

CONSECRATED LIFE AND CANON LAW

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the UISG established an **International Council of Canon Law** (CLC) composed of religious women experts in Canon Law, coming from different geographical areas.

The members are: *sr. Mary Wright, IBVM* (Australia); *sr. Marjory Gallagher, SC* (Canada), who unfortunately passed away last November; *sr. Mary Gerard Nwagwu, DMMM* (Nigeria); *sr. Licia Puthuparambil, SMI* (India) e *sr. Tiziana Merletti, SFP* (Italy).

The Executive Committee of the UISG had various reasons for creating this reality. First of all, it was necessary to find canon lawyers who would be able to advise the Superior Generals and other major superiors regarding issues that could emerge in the context of women religious life.

In fact, in many parts of the world, women religious who have graduated with masters or doctoral degrees in Theology, Sacred Scriptures and Canon Law become invisible when they return to their congregation. Although they give an extraordinary contribution within their respective congregations, they remain unknown to others. In addition, when Superior Generals look for canonical consultation, the local canonist is most often a diocesan priest with little or no experience in women religious life. Especially in areas where religious life is rapidly growing, the support of an adequate canonical consultation is essential.

Hence, the **objectives of the International Council of Canon Law** are as follows:

1. To explore a variety of ways to provide canonical service to Superior Generals.
2. To create a worldwide network of religious women canon lawyers who are available to advise Superior Generals in different parts of the world.
3. To offer laboratories or other opportunities for learning, aimed at increasing the canonical competence among women religious.

Since 2015 up to today, *canonical consultation* was offered to many Superior Generals through meetings, phone calls and email contacts. A *Seminar* for forty women religious canonists was held in Nemi (Rome) in December of 2015, and a *Laboratory of Canon Law* in May of 2016. The *first Laboratory on Reconfiguration* was organized by the Council of Canonists in November

of 2016 and a second one in January of 2017. Lastly, two Laboratories of Canon Law took place in Nairobi (Kenya) from the 20th to the 26th of February 2017. Other events are in plan and may be consulted on the UISG website (www.uisg.org) for further information in this regard.

In this issue of the Bulletin, we want to publish a few reflections that were presented to the participants from the different Laboratories of Canon Law organized by the UISG, to allow all Superior Generals, and especially all those who could not participate, to benefit from it.

Sr. Simona Paolini presented her reflection on the *Responsibility of the Leadership* to the participants of the Laboratory of Canon Law on Reconfiguration (UISG, November 2016). What is asked of the responsibility of the leadership today is to remain between autonomy and obedience in order to make one's charism bear fruit through prophetic and implementing choices in a renewed style, which the Church itself is suggesting in today's journey.

Sr. Mary Gerard Nwuagwu addressed, together with the participants of the Seminary of Canon Law (UISG, May 2016), the difficult theme of the *Discipline within the Institutes of Consecrated Life*. In her reflection, starting from the norms of discipline specified by the Church in Canon Law, Sr. Mary Gerard analyses in detail three areas in the religious life in which the question of discipline often becomes problematic: the vows, communitarian life and the apostolate.

Sr. Mary Wright developed her reflection from a document prepared for the Seminary of Canon Law (UISG, May 2016) on the theme of the *Departure from an Institute of Consecrated Life*. Membership in an Institute of Consecrated Life requires a commitment that is both public and private in following Christ more closely in a specific communitarian life. The separation from the Institute for whatever reason is an interruption, or at least an alteration, of this commitment. Canon Law provides processes for these special circumstances so that the rights and duties of both the Institute and the person who is leaving may be protected for the common good.

The text of **Sr. Chineaka C. Ezeani** which closes this Bulletin helps us to reflect on a crucial and delicate aspect of the ministry of formation in religious life: *the process of discernment which deals with the separation of a member from an Institute*. The person who leaves a congregation lives a very difficult moment which requires particular sensitivity and empathy on the part of the formation guide. It is absolutely necessary to accompany with empathy, in order to remain evangelically close to a person leaving the Institute and to support her in a very vulnerable moment in her life.



THE RESPONSIBILITY OF
LEADERSHIP BETWEEN
AUTONOMY AND OBEDIENCE TO
THE CONSTITUTIONS

Sr. Simona Paolini, FMGB

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(The text was presented at the Laboratory of Canon Law on Reconfiguration, UISG; Rome 19-11-2016)

Original in Italian

A meeting on the *responsibility of leadership* serves a purpose in as much as it fosters a *clear and suitable leadership*.

In fact, at a time of reconfiguration, leadership should be defined based on the criteria of clarity and timeliness; where **clarity** refers to a *leadership* that is:

- *chosen*, secure, not left to extemporaneous improvisation;
- *immediate*, capable of making an impact on history;
- *coherent*, while necessarily adapting to events, it remains faithful to itself.

Not only a *clear leadership* is needed, but also a **fitting** one for its **timeliness**:

- opportune to the *times* in which we are living:

we need to know how to read the specific situation we are living in. One was a time of foundation, another was after the II Vatican Council with the call to adaptation, another was after the promulgation of the Code of 1983 with the revision of law itself, and another is today's times at the conclusion of this

special year dedicated to consecrated life;

- opportune to the *patrimony* of which every religious family is a beneficiary:

every religious institute has been entrusted a patrimony, a juridical translation of the most well-known charism, to be preserved and made to bear fruit by all, especially by the one who is called to practice the service of authority. Faithfulness to the charism is foremost, because it is primary, fundamental, the boundaries, and the point of reference in the exercise of authority.

It is noteworthy how the organizers of this speech on *reconfiguration* have placed it within two end points, **autonomy** and **obedience**; thus within a typical legislative system. In fact, autonomy is *auto-nomos*, that is, giving oneself his/her own law, and obedience, which is subjecting oneself to the law, to one's own constitutions. From these two extremities, we learn a fundamental condition for the *responsibility of leadership*, which is to be exercised according to the law!

Pope Francis in his address to the consecrated for the Feast of Consecrated Life on February 2, often referred to obedience to the law, and the very letter *Scrutate* equally calls us to this obedience, starting from the important rapport that our Founders had with the rules or constitutions.

In the account of Jesus' Presentation in the temple, wisdom is represented by two elderly persons, Simeon and Anna: persons docile to the Holy Spirit (mentioned 3 times), led by Him, inspired by Him. The Lord granted them wisdom as the fruit of a long journey along the path of obedience to his law, an obedience which likewise humbles and abases, but which also lifts up and protects hope, making them creative for they are filled with the Holy Spirit. ((Pope Francis, *Homily*, February 2, 2015)

Therefore, the responsibility of leadership is to be exercised in the light of autonomy.

The CIC '83¹ defines autonomy as among the norms common to all institutes of consecrated life and among the first canons, in fact to indicate the extraordinary value of this disposition.

Can. 586² in §1 states that: *A true autonomy of life, especially of governance, is recognized for each institute.* Its importance is so fundamental that it must be preserved and safeguarded by all.

Already from these few words we can well-understand what autonomy is.

Autonomy *is recognised (agnoscitur)*, that is, it is not a concession to consecrated life. It is not a positive law established by the Legislature, but a special condition that must be declared as being already there, for itself, for being a divine gift made to the Church, thus an innate right. It cannot be any form of autonomy, thus not simply a correct or fair one, but a true autonomy because inherent to the *proprium* of consecrated life, precisely of what consecrated life

is. It is by its nature an autonomy that must be safeguarded and preserved by all, an expression of a patrimony that has been entrusted.

The autonomy ratified by CIC '83 is a revelator of the divine nature of consecrated life, given to the Church as a form of the very life that the Son of God had chosen for himself, a form entrusted to the religious, founded on the words and teachings of Christ, placed in the body of Christ, which is the Church. This autonomy is clearly not independence nor self-sufficiency. It is not a special form of liberty, neither from outside nor inside, but above all, a particular tie that binds the consecrated life to the Church and to His mystery.

Highly indicative is the fact that following can. 586, the Legislature placed can. 587, dedicated to law³, in order to see it as the first form of autonomy, but also to place the law as the guard of a true autonomy.

The purpose of law clearly emerges from the *incipit* of can. 587: *ad fidelius tuendam vocationem et identitatem*. The law is to protect the vocation of all the religious and their charismatic identity. In addition, it is an instrument for *striving for the perfection of one's state*⁴ towards that fullness to which a religious has been called. The consecrated life is called to obey this particular form of law.

Hence, there is in consecrated life an autonomy circumscribed by obedience and an obedience protected by autonomy. The service of authority is situated precisely in this tension, as a ministry to spread the charism of the institute and to protect the vocation of its members.

If the patrimony/charism becomes the fundamental sum of the exercise of responsibility, then we need to understand this reality, which summarizes in itself various aspects, from the nature of the institute⁵ to its character⁶, from its purpose⁷ to its spirit⁸. It is a container that puts together a plurality of charismatic dimensions, from the charism of the Founder to the collective one of foundation, to the charism entrusted to each individual member, united to the healthy traditions embedded in the institute's history and which integrate the reality of the patrimony.

If the charism has thus been revealed as a free gift of God entrusted to the Founders and in them to the individual religious, then the patrimony is this same gift, which over time has taken form, has been manifested in the continuous tension between being a gift to be preserved and a gift to render fruits. The missionary potential reaped by the charism becomes manifested in its own works, charism. The *responsibility of leadership* is called to remain in this constant tension, which asks the consecrated life in the *Perfectae caritatis* with its *accomodata renovation*. This is so that the founding values of the charism may be combined with the urgings of history, according to that peculiar and radical discipleship that the *Vita Consecrata* will indicate through the expression

of *creative faithfulness*, for a renewed identity that values history and creates a future.

Today this process expresses the dynamics of enculturation, which is not to be understood as a sterile adjustment to a context that is new and different from its origins, nor as an internationalization of the charism. It is above all a renewed incarnation of the gift received, reading reality with faith, tracing the progress of the Kingdom of God amidst the turn of events of our charism's history.

Restructuring-reconfiguring-re-dimensioning cannot be separated from this look of faith, in order to avoid limiting it to a burdensome management, an administrative process that involves people and works.

Pope Francis suggests an attitude to have in order to live this complex period of reconfiguration well, and the word is decentralize.

Decentralize. In order to live and bear fruit, every charism is asked to decentralize in order that Jesus Christ alone is at the center. A charism should not be preserved like a bottle of distilled water. It should be made to bear fruit with courage, comparing it with current reality, with cultures, with history. (*Pope Francis, Address to participants in the National Assembly of the Italian Conference of Major Superiors, 7.11.2014*)

Therefore the responsibility that the Superior is called to live is knowing how to put himself/herself aside, in order to put the Lord at the center, and knowing how to give a response to history, based on the charism. He or she must sustain the journey of the institute, without substituting it, accompanying its members without abandoning them, through an itinerary marked in time by discernment and actualization.

If discernment is learning to read history by understanding what is true, consecrated people are called to a prophetic reading, capable of penetrating events, searching for others, looking beyond, according to other criteria and for other reasons, according to God's coming.

You must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing things and of conducting yourselves. They are the values of the Kingdom made incarnate." Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way «They are men and women who can wake up the world and light up the future. Consecrated life is prophecy. God is asking us to come out of the nest that keeps us, to go forth to the world's frontiers, avoiding the temptation of being subdued.» (Pope Francis, Address to Major Superiors, 25 Novembre 2014.)

The prophecy to which consecrated life is called has the particular form of actualization.

The responsibility of those in authority calls for a proactive approach and not merely survival. Superiors of institutes of consecrated life are called to have a new intelligence of the charism. They must know how to create a future, pushing history towards its fulfilment, towards the holy work, the translation today of that missionary passion of modern Founders, which has shown over time the diaconal face of the Church, without necessarily creating new structures or institutions – which already exist! – but above all, by adopting new methods of management and valorization.

Thus what is asked of today's *responsibility of leadership* is to remain between autonomy and obedience, to render one's charism fruitful through prophetic choices and implementing them in a renewed style that the Church itself is suggesting to us in its current journey.

