

ONGOING FORMATION AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL A SHARING (INDONESIA)

PAULUS SUPARMONO, C.M.

Visitor of the Province of Indonesia

I have been asked by Father Superior General to speak today, in 10 minutes, about Ongoing Formation at the Provincial Level. My presentation is just a sharing. I want to share with you what we have done and tried to do, and what successes and difficulties we have found in the Indonesian Province. When I was elected Visitor at the end of 2006, we had just finished Provincial Assembly with the important result: Provincial Norms 2006. On ongoing or permanent formation, there are two sections in Provincial Norms 2006 as the point of reference, namely on *Ongoing Formation* itself and *The Commission of Formation*.

Ongoing Formation (Provincial Norms 2006: 87-91)

87. The members should do their own ongoing formation through reading, attentive to the advance of the science, philosophy, theology or follow an ongoing formation suggested by the Province, either for deepening the Vincentian charism or for ever-increasing the service to the needs of the time effectively.

88. The Visitor and the Councils should be responsive to the needs of the confreres regarding the expertise needed in the pastoral ministry, either for accompanying the people, the service to the poor, or for other various missions.

89. A confrere should be prepared accordingly before taking the particular assignment.

90. To choose the confreres to follow an ongoing formation program is subject to the Visitor and his Councils considering a variety of aspects such as the time of their service, the needs of the province, personal needs, etc. On the other hand the confrere should actively propose an ongoing formation program related to their needs and interests.

91. The confreres should use the sabbatical period or the long break in conjunction with the needs of personal ongoing formation and should be discussed with the Visitor at least 6 month before it.

The Commission of Formation

141. The Formation Commission has the following tasks and capacities:

- a) To help the visitor in formulating basic policy regarding the formation of the members in the form of *Ratio Formationis* corresponding with the situation of the Indonesia Province (cf. Sta. 41-42).
- b) To help the visitor in the animation and formation of the members for apostolic ministries.
- c) To foster relationship and cooperation with other provinces in Asia-Pacific Region on formation.
- d) To document activities of the commission and give reports to the visitor regularly, at least once a year.

142. The members of the Formation Commission will be appointed by the visitor considering representation from various stage of formation and age groups.

Implementation of Provincial Norms 2006 and Experience

To formulate norms is not a short and easy process. Yet, experience tells us that to implement or to actualize the norms, which is really good and beautiful, is more difficult! It needs longer process, effort, patience and perseverance. How to put into practice the normative imperative that “the Visitor and the Councils should be responsive to the needs of the confreres regarding the expertise needed in the pastoral ministry, either for accompanying the people, the service to the poor, or for other various missions?”

At the provincial level, we have been trying to contextualize the program of ongoing formation, which corresponds to what most of the confreres really need and propose for their own ongoing formation at the Provincial Level. So, at the beginning of my ministry as Visitor, I asked the Commission of Formation to make a survey, just a quick and simple survey, sending sheets of questionnaire based on 5 important areas: 1) human maturity development; 2) spiritual life; 3) community life; 4) apostolate; 5) Vincentian charism. The confreres were given also a free space to give suggestions or

proposals. From the responses they sent, these are the results of the survey as to what most of the confreres need and want:

1. Developing the capacity and skill in communication and human relations
2. Spiritual discernment and prayer
3. Conflict management
4. Deepening priestly identity in the contemporary circumstances and Social Teaching of the Church
5. Contextualized Vincentian Study

And we have received suggestions or proposals from most of the confreres:

- To create an ongoing formation program which includes **experience** of immersion or direct contact with the poor, accompanied with personal reflection and sharing, not merely an intellectual workshop nor pure study about poverty and Vincentian spirituality.
- To provide an opportunity to experience the internationality of the Congregation through international formation together with the Vincentian confreres of other provinces.

