

Formation for Celibacy

A Possible Approach

Introduction

Consecrated celibacy is the single-hearted commitment to follow Jesus that renders the Passionist religious unmarriageable for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is the mystical heart of religious life as total self-gift to God to the exclusion of any other primary life commitment. In some ways, consecrated celibacy is the distinctive and defining feature of consecrated religious life. The choice to commit oneself to Christ to the exclusion of all other primary life commitments - spouse, children, blood relatives, work – means that religious need to find in their relationship with Christ the affective depth, totality, and effectiveness that will nurture their hearts to human and spiritual maturity.

During recent years, formation for celibacy has become a much greater concern in the formation of men for the religious life and for priestly ministry. In different documents, the Church has recommended that this be an integral part of every formation program. It has also become an important part of the Vatican's thinking about the future of seminary training. The new *Ratio Fundamentalis*, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, (2017), states, "As a sign of complete dedication to God and neighbor, the Latin Church upholds perfect continence in celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven as especially fitting for priests. . . . It would be gravely imprudent to admit to the sacrament of orders a seminarian who does not enjoy free and serene affective maturity. He must be faithful to celibate chastity through the exercise of human and priestly virtues, understood as openness to the action of grace, rather than mere achievement of continence by will power alone" (n.110).

The congregation's new *General Program of Formation* (2018) recognizes the necessity of a more profound formation for celibacy. Celibacy and the whole area of human sexuality are given priority attention in the pre-novitiate stage of formation to emphasize its paramount importance for a happy and healthy religious life. However, in this paper we offer some suggestions for a systematic and more complete coverage of celibacy and related matters that can be presented progressively over the many stages of initial formation.

Formation for a happy and wholesome celibate life is one of the daunting challenges facing both formators and formandi throughout the Congregation. We recognize that the whole topic of sexuality varies from culture to culture. In some societies, sexuality is highly eroticized and everyone seems to be sexually aware from an early age. In other societies, sexuality is a private reality shared with only a few. In still others, celibacy does not have a cultural value, and the cultural push is to sexual intimacy.

Where to begin? What does one include in a formation program? What is appropriate and what is not appropriate? What belongs to a spiritual director or confessor? Does a program of Formation for Celibacy primarily give information or bring candidates to integration? These are just a few questions that are often raised when discussing the issue with formators.

In some parts of the Congregation, most candidates are already experienced adults who have lived and worked in the surrounding society for many years. Through knowledge and experience, they are fully aware of the challenges of living celibacy in a happy and

wholesome way. Others come from the minor seminary and have had a sheltered upbringing. The General Secretariat for Formation cannot develop a program that is suitable to all candidates from the many backgrounds and in the many cultures where the Congregation is located. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that a comprehensive program¹ for formation for celibacy must include the following:

- I. A healthy understanding and appreciation for human sexuality (some suggestions are offered in Section I)
- II. Celibacy and Chastity as understood in Church teaching, religious life, and the Constitutions, with focus on teaching, spirituality and practice (some suggestions of what this might look like are offered in Section II of the syllabus)
- III. A healthy understanding and appreciation for human intimacy appropriate to Celibacy (some suggestions are offered in Section III)
 - in community
 - with men and women
 - in ministry
- IV. Practical and professional understandings of boundaries in community, friendships, and ministry – including professional skills (what this means and how to approach the topic are offered in Section IV)
- V. Lived experience of celibacy and chastity in the Congregation in both community and ministry (suggestions on how this could be developed are offered in Section V)

The following syllabus or program is divided into five sections corresponding to the five themes indicated above. It is simply a list of the topics/themes that might help the development of a more detailed and comprehensive program and curriculum appropriate to the different regional and cultural contexts. The formation commission in each configuration can determine what, when, how and by whom the different elements may be included in the formation programs of that part of the world.

This is not intended to be a program for one stage of formation, but a progressive program that should permeate the whole of formation. Different stages ought to emphasize different elements of the program. In this way, a gradual and progressive formation for celibacy begins in postulancy, is deepened during the novitiate, and becomes more integrated into the years of temporary profession and preparation for ministry.

It is hoped that the progression of this program, from general to specific, will build trust and comfort for candidates to speak and share more freely about this dimension of our religious lives. It may also assist them in developing the vocabulary and tools to express themselves appropriately. The objective is not to have knowledgeable candidates, but candidates who have integrated this knowledge into their lives as celibate and chaste Passionists.

¹ These notes are based on work done by the Redemptorists and Claretians.

It is the overall responsibility of the formators at different stages to see how this formation for celibacy takes place. However, one formator cannot be responsible for the whole program. In fact, many aspects of this formation would be better dealt with by outside professionals such as medical doctors, nurses, psychologists or clinical social workers. We strongly suggest that professionally trained experts be engaged where appropriate, but always in collaboration with the formators.

FORMATION FOR CELIBACY: A POSSIBLE SYLLABUS

Section I: A healthy understanding and appreciation of human sexuality

In each section we indicate who might be best suited for presenting the different elements of this program. We recommend that the formators and other religious participate in these formative sessions.

This section includes:

A. Basic biology and physiology – this could be presented by a medical professional

B. Knowledge of terms – this could be presented by a professional

- **SEX AND SEXUALITY** – What’s the difference?
- **SEXUAL AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT** - How do we grow sexually? Do men and women develop differently?
- **INTIMACY AND SEXUALITY** – What is intimacy? Can you be intimate without being sexual?
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION** – What is sexual orientation?
- **SEXUAL DIFFICULTIES AND DISORDERS** – What are some of the sexual difficulties and disorders people have with sexuality?

