



Mission of the Community of Passionist Partners:

We are a group of lay men and women and professed Passionists partnering with Holy Cross Province, who formally commit to share in the charism of St. Paul of the Cross, through a contemplative prayer life, ongoing spiritual formation, and profession of the message of Christ crucified.

History

The Community of Passionist Partners (CPP) is the result of a long series of discussions that took place over several years involving both vowed Passionists and concerned laity. Lay involvement was a central topic at both the 1988 and 1995 General Chapters. A Lay Collaboration Committee produced a document that was discussed at the Province Chapter in 1995.

“Our charism is a great gift. Our vocation to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus does not only belong to our Congregation or to our communities; it is open to all those human beings that are moved by the action of the Holy Spirit. We accept the call to live in communion with so many men and women who witness to its relevance and vitality.”

Passionist General Chapter 1995

This foundational idea led to further discussions and refinements in 1996 and 1997. By May 1997, a board of directors was formed, consisting of vowed Passionists and lay persons. The board commenced work on outlining a specific plan for the development of the CPP program.

In January of 1998, the first formation programs began in Detroit, Michigan and Sierra Madre, California. Within a few months, similar projects began in Chicago, Illinois and Citrus Heights, California. Soon they were joined by formation programs in Houston, Texas, Louisville, Kentucky and eventually in Birmingham Alabama and San Antonio, Texas.

Formation

In light of the development of the CPPs, a formation program was developed and implemented. The community gathers each month and once each quarter there is an all day meeting featuring a presentation of some aspect of Passionist charism. The formation curriculum is sectioned in quarterly sessions for the first four years. Each community of CPPs receives the same instruction by an expert cadre of instructors. The fifth year is designed so that each community decides what they want to study is light of the mission and covenant.

1st Year. “Moving toward Covenant”

- Memory of the Passion (Sr. Elissa Rinere CP)
- Life and Spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross (Fred Sucher CP)
- Prayer and Apostolate (Jack Conley CP)
- Outstanding Passionists (Kenneth O’Malley CP)

At the end of the first formation year, members covenant with the community and Province

2nd Year. “Living the Covenant:

- Discernment in the Spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross (Richard Burke CP)
- The Passion and the Four Gospels (Don Senior CP)
- Noisy Contemplation (Bob and Carol Smith)
- Vatican II BS St. Paul of the Cross (Philip Paxton CP)

At the end of the second year, new members who feel ready, enter into covenant with the community, and those who previously covenanted renew or revise their commitments as well.

3rd year : Toward Ministry:

- Remembering the Passion (Elissa Rinere CP)
- The Meaning of Suffering in our Lives (Fred Sucher CP)
- Two other presentations arranged by the local community

4th year: Theological Reflection and Contemplation:

- Theological Reflection and Contemplation (Kenneth O’Malley CP)
- Lay Spirituality (Thomas More Newbold and Robert Smith)
- Two other presentations arranged by the local community

5th year: Encountering and Ministering to the Crucified:

- Each community decides what they want to study in light of the topics of contemplative prayer, ongoing spiritual formation and profession of the message of Christ Crucified

Discernment

For the CPP, discernment refers to:

- Discerning membership: Candidates first discern whether or not to become a member of CPP
- The community must also discern whether or not the person is a good candidate for membership
- Candidates then must discern the nature of the individual part of their covenant
- Each year, members need to again spend time in discernment as they review their covenant deciding to renew and deciding on changes to their individual part of the covenant

Discernment always involves prayer, especially prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance. Discernment is an integral part of the candidates in first year formation, but also to all members as they progress in their spirituality.

Covenant

As stated in our mission statement “we formally commit to share in the charism.” This formal commitment is manifested in the form of a covenant. The covenant is the focal point of the first year of formation and is made only after the year of formation where candidates are asked to discern making this commitment.

The covenant is a special type of commitment. It has meaning and symbolism that resonates with our biblical and spiritual traditions. The covenant:

- Is made with one another, not with the congregation
- Is made by lay and professed
- Is not binding in a legal sense, but is binding in a moral, ethical sense

The covenant as stated:

“I covenant with you, the Community of Passionist Partners, in the presence of God, and witnessed by a representative of the Congregation of the Passion, to foster and pursue the memory of the Lord’s Passion, as a member of the Community of Passionist Partners, in accordance with the spirit and vision of St. Paul of the Cross.

I pledge to do so within the Community of Passionist Partners, for a period of one year, taking part, during this time, in communal prayer and in ongoing formation programs of the Community of Passionist Partners, and in the practice of personal prayer and spiritual direction.

In addition, during this time, I will make my individual promise of ways to live out the mission statement of this community.

Furthermore, as an expression of my love and support for my brothers and sisters of the Community of Passionist Partners, I will serve with them in common mission, participating in community gatherings and entering fully into community life.

With the help of God, the intercession of St. Paul of the Cross, and support of this Community of Passionist Partners, I promise to fulfill this commitment.”

The covenant is usually celebrated in each community with some kind of solemn ritual. Family members and friends may be invited. The covenant is formalized by having the member sign a covenant form which is sent to the CPP central office in Chicago and is kept on file. The initial covenants are affirmed by the Provincial Superior through a letter to the new member accepting their commitment and congratulating them on the covenant based on the common goal to foster the memory of the Lord’s Passion.

Community

The central focus of CPP is that all members are drawn to the spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross. We form community around the memory of the Passion of Our Lord. We contemplate the mysteries inherent in the Passion and attempt to follow the Holy Founder’s vision in our lives and ministries.

CPP members consider that the Passion of Jesus was the central event in history and that our discipleship is empowered with a “Passion for Life.” We respond to each other and to all of the people in our midst with a sense of compassion and love. This message is needed in our broken world, in our struggling church, now more than ever.

Perspective

As I travel around the province to each of the local communities of CPPs, the charism of St. Paul of the Cross comes through each member and gathering. I hear people tell about how the charism has enriched their lives and ministries. We support each other in difficult times; we celebrate with each other and we pray together. It is exhilarating to share prayer and conversation with each community.

Lay groups that are affiliated with religious congregations are growing all throughout the United States. The CPP program is also growing with nearly 200 members in 8 communities throughout the province. It is a great privilege to spend time with each of the CPPs and see first hand how they are living out their covenants.

The Communities are learning from their members and from other communities. The board of CPP recently undertook a strategic planning process and outlined initiatives related to formation, membership/community, stewardship, communications and ministries. Each Community is also looking at strategies, next steps, issues and challenges. CPPs are exhibiting great creativity and pronounced dedication to the Memory of the Passion.

Each community elects their own leadership teams and each community has representation on the board of directors. The CPP is looking toward the future with the realization that community development is a part of the charism. We study and pray together as well as manage our meetings and work on our future. We are uniquely poised to form a new way of Passionist life, *the covenant community*, whose reason for existence is based on the Memory of the Passion and how we live that reality in our everyday lives, whether professed or lay. We meet at the foot of the Cross and ask for God's life to continue through us and into the world.

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