

THE GENERAL FORMATION PLAN (GFP), 2023

Catechesis

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PASSIONIST FORMATION

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Formation as crucial

In each religious order and congregation candidates and new members are guided, so as to become acquainted with the general characteristics of religious life and with the charism of that particular religious institute. Such an initiation is crucial for the individual members, their life together and the mission of their institute in the Church and in the world.

Initial formation is an invaluable investment in the religious themselves (personal growth) and in the religious institute as a community of brothers and/or sisters in Christ.

Those who found the right track from the beginning, are better able to make the charism of the congregation their own and to

grow in it, making it the centre of their life and taking responsibility for it.

People who feel enriched by the charism of their religious institute become balanced and focused people and find happiness in living the charism together. In this way they help build up the gathered individuals in all their diversity into a real community of faith, hope and love in the light of that charism. Thus, they become recognizable as light of the world.



Formation is not just for the ones who enter a religious family, as if it were a hurdle to be passed once and for all.

Formation is rather a life-long process of growth in being immersed in the mystery of living with God, with one another and with yourself (n.1). Ongoing formation is therefore as important as formation in the initial stages.



Formation does not take place in a vacuum: our own cultures, the world as a whole, the Church and also the religious institutes in it are in a continuous process of development. Since 1986, when the last version of a general plan of Passionist formation was issued, also our Congregation has changed quite a bit, as it is now much more international, with many more members from the former missions.

The many developments and changes within the Congregation and around us call for a revision of the General Formation Plan (GFP). This updated GFP, however, cannot and does not address all issues of formation of religious and priests; it focuses on the essential elements of our (initial) formation and refers to other recent more general Church documents (n.4).

Also, this updated version takes into account that our Congregation has become more culturally diverse and that our cultural context colours our Passionist life, but does not address all the questions and challenges in the different parts of the Congregation (n.3).

In other words: the essentials of our spirituality must be applied by us to our own situations.

If we forget what we have received and do not maintain nor develop what we learned, we will be like grain that withers before it bears fruit.

In religious life we are in a continuous process of learning by doing. Final profession and ordination are in no way an arrival at a final destination nor a guarantee of happiness or being a good person. Those who have taken vows and 'even' those who are ordained are blessed and consecrated in a special way but remain open to advance and decline; no one of us ceases to be human.

**“In religious life
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Passionist Formation

The GFP of the Congregation of the Passion is meant for brothers and ordained alike (n.2); all are fully members of the Congregation.

The GFP is a Passionist plan: it approaches formation (as a whole and every aspect of it) in the light of our charism (n.15): which elements are essential to being a good Passionist religious? Hence, the purpose of the formation process of Passionists is formulated as: turning to Christ Crucified, internalising the gospel He preached, and following Him, in order to become more and more like Him (cit. Philippians 2:5): a life-long journey (n.1).

Through our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross, we realise that the source of our life as Passionists is the mystery of God who is love. We are deeply touched by the way God's love for us and all creation is revealed to us especially in the Passion of Jesus Christ. The aim of the formation process is that this love permeates our heart and mind and gives direction to every aspect of our life (community life, family and friends, devotion, prayer, studies, practical, pastoral, and missionary work etc.)

Formation, therefore, is first of all a matter of grace, of receiving from God; the initiative is His. Vocation, then, is for us a matter of remaining open and attentive and of responding all the time: wholeheartedly, consciously, and concretely in our attitude and in what we say and do – not because we have to, but because we desire and freely choose to do so.

So, becoming a Passionist is a guided journey, and the primary guide is the Triune God: through Christ on the Cross attracting us – as He promised (in John 12:32) – and the Holy Spirit moving us (n.1).

This implies that the guiding role of the formators is seen as a way of cooperation with the Holy Spirit. A formator is to accompany his Brethren in the same Spirit. Rather than enforcing his own will, he will seek together with the ones whom he is accompanying what God is asking of them as Passionists. Living from the charism given to the Congregation we are better able to discern our way.

Formation and Human Development

In recent years we have learned as never before that in formation serious attention must be given to the individual person as a human person and to his human development. The underlying idea in this updated GFP is that spiritual growth and human development go hand-in-hand. For keeping this balanced approach, we need the help of professionals outside the Congregation: not only for the theological education, but also for the ongoing training of the formators and for the assessments of the candidates.

Formation is a matter of the community as a whole; formation requires supportive and well-equipped communities, where formation is a focus and a shared responsibility of all (n.5). Mature, reliable, and responsible community members become examples and inspiring Brethren by the ways in which they contribute to our fraternal way of living together and by their efforts in our mission in the Church and in the world.



Just as the spiritual journey is a path which is taken step-by-step, the human development of us all is a process.

Throughout pre-noviciate, noviciate, and post-noviciate there should be a steady attention to this aspect of human development in view of the purpose of formation.

Safety

This awareness should also lead to a safe environment. The theme of safeguarding receives special attention in the GFP (n.12) – and recent experiences show that this is absolutely necessary and urgent: not only for the ones working in formation and for the ones in initial stages of formation in view of their great responsibility in the future, but for all members of the Congregation, here and now, and for those who are associated with us and work together with us.

In this context the GFP highlights the connection between our life in the community and our ministries: “A fraternal and caring environment in the community helps us to be caring and sensitive towards others and prepares us to minister to vulnerable people in a manner that is safe” – and vice versa we should say.

