and his passionate concern for the poor: to build God's kingdom of love, justice, and peace in the world today. To meet this objective:

1. The confrere will make an annual retreat of five days to focus on personal renewal and evaluate how his ministry and life in community have been expressions of his union with Christ.
2. He will share his spiritual journey with other confreres, especially with a Spiritual Director or other confrere with whom he can speak with openness concerning the joys and challenges of his life.
3. He will celebrate the Eucharist daily, and participate regularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. He will be attentive to the Word of God, particularly as it is presented in the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.
5. He will spend quality time each week reading spiritual books and/or periodicals to keep up to date with Christian approaches to religious and pastoral issues of the day.
6. He will seek nourishment from the teachings and documents of Vatican II.

C. Intellectual Formation

The objectives of the intellectual dimension of ongoing formation are to: assist confreres to remain current in theological and pastoral developments within the Church as it faces issues of the contemporary world and their diverse cultural realizations; and assist confreres to acquire the competencies they need for their specific apostolate. These objectives will be met by employing the following strategies:

1. The province will provide confreres with opportunities for formal training as they: enter a new apostolate; assume the role of Spiritual Director (especially serving those in initial formation); become a superior; and prepare to engage in a mission “ad gentes” (linguistic and cultural formation).
2. The province will provide confreres with opportunities for periodic workshops on the ways of addressing current pastoral and community issues which affect Vincentian life and ministry today.
3. The confreres will acquire necessary competencies when they consider and/or accept new ministries.
4. The confrere will consistently read at least one periodical which addresses contemporary pastoral and/or theological issues, and at least two spiritual or theological books annually to nourish his growth in theological understanding, and discuss what he reads with other confreres.

D. Apostolic Formation

The objective of the apostolic dimension of ongoing formation is to support confreres as they: seek to deepen their appreciation of Vincentian ministry; transition from one work to another; seek to exercise creativity in taking on new works; and let go of ministries or placements which no longer serve the Vincentian mission effectively. The following strategies will serve this objective:

1. When beginning a new ministry, each confrere should seek the guidance of a confrere who has experienced that ministry for some period of time.
2. A confrere about to undertake a new ministry that requires special skills should be offered an opportunity to prepare for the ministry through a program of formal education.
3. Each local community will have an Apostolic Plan which envisions ways in which confreres can support one another both in their ministerial labors and in their apostolic reflection.
4. Each local community will include in its House Plan, at least monthly opportunities for communal theological reflection and faith sharing, centered upon the ministries of the confreres.

E. Community Formation

The objective of the communal dimension of ongoing formation is to help confreres develop an increased sense of belonging, being brothers in one family as they journey together in Christ through the varied stages of their lives. The following strategies will foster this objective:

1. Confreres will participate in the establishment of a House Plan and an Order of Day to which they will commit themselves as a covenant to one another.
2. Each confrere will take responsibility for building community by meeting the needs of his brothers and by generously fulfilling any office he holds within the local community.

F. Human Formation

The objectives of the human dimension of ongoing formation are to help confreres maintain their physical and psychological health, and continue to develop their gifts while learning ways to move beyond their human weaknesses. The following strategies will serve these objectives:

1. Confreres will be given opportunities to seek psychological counseling if it will be helpful for further developing their self-understanding and human skills, particularly relational skills.
2. Confreres will care for their physical health by regular physical exercise, maintaining a proper diet, and by seeing a doctor at least annually for a physical examination.