

The Charism and the “Crucified of Today”

Passionist formation in the cultural context of one’s relationships with Jesus, with Passionist community life, with the formator, and with the Passionist mission.

Where is the grace that allows for formation to touch, to change as needed, to clarify and help mature and foster the candidate’s calling to a life-giving commitment to the Passionist vocation? Our own experience has taught us that this grace is found in our relationship with Jesus, with the members of the Passionist community (especially initially with the formator) and ultimately in the association of the candidate with the Charism in the context of the mission to the “Crucified of Today.” If this mission is to be effective in a candidate’s formation in the Charism of St. Paul of the Cross, it will be defined within the culture of the people it seeks to serve.

Enculturation is a graced challenge for formation of Passionist candidates that holds a great hope for the Congregation as its presence grows in over 59 different countries. Today the majority and the growth of the Catholic Church is in the Southern Hemisphere. This is true of our Congregation as well. As we make this shift, the process of enculturation implies a shared enriching grace of God’s Kingdom for all involved in formation—the missionary and the native vocation, the young and old, and male and female. The Gospel is alive in all these relationships. Given the growth of our Congregation, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, the cross culture formation will be a rich challenge that will face us for some years to come.

Formators and the Formation Community need to be seen as one. The formation of the candidates as a grace is entrusted as a relationship with the local formation community, with the formator being the most responsible member in dealing one-on-one with the candidates. However, he does not act alone, but within the context of all members of the formation community, who all bear the responsibility to exemplify the life of the founder, St. Paul of the Cross. The formator and the members of the formation community need to appreciate their calling as members of a formation team—there needs to be a mutual respect of each other’s roles, and the commitment to be there for each other as well as for the candidates.

The local formation community is always challenged to deepen and exemplify personally a relationship with Jesus. This relationship reflects humility, a generosity and a transparency that allows for the candidate to be challenged as well as inspired to let go and let God become more a part of his life as well as offer him a guiding light—that is, establishing a greater confidence in his encounter with Jesus. This is reflected in the formation community’s personal relationship with the Lord, as well as opportunities for community prayer, Eucharist, and shared faith life. Further, fraternal relationships among the community members is a source of grace for the candidate to sense that he is being invited into a community, a place where he begins to sense a religious home and place of belonging.

This relationship with the Lord among the members becomes the inspiration and source of grace for a candidate’s vocation. A vocation is first and foremost inspired by a grace that is

experienced and present in his relationship to the local community (and particularly with his formator) and its mission. The candidate will experience the charism of St. Paul of the Cross as it is lived out in the member's daily lives.

The charism has not only to be explained, but lived in community and expressed in mission. The "Crucified of Today" needs to be self-evident in the community and the formator. What is the relationship of the community's mission to the poor? Part of the answer is in awareness and exposure of the candidates to the social teachings of the Church—the relationship of "the preferential option for the poor" and our charism--to serve with love the "Crucified of Today."

There is a graced relationship of our charism and the poor. For the charism to be able to foster the graced inspiration that is necessary to move a candidate forward it must have visible association with the "Crucified of Today" in the life of the community, but especially in the formator. If the mission is not clear here or lacking in integrity, the commitment on the part of the candidate may waver, or even decrease in as much that he may leave the community, because of what is lacking in the community, not the candidate.

The formation Community is not only made up of vowed religious including a formator, but also of other candidates. The interaction and relationship of the candidates to one another are an important part of the formation and inspiration as a candidate moves forward in his commitment to be a Passionist with the help of God's grace. Opportunities could be provided for the candidates to share their life experiences and struggles, this being the means and the inspiration for each other to move forward in their calling. There may be shared spontaneous prayer, ministry together in a mission, projects around the community house, etc.

We are reminded in the Gospel that Jesus sent out the disciples in twos or in groups. We learn best together; we are not meant to operate alone, but with each other. Formation can foster this graced capacity to serve as a "team" player. God constantly invites us as Passionists to bond and realize that we can depend on each other and each other's gifts as we strive to further the mission of St. Paul of the Cross as a part of the mystical Body of Christ.

The formator should be trained in the culture in which he is exercising his ministry, in order to be able to "journey" effectively with the candidates. He is a spiritual guide, whom the candidate can relate to so the candidate can incorporate the charism into his daily life and sense its meaning in the culture he lives in and for his people, whom he hopes to serve. If the formator is trained in another country and then returns to his own country to be a formator, then there may be a need for some training of the local formation community he is returning to. The community could invite the formator to share what he has learned so that they can own and be a part of a richer formation process. The new formator also may desire to get some feedback from his local formation community so that what he has learned reflects the culture that he is returning to.

The formator should foster an ability to love his candidates, especially in the formator's capacity to be able to listen to the candidate and the movement of the Spirit in the candidate's life relative to family, the growth of the individual charism in his heart, and how his unique relationship with Jesus is growing. Listening is a grace filled art that allows the candidate to

imagine himself in a new and more spiritual mature manner, and then to begin to trust that image of himself as part of God’s graced plan for him—his Passionist vocation.

It is important for the community and especially for the formator that through listening and through their love for God, for the candidate and for the congregation, especially in the context of a different culture, that they try to understand what is being communicated to the candidates. What is the candidate within his own culture “hearing” or “understanding” by what is being communicated to him by the formator or the community? Are the expectations of the formator in line with the gifts and the culture of the candidate? It is important what is being said by the formator, and also what is being heard or being understood by the candidate within the context of the community life they are living.

The ministry of the Church is entrusted to all members of the Body of Christ. Formation stands to celebrate this grace in collaboration with the Laity. A Passionist vocation is a living relationship with God’s people. The involvement of the candidate in ministry and ministering along with other committed laity is essential for today’s Passionist. The call of the laity, especially Passionist laity (those that have grown in the Passionist Charism themselves), to serve alongside vowed Passionists is an essential and rich grace that can form the vowed Passionist vocation as well as the lay Passionist vocation.

Formation Communities are the new frontier of our Congregation as it entrusts itself to the graces of restructuring and solidarity. As the Passionist Community continues to grow in so many more difference cultures and countries, the Sons of St. Paul of the Cross stand to be blessed and enriched so many times over. Grace abounds. Let us seek and go forth trusting our love of God, our love of His people and our love of the Congregation in each of our hearts as we take our place at the foot of the Cross, with our hearts filled with hope that offers us today a life of fulfillment, which the love of the Crucified bestows on all of us.

- Where is the grace that allows for formation to touch, to change as needed, to clarify and help mature and foster the candidate’s calling to a life-giving commitment to the Passionist vocation?
- Why is the relationship of a formation community’s charism to the “Crucified of Today” imperative?
- Why is the role of a “Formation Community” important to the formation of a candidate, especially as it relates to enculturation?
- What is the candidate within his own culture “hearing” or “understanding” by what is being communicated to him by the formator and/or the community?
- Why is it essential to have the expectations of the formator aligned with the gifts and the culture of the candidate?

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