For, if in our ongoing formation process, we make the Congregation’s values that are in the norms of safeguarding our own, these will become fruitful in our whole way of life, inside and outside the community: in our awareness, attitude and behaviour, words and deeds.

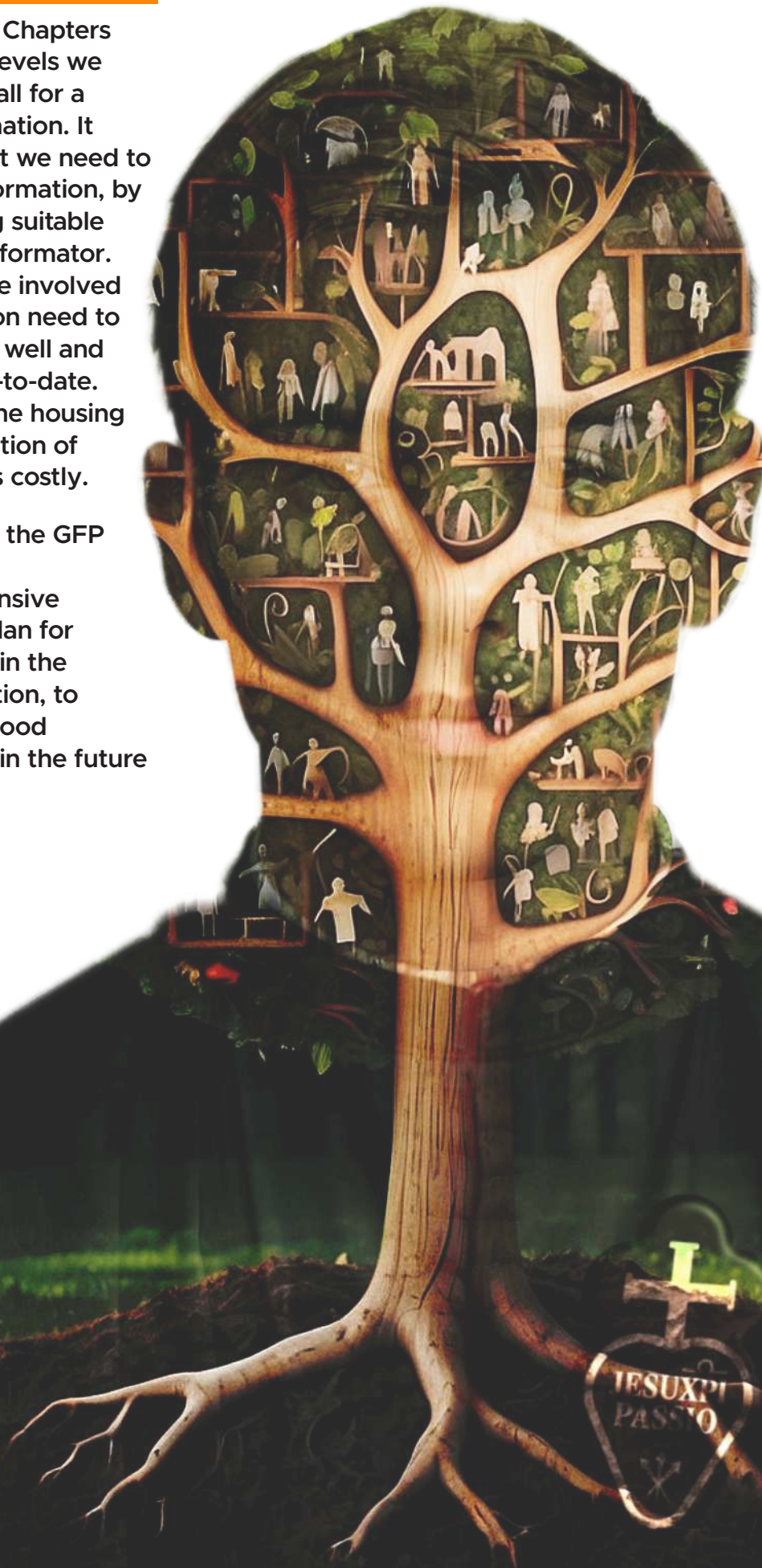
Passionists have the suffering Christ as source of their inspiration for being with the ones who suffer today. Therefore, there is no place in our Congregation for any type of abusive behaviour that makes people suffer.

So, our communities should be safe places, where all who live there are at home and feel at home. Concretely this means that all members of the community should be respected, at the least, for who they are. And all who visit our houses should be welcomed in such a way, that they enjoy being there with us and experience that it is a religious community where the love of God is shared in a fraternal way.

Formation as a Priority

In General Chapters and at all levels we hear the call for a good formation. It means that we need to invest in formation, by appointing suitable people as formator. All who are involved in formation need to be trained well and remain up-to-date. This and the housing and education of students is costly.

Therefore, the GFP calls for a comprehensive financial plan for formation in the Congregation, to ensure a good formation in the future (n.6). ✝





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Was for years a teacher of theology and spirituality and a chaplain for students. In the Passionist Congregation he has given retreats and lectures about aspects of Passionist community life, theology and spirituality. From 2014 to 2020 he was a member of the Commission for Formation that helped Fr. Martin Coffey C.P. prepare the revised formation plan of the Congregation. He is currently Provincial Superior of The Mother of The Mother of Holy Hope Province in Holland and northern Germany and President of the Conference of Religious of Holland.

**“Here I Am,
Send Me”**



**The Passion
of Christ:**

**our source
of life
and mission**

48th GENERAL CHAPTER