In this ecclesiological period of ours in which communion is understood more and more as a multiform reality that is composed of the convergence of various hierarchical and charismatic gifts, with the expression of their coming together giving a harmonious form to the one ecclesial body, perhaps the *responsibility of leadership* could be understood as a fruitful relationality: *synodality*. Considered an old category, synodality is to be recuperated today, being a *constitutive dimension of the Church*, and for this reason, necessary and essential to the life of the entire People of God.

Synodality, an ecclesial characteristic since the post-Easter community, is proposed once more for the journey of today's Church by the current ecclesiological reflection⁹ and recently by the magisterium of Pope Francis. At the conclusion of the Synod on the Family in October of 2015, during the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, he referred at length to this particular expression of communion.

This synodality is not to be understood as structured coordination, nor as a serene possibility of putting together the best of everyone without any further involvement. Rather, it is an occasion to take steps together, starting from reciprocal listening, and from which emerges a journey together of the holy people of God, according to stages that advance along the steps of *co-responsibility, collegiality and cooperation*.¹⁰

Synodality, for those responsible for *leadership*, means always walking among others, in the midst of others, in equal stride, maintaining one's specific authority, while nonetheless promoting structures of communion and participation, in order to hear the Spirit who speaks and lives in all the faithful.

The other request on the *responsibility of the leadership* is suggested by the *mysticism of encounter*, to which the Church calls the religious in a special way today.¹¹ Religious are called today to build a culture of dialogue and

proximity, promoting a truly humane society, open to the *complementarity of differences*, which walks in the *wholesome rhythm of closeness*, training oneself to learn “the difficult art of relating with the different and of collaborating cordially to build together”.¹² In this encounter, the religious are called to lower their guards, open the doors and build bridges¹³, to say in the midst of so much human fragmentation, a word of unity. Those called to exercise a service of responsibility seems to be particularly called to this witness, so that their authority may solicit the encounter with the other, beyond an austere impersonal exercise, or a disincarnated spiritualism. In the *mysticism of encounter* that builds relationships with the other,¹⁴ a *leadership* by an individual passes onto a *relationship*¹⁵ of communion.

At the end of this course on the *responsibility of leadership*, there remains the strong invitation of the Church to grow in the

Ability to hear, to listen to other people. The ability to seek together ways and means, also not to be alarmed. If each one of you is there for the others, it is a precious possibility to meet God, It is to rediscover the responsibility of being prophecy. (Scrutate 13)

May it be considered a wish, that of learning to take common steps, trying to make way together, in reciprocal listening, in shared discernment, for projects assumed in collaboration and co-responsibility, and without being too alarmed!

¹ Code of Canon Law of 1983, from now on, CIC '83.

² CIC '83, can. 586 § 1. A true autonomy of life is recognized for every single institute, especially of governance, through which institutes may have in the Church their own discipline and may preserve their own patrimony, of which, can. 578. § 2. It is the local Ordinaries' task to preserve and protect such autonomy..

³ CIC '83, can. 587 § 1. In order to protect more faithfully the vocation and identity of the single institutes, the fundamental code, or constitution, of each one must contain, besides that which is established in observing can. 578, the fundamental norms relative to the governance of the institute and to the discipline of its members, to their incorporation and formation, and the object of sacred bonds.

- ⁴ CIC '83, can. 598 §2. All members must not only observe integrally and faithfully the evangelical counsels, but they must also live according to the law of their own institute, in such a way as to strive for the perfection of their state.
- ⁵ *Nature is the genre to which the institute belongs, its genus: religious or secular institute.*
- ⁶ Character is a specification of the nature of the institute, its species: apostolic religious institute or contemplative religious institute; contemplative institute of pontifical or constitutional seclusion.
- ⁷ Purpose is its mission in the Church, the precise reason for which the institute was born.
- ⁸ Spirit is that particular way in which each institute participates in the mystery of Christ, its way of speaking Christ.
- ⁹ VITALI D., Towards synodality, Magnano, 2014; «More Synodality. The Church of Pope Francis», La Rivista del Clero Italiano 2016, 1-34; BONNET P.A., «Ecclesial Communion and synodality», Ephemerides Iuris Canonici 47 (1991), 93-137; La synodalité. La participation au gouvernement dans l'Église, Actes du VII congrès international de Droit canonique, Paris, 21-28 septembre 1990, in L'Année Canonique, hors série, Paris, 1992, 2 Tom.
- ¹⁰ Cfr. CORECCO E., Sinodalità, in Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia, dir. da G. BARBAGLIO – S. DIANICH, Milano, 1988, 1431-1456; cfr. PIÉ-NINOT S., «Synodality is “advising” in the Church», fifty years since the Apostolic solicitude. The Synod of Bishops at the service of a synodal Church, L. BALDISSERI ed., Vatican City, 2016, 397-402.
- ¹¹ Cfr. CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, Lett. Scrutate: to men and women religious, walking along the signs of God, Città del Vaticano, 2014, 69-77.
- ¹² CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, Lett. Proclaim: to men and women consecrated, witnesses of the Gospel among the people, Vatican City, 2016, 116.
- ¹³ Cfr. CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, Lett. Rejoice: to men and women religious from the magisterium of Pope Francis, Vatican City, 2016, 56.
- ¹⁴ Cfr. CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, Lett. Contemplate: to men and women religious along traces of beauty, Vatican City, 2015, 118-120.
- ¹⁵ Cfr. DOLPIN B. – GARVIN M.P. – O'DWYER C., *Leadership in consecrated life today, in Formation and the Person: Essays on Theory and Practice*, dir. da A. MANENTI - S. GUARINELLI – H. ZOLLNER, Leuven, Belgium, Peeters, 2007, 257-280.



*PRACTISE OF DISCIPLINE
WITHIN COMMUNITIES
IN AFRICAN CONTEXT;
ESPECIALLY MISHANDLING
OF FUNDS*

Sr. Mary Gerard Nwagwu, DMMM

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This text was presented to the Canon Law Workshop for Superiors General, UISG, Rome, May 6-7, 2016.

Original in English

Introduction:

Discipline within Institutes of Consecrated Life is quite a familiar theme though an unpleasant one whenever consecrated persons gather for discussion regarding their mode of life. The reason is not far-fetched to perceive. Discipline is often viewed as an uncompromising aspect of life in community, rather restrictive and restraining. For some religious persons, it is all about the cautionary measures that signal the path to authentic spirituality and acceptable behaviour for peaceful co-existence. Yet for many others, it is a controlling technique in the hands of superiors or community leaders which they adopt/use

to enforce a code of conduct that could be resisted one way or the other.

Discipline would then serve the main purpose of *controlled behaviour and regulation of day to day activities following a set of rules meant to ensure order, conformity and uniformity*. Notably, this understanding of discipline as the daily routine exercises and practices observed in religious communities has always been taken for granted. More emphasis is placed on viewing discipline as *an instrument of vigilance and supervision*. Then it imposes limits and control over excesses, passions, selfish desires, and unbridled urges, all in deference to the common good.

It is alongside the above understanding of discipline does it represent a redemptive dimension for the collective good of the Institute, and so makes it the gauge of vitality of an Institute, even if for the individual religious, it becomes limitative or corrective or chastising.

Meanwhile, this consideration of theme of discipline as practised in religious life is of a discursive kind. For a layout, the paper will first *recalls briefly the main features of rule of discipline within institutes of consecrated life* as detailed by the Church in its documents and Code of canon law. It is followed by a survey of issues arising from three areas of religious life where matters of discipline are often found to be problematic. These areas are: *the three vows, community living and the field of apostolate*. The concluding part looks at some disciplinary measures that have been advocated or applied and the degree of effectiveness such have achieved as remedies to indiscipline.

I. Ecclesial Rulings on Discipline

At the early beginnings of religious life, hermits, anchorites and monks/nuns living alone or in monasteries have always lived according to the rigors of strict religious discipline. They followed a routine style of life that focused on ascetic and penitential practices, manual labour and recitation of divine office in all its hours. Over the centuries, the Institutes of Apostolic Works at their own pace adapted some of the strict religious practices to suit the demands of their active apostolate programmes mostly carried out outside their communities. But the daily regular religious discipline still remained as of: enclosure and residence in convents as forms of separation from the world, spiritual exercises, divine office, mental prayer, rule of silence, Eucharistic participation, annual and monthly recollection, confessions, etc. (**cann. 662-672**).

These activities of daily order and system of regulations are those taken for granted. They are generally observed but also adjusted to suit the times and the apostolate. Belonging as they are to the spiritual features of religious discipline,

they do not occasion opposition. Every consecrated person knows and remembers his/her obligation to spend time with the Lord, practise some forms of asceticism and pray the liturgy of the hours. All the same, the discipline of spiritual exercises is meant to instil the discipline of ordered behaviour and submission to rules and regulations of the community, its constitutions, traditions and customs. It is this other side of discipline that encounters instances of disobedient behaviour and discordance with expected mode of conduct.

According to canonical provisions, many canons directly or indirectly refer to the observance of rules and regulations which guarantee religious discipline in daily routine and in conduct or behaviour of members. The canons as well limit the extent and likely excesses in protection of individual rights. A few examples suffice:

- (i) **Can. 220:** protection of members' *good reputation and privacy* as against insinuation and suspicion.
- (ii) **Can. 221:** members' *right to self-defence* when accused of culpable behaviour and due process in imposition of punishment while observing legal principles.
- (iii) **Can. 208:** the principle of *equality of all before the law* and so a formal opposition to discriminatory practises in maintaining discipline within Institutes.
- (iv) **Can. 573:** the theological basis for *demand of regular religious discipline* – being the *fact of consecration* and all the obligations that follow it for “a distinct manner of life”
- (v) **Can. 574:** relevance of *orderly behaviour of religious persons* since they portray *holiness of the Church*
- (vi) **Can. 587:** essence of discipline as *obedience to the rule and regulations* found in their constitutions and other books.
- (vii) **Cann. 596 & 618:** *submission to authority of superiors* and chapters, though with dialogue, is another aspect of maintaining discipline.
- (viii) **Can 598 §2:** code of canon law urging members to *observe the law of the counsels/vows* and live according to their rule of life, i.e. the Constitutions.
- (ix) **Can. 607 §§2,3:** the discipline of *fraternal life in common is obligatory* for all religious and observe the rule of some form of separation from the world.
- (x) **Can. 610 & 611 1^o:** a call to live in established religious houses and *follow their regular rule of life as routine discipline*.
- (xi) **Can. 654:** *vows taken to observe the three counsels* constitute

- the core of obligations of religious life; as such, they can be verified juridically and their non-observance punished. (**can. 696**)
- (xii) **Cann. 662-672:** details of the rules where compliance is specifically demanded.
- Spiritual exercises
 - Residence in religious houses
 - Discreet use of media
 - Enclosure
 - Minimal financial involvement
 - Identifiable sign of consecration
 - Supplying needs of members
 - Taking up outside jobs independently
- (xiii) **Cann. 686-688:** applicable rules from clerical obligations
- (xiv) **Cann. 694-704:** available disciplinary measures
- Dismissal, excommunication, refusal of renewal of vows

These canons and more besides demonstrate how *every aspect of consecrated life is intermingled with disciplinary rules and regulations*. Other details are regulated by proper laws of each institute over and above the universal laws in the code.

The detailed rulings come as aftermath of the levelling religious life practices from 19th century to Vatican Council II. Even after, many congregations founded in African soil still succumb to it. There are witnessed many *instances of debilitating conformity to the strict rules and their stricter application*, to a total neglect of initiatives and creativity from local contexts. Based on these factors, the problematic surrounding non-observance of vows and non-compliance within community and apostolate demands could be situated.

II. The Vows and Undisciplined Behaviours

The disciplined observance of the vows is *frequently a point of exaggeration, distortion and opinionated interpretation*. The vows are rarely given a balanced considerations from the point of view of those who practise them, non-clerical men and women religious. Acts against the vows may be contrary to acceptable discipline, yet they *result as offshoots of a system that should be reformed*.