C. Psychosexual Development – This area could be presented by a professional in human development together with the formation team.

- a) Psychosexual development and prenatal life
 - Family attitudes towards sex
 - Parental attitudes
 - Pregnancy, labor and delivery
- b) Psychosexual development during childhood
- c) Psychosexual development during adolescence
 - Awakening – sexual information
 - Sexual fantasies and body reactions
 - Masturbation
 - Physical changes and personal appearance
 - Relational experiences – falling in love
 - Sexual trauma or abuse
 - Sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS
- d) Psychosexual development during adulthood
 - Psychosexual Maturity
 - Integration
 - Genital expressiveness

Intimacy

- e) Sexual Orientation
 - Asexuality – people who have little or no sexual response
 - Heterosexuality
 - Homosexuality
 - Bisexuality

- e) Psychosexual Issues
 - Sexual Abuse by clergy
 - Escaping our sexuality – (internet, pornography, etc)

D. Sexuality and celibacy in the social-cultural context of the candidates – this section could be dealt with by an anthropologist, sociologist or social worker plus the formation team.

Society's views of sexuality

- the influence of culture and family traditions
 - the influence of peers
 - the influence of media, pornography, internet
- How do these affect our views of sexuality?
How do these affect our means of living celibately?

Section II: Celibacy and Chastity

Church teaching, religious life, and the Passionist Constitutions, with focus on spirituality and practice.

Some suggestions for this Section:

- 1) Celibacy in the non-Christian world
 - experience of celibacy in different religious contexts (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism)
- 2) Celibacy in the Bible
 - Jewish experience of sexuality and celibacy
 - Sexuality and celibacy in the Gospels (Matt 19)
 - Celibacy in view of the parousia – in the writings of St. Paul
- 3) Celibacy in Church practice and teaching
 - early development of celibate practice
 - celibacy in the Western and Eastern Churches
 - celibacy and ordination
- 4) Celibacy, Chastity and Virginity in Religious Life and Priesthood
- 5) The deep meaning of Celibacy
 - Celibacy for the Kingdom
 - The cross and happiness in Celibacy
 - Celibacy as a witness to the Resurrection
- 6) Celibate Chastity in the Constitutions
- 7) Community and gospel friendship as aids to celibacy

Section III: Intimacy and Celibacy

**A healthy understanding and appreciation of human intimacy appropriate to celibacy
– in community, with men and women, and in ministry**

1) Sexuality, Intimacy and Celibacy

What intimacy is and is not

Mature and immature intimacy

Sex and Intimacy

Trust and self-disclosure

Friendship

Sexual tensions between individuals when working closely together

Issues of control and dependence

Pornography and false intimacy

Conflict and intimacy

2) Loving as a celibate

Loneliness and solitude

3) Intimacy and Passionist Community

Constitutions 16-19; 25-28.

4) Intimacy and spirituality

Religious images of intimacy

Intimacy with God

Developing a celibate spirituality of chastity

Section IV: Professional and Personal Boundaries

Practical and professional understandings of boundaries in community, friendships, and ministry – including training in Safeguarding Minors

1) Professional and personal boundaries

- Priesthood and religious life as a profession and lifestyle
- Professional relationships and boundaries
- Personal relationships and boundaries

2) Priestly Sexual Misconduct with Children and Adolescents

3) Sexual Abuse in the Church

- The Horror of Sex Crimes
- Pedophilia (sexual attraction and involvement with children)
- Ephhebophilia (sexual attraction and involvement with teen-agers)
- Read and study Protocols (Diocese, General and Provincial) for sexual misconduct
- Treatment and re-entry into ministry

5) The impact of child sexual abuse

6) Professional Boundaries – misconduct with Adults

- Touching, Hugging – good touch, bad touch
- Sexualized Behavior – imbalance of power
- Professional Relationships and Friendships – the relationship continuum
- Dual Relationships
- Crossing the Boundary
- Characteristics that create the potential for boundary violations
- Prevention

Section V: The Experience of Celibacy

Lived experience of celibacy and chastity in the Congregation in both community and ministry

1) The first five years of ministry –

The honeymoon period – the importance of mentoring

Disillusionment – loneliness, feelings of being unappreciated, misunderstandings with superiors, difficulties in community, burnout and overwork

Satisfaction in ministry –

a rich prayer life, Eucharist, Preaching, collaborating with clergy and laity, spiritual direction, support from confreres and gatherings to share experiences, living a balanced lifestyle, mental hygiene (awareness of how the mind and emotions work and the things to do to keep yourself emotionally healthy).

2) Conflicts regarding chastity

Sexual difficulties – compulsive sexual fantasies and masturbation, anxieties, use of the internet, pornography and questionable behaviours

Falling in Love

Sexual involvement

3) Developing mature and sound principles

4) Celebrating the virtue of chastity and personal values

5) Ministry as collaborative

Working as a team – attitudes and behaviours

What are the benefits? – What are the tensions and problems? What are the aids to foster healthy interactions?

Sexual tensions within teamwork

Developing one's relational skills

Importance of Gospel friendships and Intimacy