



The National Association of Vocation & Formation Directors (NAVFD)

September 2018

ONGOING FORMATION FOR THE WHOLE

"...live in the newness of life" (Romans 6:4)

"Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a

temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:21-22)

These two citations from Scripture capture the essence of formation: its call to continual conversion and its wholistic, integrated nature. Let's follow them with two additional quotes: one spoken with frequency these days by some religious and the other taken from a reflection given by a man completing his term in elected congregational leadership. Both carry implicit assumptions. *"We don't have anyone in formation."* *"Back in 1980, when I entered religious life, ongoing formation was a fundamental element of our life. The provinces prepared courses, developed programs and materials; gatherings were organized even at an international level... I would say it was a true 'boom'. This interest in ongoing formation has slowly decreased. On one side, the lack of personnel in some provinces makes it difficult to organize these gatherings as well as 'freeing' people so that they can dedicate some time to formation is starting to be considered almost as a 'luxury'."* (Fernando Millan Romeral, O.Carm)

The first quotation makes a disturbing assumption that unless a congregation or province has members in initial

formation, no one else is "in formation". It does not take into account that we are *all* in formation; our formation is lifelong.

The assumptions implicit in the second, longer citation are more subtle and will be addressed throughout this article. A key implication is that ongoing formation takes place primarily through courses, programs, and gatherings. Many of us might make similar statements: "We used to offer quite an array of ongoing formation programs in the past but no longer have the personnel, on the one hand, nor the attendees, on the other hand, to plan and implement them."

It is time to look at ongoing formation in a broader perspective and to realize that it is an integral part of each of our lives, no matter our age, stage, or status in religious life. This shift in thinking does not require additional programming as much as a shift of consciousness and tools for continued discernment.

...Formation is a continuous conversion of heart that involves the *whole person* in a lifelong process of change and growth. Conversely, formation is not the mere communication of some particular content within a specific timeframe. It involves far more than taking courses.

More specifically, what is *ongoing* formation? Ongoing/lifelong formation focuses on the continual growth of the whole person to promote a deeper, fuller commitment. Again, it is not about professional recycling or giving more information or helping members to be better informed. Ongoing formation is not the complement or correction of



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initial formation. Contrary to much of our thinking and structures, it doesn't begin when initial formation is "completed."

In the *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* we read "... whereas initial formation is ordered for the person's acquisition of an autonomy sufficient for faithfully living a religious commitment, ongoing formation assists a religious in integrating creativity with fidelity." How do we not only remain faithful but foster a fidelity that is also creative? Might this be the true aim of ongoing formation (and perhaps a good discussion question at our next Council or Formation Committee meeting?)

Initial formation is a part of (not apart from) ongoing formation. Many of us who were once teachers sought to foster a love for lifelong learning in our students. Likewise, formators are called to encourage a continual attentiveness to the formative action of God in the lives of the members of their congregation/province.

A brief scan of the literature on formation results in a long list of the various types of formation: human, spiritual, cultural, theological, pastoral, doctrinal, charismatic, apostolic, intellectual, cross cultural, practical, professional and community. *Vita Consecrata* organizes this overlapping set into 5 dimensions: life in the spirit, human and fraternal, apostolic and missionary, intellectual, and charismatic. The underlying assumption is that formation involves the whole person, in all of his or her complexity, in an integrated manner.

With these definitions in mind, let's return to the assumptions presented at the start of this article and the challenge to look at on-going for-

mation in a broader perspective. None of us need scientific proof of the fact that our lives are marked by perpetual movement.

This is true of the molecules in our world, the cells in our bodies, the thoughts of our minds, and the growth of our person. Even when we think we are at rest (or merely gliding along), imperceptible change is a constant companion. Likewise maturation is always at work within and among us. We can choose to be a passive recipient of the change process or we can welcome it and take some charge of and responsibility for it.

The task of formation is threefold: reflection, discernment, and integration. It is somewhat akin to what we were told to do as children when crossing a street: stop, look, and then cross. We must first take a pause, however momentary, to become aware of and open to the new realities of each day and the learnings and changes that they bring. Secondly, though certainly not in linear fashion, we are called to take a serious, honest, and critical look at our life in today's world. Often this calls for action to integrate, re-organize, and restructure life's new learnings and awarenesses. It is not unlike reading the signs of the times and responding to them.

What does this require of us? Again, a threefold response is required: openness, freedom, and flexibility. Realizing that conversion, spiritual transformation, and

ongoing formation are primarily the work of the grace of God, openness of heart and an openness to experience and learning are key. This is the responsibility of each individual who is invited to respond in freedom to the daily call to grow. "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live." (Deut 30:19) The continual reorganizing and reintegrating calls for a certain flexibility of self as well.

"To follow Christ means that one is always on the road and that one is on one's guard against ossification..."

(Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes)

What, then, is the role of formators in the ongoing formation of members? Without negating the value of programs and resources, it is important to take a

broad view, rather than one that compartmentalizes it through the offering of sporadic programs. To confine ongoing formation to a series of speakers or a set of materials is to neglect the daily nature of the process. The formator, then, is more of a facilitator who encourages the elements of reflection, discernment, and integration described above. These can be the focus of resources and/or input to members, thus enabling them to be stirred and shaped by their everyday lives, to be attentive and aware, to be reflective and responsive, and always to be discerning.

While this article is focused primarily on the ongoing formation of each individual, it is also written with the awareness that members form the body of the congregation. Thus, the ongoing formation of each contributes to the renewal of the whole. The ripple effect extends beyond individuals to the province/ congregation and to all of religious life.

J.S. PALUCH VOCATION SEMINAR

The two new “kids on the block” of the Board of NAVFD were invited to represent NAVFD at the annual Vocation Seminar sponsored by the National Vocations Awareness Division of the J.S. Paluch Company, Inc in Chicago. It was an appealing “all expenses paid” trip making it a very palatable option. This seminar provides a forum for discussion on collaboration among many leaders of organizations in the USA related to vocation, evangelization, youth, young adult and other related Catholic ministries. Some of the organizations represented there were the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, the National Religious Vocation Conference, the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, LCWR, Serra Club, Marriage Building among others. All this was happening in an exquisite environment of the Embassy Suites Hotel.

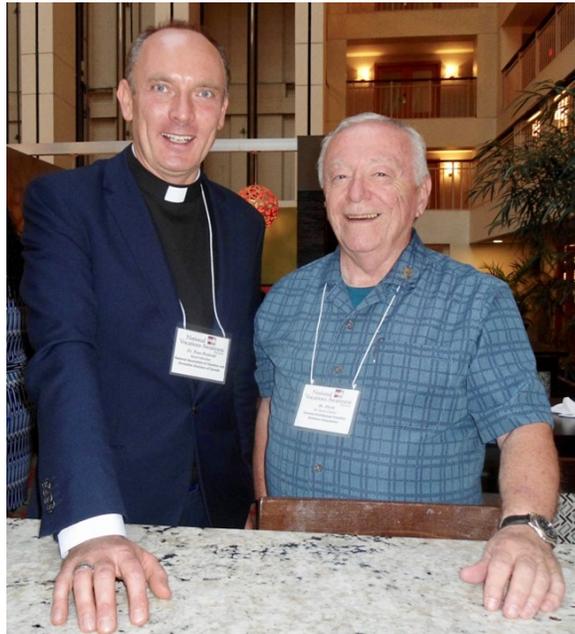
From the moment we arrived at the hotel, arms were wide open in an expression of hospitality that was overwhelming and genuine. Upon entering my room I thought how wonderful it was that the hosts were receiving we foreign visitors with such exquisite rooms but a reality check soon set in when I found out all the rooms were identical.

Flying from Chicago I had that tingling sensation that, after the recent release of the grand jury report on clerical abuse in the state of Pennsylvania, there would be a meandering “elephant in the room” and how would my American counterparts deal with it. That question did not linger long. Bishop Frank Caggiano of the Bridgeport Diocese was our keynote speaker and he addressed the situation directly and quite forcibly. There was no “excuse” for what happened and the Church Authorities had to deal with the situation wholly and without distraction. As for us we had to be fully aware that the scandals affected us in our vocation fostering efforts. “The great works of 99

dedicated Priests was seriously undermined and even negated by the actions of one bad apple.”

This set a tone of openness for the seminar.

Fr. Paul Jarzembowski presented the World Youth Day and National Dialogue Report. A Panel then ensued consisting of three young people, two from the Pre-Synod and one from the Grotto Network. Wow! What dynamic talent there is within the Catholic Church. All of us were held spell bound as a presentation, discussion and feedback ensued. If anyone doubted the liveliness and spirit of the Church this soon evaporated.



Fr. Tom Puslecki and Brother Denis Claivaz represented NAVFD very well at the recent J. S. Paluch Vocation Seminar in Chicago.

Reports from the various groups present were given and discussed. Salt & Light did not let down the Canadian side. They gave a presentation of their past and present works using the imagery for which they are well known.

The magic of the warmth of the group assembled could not be ignored. Networking among the delegates was in constant motion. Listening to the stories of people who worked in very similar environments to ourselves was very encouraging.

It was certainly not all work and no play. Each meal and coffee break was a melange of quick wit, humor and personality richness. There was

just so much talent and experience in the room. Daily Mass was celebrated giving a special start to the day. On Tuesday evening there was a concert which epitomized the flavour of the seminar.

No words could describe the fulness of these few days in Chicago. What a treat it was to be part of this wonderful experience. We feel enriched and emboldened to continue our work here in Canada and we are grateful to Mary Lou Paluch Rafferty and the J.S. Paluch Company for their kind invitation to participate.

