



Seminar JPIC Commission of the USG / UISG - Religious men and women Promoters of JPIC



“GO AND PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

JPIC in the formative process of Consecrated Life

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Brother César Augusto Rojas Carvajal
Director of the Secretariat HERMANOS HOY
Community of Marist Brothers

To promote, in all the stages of the formation process, the centrality of the passion for the Kingdom of God, root and force of apostolic consecrated life.

In today’s world, how does your Institute promote formation to an incarnated and liberating spirituality that generates passion for Christ and for the Kingdom of God, that is, passion to live charity expressed in service to the poor and in the defence of human dignity, of the common good, of peace ...?

Number 95 of the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers reads “the vitality of our religious family and the fidelity to its mission depend, to a large extent, on the formation of its members”. The formative process in our Institute seeks to promote an itinerary of steady growth that consolidates his option for Jesus in the Marist charism and allows him to develop his apostolic and missionary zeal. In 1993, the General Chapter approved the *Guide for the Marist Formation*, a tool that unifies objectives, contents, experiences and fundamental aspects in the different stages of formation, both initial and ongoing.

The Guide for the Marist Formation orients the work of the different formation Teams, promoting a process that makes possible the realization of experience along the same lines proposed by the ***“Formative Itinerary for a prophetic religious life”***. It promotes an incarnated spirituality that opens up ways for dialogue and reconciliation, and is lived in the midst of the poorest, with a growing awareness of the responsibility we have for creation. The cry of the world, especially of the poorest, reaches the heart of God and our heart, as well.

The Marist charism urges us to be attentive to the cries of our time, to the expectations and concerns of the people, especially of the children and the youth. Beyond cultural and religious barriers, we all seek the same dignity for all: human rights, justice, peace and equitable and responsible access to the earth’s resources.

The *Guide for formation* affirms that insertion in society is a social and apostolic necessity, a consequence of our mission as educators and our preferential love for the poor. For this reason, from the beginning of formation and through various mediations, we try to accompany the young people in formation so that they may develop a deep sensitivity to the needs and feelings of the poor, those with disabilities whether physical, emotional, intellectual and/or moral. In recent years, a significant number of administrative units have reflected on the location of their formation houses, trying to favour presence in working-class neighbourhoods where the young people in formation live a simple and sober lifestyle, similar to that of the people in the neighbourhood (cf. GF 72).

Allow me to highlight, among others, some significant experiences that have been promoted at the stages of initial formation and ongoing formation that have helped us to awaken and/or generate our passion for Christ and for the Kingdom of God.

INITIAL FORMATION

As regards the pre-novitiate, novitiate and post-novitiate, the plan of formation combines theory and academic elements with mission experiences in working-class environments, especially in the field of evangelisation, catechesis (sacraments of Christian initiation), movements and apostolic groups of children and youth ministry, NGO's, among others. In some of our post-novitiates, the young aspirants work for some days during the week, in order to concretely enter into the world of work, to become aware of the life of many persons, sharing with them their difficulties and circumstances. They grow in the responsible use of money and develop different talents. They learn to read their life in the light of the Gospel and the context where they are. When they arrive at the point of making an evaluation of their experience, the young people in formation appreciate these experiences as an important moment of growth in their integral formation.

Aside from promoting experiences of social ministry during the formation process, all our novitiates give the novices from one to three months of insertion in our apostolic communities located in working-class neighbourhoods. Through this experience they share the life and the mission of our Brothers and lay collaborators. In general, these communities engage in education for the working class, migrants and displaced persons, or they offer non-formal education and other services in rural and indigenous zones. When these novices go back to the house of formation, they make a personal and community evaluation of the experience seen in the light of faith and of the Marist charism.

Every year our Secretariat for International Solidarity elaborates a material in harmony with the liturgical season of Advent where, from the testimony of many children and young people from all over the world, we highlight the sensitivity for the defence of their rights. This text, other than being an element for community prayer, also motivates the study of the rights of the child. In our houses for initial formation, this material is used particularly in animating prayer moments and celebrations during the Advent season.

ONGOING FORMATION

These programmes are designed for the Brothers who are fully immersed in the mission. Their objective is to provide training experiences appropriate to different stages of life, with the goal of renewing and reinvigorating the experience of the “first love” and the meaning of life as a Marist.

While the provinces and districts design their own programmes, the Congregation has two centres of renewal for this purpose. One of them is in Manziana (Italy) for the English-speaking Brothers. The other one is in San Lorenzo del Escorial (Spain) for Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Brothers. In both centres there is a team of Brothers who, along with members of the Secretariat Brothers Today, animate and support the implementation of programmes. For some years, the courses have been held in the city of Cochabamba (Bolivia) with accent on solidarity, option for the poor and apostolic spirituality. There is a suggestion to continue this initiative in the future, especially in Latin America and Africa.

At this level I would like to highlight the experience of solidarity we are hoping to make for our middle-aged Brothers, a stage which we call “Hiking stage” that lasts for five months. For 15 days the Brothers travel to some centres for migrants, refugees, children with drug and learning problems, and some of our communities for child care in Romania. These Brothers participate as volunteers in the various activities taking place in the different centres.

This experience is complemented by a seminar on defending the rights of the child and prepares the group for a visit to our community in Geneva. From our origins we have been committed to defending the rights of children and young people through our educational service. Today we understand that this defence must touch structures and politics, by trying to intervene where decisions are made that can change the structures that generate or perpetuate human rights violations. Hence our presence in the United Nations, to express own values; and hence the need to take into account in all our formative stages this important issue, as we glimpse opportunities where we can act in social or political institutions working in the defence of children's rights in the countries where we operate.

These very experiences of solidarity with the realities of poverty were promoted in the three training courses organized by the Institute for formators, which included a strong experience for three weeks.

Finally, I wish to highlight the programme that the Institute has been implementing since 2006 and is designed to prepare both Brothers and lay people to live the experience of mission *ad gentes* in Asia. From our origins, the missionary dimension has been one of the features that Marcellin Champagnat promoted among the Brothers. Today we are called as an Institution to shift our focus on this region of the world where there is a widespread presence of exclusion, poor children and youth, and with a great necessity for education. There is a special commission of Brothers that implemented a series of

five-month sessions in Davao city (Philippines), with the aim of providing elements for discernment and training in this aspect. Seven training sessions were held where a total of 80 people (Brothers and lay people) have participated. Now the project has 41 Brothers and 7 laymen present in seven countries in the region. For this project our Institute has shown the ability to include in all our training programmes the missionary aspect as a beautiful opportunity to incarnate Christ who is present in realities like these.

In a new era and with the coming bicentennial of the founding of the Institute (2017), our formative proposal integrates and takes up in all its rich dimensions the call of the last General Chapter, inspired by the Gospel account of the visitation that invites us "*With Mary, to run quickly to a new land.*" This implies a willingness to move, to let go, to assume a formative journey of both personal and institutional conversion, and make this journey with Mary, our guide, model and companion.

We are aware that processes take time and are slower than we can imagine, that realities are different according to each region, but we also feel that the Spirit is calling us personally, as communities and as congregation to look for ways that respond to the needs of a world that asks us to be witnesses and heralds of the Kingdom of God, and in our particular case, in the midst of children and young people, especially the poorest and most abandoned.

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