Vow of Obedience:

The first of the vows to be considered is obedience. Among most African communities, *insistence on obedience is a strategy to exact compliance to status quo in all spheres of life*. The vow of obedience properly emphasizes

submission of the will to lawful authority. But the laws wish that such be effected through dialogue, sense of responsibility and subsidiarity. Leaders are to invite and welcome collaboration, suggestions, ideas, showing respect for rights of the human person, equality in dignity and opportunity, recognition of privacy and personal sphere of freedom.

Instances of problems of non-compliance to matters related to obedience within the African context concerns the following:

Assignments and tasks given to members: behaviours that can be taken as acts of indiscipline come as reactions from *members who are assigned jobs and functions that are contrary to their fields of training.* Some members are left floating after their qualification without assignment. They then search for their own private jobs without reference to their lawful authorities. At other times, *initiatives and creativity of members are completely disregarded and repulsed.* The result is distrust of authority and taking up ways opposed to principles of action.

Undertaking further studies and specialization: within religious institutes in Africa and Nigeria specifically, there is experienced the *urge for higher educational pursuits and specialization by younger members.* Funded by family and friends, they follow this practise of the secular world occasioning conflicts with their superiors. They would rather wade into these acts of indiscipline than delay in achieving their aims.

Issue of proper limits of exercise of authority: exercise of authority in the Church is never arbitrary but complementary. In consecrated life, it is majorly collegial with minimal occasions for personal sphere on superior's part. There are also differentiated levels for varied grades. When *superiors exceed their limits of authority, grounds are created for acts of indiscipline and insubordination,* like opposition and resistance. Acting *ultra vires* is of itself gross indiscipline negating expected exemplary behaviour. Such is sadly frequent in African context where leaders hold on to authority for too long.

Vow of Poverty:

Observance of vow of poverty poses multiple challenges in the African context, such that lead to acts of indiscipline with disobedience of rules regulating poverty. Certain *suppositions underline the non-observance of poverty in local cultures.* These include:

Desire for better living conditions: the average African look forward to better living conditions. *In a world of underdevelopment verified on all aspects,* people long for better days, adequate social amenities, personal comfort, dignified livelihood. With already poor environment, *advocating for*

more poverty appears senseless.

Prevalent economic hardship: majority of African countries are perennially bedevilled by *harsh economic meltdown due to political instability and poor management* of scarce resources. The Holy Father describes Africa as a mere appendix to the western world. (*Ecclesia in Africa* 42). With many living below poverty level, it is difficult to shed off its dehumanizing effects even within religious life environs.

Constraints of natural family bonds:

Members of institutes belong to natural families. With lack of social welfare and insurance system in most countries of Africa, *maintenance of close family and relatives devolve on educated members with better social status. Religious belong to this group and are expected to contribute in caring for parents and relatives.* Irregularities are often perpetrated to assuage these demands. Examples are:

- non-accountability of project managers or those in official position;
- secretive ways used to provide for aged and indigent parents
- manipulation of records to cover up excesses
- commencement of new ventures and private practise without approval

Cultural divide experienced within institutes:

There is a subtle feature of culture divide in institutes operating in Africa, whether they are of missionary foundation or indigenous foundation. Aware that religious life practices and ideals are more of western culture, *contrasts arise in attitudes and observance of vow of poverty.*

African approaches are coloured by problems of: difficulty building up reserves for a rainy day, unavailability of standard facilities, reduced revenue provision, lack of opportunities to augment resources, etc. But for other cultures, these are non-issues. In the face of such *challenges many take up engagements that compromise vow of poverty.* Likely disciplinary measures are not deterrent because the situations are existential.

Vow of Chastity:

There have been misconceptions that African culture is not fully in harmony with the demands of chastity. It may be partly correct in so far as for every culture, African or non-African, *chastity is a realm that require specific evangelisation of the flesh and may not be presumed natural.* But it is mostly incorrect because Africans treasure virginity before marriage and chastity within marriage. The unmarried state as religious life proposes was for few priestesses of powerful shrines.

Incidents of irregularities in observance of vow of chastity arise from these premises:

Relegating matters of sexuality to personal domain:

African culture makes the community or society at large the custodian of morality and sexuality. Where there are gross violations, the whole community is incensed and moves for reparation and purification of the land and people affected. In the religious life sphere, *violations are personalized and treated more of the internal forum.* Challenges which are minor at the start, result undetermined in good time and so lead to more serious violations.

Inadequate assessment of sexuality issues:

Assessment and presentation of sexuality of the human person at the early formative period is invariably inadequate. Ignorance and lack of opportunity to assessment of yearnings have precipitated to *relationships that compromise chastity.* Acts of misdemeanour that result are shielded, denied and hidden. At the end, there is difficulty retracing one's steps until the stage is set for highest disciplinary measure of dismissal.

Desire for high class luxury goods:

Longing for luxurious and pleasurable goods are natural and harmless by themselves. Experiences in comparison with colleagues and age mates do become points of challenges to younger religious persons. *Attraction of exotic goods very easily lure the younger generation into relationships* that make available the funding for satisfaction of such fancies. Without doubt, these friendships also precipitate into conduct that damage religious chastity.

III. Fraternal life and Matters of Discipline

A good number of instances that depict religious persons who break their promise to observe the three vows can be traced to *community living that is defective, dysfunctional and non-affirmative of the human person.* The conflicts that translate into forms of indiscipline in behaviour and conduct mostly *originate and mature within community setup.* *Congregavit Nos 27* noted that a joyless fraternal life induces the members to seek elsewhere what they can no longer find within their own quarters. They are not to be blamed for this. In the process of satisfying basic human needs, they become involved in acts censured by religious life decorum and discipline.

Closely experienced within fraternal life lived in common, there are occasionally *aggressive behaviours that upset community peace and harmony.* Where they are verified, these disruptive activities fester for a long while before

reaching a climax that push the institute to take steps to undertake process of one form of separation or the other. The guiding principle is to protect the common good for mutual sharing. Some of the *unruly behaviours that damage community bond* include:

- acts of calumny, defamation of character and destructive gossips;
- incidents of jealousy, envy, vindictiveness and hostile attitude;
- behaviour fanning the ambers of cultural divide
- outright opposition to lawfully constituted authority
- deliberate causing of tension by unverified claims, insinuation.

In the African context, the problematic lies more with *curtailing communitarian tendencies that are over-bearing and suffocating*, which do not allow recognition of the dignity and giftedness of individual members. Rigidity is often evoked as though the approach that guarantee ideal on religious discipline. But such is not always the case. (*Evangelica Testificatio* 32) Moreover, persons are valued according to the degree of their material contributions, that is to say financially, or from positions occupied. Having lost sense of belonging, some members indulge in negative acts.

Some situations that encourage acts of indiscipline include:

- felt *injustice in discriminatory assignment of functions, duties and tasks*;
- *non-provision of personal needs*, medical, professional training and natural family support.
- using *double standards in handling cases* and applying measures;
- carelessness and *lack of commitment of management* of apostolate;
- *lack of support of the community* on occasions when problems are encountered in the apostolate;
- *feelings of alienation* consequent upon misunderstandings;
- *periods of crises* occasioned by physical/mental illness, deaths, spiritual aridity;
- feelings of *uselessness, of being unwanted*, of redundancy;
- conflicts of relationship with superiors on personal basis.

The disciplinary measures that call members with unruly conduct have to be uniform and followed with canonical legality: proper and direct notification of the offender, opportunity for self-defence, objective consideration of facts of the case, and collegial decision, are all *requirements for fair and unbiased treatment*.

IV. Works of Apostolate and Matters of Discipline

Except for few dotted monastic foundations, the greater numbers of religious institutes in Africa belong to institutes of active apostolates. Like their forbears in other parts of the world, they are engaged at various levels of parish and diocesan churches: health services, educational, social services for the poor, aged, youth, prostitutes, divorced, unwed mothers, etc. The very varieties of works engaged by institutes frequently become *fertile grounds for irregularities that jettison religious discipline to the winds*.

The sphere of apostolate has recorded most of the challenges, contentions and disagreements between local hierarchy and superiors. Issues spring up from:

- mode of operation of *works entrusted to religious by bishops* differentiated from those belonging to institutes;
- debates between institutes on running diocesan projects in same locality;
- disagreement over implement of contract on accruing revenue; etc.

Within the African context, these instances generate disaffection and disillusionment of the religious person that handles the work directly. The tension caused pulls the personality to two opposing directions: the local ordinary and ones proper superior. Experience attests that *some members prefer loyalty to the local ordinary to fidelity to interests of their institute*. Such translate to acts of in-subordination to their superior and therefore attract disciplinary measures. Outstanding areas of problems of discipline include:

- (i) *impromptu change of personnel managing various projects* while the local church authorities are both unwilling and unprepared to relinquish the religious person concerned;
- (ii) *unwillingness to implement the contract agreement* on various elements of conditions of service: dividends, tenure, appointments, allowances, etc.
- (iii) *individual religious running projects and works as private practice and personal venture* in contrast to community projects;
- (iv) *members assigned to specific jobs, taking up other apostolic works abandoning their primary assignment;*
- (v) *the primary assignment are also abandoned not for other works but to pursue further studies or engagements for benefits of natural family concerns;*

On issues of the apostolate, the involvement of the local church and the lay faithful colours any disciplinary action that may be taken. Caution remains the key word to *avoid escalating tempers and causing scandal of in-fighting* within a local church or a divided mission of religious bodies versus the hierarchy.

V. Mishandling of Funds within Institutes

Canonical Principles on Management of Funds

Mishandling of funds may very well merit particular consideration in so far as it touches exercise of authority, a sphere that belongs to superiors and their project managers. The canonical principles that inform and govern instances of mishandling of funds fall mainly (there are few others) within the section on "Administration of Temporal Goods in the Church" (**cann. 1273-1289**). A complementary section comes under the canons on Institutes of Consecrated Life with the title: Temporal Goods and their Administration (**cann.634-640**).

These canonical rulings depict how *administration of property and finances is a crucial feature of governance in the Church*. What grounds organizations is often the incompetence of those in charge to manage personnel, or finances or equipments. *Good governance embodies the competence and capability* to carry out purposeful management of the resources available to any juridical person as religious institutes. Particular attributes are called for such as: integrity and honesty, practical common sense and wisdom, accountability, experience and being knowledgeable of financial matters, deep sense of responsibility and humility. Four main elements are emphasized in administering goods inclusive finances:

- (i) dexterity to *maintain and preserve* what is already acquired as resources;
- (ii) *improvement on the goods* and monies in place, as goods are conserved by improving them;
- (iii) application of *principle of productivity* through making the resources fructify, render income and generate interest;
- (iv) *disbursement in the most equitable manner* to their destined end or persons.

Neglect of any of these areas leaves room for dissipating funds, resources and paving the way for mismanagement.

On the practical level, canonical provisions require that institutes, provinces have financial administrators distinct from the major superior. It would apply to communities to a lower degree. It adds that these persons "administer the goods under the direction of the respective superior" (**can.636**)

In other words, *the real administrator is the superior*, the financial administrator acts in delegation. Same point is affirmed in **can. 1279** that states: administration of goods pertains to the one with direct power of governance over persons to whom the goods belong. Therefore it is the major superior who receives commendation for good administration of monies, and when there is

condemnation over cases of mishandled funds, the superior receives the brunt as well.

In handling finances in the Church, *accountability is the key ruling* involving other references to: care and commitment, accuracy and transparency, honesty and fidelity, prudence and sense of responsibility; (**cann. 1284, 1287, 636 §2**). On the other hand, *mishandling of funds contradicts these stated elements of good stewardship*. Within religious bodies, *it becomes a betrayal of trust and act of injustice towards the religious body*; who being regarded as a minor that requires representation and defence, has been taken advantage of by one meant to protect it.