UNDER 50ISH RETREAT

During the summers of 2017 and 2018 at Queen's House in Saskatoon, SK, 37 women and men Religious from across Canada (and beyond), gathered together for summer retreats. These retreats were facilitated by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio Texas, and born and raised on the Canadian prairies. What was unique about these retreats? It was Religious 55(ish) and under or in formation, together in prayer, silence, building community, and sharing sacred stories. The participants represented 18 Religious Communities (Apostolic and Contemplative) and 2 Rites.

Summer 2018 Searching for a covenant of mutual support - a deeper oneness within the Mystical Body of Christ

Fr. Ron Rolheiser invited the 20 Consecrated Religious to reflect more deeply on our vows through the lens of being part of the Mystical body of Christ. This opened our hearts to hear and share more easily on how we can and need to be intentional as Religious at this age/stage, about our connections to one another and how that impacts the Body of Christ.

The following are 2 reflections from participants of the 2018 retreat.

At a time when many of us are experiencing the shrinking of our Congregations, it is indeed a gift to gather together and experience a larger reality of Religious Life in Canada. Fr. Ron guided us, shared with us, and affirmed us in our desire to continue to say "yes" to our Congregations, and to grow in relationship with one another. Timothy Radcliffe says that God's Grace is the future breaking in. This retreat was just that, an experience of Grace in which we glimpsed the

future of our Religious Life in Canada, and this is a gift. These are the people with whom we will be in relationship, share community and ministry, support in



mission, and move creatively into the future. Pope Francis calls us to create a culture of encounter; this retreat provided us the opportunity to encounter one another, and in doing so the narrative of Religious Life in Canada continues to evolve.

Sr. Joanne O'Regan, CM

Searching, Covenant and Christ

We came from places near and far,
from coast to coast by plane and car,
to gather for some wisdom and rest,
so we can be and do our very best.

A chance to meet religious young,
prayers were prayed and hymns were sung,
to lift our spirits and light the way,
for us to embrace this gift each day.

Wisdom shared from Father Ron,
insights glimpsed from dusk to dawn,
in the silence we were nourished,
then the conversation really flourished.

Support and dialogue were the norm,
'Aha' moments were continuously born,
Healthy enzymes we are called to be,
we live for the Church not individually.

Growth, healing and charity in our steps,
renewed to be the Light's reps,
a commitment to do the puny well,
as young religious with our Emmanuel.

Br. Michael Perras, O.F.M.

See next page

UNDER 50ISH RETREAT—CONTINUED

What Next?

It was evident as the 2018 retreat was concluding that the need to continue these retreats is crucial. The participants recognized that although Religious, and specifically ones in this age and stage, are not a large number; there are more who could benefit from this experience and connection. So a commitment to continuing the retreat for the next 4 years was decided. The reality is that Canada is a large country geographically speaking, and to ease the burden of cost and distance, the consensus was to rotate locations between

Saskatchewan and Ontario.

Another evolution from the retreat is the creation of a blog. This is an opportunity to gather virtually. The blog which is expected to launch in early October 2018, will be called aroundthewell.ca and it will be directed towards Religious 55ish and under. Though it is a public blog and others are welcome to view it, those who post will be from this demographic. The hope is to provide stories, images, articles and reflections for one another and share the life and joy

our vocation offers the Church and world.

We are committed to living out our vocation authentically in the midst of today's realities. Given that our realities are different than those before us in Religious Life, this calls for us to imagine the possibilities differently. We recognize more than ever, that our need to be healthy enzymes in the Body of Christ is essential. We are grateful to our Religious Communities who continue to support our need to gather as we live out our call prophetically and attentive to the Holy Spirit.

Save the Dates

2019 Retreat July 14-19, Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, Mississauga ON. with Fr. Ron Rolheiser, omi
Watch for aroundthewell.ca blog site October 2018

LANDSCAPE OF RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS IN CANADA

NEWSLETTER REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2018



Greetings from the team of the “Canadian Vocations to Religious Life” research!

We will dedicate this

fall to implementing a communications strategy geared to spread the results of our research far and wide. Our hope is to ensure that religious congregations, as well as other religious organizations, obtain updated information about vocation animation applicable to their

contexts. This information will allow religious congregations to better understand the changing reality of vocations to religious life and to develop appropriate ways to minister to those discerning in today's world.

We plan to accomplish our communications goal by distributing a series of accessible materials that explain our research findings and highlight our key learnings, conclusions, and recommendations. Simultaneously, we plan to publicize these findings through diverse media outlets and academic publications. If you have any suggestions of regional or local

media channels - or any other organizations that should receive information from us - please do not hesitate to contact us.

Before the end of September you will be receiving some of these materials together with the information on how to access the complete research reports. In the meantime, if you have any questions, or would like to find out more about our research results, please contact me at navfd.research@gmail.com.

We ask for your prayers and support as we conclude this important project. Fall Blessings!

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