



information

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# Ongoing Formation for the Whole

by Ellen Dauwer, SC

*"...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.

What is formation? 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 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 five 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 ongoing formation in a broader perspective. None of us need scientific proof of the fact that our lives are marked by perpetual movement.

## 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 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, reorganize, 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.

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.

*"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)

See next page for Ongoing Formation Resources



# ONGOING FORMATION RESOURCES

## **Directives on Formation in Religious Life**

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

## **Ongoing Formation as Creative Fidelity**

Alfredo Becerro Vazquez  
*Vincentiana* (March-April, 2005)

## **Ongoing Formation My Personal Experience**

Benjamin Crespo Lopez de Castilla, SJ  
Review of Ignatian Spirituality (XLII, 1/2011) pp 36-47

## **The Challenges in the Leadership of Religious Life Today in View of Ministry Both "Ad Intra" and "Ad Extra"**

Fernando Millan Romeral, O.Carm  
<http://ocarm.org/en/content/ocarm/challenges-leadership-religious-life-today-view-ministry-both-ad-intra-ad-extra>

## **Ongoing Formation and Its Challenges for the Future**

International Union of Superiors General  
<http://internationalunion SUPERIORSgeneral.org/ongoing-formation>

## **Formation Today: Ministry and Mystery**

Amedeo Cencini, FDCC  
<http://www.ofmconv.org/x/CenciniEng.htm#2-1>

## **Ongoing Formation: Continuing Renewal**

Joseph Aubry, SDB  
*The Way* <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s041Aubry.pdf>

## **Formation, Initial and Ongoing**

Mo. Ma. Araceli Escurzon, OSB  
[http://www.anselmianum.com/congressus\\_osb/documents/F5ESCURZONFormationENG.pdf](http://www.anselmianum.com/congressus_osb/documents/F5ESCURZONFormationENG.pdf) (monastic)

## **A Unified Vision of Life Long Formation**

Sisters of St. Joseph Federation  
[http://www.cssjfed.org/images/Approved\\_Unified\\_Vision\\_for\\_Life\\_Long\\_Formation\\_\\_1\\_2016.pdf](http://www.cssjfed.org/images/Approved_Unified_Vision_for_Life_Long_Formation__1_2016.pdf)  
(more resources online)

## **Ongoing Formation of Religious**

Cyril de Souza, SDB  
*2007 Vincentiana*  
[https://cmglobal.org/vincentiana-novus-en/files/downloads/2008\\_1\\_2/vt\\_2008\\_01\\_15\\_en.pdf](https://cmglobal.org/vincentiana-novus-en/files/downloads/2008_1_2/vt_2008_01_15_en.pdf)  
(very extensive)

## **The Role of Ongoing Formation in the Renewal of Religious Life**

Sr. M. Breda Carroll, OP  
[http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier/ongoing\\_formation\\_breda.doc](http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier/ongoing_formation_breda.doc)

## **CICLSAL Resources**

Office of Religious - Archdiocese of Dublin  
<https://yearofconsecratedlifedublin.wordpress.com/prayer-resources/ciclsal-resources>

## **Some Congregation Examples**

### **On-Going Formation**

#### **Springfield Dominicans**

<http://springfieldop.org/what-we-are-studying-now>

### **Ongoing Formation**

#### **School Sisters of Notre Dame**

<https://gerhardinger.org/community/ongoing-formation>

### **Formation and Transformation**

#### **Congregation of Holy Cross**

<http://www.holycrosscongregation.org/holy-cross-resources/constitutions/6-formation-and-transformation>

### **Ongoing Formation**

#### **Order of Saint Augustine**

[http://augustinians.net/index.php?page=formcourse10\\_en](http://augustinians.net/index.php?page=formcourse10_en)

### **Ongoing Formation**

#### **Claretian Formation**

<http://www.claretianformation.com/ongoing-formation>

### **On-Going Formation**

#### **Franciscan Friars Third Order Regular**

[http://anne.ontargetwebsolutions.com/~friars/archive/resources/formation/stf\\_part5.htm](http://anne.ontargetwebsolutions.com/~friars/archive/resources/formation/stf_part5.htm)

### **Ongoing Formation**

#### **Society of St. Paul**

<http://www.stpauls.in/DropDownDetail/Index?Id=61&Type=A>

*we want to hear from you!*

What does ongoing formation look like  
in your religious institute?

Take our short survey:

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/Ongoing-Formation](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Ongoing-Formation)