Experiences within the African context, indicate that *mishandling of funds easily manifests as an abuse of authority* in using one's position as a superior or project manager to defraud the body entrusted to his/her care. Typical instances can be enlisted as examples:

- fraudulent activities involved in *inflation of costs of materials* to have a higher rate than their real cost at the market price;
- falsification of documents through presentation of *records with entries that are altered or tampered with* or figures manipulated;
- *diversion of funds received* from benefactors into other businesses than for those they were granted, ignoring the imperative of respect of donors wish (**cann. 1267 §2,1300.**)
- making *purchases that would benefit a third party*, often family relations and friends, while the juridical person loses out in the transaction done.
- using the *name of the juridical person to make appeals for collection of funds* for a programmed project without due reference.

On occasion, two factors render the mishandling of funds difficult to assess and establish the extent gone. In the first place, funds of an institute or religious body are invariably under the control of the superior, for though the financial administrator is a separate person, yet it is someone with whom the superior can comfortably work with. Practically, *the superior determines to whom, when and how the funds are disbursed*. When mismanagement results, both are involved and *getting to the facts could be difficult*.

In the second instance, the superior is a most trusted member of the juridical person, its no.1 official representative. The *presumption is that he/she acts to the best interest of the juridical body on all occasions*. It is an uphill task to debunk such presumption and allege that the acts performed damage and defraud the juridical body instead of benefitting it.

Nevertheless, there is likelihood of such fraudulent acts being done, given the canonical rulings that come against them. Some examples suffice:

- (i) **can. 639 §4:** where superiors are *cautioned against contracted liabilities* that burden the juridical bodies they represent;
- (ii) **can. 1281 §3:** a canonical *disavowal for invalid acts by administrators* of a juridical person;
- (iii) **can. 1298:** a prohibition against *administrators benefitting by themselves* or their relations of financial deals involving the juridical body;
- (iv) **can. 1377:** affirmed an appropriate punishment of a just penalty to be meted for *violations against due process required* in financial engagements;
- (v) **can. 1391:** the punishment or envisaged for:
 - any act of falsification of records tendered as documents,
 - the presentation or giving of false reports,
 - altering of figures for any such public ecclesiastical document.

The factors referred to by the canons listed above and more besides are somewhat unsettling. Superiors and their administrators would then see it fit to avoid any suggestion of double dealing or misuse of property and funds belonging to their juridical bodies. For as **can. 617** affirms: superiors are to fulfil their office and exercise their authority in accordance with the norms of universal law and of their own law. Then **can. 619** notes that they are to be an example to members in cultivating virtue and in observance of the law. Thus weight of blame of mishandling of funds falls on superiors.

VI. In View of a Conclusion

Discipline is commonly practised in institutes of consecrated life either as a daily routine of exercises or as the expected mode of conduct and behaviour in conformity with the rules and regulations of the body. Without doubt, discipline determines the identity of an institute to guarantee authenticity of its charism, usefulness to the Church, vitality and effectiveness to the world.

Correspondingly, *indiscipline damages the character of an institute* and records an alarming note of disservice to the Church, besides the negative witness to the society. The insistence of the canonical provisions on the obligation to maintain discipline in religious life is attested to by the various sanctions and penalties meted to offenders to redeem the situation.

Meanwhile, in considering the multiple instances where acts of indiscipline are frequently observed within religious communities especially in the African context, it comes without doubt that for maintenance of discipline, prevention is better than cure. Many consecrated persons are *compelled by circumstances to go back on the obligation* of their religious promises.

What must be determined is to decipher whether these acts of indiscipline are deliberately done for selfish motives; or whether they are from constraints and so without malice towards the institute. Whether the consideration is on the vows or on the fraternal life in common or on the exercise of the works of the apostolate, acts of indiscipline should be carefully looked into, as each instance differs from the other.

Rigidity and rigorous application of the rules may not be the answer but the handling of cases of indiscipline with genuine interest in the wellbeing of the member and adoption of dialogue for best results. Examining the disciplinary measures that are invoked for cases of indiscipline, the more frequent ones are: change of office or position or apostolate or undergoing counselling sessions etc.

More stringent measures may well be: outright removal from office, or from management of the project, closure of any new venture or enterprise commenced. Where the offence has been repeated and offender cautioned to no avail, then imposed excommunication or dismissal is considered. For offences that concern funds, property and financial resources, the restitution of moneys wrongly diverted or misused, is an obligatory complement.

In all instances of correction or reparation of wrong done, care is taken to avert scandal and unnecessary publicity of the offence committed. Else more damage is inflicted on the reputation of the juridical body. Prudence and justice demands that while punishing the erring members, the loyal ones are not discouraged but consolidated in their good resolve and commitment to the institute.

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*DEPARTURE FROM THE INSTITUTE:
SOME PRACTICAL NOTES*

(CIC cc. 684-704; CCEC cc. 487-503, 544-583)

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Membership of an institute of consecrated life is both a personal and a public response to the call of the Spirit to follow Christ more closely, in a specific communal life of dedication to the mission of Jesus in the Church, for the salvation of the world. Departure from an Institute, for whatever reason, is an interruption, or at least an alteration of this commitment. The law provides processes for these exceptional circumstances, so that the mutual rights and obligations between the member and the Institute can be protected for the common good.

These notes have been developed from a paper prepared for the UISG Canon Law workshop on the topic offered prior to the UISG International Assembly of 2016. They are provided to assist superiors of religious institutes to understand the canonical provisions about departure of a member from her institute, and to carry out the required processes correctly. No attempt has been made to provide a comprehensive commentary. Only some issues have been mentioned below, especially those which are more complex and those which may be misunderstood. Because they involve exceptions to the law, these processes must be followed to the letter (cf. c. 18; CCEC c. 1500).

This paper does not address the processes of transfer or exclaustation, even though they are included among the canons on separation (cc. 684 – 687; CCEC cc. 487-491). The processes involved in dismissal have been included without any attempt to discuss the complexities of the specific offences which might give rise to the dismissal.

While many of the principles and practices are very similar, there is some variation between the provisions of the two Codes of Canon Law in this area. The comments below refer only to the canons of the Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church.¹ Differences between the two Codes have not been discussed. References to the Eastern Code² have been inserted to assist members of Institutes belonging to the Eastern Churches to find the relevant references.

The canons provide a variety of processes for departure from the Institute:

- Departure from the novitiate (c. 653; CCEC c. 461)
- Voluntary departure after temporary vows (c. 688 §1; CCEC c. 546 §1)
- Exclusion after temporary vows (c. 689; CCEC c. 547 §1)
- Dispensation from temporary vows (cc. 688 §2, 692; CCEC cc. 496, 546 §2)
- Dispensation from perpetual vows (cc. 691-693; CCEC c. 492, 493, 549)
- Dismissal (cc. 694-703; CCEC cc. 497-503, 551-553)

Some canonical principles apply in cases of departure:

- a. The member has the right and obligation to live in the Institute and to lead the life proper to the Institute according to the Gospels and the Constitutions
- b. The Institute has the right and obligation to act in accordance with the Gospels and Constitutions and to carry out the works proper to the Institute
- c. The competent authorities in the Institute are obliged to exercise their authority in accordance with the norms of the universal law and of their own law (c. 617).

- d. Once the person is accepted and takes perpetual vows in the Institute, she has the right and obligation to remain. The law makes provision so that she may leave with permission, if she so chooses. It also provides for dismissal if her actions lead to loss of her right to remain.
- e. For those in temporary profession, the right to remain is limited by the concept of “suitability”, which is still being tested during this time (cf. c. 657).
- f. Those in the novitiate do not have any right to remain. Their suitability is not to be assumed. It must be established in the judgment of the responsible superior (cf. cc. 642, 645, 646, 653; CCEC c. 461).

Choosing to leave freely during initial formation

- a. A novice is free to leave the novitiate at any time, without restrictions (cf. cc. 219, 653; CCEC cc. 22, 461)
- b. A member in temporary profession is free to leave when her vows expire, without restrictions (cf. c. 688 §1; CCEC c. 546 §1)
- c. Superiors cannot impose conditions on these choices. However superiors are obliged to ensure, if possible, the dignity and safety of the person as she leaves (cf. c. 702; CCEC c. 503).

Choosing to leave with permission

A member in temporary profession may request an indult (that is, formal permission usually given in writing) to leave the institute for serious reasons. The superior cannot impose this decision on a member. It is her free choice. The indult may be granted by the Superior General with the consent of her council. For diocesan right Institutes, the indult also requires confirmation by the Bishop of the diocese where the member is assigned. Note that in this and related instances, as an exception to the general rule, the Bishop of the diocese where the principle house is located is not involved (cf. c. 688 §2; CCEC c. 496, 546).

A member in perpetual profession may request an indult to leave the institute for very serious reasons. The superior cannot impose this decision on a member. It is her free choice, although of course superiors should ensure that the member has been offered appropriate assistance and advice in her discernment. The request is sent to the Superior General, who must forward it to the Holy See or, for diocesan right Institutes, to the Bishop of the diocese where the member is assigned, with the Superior General’s own

opinion and that of her council. The Superior and council do not vote on this request, nor are they required to consent in any way. (cf. c. 691; CCEC c. 492, 549).

The indult to leave the institute carries with it a dispensation from the vows and from all obligations arising from profession (cf. c. 692). The member loses all offices which she holds as a member of the Institute. The member is given her will and any patrimonial assets she may have entrusted to the administration of the Institute and any documents which belong to her as a citizen. Any correspondence she has sent to the Institute remains the property of the Institute. The departing member cannot claim anything by virtue of work she did as a member of the Institute, or which came to her through a pension, gift, grant or insurance unless the Institute's own law decrees otherwise (cf. cc. 668 §3, 692, 702; CCEC cc. 468, 503).

Notification of the indult

The indult becomes effective as soon as the member is informed that it has been granted, unless she rejects it at that moment (cf. c. 692; CCEC c. 493). She cannot ask for more time to think about it or to negotiate a financial settlement before she accepts it. She either rejects it outright, in which case it becomes void, or it becomes immediately effective (cf. cc. 80 §2, 692; CCEC c. 493 §1). These limitations should be explained to her well in advance of the indult arriving. If the act of notification takes place before two witnesses, they must sign the record of this act, which is thus valid even if the member refuses to sign that she has been notified (cf. c. 56; CCEC c. 1520 §3).

Dismissal of a member in formation

- a. Dismissal of a member in formation does not necessarily imply any offence. The Constitutions should state which authority in the Institute is competent in each case (cf. c. 653, 656, 3°, 689 §1).
- b. During the novitiate, a novice can be dismissed for any just reason³ (cf. c. 653 §1; CCEC c. 461 §1). At the end of the novitiate, the novice must be accepted for profession if she asks for it and is found to be suitable. If a doubt exists concerning her suitability the novitiate can be extended for up to six months. She is to be dismissed if she is found not to be suitable. (cf. c. 653 §2; CCEC c. 461 §2).
- c. At the expiry of any period of temporary vows, the member can be refused admission to further profession for any just reason, by the

competent major superior, after consulting her council (cf. c. 689 §1; CCEC c. 547 §1).

- d. If the health of a member in temporary profession makes her unsuitable to live the life proper to the Institute, this is a reason for not admitting her to further profession, unless the infirmity was contracted through the negligence of the Institute, because of work performed in the Institute or if she has become 'insane' (cf. c. 689 §§2, 3; CCEC c. 547 §§2, 3).

Dismissal of a temporary or perpetually professed member⁴

The canons contain different processes for dismissal of a professed member for a variety of reasons:

- a. Automatic (c. 694; CCEC c. 497)
- b. Special offences, such as concubinage, abortion, murder (cf. c. 695)
- c. Other offences (c. 696; CCEC c. 500 §2)
- d. Danger and scandal (c. 703; CCEC c. 498)

The seriousness of dismissal after profession would normally oblige superiors to obtain expert canonical advice before and during the process. The Apostolic See will not confirm a decree of dismissal if the process has not been correctly followed.