Formal Ongoing Formation Grouping

Considering the number of confreres in the Indonesian Province and human stages of socio-psycho-spiritual development, though we are all adult persons, we see the importance of grouping for the sake of effective ongoing formation meeting and sharing. Though every person is unique, yet slowly but surely we come to see that in fact almost all confreres in the group have a kind of common personal experience, joy, dream, struggle, crisis, and life question in their search for meaning as priests in their personal life, community life and pastoral ministries. So, for that reason we divide ourselves into 4 ongoing formation groups: 1-7 years of priesthood (23 priests + 1 brother); 8-15 years of priesthood (25 priests); 16-60 years of priesthood (17 priests); 60 years old and more, including our aging confreres in retirement (23 priests). The only one incorporated brother we have now belongs to the classmate in his initial formation.

Each ongoing formation group has one coordinator, who represents his group in the Commission of Formation. Then one of the group coordinators must be chosen by the Visitor as the coordinator of the Commission of Formation for a term of three years. I have entrusted to this commission the tasks of formulating basic policy

concerning the formation of the members which corresponds with the situation of the Province and to animate the members for apostolic ministries.

In dialogue with the Commission of Formation and the Provincial Council, I have been trying to be attentive and responsive to the actual situation of the Province and the needs of the confreres. Then, based on our observation, we decide and formulate an annual theme to guide all confreres in the Province in their ongoing formation meeting, though till now we are still unable to formulate *Ratio Formationis*. But this Commission has done something meaningful also. For example, in 2009 our annual theme was “Incorporation in the Congregation as spiritual journey”; and in 2010 our annual theme is “Love, like that between brothers, should always be present among us” (*The Common Rules* VIII, 2). In 2009, I asked the Commission to write and disseminate a reflection on the annual theme: Incorporation in the Congregation as spiritual journey. Then all ongoing formation groups used this reflection as the point of reference in their annual meeting.

In general, every ongoing formation group has a meeting at least once per year. But they are free to decide to have more than one meeting per year. Some groups, according to their own needs and agreement, have two or three meeting. In these formational meetings usually they invite an expert or a person of rich experience in a certain field to give them input, and then they continue the process with personal reflection and sharing. Another time they just go for vacation or recreation together to foster fraternal relationship.

TEMBIKAR: Informal Group and Meeting

It is good that some confreres are still faithful and committed to continue our informal group, named TEMBIKAR (Temu Bina Diri dan Karya), which means informal meeting for ongoing formation and apostolate sharing. Originally this informal group was initiated by young confreres under 5 years of priesthood, but then many older and even aging confreres are willing to come to their meeting. So, now TEMBIKAR meetings are open and invite all confreres. Sometime they invite speakers to talk important and urgent issues. And when Indonesian missionaries working in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, China/Taiwan Province are coming for vacation, they will invite them to share their experiences. Though undergoing ups and down, this informal meeting or gathering has been very meaningful and enriching in term of ongoing formation.

Annual Retreat and Popular Mission

- Annual Retreat and active participation of the confreres in the Popular Mission are always special and important opportunities for ongoing formation.

Providing Opportunity to Experience International Formation

- Sending confreres to participate in SIEV and CIF Formation Program in France.
- APRF-CCC Joint Meeting.

Sending Confreres for Further Study

- Attentive to the talents, interests and special competence of the individual confreres which corresponds to the needs and apostolate of the Province.
- Requesting scholarship and financial assistance from other Provinces.

Observation and Reflection

We are reminded in this General Assembly that our main resource is ourselves. But our Province has been punched several times by painful surprises. Some of our confreres that look very good and exemplary suddenly left the Congregation. So, what? How to hold and to help them in permanent creative fidelity to the mission?

All that we can do in our formation program is just to provide opportunity, assistance, context and material for ongoing transformation of our beloved confreres. But I think the innermost domain and the goal of ongoing formation are beyond our reach, that is, the world of the individual's freedom of our confreres and their personal response to the action of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we should continue to believe and to strive that ongoing formation really deserves our special attention, because our confreres are our main resources.