

Personal accompaniment

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Personal accompaniment is critical in fostering a greater understanding of deep emotions, capacity for self-acceptance, capacity for trust and mutuality, growing in self-esteem, dealing with change and developing capacities for healthy intimacy. Some of the challenges faced in the area of personal growth could be classified as intra-personal and inter-personal issues.

While interpersonal is used in relation to an individual's relationship with others; intrapersonal issues refer to the feelings, ideas and thoughts that occur within a person. Intrapersonal issues can be disruptive and stressful if a person does not understand nor able to handle his personal needs and desires. Some of the intrapersonal issues among candidates include, lack of self-awareness, unresolved emotional issues festering like wounds of life, lack of proper motivation, lack of self-confidence, negative self-perception, inferiority or superiority complex, traumas, internet pornographic addiction, masturbation, lack of psycho-sexual integration, intimacy, lack of personal identity, etc.

Snehanand (2012) noted that the feelings of inferiority are often manifested in tendencies to withdraw, anxiety or tendency to compare, excessive nervousness, shyness also in superiority complex, aggression, grandiosity, perfectionism, 'workaholic,' etc. The lack of real self-worth leads to various forms of fear, fear of failure or of making mistakes, of public appearance, jealousy, competition and rivalry. Developmental theorists suggest that persons who have been abused will tend to experience the feeling of fear, anger, guilt, inferiority complex, irrational beliefs, prejudice, sadness, self-rejection, shame, etc.

In the spectrum of interpersonal issues, the challenges faced by the formees are basically in relation to their formators, fellow seminarians and the complementary sex. Some of the underlying issues include unhealthy comparison, boundary violations, lack of capacity to relate to others, learning to love females in a non-genital manner, lack of empathy, envy, jealousy, peer pressure, accepting the renunciations inherent in the vows, insincerity, bitterness, living with mask, fear of being misunderstood and misinterpreted by formators, etc. Snehanand (2012) argues that unhealthy comparisons are a major block to self-understanding and self-realization.

Often these issues are repressed or suppressed by the candidate and unconsciously projected on to authority figures and peers in community. A lot of candidates during formation and even after perpetual commitment are either afraid of relating to persons of the other sex or cultivate a level of relationship or intimacy inappropriate to their commitment in celibacy, often leading to grave consequences. McClone (2009) explains that your connections with others can only be as rewarding as the connection with the 'someone' with whom you live every moment of your life: your own self.

The human personality of the priest is to be a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ (PDV, no. 43). Pastores Dabo Vobis (no. 43) tells us, "Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper and due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry." The life of the future minister or religious should be marked by genuine human freedom, strong moral character, prudence and discernment, empathy, the ability to listen and to

communicate, and the capacity to assume the life of a public person (Program of Priestly Formation, no. 76).

According to Rulla (2004, p. 364), "priestly and religious vocation are an invitation or call from God which lays a claim on the whole existence of the person called." In other words, effectively living a vocation implies a certain work to be done on our-self. If we hope to surrender our-selves to God, then we must first have a "self" to give. We cannot entrust to God a wounded, unformed and unknown self. According to Christian theology, grace builds on nature, and the healthier the human nature, the greater is the possibility for grace to penetrate the human person and transform him/her from within (Mathias 2008).

Fostering personal growth is essential in ensuring a more authentic vocation discernment and growing in healthy intimacy with others and with God. Growing in healthy intimacy, which involves facing the shadow parts of ourselves, is about becoming more real. According to McClone (2009) growth in healthy intimacy presupposes certain reflective self-awareness, naming, claiming and embracing old hurts and negatives scripts from families of origin and making conscious decisions to act with integrity.

The Religious Formation Programme (2017) of the Divine Word College Seminary emphasizes that to foster growth in self-awareness, the Formator helps candidates set reasonable and measurable personal goals at the beginning of each academic year, including the concrete steps to achieve the goals. This process encourages the candidates to undertake greater responsibility for their personal growth.

The literature concerning personal growth for lifelong commitment in priestly and religious life is immeasurable. The researcher identifies with the most recent, such as Ridick (2000), Cencini (2002, 2005), Mathias (2008), McClone (2009) and Manuel (2012). These authors emphasize how accompaniment can be effective in fostering the growth of those in initial formation coupled with solid spirituality. Several authors including Nugent (2000), Kuttianimattathil, Lendakadavil and Pereira (2012), Parapully (2012) and Snehanand (2012) stress the need for "inner work" through a process of counselling or psychotherapy during which the person works on strengths and targets particular problematic areas of the personality.

Obviously, "a healthy and well-integrated personality is indispensable if the other aspects of formation are to flourish" (Strange, 2004, p. 213). As a means of fostering growth in candidates, it is important to challenge and question the motives of their actions and decisions. Challenges are important in formation, especially in situations where the candidate is engaging in inappropriate or destructive behaviours that are not in keeping with his vocational choice.

Challenges can enable the formee to go beyond his comfort zones and achieve new insights; he becomes more aware of the issues (contradictions, defenses and irrational beliefs), feelings and behaviours that contribute to or sustain his problems. Candidates who have learned through their mistakes, trials and error become better equipped to face the inevitable challenges of religious life. Portelli (2014, p. 34) postulates that "a continuous process of self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance could help

candidates in formation make healthy choices according to personal feelings and needs."

Moreover, according to Rulla, Imoda and Ridick (2001), the person receiving formation is realistically unable of becoming a good recipient of formation due to unconscious hindrances. Rulla et al. research on the relationships of seminarians and young religious (male and female) reveals that in about 90% of these young people there are present attractions and repulsions which have been repressed and are more or less unconscious. It influences the degree of emotional maturity, the type of relationships these young people establish with others and even vocational maturity.