Declaration of dismissal

In the case of marriage or notorious defection from the catholic faith, the major superior with her council simply collects the evidence and declares the fact of automatic dismissal (cf. c. 694; CCEC c. 497).

The dismissal process

- a. All cases of dismissal must involve a provable offence.
- b. At all stages in the process, the member must be given the opportunity for defence (cc. 697, 698).
- c. The major superior with her council, when the evidence is available, begins the process by gathering the evidence and formally deciding to proceed.
- d. In the case of offences mentioned in c. 695, there is no requirement for warnings. The dismissal process can begin immediately.

- e. In the case of the offences mentioned in c. 696, two explicit canonical warnings must be given. The minimum time of fifteen days between these warnings, and before issuing the decree, must be strictly observed.
- f. When both the warnings have been in vain, if the major Superior with her council decides that there is sufficient proof of incorrigibility and that the member's defence is insufficient, she sends the signed acts to the Superior General.
- g. The Superior General and at least four councilors, gathered as a college of equals, consider the evidence together with the arguments and the defence, and then vote in secret on the question.
- h. If an absolute majority of the votes is for dismissal, the Superior issues a decree, giving at least a summary of the law and the facts, and indicating the right of recourse. This decree must be confirmed by the Holy See, or by the Bishop of the diocese where the member is assigned, for diocesan right Institutes, before it becomes effective (cc. 697-700; CCEC cc. 500-501, 551-553).
- i. The member retains the right to have recourse to the competent authority within ten days of receiving the decree (cf. cc. 700, 1732-1739; CCEC cc. 501, 552 §3, 996-1006). The recourse has suspensive effect.

Expulsion

It sometimes happens that the behavior of a member is so dangerous or so scandalous that superiors have to act quickly, without waiting for the processes of the law to take place. Situations of political threat, physical violence by a member, or public inappropriate sexual behavior, for instance, might require immediate expulsion from the community (cf. c. 703).

Obviously superiors should do all in their power to ensure the safety and security of the expelled member. The expulsion is only a temporary measure, and must be followed up by the formal process of dismissal if no other solution can be found. If the processes of the law are not applicable, the matter can be referred to the Holy See.

Important practical points to be observed by those responsible in cases of dismissal

- a. As soon as a problem starts to give rise to the possibility of dismissal, all relevant events and actions should be documented, and all formal

- communication should take place in the presence of a witness
- b. Email communication is not accepted as evidence
 - c. Get early advice from an experienced canonist
 - d. Where possible, ensure reasonable efforts are made to obtain amendment or resolution of conflict
 - e. Ensure that the member in question has support, information and professional advice
 - f. Read the canons very carefully
 - g. Follow every detail of the process exactly
 - h. In the case of offences mentioned in c. 696, it is usually advisable to focus on one serious, provable offence, rather than on a whole history of difficulties and problems.

Resolution of the problem of disappearance

After a member has asked for an indult to leave the Institute, it is not unusual for her to disappear, so that when the indult arrives she cannot be found. However the indult does not become effective until she is notified that it has been granted.

- a. In justice, every effort must be made to find the member. Often family members, a parish priest or members of another religious community can reach the absent member.
- b. The member should sign that she has received the indult she requested, but if she refuses to do so, the presence of two witnesses to testify that she received it is sufficient (cf. c. 56).
- c. Notification by certified mail, or mail delivered into the hand of the member is canonically valid. Notification by email or telephone communication is not valid.

Similarly, when there is a question of dismissal, it frequently happens that a member leaves the community without permission and her whereabouts cannot be discovered.

- a. If she leaves when there is possibility of dismissal for reasons given in cc. 695, she is unavailable to receive the accusations and evidence, and have the opportunity for defence required by the law.
- b. In the case of an offence mentioned in c. 696, including the offence of being absent unlawfully for six months, she cannot be found to receive

the obligatory warnings and to defend herself (cf. cc. 665 §2, 696 §1, 697, 2°; CCEC c. 500 §2. 2°).

If the member cannot be found after earnest effort, a letter can be posted on the general notice-board of the community house to which she is assigned and in an accessible place in the provincial house. This letter of summons to return by a certain date to receive the information (of warning, or of the indult) (cf. c. 56; CCEC c. 500 §2, 2°, 1520 §3) is regarded as a valid notification. A reasonable time should be provided before the notification is deemed to have occurred.

A decree is deemed to have been made know if the person to whom it is directed has been duly summoned to receive or to hear the decree, and without a just reason has not appeared or has refused to sign (c. 56, cf. CCEC c. 1520 §3).

Provision for the member who departs

The institute is to observe equity and the charity of the gospel toward a member who is separated from it (c. 702 §2; cf. CCEC c. 503 §2). Financial and other assistance is to be offered to any ex-member, including those who have been lawfully dismissed. The amount of assistance does not depend on the virtue or otherwise of the member, or the value of her previous service to the Institute, but is to meet the current needs of the member with reference to her personal situation, her capacity to earn and the financial conditions in the country. It is meant to enable the member to transition with safety and dignity to her new situation, not to support her for the rest of her life. However exceptional provisions might need to be made for older ex-members or those with particular needs.

Mentioning all separations in the Report to the Apostolic See

In order better to foster the communion of institutes with the Apostolic See, each supreme moderator is to send a brief report of the state and life of the institute to the Apostolic See, in a manner and at a time established by the latter (c. 592 §1; cf. CCEC c. 419).

In the report referred to in c. 592, §1, which is to be sent to the Apostolic See, mention is to be made of members who have been separated from the institute in any way (c. 704).

Reflecting the values of the Gospel

The legal provisions for departure are to be carefully followed, in order to protect both the rights of the Institute and of the member, including the right to a good reputation and to privacy (cf. c. 220; CCEC c. 23). Beyond the letter of the law, however, superiors of Institutes should also ensure that as far as possible, despite the sadness and distress that is often involved, they act with sensitivity, respect and generosity towards departing members (cf. cc. 618, 619, 1752).

¹ The Code of Canon Law in English Translation, Collins, 1983.

² *Codex canonum Ecclesiarum orientalium auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus*, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990.

³ A just reason is any reason which is not trivial. It does not need to involve moral fault.

⁴ In the Latin Code, the dismissal processes are the same for both temporary and perpetually professed members. In the CCEC, this is not so.

WHEN YOU LEAVE RELIGIOUS
LIFE, WHAT THEN?
ACCOMPANYING PERSONS IN THE
PROCESS OF DISCONTINUATION
FROM RELIGIOUS FORMATION

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Introduction

Around the world, people have continued to seek admittance into seminaries and houses of religious formation. Usually, this is in response to what the individual has perceived as a call to embrace the priestly or Religious Life. Enthusiasm and proclamation of ideals about what religious vocation entails are often elements in the desire for this way of life. In recent years, in some parts of the world, the numbers seeking religious life have decreased considerably. As a result, greater investment and diverse kinds of creative endeavours have been launched with the aim of attracting and recruiting potential candidates. It appears a great deal has been written about the work of fostering and recruiting vocations, but I dare say, not enough seems to have been written about the accompaniment and preparation of persons for discontinuation during the course of the actual formation process. In other words, more discussion and reflection are needed on how to accompany persons humanely and creatively, who after they have entered formation, come to a point when indicators begin

to surface as to the need to seek paths of the Christian journey other than the religious life or priesthood.

Normally, at the completion of the formation programme, beautiful liturgies and social celebrations are planned to ritualise and enjoy the day of profession of vows or ordination to the priesthood. The community, family of candidates, friends and well-wishers are brought together by this happy event. Nevertheless, it equally happens sometimes in the course of the formation programme that some candidates freely make a choice to discontinue. At other times, such decisions can come from the congregation through the formators who are directly involved with their personal accompaniment. The Gospel scene comes to mind of the young man who volunteered to follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus, however wisely declined his offer: 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Lk 9: 57-58). There is equally no doubt that there is a struggle on the part of the ones 'invited' or 'called' as seen in the young man whom Jesus asked to follow him: 'Let me go and bury my father first.' 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home' (Lk 9: 59; 61). A person who perceives a call to the religious life or the priesthood and is open to explore that, might discover or be helped along the way to see that it is not necessarily his or her calling. This can often be very difficult and emotionally taxing for all parties.

While this is a reality of the religious formation situation, it is nonetheless interesting that not much literature on this crucial aspect of religious formation seems readily available. Considering the importance of such a 'pastoral issue', it is uncertain how much attention seminary rectors, bishops, leaders of religious congregations and formators have accorded the issue of how persons leaving the seminary or houses of formation can be adequately prepared and accompanied to leave, living joyfully, and still continuing the practice of their faith. Arguably, the number of candidates who discontinue from a formation programme might appear generally smaller in comparison with the number who stay. Yet, the seemingly fewer numbers nonetheless, need to be well prepared and accompanied in every possible way in the often daunting process of readapting to the 'world' they had left behind to enter the seminary or convent. Since no one is an isolated entity, each one's own unique journey of life has effects on the lives of numerous other people – family, friends, the Church and the wider society. The seminary or convent of which they had been part is not excluded from this network of interconnectedness.

The Focus of the Article

This article first points out the need for constant attentiveness to the Spirit in formation accompaniment and in the discernment process. It also explores

possible reasons for persuading candidates to leave the formation programme and continue their Christian journey elsewhere. This can range from candidates in the initial stages of formation, to those who are already professed but still in temporary vows. It needs to be emphasised however, that because of the complexity of persons and situations, one can never grasp all the reasons. To help formation directors, attention will be paid to what they might expect when a person discontinues from their programme. Awareness of what to expect can be good anticipatory tactics to help them cope better. Finally, some strategies on how to accompany with sensitivity those in the process of leaving will be proposed. This no doubt cannot be exhaustive. They are simply indicators and suggestions. Formation directors will find out what might suit a particular individual and situation best, as each person is unique and identical to none.

Discernment is crucial

A significant part of religious formation work is discernment. Because of the nature of this form of Christian vocation, which is somewhat ‘unconventional’, discernment is doubly crucial. Discernment, for the purpose of this article is seen in the sense of an ability to obtain sharp perceptions or to judge well, going past the mere perception of something and making nuanced judgments about its properties or qualities. This equally involves wisdom and good judgment especially in matters which could be easily overlooked if the inner discretion of discernment is not employed. In Christian literature, the word ‘discernment’ can be used to describe the process of determining God’s desire in a situation or for one’s life. In large part it describes the interior search for an answer to the question of one’s vocation, namely, determining whether or not God is calling one to the married life, single life, consecrated life, ordained ministry or any other calling (cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discernment> - accessed 28 July 2015). A recent article on ‘St Thomas Aquinas and Vocational Discernment’ aptly illustrates the significance of discernment with regard to the consecrated life:

The existence within the Church of several forms of personal consecration, matrimony, evangelical vows, and Holy Orders, raises the question of what today is known as ‘vocational discernment’. In other words, how do I know what God wants me to do? How do I discover God’s plan for my life? How do I learn the ways by which God will make me a saint? Because of the natural attractions that draw men and women together, discernment is not ordinarily applied to those who aspire to marriage. Instead, one finds the right spouse...Priesthood and consecrated life, however, enjoy no such natural pull or attraction. Why? Priesthood and consecrated life exist because of the Incarnation. Only Christ the High Priest gives legitimacy to a celibate priesthood and makes becoming a priest a justifiable option for a young man. There is no such thing as a natural

inclination or yearning towards remaining celibate. The divine command given to men and women, 'Be fertile and multiply' applies to every person on the planet. Those who *cannot* fulfil this command are called 'eunuchs' (see Mt 19:12). Likewise, only the example of the virginal Christ allows men and women to imitate him by committing themselves to a life of consecrated virginity or chastity... (R. Cessario, 'Thomas Aquinas and Vocational Discernment, *Religious Life Review*, volume 54, number 291, March/April 2015, p. 70).

It is crucial to work at getting to know each candidate reasonably well as to be able adequately to help them discern properly where they might be called and fitted in according to their own particular gifts. Another dimension is being attentive to not only identifying candidates who are unsuited to a specific congregation, but also where else a particular candidate might be better suited, happier and well-adjusted. Although some of the candidates may not be at a chronologically young age, assistance in discernment is still very important to them as some could still be struggling with self-knowledge and identity formation in terms of to what career or vocation they might devote their lives. Hence, the following questions could be helpful:

What psychological traits are needed in abundance, in this group or geographical area, at this time in history? What traits are seldom needed? What traits would be a hindrance or a problem? Another important question may come to mind after some months of working with a candidate: Could it be that this candidate's traits indicate a religious vocation but not to this particular order; or not the diocesan priesthood? Candidates usually knock on the doors they know about, and most candidates do not know the full array of options. Furthermore, they may not know themselves well enough to know what they should seek for themselves. Formators must consider that their role may sometimes be to encourage a candidate to leave his or her chosen programme and seek another. (J. M. Greer, 'Vocational Assessment', *Human Development*, Vol. 20, number 2, 1999, p 29).

Formation directors need therefore to ensure that they are personally attuned to the voice of the Spirit in their day to day living. They are to assist those they are guiding to equally progress in attentiveness to God speaking through the daily experiences of themselves, the whole of life and the actual work with them. Discernment 'allows the Spirit of God to shape not only our actions but also our 'hearts', the centre from which those actions flow. By responding in daily life to the call of the Spirit, we are allowing God's will to be done in us...' (D. Lonsdale, *Dance to the Music of the Spirit – the Art of Discernment*, London: DLT, 1992, p 114). No one is born with clairvoyance of God's will in every situation. Seeking is therefore vital in this process and journey of faith. Fortunately, good guidelines for discernment and discovering God's will abide,

namely: the gift of our intelligence and good sense/intuition, the example of the life of Jesus, the Scripture, daily experiences and events, and of course, the power of prayer. For authenticity in discernment, five imperatives, as propounded by B.J.F. Lonergan, can be very dependable guides: ‘Be attentive, sift through experiences intelligently, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in love with God and God’s creation.’ (M. C. Blanhette and R. P. Maloney, ‘A Guide for Religious Beginning Spiritual Direction’, *Review for Religious*, 68.1, 2009, p 80). In addition and very importantly, those in formation are to be assured that their openness and audacity to make the journey is what counts most, hence the same openness to the discernment of their perceived call is imperative. As Paul Theroux wisely said, ‘The journey, not the arrival, matters; the voyage, not the landing’ (<http://www.azquotes.com/quote/959496> – accessed 28 July 2015). For those accompanying them and for the individual as well, the love of Christ and the courage to make the journey are the root of all endeavours in the formation process and the exercise of discernment.

Some Possible Indicators for discontinuation from Formation

Owing to the complexity of life and the unique spiritual nature of the religious life, it is not always easy perfectly to *identify* and *enumerate* the reasons why a person may need to discontinue her/his religious formation. Although every follower of Christ, in whatever state of life, is called to the fulness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, Religious Life is certainly not a perfect state for perfect persons. It should, therefore, not be about impeccability of a candidate. The religious formation and growth in Christian maturity is a process. And being a *process* implies that it is gradual, and lasts all through the life of a person.

Certain criteria and levels of maturity are nevertheless required of individuals at the beginning of the journey of religious formation. In the *Directives for Formation in Religious Institutes*, it is clearly stated that: ‘It certainly is not required that a candidate for the religious life be able to assume all of the obligations of the religious life immediately, but he or she should be found capable of doing so progressively’ (*Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, No 42, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, London: Incorporated CTS, 1990). It is admittedly true though that at times, intuitive experience corroborated by certain events can help confirm the necessity for a person to discontinue formation. In every action, Christian love and compassion are to be at the base. No one must be asked to discontinue formation merely at the whim of the formator or simply out of pure personal displeasure with an individual. One important aspect, which requires a great deal of patience, is suitable preparation of people before they are admitted to religious formation. Hurry or need for increase in numbers is certainly not a

good way to handle admission to religious formation. If, however, issues that will warrant discontinuation from formation arise, in spite of all the initial preparations done, they still have to be adequately followed through.

One of the requirements of various Religious congregations is usually some degree of reasonably good *health*. Health embraces not just physical health, but psychological as well. Depending on the nature and charism of the group, there are varying health requirements for applicants. For some, if a candidate has certain medical problems that could hinder fuller participation as a member and ability to engage in the ministry and the demands of the life, it could warrant letting the person go. The person might find a home with other groups with different health requirements, or else, seek another way of life altogether. According to the Code of Canon Law, even though contracted after profession, a physical or psychological infirmity which, in the judgment of experts, renders the member in temporary profession unsuited to lead a life in the congregation, constitutes a reason for not admitting the member to renewal of profession or to perpetual profession, unless the infirmity was contracted through the negligence of the congregation or because of the work performed in the congregation. (Canon 689 §2). (In order to understand this canon 689 (*i.e.*, §§ 1, 2 & 3) and all its ramifications more fully, it might be helpful to study it in its entirety, with all the explanatory notes therein.) In certain instances, an individual could conceal a serious matter in their medical history during the admission process and it is discovered later in the course of formation. When this happens, it can be very difficult for all parties. At times, the congregation might recommend withdrawal to that individual. Giving proper care to the person would be the first approach, and a charitable one. Afterwards, sound medical advice could be sought before making a decision about that person's future in the congregation. In the instance where a candidate would have to discontinue for health reasons, it might be helpful to bring the family into the picture so as to be prepared and plan on-going care of the person after his return home.

The world is changing fast. Religious need to keep up with the pace in order adequately to grasp and respond to the 'signs of the times'. Owing to the realities of the modern world, there is a level of *intellectual/academic* qualification/competence required of religious. Unfortunately, in certain situations, because of pressure to get more members, some of those could be overlooked during the admission and screening process. Alternatively, a candidate might come in with a good enough paper qualification. However, in the course of the formation programme, it could be seen that he or she has considerable difficulty grasping the content of the programme. When this happens, it could warrant a decision either to advise the person to leave and update or otherwise seek other paths in life. Even if a person is not gifted intellectually, he or she can still make positive contribution to the society in other ways. Because the consecrated life as it is

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lived today is often in community with other persons, there is needed a capacity to *live communally*, sharing life with other individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, personality and dispositions. Where one experiences almost unbearable discomfort and difficulty in accepting this reality, the better option might be a life style where one is not necessarily compelled or required to share life with others in such close proximity.

There could also be *the problem of 'fitting in'* or struggles with *emotional development*. An important question formators and the person in formation need to be open to exploring, is honestly *gauging* in some way one's emotional maturity and ability to sustain a life where regular and consistent spiritual exercises are a prominent prerequisite. If such seems like a burden to a person, that might be an indicator for not 'fitting'. Would the candidate embrace and live celibate chastity without extraordinary difficulty and an unbearable burden? These questions are worth exploring honestly with the candidate. To be effective in accompaniment and discernment in the formation work, those assigned to the formation ministry are to be *au fait* with the particular nature and requirement of their congregation; the realities of their context or mission. This will help to identify and be confident about whether a particular individual candidate's personality, gifts and disposition fit.

Sometimes, a person may pass through serious *inner struggle* and considerable *resistance to some necessary change* required for the way of life that he or she is being prepared to embrace and live. When a candidate tends consistently to utter statements like: 'You should accept me as I am, this is who I am, and there's nothing anyone can do about that'; 'I am used to this, and this is the way I function', there could be cause for concern. Statements such as the above can mask an unwillingness to transformation through the formation experience and exposure to new ways. Does the formation environment seem to stifle the individual and prevent him or her from living authentically as the person deems right? Discontinuation from the programme might be a healthier option for a person; for Jesus came that we might have life abundantly, not suffocated (cf Jn 10:10).

Human nature is complex. For this reason, it is not surprising to find that for some individuals, at the time of admission into the formation programme, there can be a confusion and *mix-up of motivations*. A young entrant might be motivated by youthful exuberant infatuation for some perceived ideal of life. It is hoped, however, that as the individual progresses in the spiritual journey, prior motivations can become clearer. Entering religious life, it is not unusual for one to have both conscious and sub-conscious motives for doing so. Almost always, the ideals can be quite high, but upon entry, they begin to discover that religious life may not be exactly as they had expected. Sometimes, a person is unable to reconcile their stereotyped notion of the religious life with the reality of the

human condition, accepting their own human vulnerability in it all. This can adversely affect them in a way that warrants exit from the programme.

For some, the initial *enthusiasm* for religious life can just *wear out* quickly. Spiritual stagnation can set in as a result, and there will not be much emotional stamina to engage fully in the formation process. For instance, a novice or seminarian can show signs of growth in gaining insight into some significant personal weakness. However, he or she can tend to glory too much in the growth, without showing a matching ability to progress to any further step of utilising the fruit of the self-discovery for change. More often than not, this can be simply a basic inability: A person's level of awareness is the door to change, but it does not mean that they will go through it. There are those who can't and those who won't but generally formators are dealing with blindness, not ill will'. (M. Drennan, 'Special Issues in Formation', in B. McGregor and T. Norris [eds], *The Formational Journey of Priests: Exploring Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Dublin 1994, p. 89).

Another possible indicator is a seeming visible *joylessness* in a person in an early stage of religious formation. Pope Francis maintains that Consecrated men and women can respond to the invitation to follow Christ in the Consecrated life first, by 'being joyful': 'Show everyone that to follow Christ and to put his Gospel into practice fills your hearts with happiness.' For him, this happiness should be contagious, and lead people to seek the reason for this joy, so that they too can share in it. It is indisputable that 'Where there are religious, there is joy.' Hence, when a person in formation goes around with a long sullen face and infects everyone around with negative energy, it will be worth exploring with the person what is happening with him or her, and whether they are in the right place. (Cf Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, *passim*.)

At times, a candidate might simply have inner battles; like *personal uncertainty* and *self-doubt* about their suitability for the religious life or priesthood, although on the part of the formator, there might be no visible signs indicating serious concerns or unsuitability. In this case, it is helpful to engage in active discernment process with the person in order to help them choose correctly and be at peace with the outcome of the discernment. At times too, their inner struggle might corroborate the formator's observation of their outward behaviour. In all cases, openness to discernment and the 'voice of the Spirit' remain vital.

Preparation of those who are to leave

Taking time humanely to prepare and accompany the individuals on their way out of the formation programme can be a strenuous process. There is no

denying this fact – that it can be quite demanding. For this reason, there could be a temptation to seek an easy way out by avoiding full engagement in this difficult process. There is no doubt though that many try their best in handling this crucial aspect of the formation ministry. Some may be simply ill-equipped for this difficult part of their work. The good news, however, is that help is available if one truly desires to be committed to this difficult aspect of formation work.

What Formators can expect

Personal inner turmoil

While there is a good level of inner conviction of doing one's work to the best of one's ability, it is not unusual for formation personnel to agonise over this, worrying about the authenticity and accuracy of her or his decision to prepare a candidate to abandon the formation programme. The formator can experience self-doubt and guilt which crops up from inner wonderings if his or her own personal bias is not blocking the process and journey of another fellow human being. There could also be fears that one might be making a mistake and 'depriving another of their vocation'. A formator once approached me because of her struggle around an impending decision to ask a novice to discontinue from formation. Although she gave many examples of her experience of the young woman and seemed clear on her true state in the process, she still experienced the inner struggle and desire to get another person to help confirm her. Her approaching another person for confirmation of her own perception was probably a way of getting someone outside of herself to affirm and 'validate' her inner conviction regarding the unsuitability of the said young woman for her congregation's way of life. That seemed important to her to put her mind at rest.

Varied reactions from companions of the candidate leaving

Considering the reality of peer affiliation and mutual support, it is understandable when companions in the programme of the particular individual in the process of leaving feel or react angrily to their formator who is 'sending away' their companion. Their reactions can also be ambivalent. With the sense that perhaps the person needed to leave anyway, they nevertheless struggle with fear for themselves who could be 'the next' to be asked to go. It is not uncommon too that in many cases, the other candidates had perceived the one going as the one who is really doing everything right in the formation. Hence, they wonder: 'If this person who seems so perfect is leaving, what could become of me?'