The discovery of the importance of taking into account the unconscious realm of the formee is an important contribution and an eye opener for those concerned with formation. Candidates in formation need to be accompanied for a more comprehensive knowledge not only of the spiritual aspect of growth but also about the physical, psychological, social and pastoral dimensions (Schuth 2012). There is frequently a gap between the level of the formees academic or secular knowledge, often highly specialized, and that of their personal and affective maturity. This gap needs to be acted on during the initial formation through a personalized and person-centered approach.

Experience has shown that there are unexpressed emotional residues in every person's life which blocks real and healthy relationships. Candidates who have core issues rooted with trust in past relationships that left them hurt and wounded may often lack courage and confidence to relate to others

in community. They feel insecure, aggressive, fearful, possessive, resentful, restless and rigid.

On the basis of these assumptions, regular personal accompaniment on average twice a month for about an hour along with vocational counselling sessions, tools for personal reflection and inputs related to emotional, psychosexual and spiritual formation, group processing and feedback can play a vital role in making up for the deficit, repairing or correcting damages, healing past wounds and empowering formees for a more authentic relating with self, others and God. In this regard, one of the signs of growth would be the formees capacity to deal more effectively with the sufferings and trials of life and lessons they draw from those experiences about themselves, and others. McClone (2009) suggests that personal growth and change involve confronting life's challenges without fear, doubt or anxiety.

The effectiveness of the person-centered approach in fostering growth and maturity depends largely on the training, integration, and maturity of the formator. Giallanza (2000, p. 19) declares that, 'to be effective, formators must have serious and solid preparation and a generous and total dedication in their commitment to be imitators of Christ in the service of their brothers and sisters.' Indeed, with some training and the use of counselling skills, the formator is equipped to accompany and guide the candidates to maturity in the cognitive, emotional, relational, sexual, social, spiritual and apostolic spheres. Formators can best foster growth in candidates by being aware of how they themselves have developed greater self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-acceptance in their own psychosexual journey.

Looking into their own growth process formators may see how personal reflection and facing new challenges helped them to grow in confidence and esteem. To achieve this goal, the formator needs to be non-judgmental, capable of great patience, compassion, empathy and congruent (Kofler, 2007). The formator becomes the mirror wherein the formees can see their strengths, limitations and possibilities, and journey towards integral self-transformation. Formators who have arrived at integrating their own pain and struggles growing up in their relational lives will be able to foster growth in others.

McClone (2009) argues that formators can assist greatly in fostering personal growth in candidates by the attitude they personally model with regard to dealing with their own limitations and weaknesses. By modelling acceptance and encouraging growth-enhancing opportunities in community, ministry and studies they can foster candidates' own growth and acceptance of their whole selves. Formators can model balanced self-care that reflects their genuine reliance on God and others; they can model both healthy communication and an appreciation for solitude and holistic living. "If there is low self-esteem and unhealthy patterns that seem to block genuine growth, candidates may need more professional help to unlock destructive negative tapes from the past and substitute more affirming self-talk" (2009, p. 13).

One of the difficulties faced in formation is the uncovering and healing of past emotional wounds. Often times, the difficulty lies in moving towards the center, the core of the being; discovering what is in each layer may involve

some pains like the process of peeling an onion. There will be resistance to face the wounded self, the self that needs healing.

In his book, *Reconciliation: Healing The Inner Child* (2010) Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, scholar, and human rights activist, asserts that the cry we hear from deep in our hearts comes from the wounded child within. Healing this inner child's pain will transform negative emotions. Fostering growth and healing involves uncovering these wounds that have been repressed and pushed to the unconscious so that they can heal properly. This demands, on the part of both the formee and formator, trust, openness, humility and availability; setting aside his precious time on a regular basis. Formators can foster growth by their own capacity to self-disclose in appropriate ways as well as in the way they listen, empathize and seek to understand the formees experiences.

Personal growth can be achieved through regular experience-based involvement and ministries in keeping with the stage of the formee, with guidance, tools for personal reflection, integration, evaluation and feedback. Branch and Paranjape (2002) argue that personal reflection leads to growth of the individual, morally, psychologically, and emotionally, as well as cognitively. Through personal reflection and guidance, the formees can be helped to acknowledge and challenge possible assumptions on which their ideas, feelings and actions are based, to acknowledge their anxieties, doubts, fears, and to better understand their strengths and weaknesses.

The formee is led to identify and question his underlying values, attitudes and beliefs, as well as identify possible inadequacies or areas for

improvement and growth. To the degree of the openness of the formee, personal accompaniment can foster a greater emotional and psychosexual maturity for a consecrated and celibate way of living. Lespinay (2010) is of the opinion that the formator needs to be open enough to listen and to understand.

The task of the formator is to guide the formee in a way that moves him (formee) forward to deeper insight into his life in relation to others. The formator intentionally journeys with the formee from the previous phases of life and gradually frees him from irrational beliefs, develop a positive self-image, inner freedom and gain a certain degree of independence; improve his social and relational skills and capacity for healthy relationships, intimacy and friendships with persons of one's own and the complementary sex. Consequently, the formee feels empowered, self-reliant and competent enough to cope with life's challenges and takes active care for the evolution of his life commitment. This care must be exercised at the level of thinking, acting, choosing, understanding, reflecting, experiencing.

A spiritual author Parangimalil (1995) suggests steps of attaining personal integration and wholeness: self-awareness, sensitivity, acceptance, reflection, conviction, decision to change, commitment, action and evaluation. Personal growth and change is required to be who God has called me to be. In the next part of our research we try find ways through which the formator may guide the formee towards the internalization of the values upon which priestly and religious life are founded.