Reactions and judgment from other Members

It often happens, unfortunately, that usually those who are not the formators could be quite quick at judging the actions and decisions of formators. The same applies to those in leadership. When some persons are not the ones directly responsible for formation, they could feel themselves as knowing how best to treat those in formation. In addition, since some persons believe in numbers as a sure sign of the success of formation, when anyone leaves, irrespective of whatever reason, their reaction is usually negative, laden with criticism of those in the formation work. The formator could be accused of high-handedness and strictness with expectation of young people that are too high. When a candidate had been introduced to the congregation by a sister or confrere, it could become even more toilsome for the persons directly involved with the formation. In certain cases, the particular confrere or sister reacts very strongly to the said formator for ‘expelling *my* candidate’. Added to the already present inner turmoil, there can be tremendous suffering for the formation directors. These are realities that formators could face if a candidate is leaving.

Resistance from the part of the Candidate leaving

In the discernment process, if a person tends to take the issue of religious vocation as a do-or-die affair, it is almost always a negative sign. This is not a good sign at all because authenticity and openness seem to be lacking. It can serve as an added indicator for a formator that this individual might be unsuitable for the religious life. Wherever unyielding stubbornness and insistence on one’s perceived vocation no matter what anyone else sees or says come from, it is clear they do not come from the spirit of Christ, whose core disposition was always to do the will of the Father- “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work” (John 4: 34). Meeting with disappointment or events going against one’s plan can be very challenging and difficult. Whether a candidate leaves of his own volition or is advised to withdraw, it can be a real loss – of a treasured way of life even if one has not yet made perpetual vows. Because some people are not really affected by a particular experience *per se*, but by the meaning they attribute to it, leaving can be taken as not merely a loss, but also a failure in one’s life project. This can threaten a person’s sense of self and accomplishment. For some, it could also lead to a loss of faith and belief in the Church. Formation personnel can devise ways and processes to enable those who leave adequately to ‘mourn’ their loss and at the same time seek to find the faith and will to move on in life and embrace other opportunities and ways that Life will open up for them. One can only do this with a healthy letting go of what has passed, having honoured it as part of their graced life story/journey. The feelings experienced by those who leave can be comparable to those who lost

their jobs. Formators need to pay attention to this and not take it for granted. The skills to facilitate this important process are greatly required on the part of the formators.

Reactions of the Family of the Candidate

This particular point might be shocking to some persons, depending on their cultural backgrounds and contemporary reality. In some cultures, leaving the seminary or convent could be seen as a sign of failure. It can be worse in the case where the particular individual is advised to leave. A feeling of hurt self-pride could be triggered in both the individual and his or her family. However, where a candidate is fortunate to come from a family that has openness and understanding of the human condition, it can be much easier to handle. A good example is Dr Van der Mal in the film, *The Nun's Story*, who told his daughter Gabrielle (Sr Luke) as she left home for the convent that once she felt she could not cope with convent life, she could come home and would be always welcomed back. This kind of family background can be highly supportive to an individual in formation to engage freely in the discernment involved. She is spared a heavy burden of untold fear and anxiety about the future and its outcome. In cases where the opposite is the case, that is, where family and relations consider quitting the seminary or convent as a failure and dishonour to their family or even the clan, it can be unduly difficult for a candidate who leaves to cope. To readjust and make a reasonable life for themselves becomes harder. In certain such instances, persons have been pushed to take their own lives as a way out of the predicament. It is helpful therefore to help them all to see that if one door closes, another can be allowed to open.

Some Strategies for accompanying candidates discontinuing from formation

Be it a postulant or novice who has not been long in the formation or an already professed member in temporary vows, the process of exiting from formation can be a very challenging one. When the decision to leave is the initiative of the person, it could be relatively easier, although there are still issues to be dealt with. For instance, the emotional letting go and parting from companions with whom one has shared life - joys and sorrows, faith and dreams. In addition, the future is uncertain. Hence, it is likely there will be feelings of fear, apprehension and worry about what the future could bring. For all these reasons, significant consideration is required in finding adequate ways of accompaniment and care in handling the exiting process. It is very important that those who leave are accompanied to do so graciously, not with bitterness and ill feeling. Instead, respecting their basic human dignity is to be aimed at with all intent.

Since human beings are individuals and unique, it is not easy to prescribe any single strategy to suit the needs and temperament of every candidate in the process of preparing to leave a religious formation programme. Nevertheless, since human nature is basically universal, there are certain values that might have a wide appeal irrespective of personality or context.

Empathetic accompaniment

It is essential to remember that this is a very difficult time for the individual leaving. This person had come into the formation programme with all intent to become a professed religious. It has come to a point, however, that they are to withdraw from the formation programme possibly because 'it was not working out' as anticipated, or that it is possibly 'not their calling'. Whereas it is usually a considerably difficult experience for most persons who have to discontinue in the course of their formation programme, those whose choice it was not to discontinue, but were rather advised by their formators to leave, can experience more sense of failure and threatened self-esteem. Sensitivity and empathy are highly required in this case. The formator needs to tread very gently on this holy ground. What can help one is to imagine oneself in the position of this person in the process of preparation to exit. The Gospel exhortation to 'do to others as you would have them do to you' (Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31) comes in handy in these circumstances. It will help to keep the formator empathetic. Empathy enabled Jesus' genuine concern for people, *feeling* their emotions and thoughts, which consequently moved him to loving action (Lk 7:11-16; Jn 6: 1-14; Jn 11: 33-35; Jn 2: 1-11). Empathetic accompaniment is definitely needed in order to be meaningfully with a candidate on the path of departure. The saying of Kahlil Gibran is quite true: that one gives but little when she gives of her possessions, but it is when she gives of herself that she truly gives. This is a challenge and an invitation to formators at this delicate time in the life of an individual, to really give of the self – time, care and attention - to this individual at a very vulnerable time in his or her life.

Utmost care and Gentleness

Irrespective of the reasons for discontinuing religious formation, the individual in question needs to be dealt with gently and humanely. Undoubtedly, the more tenderly and humanely persons are accompanied in the process of leaving, the more likely there will be positive results in terms of their personal response and equanimity. In other words, persons who are shown genuine love and consideration when it comes to helping them withdraw from the formation programme are more likely to have less resentment and strong negative reactions towards the formators and the congregation. It is likely

that the necessary re-adjustments and finding their way in life will be easier for them. This is the reason why it is more important to work hard at building up their esteem and self-appreciation, than repeatedly harping on their shortcomings. A strong temptation that a formator could face is highlighting the weaknesses of the candidate to justify the decision and assuage feelings of inner struggle and pain that often accompany such decisions. This way of coping with the situation would produce more negative thought and reactions. It is not enough to say, 'yes, I have warned her time without number that she is heading for the door if this *carry-on* continues!' Formation accompaniment and discernment are not about warning. Such threats are more likely to increase the fear or self-doubt of candidates, which can lead to compliance to avoid being 'sent home'. That a person does not fit in a particular congregation does not mean that he or she is no good and cannot make an excellent life in another setting or another congregation for that matter. It is good always to bear this fact in mind.

Awareness of the Power of words used

Words are powerful in the force of their influence on human beings. When candidates are in the process of leaving, they usually feel vulnerable and often unsure of themselves. At times like this, a person might tend to be more sensitive to little stimuli of all kinds than they would ordinarily be. That is why it is important to be attentive to the words one uses with them at this time. If a candidate seems unsuited to a particular congregation, it is only fair to accompany and redirect him or her instead of bombarding the one with negative condemnation, judgment and 'putting down'. This is not at the service of love. 'Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you' (Eph 4: 29).

It is true that candidates exiting from religious formation need to be sensitively cared for and counselled, however, it appears even more important to pay special attention to those in whose case the initiative to discontinue had not come from the individual but instead from the congregation. This is crucial because of the possible inclination to link their being asked to leave as a personal failure which has shaken the very foundation of their ability as a person. Giallanza therefore wisely counsels formators to 'take care that their message does not diminish the person's self image or self-esteem. The decision to tell a person to depart from the formation programme is never an evaluation of his or her worth, goodness or loveliness...' (J. Giallanza, 'The Ministry of Initial Formation', in *Human Development*, Vol. 10, number 4, 1989, p 7.) This is crucial, as fairness and respect for the individual are at stake.

Honest and transparent Feedback

Formation has to be carried out in a mature way; that in the day-to-day journeying with a person, he or she is aware of what is happening at a personal level. If such is the case, when it comes to advising someone to discontinue, it will not be 'a surprise' or seem like 'an act of meanness'. The Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria have a proverb: if you pick a tick out of a dog's skin, show it to him so that he does not think you were trying to pinch him. Letting the candidate be in the know of why she is being advised to withdraw is important. Respectful and sensitive feedback is a prerequisite for a healthy formation process. This is to be so because preparation time for exiting is not meant to be a time when a candidate is given 'a list of faults' as reasons for departure. In ideal situations, the decision to ask someone to leave is never the decision of one sole person. While accompanying a postulant, novice or one in temporary vows, and it becomes increasingly evident to the formator that exiting might be a better option for the person, it is helpful to begin letting the individual know this. Ultimately, the formator will work this through with him or her, that they are not going to be given a recommendation to continue. Taking such a stance is more mature than pushing it to 'a higher authority' in the congregation like the regional, provincial or general council, and finally telling the person: 'they did not give you the votes for profession' or advancement to the next stage of formation. In the course of the formation accompaniment and daily living, one is to be made aware of what is happening and how one's progress and response to formation is viewed and assessed. '...Formators must take the time and be clear and fair as possible in explaining the decision that has been made and what led to it'. (ibid., p 7). Such honest transparency helps to build trust. It makes exiting easier when or if the candidate is ultimately going to be advised to discontinue. It is regrettable that sometimes, one encounters an ex-postulant, ex-novice, ex-brother/sister or ex-seminarian who claims that they never knew the real reason for discontinuation, and it was never brought to their awareness. These allegations or claims, unfortunately, cannot always be verified. Nevertheless, whatever the case, formators are to ensure sincerity with people they accompany in their day-to-day work with them.

Finding some 'Outside help' for the candidate

Finding some sort of 'outside help' applies especially when the person is already a professed member although where necessary, such an opportunity can be given to a postulant or novice. Sometimes, the individual might prefer to talk to a person other than her formator who is directly involved with her formation. Possible negative feelings towards the formator, the congregation, and others can be given vent to where an opportunity to meet with a competent spiritual director has been given. This can be very helpful. Such an alternative safe and

holding place often gives the person a chance to deal with their possible overload of emotions in these circumstances.

Care of the Peers of the one leaving

Having shared life, faith, dreams, etc with a person, we realise that every parting evokes myriads of emotions in people considering their own different backgrounds and prior experiences in life. When a postulant, novice, a seminarian or young professed religious is leaving, the other companions on the journey are usually affected in varying degrees. It is not only the person who is leaving who experiences some emotional upset. The other companions and confreres equally feel the impact. This is to be taken seriously. It is worth reassuring the companions that God has a plan for each person and leads each on his or her journey in a unique way; that the divine plans for each one are ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ (Jer 29:11). Creating a safe space for them to share their feelings is helpful.

Ritualising the Transition experience

As part of the transition that is a core element in discontinuing from formation, depending on the suitability of the situation, formators can organise some form of ritual to mark and bless the process of leaving. This can be done on one to one with the candidate leaving, if he or she is open to that; and secondly with the group or community. Depending on the atmosphere and choice of the person leaving, it could include a prayer session and some symbolic acts of honouring the time/life shared with the group in a seminary, novitiate or community (mission), moving on and entering through another wide open door of a wide range of opportunities. This can be done with the discretion and creativity of the formator, and of course with the cooperation and approval of the person leaving. Where the person does not wish to have any of these, it is better they are not imposed. However, it can be noted that in certain instances, with some encouragement from the formator, the individual in transition sometimes comes around and in hindsight, is grateful for that ritual before their exit. The pain and agony of separation and goodbye can be a reason for the resistance of engaging in this kind of undertaking. Nevertheless, it has the potential of being a healing balm for both the one leaving and the group.

Family education and involvement

It can be helpful to initiate discussion with the candidate in preparation on how and when they want to involve their families in anticipation of their imminent exit from the formation and return home. In addition, feelings can be processed with the candidate around this. In some congregations, before the start of initial formation, parents/families of the candidates are invited to a ‘family meeting’.

At these ‘family meetings’, parents are educated on what religious/vocation discernment entails and the need for them to give their son or daughter all the support he or she needs on the journey. The opportunity is equally employed to educate them on realistic expectations of their wards in this venture. This prior preparation has helped in getting parents and family members attuned to the realities of religious formation and discernment. For some, it had helped them to welcome back their son or daughter with open arms when discernment points them to other paths in life. This has in many cases gone a long way in motivating and empowering those individuals to engage in life and live it fully after their exit from formation.

Support for the Formator

To be cared for, as well, is the formator, the one who accompanies the person in the process of leaving the formation. Unfortunately, it is not often easy to find much support from among confreres or one’s community. They too might equally be angry with the formator, that a would-have-been member is leaving. Leadership needs to be attentive to this reality. Formators also are to be aware of their need for support, and seek appropriate ways of self-sustenance at this difficult time in their ministry. Availing of spiritual direction and supervision can be very helpful. Dealing with feelings of possible guilt and self-doubt, which can sometimes plague many a good formator at this time, cannot be underestimated.

Post departure support

Putting in place a kind of good exiting counselling and support for young people who have left at various stages of a congregation’s formation can be a positive venture. Some congregations have tried out setting up post-departure care of their ex-members and ex-novices, seminarians and postulants. The support can consist of not only material, but equally some form of checking in for those who might be in need of such, as well as counselling and guidance support. This might not be a simple and straightforward matter. It will definitely have financial and personnel implications. Without doubt, such a venture will be a good contribution to the life of those persons, giving them a start in their ‘new’ life, to face and live it meaningfully in the challenge of transition. In addition, when people are well treated and prepared before they leave, there is more opening for maintaining a good rapport and friendship with the group with whom they had shared some precious years of their lives. In fact, some of them eventually become associates of the congregation they had left, supporting them as co-workers, collaborators and benefactors in some of their missions and apostolates. Exiting from a congregation should be an experience in response to the voice of the Spirit, instead of an exercise of hatred and resentment.

It is worth adding that leaving earlier rather than later in life could indeed be a blessing in disguise. For this person, there is more probability of having the time and opportunity to adjust and make another life for herself, including starting a family for those who might wish to do so.

Conclusion

These are real challenges. There is no denying that this aspect of formation work can be onerous and formidable especially for formators directly involved with accompaniment of candidates. Fortunately, challenges and difficulties somewhat have a capacity for leading people to growth. The difficulties involved could 'seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise'. (*Redemptoris Missio*, §35). But as people of faith, it is taken, not as 'a merely human enterprise', but God's. It is God who really calls and sanctifies all things and beings. One simply needs to be aware of this and totally surrender oneself to God's guidance in this whole enterprise.

It seems fitting to conclude this write-up with a beautiful poem by Tagore:

*No; it is not yours to open buds into blossoms
Shake the bud, strike it; it is beyond your power to make it blossom.
Your touch soils it, you tear its petals to pieces, and strew it on the dust.
But no colors appear, and no perfume.
Ah! It is not for you to open the bud into a blossom.
He who can open the bud into a blossom does it simply.
He gives it a glance of his eyes, and the life sap stirs through its veins,
for he who can make the bud to blossom does it simply.
At his breath the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the wind.
Colours flush out like heart-longings, the perfume betrays sweet secrets.
He who can open the bud does it so simply.*



From the desk of the Executive Secretary

As the months pass life at UISG gets busier, which is a good sign because we are increasingly recognised as the organization which represents sisters worldwide. We are now invited regularly to meetings at the Vatican and to events or consultations organized by various Embassies to the Holy See and by other organizations. The work of restructuring UISG goes on and I am happy to report that since the last issue of the Bulletin we have been joined by two new staff members: Sr. Florence de la Villeon, RSCJ and Ms Aileen Montojo.

New Staff Members:

Sr. Florence de la Villeon, RSCJ started work officially in January 2017. She will be working with Sr. Elisabetta Flick, SA in relation to the UISG Migrants Project. As the international coordinator of the Migrants Project, Florence will try to create a worldwide map of the places where sisters are working with migrants. She will explore ways of networking sisters involved in various aspects of migration and find ways of sharing best practice and of identifying spiritual and other resources to support those involved in this challenging ministry. She would welcome contact from any congregation that has sisters working with migrants in any part of the world. Her email address is rete.migranti@uisg.org. Florence worked for several years with JRS in Uganda and was a member of the initial phase of UISG Sicily Project. She now represents UISG at various meetings with Vatican Dicasteries, Caritas Internationalis, JRS and other agencies. She and Sr. Gabriella Bottani, CMS (Talitha Kum) will work closely together as there is an obvious overlap between migration and trafficking.

Ms. Aileen Montojo was recently appointed as the new Financial Administrator at UISG. She is replacing Ms. Svetlana Antonova who has served in this role for many years. The UISG financial system has become increasingly more complex with new projects and initiatives and the demands of increased transparency and accountability. You can contact Aileen at economato@uisg.org. We thank Svetlana for her commitment and dedication over the years. She will now concentrate on her role as Building Manager and in addition in the future she will oversee the annual updating of statistics from female congregations worldwide.

New Data Base

The UISG data base was set up nearly thirty years ago using the original DOS operating system. In its day it was a very progressive system but is now out-of-date. Currently with the help of generous financial support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the UISG data base is being totally updated and revised. It is a complex system linking the payment of annual fees and other contributions, the mailing and email lists of members and associates, the collection of congregational statistics and finally overall financial accountability in several different currencies. The computer programmers say that UISG functions like a small multi-national company! Once the new data base is completed and tested in 2017 we will begin to request the annual updating of congregational data. This has not been done since 2010. We hope that each congregation will be able to update their information online. Such information is requested regularly by many different individuals and organizations and there is a lack of accurate and current information about congregations of women's religious worldwide.

Centre for Global Religious Life

Before its closure in 2006 the Regina Mundi College at UISG offered programmes in theology and formation to sisters from many different parts of the world. The building was rented in 2008 for eight years to IES (international Educational Services) who offer courses for US university students in Rome and elsewhere. At the end of the eight year rental period, due to changing patterns of studying abroad, IES asked to rent 50% of the property rather than the whole building. There were others interested in renting the remaining two floors. However the Executive Board of UISG decided to move in another direction. During the past number of years, leaders of congregations have been asking UISG to offer a variety of long and short programmes in such areas as formation, intercultural living and working, inter-religious dialogue, preparation for ministry at the new and emerging margins etc. Therefore the UISG will shortly conduct a worldwide survey of its members to see what might a Centre for Global Religious Life offer and whether congregational leaders would send members to Rome for such programmes. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get visas to enter certain countries but because of the special relationship between the Vatican and the Italian State, religious from every part of the world can enter Italy for formation and study purposes.

In order to help us to undertake a good discernment about the future use of the Regina Mundi building can I ask UISG members to please participate in the online survey once you receive it.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL).

At the UISG Plenary Assembly in May 2016 we respectfully alerted Pope Francis to the absence of any religious sister as a consultant to CICLSAL. We are pleased to say that seven Superiors General were invited to attend the recent two-day Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery. They were Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA; Sr. Yvonne Reungoat, FMA; Sr. Ines Hurtado FI; Sr. Monica Joseph, RJM; Sr. Kathleen Appler, DC; Sr. Françoise Massy, FMM and Sr. Luigia Coccia, CMS. They also attended the one day inter-dicastery meeting with members of the Congregation for Bishops to discuss matters related to the preparation of a new document to replace *Mutuae Relationes*.

Upcoming Events

A number of *Canon Law Workshops and Seminars* are being organized for the coming months: UISG – ACWECA Residential Workshop in Nairobi (February 20-24); UISG-AOSK Seminar in Nairobi (February 25-26); Vienna (April 30 – May 3). Sr. Pat Murray will be present at these gatherings.

Sr. Pat will also attend the *AMOR meeting* which will take place in Yangon, Myanmar from February 27 – March 3 with the theme: A Call for Ecological Conversion. AMOR (Asia-Oceania Meeting Of Religious) was born in 1971 as a specific response of the religious women of Asia-Oceania to the poverty and injustices of the world. Religious from different Conferences across the Asia-Oceania region come together every 2-3 years to exchange experience and ideas, for mutual support and animation and to establish solidarity among Asia-Oceania religious and their collaborators.

Other News...

The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, February 8, 2017

“Then there were days when the three girls couldn’t even smile, and so those men, some of whom were old with wrinkles of gold, would order them to strip and if they didn’t do it immediately, the young man who had stolen their youthfulness would cover the camera for a second and hit them on the head...”

This is the story of Kaye, Irene and Liza, victims of cyber-bullism, recounted in the brochure that Talitha Kum (www.talithakum.info) had published for the occasion last 8th of February to make people aware of the issue of the

trafficking of girls, boys and adolescents in the world. “They are just children! Not slaves!” was the slogan chosen by the committee for the The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, coordinated by the two Unions (UISG and USG) through Talitha Kum.

Different events were organized in Rome and in the world, to reflect, study in depth and pray over the trafficking of children and adolescents. On the website, www.preghieracontrotratta.org, inaugurated on this Third Day, it is possible to find audio, video and text materials, such as some of the discourses at the Seminar “They are just children! Not slaves!” organized near the Gregorian Pontifical University.

“Thank you for what you do!” said that Pope to the Committee of the Day during the General Audience of the 8th of February.

“Communicate the Mission”: laboratory of formation for sisters who work on communication, promoted by the USMI and the UISG (Rome, 28-29 January 2017)

“Thank you for this opportunity of formation on communication for those who, like us, have accepted the challenge of bringing Jesus today.”
“Thank you for the welcome, the professionalism, the passion with which you carried out the course!” *“We need additional initiatives of formation: short and punctual.”*

These are but a few of the comments of the 70 participants, mostly women religious and a few consecrated women (and a lay person), in the first laboratory of basic formation on communication. “Communicate the Mission,” was promoted by the communication offices of the USMI and UISG, in Italian and Spanish. It was a beautiful time of collaboration, intercongregationality, and communion among those who have the delicate task of managing the communication in their own Institutes. We learned to use texts, images and video as a unique and interactive multimedia space to “communicate the mission.”

“We need to make Superior Generals and those in governance understand the importance nowadays of Communication for the mission. It is not a waste of time but an investment in a challenge which is particularly necessary today with the evolution of social media.” This is what a sister told us during the course. We are convinced of this more and more; for this reason, we decided to set up a series of initiatives of formation for the general governance and for the communicators at the service of women religious life, to be carried out this year 2017 in different languages.

For further information: comunicazione@uisg.org

Laboratory of Canon Law on the theme of Reconfiguration for Women Religious Institutes (Rome, January 27, 2017)

The second laboratory in Italian was held on the theme of Reconfiguration of Religious Institutes with the presence of Superior Generals, Major Superiors and Counselors. The first laboratory took place in Rome on the 15th November 2016. Discussed were the principles of delegating and questions regarding the modalities of exercising authority.

For further information: canoniste@uisg.org

Assemblies of the Constellations UISG

Between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, Assemblies were held of the Constellations UISG: South America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay), Canada (English language), Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal), the Pacific Region (Australia, Papua New Guinea), Rome, Italy.

To communicate the dates of the next assemblies of the Constellations, write to: ufficio.segreteria@uisg.org

Other news are available on the website of the UISG: www.uisg.org

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