

PROGRAM OF FORMATION

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"

(Is 61:1-2)

**PROGRAM OF FORMATION
ATLANTIC PROVINCE**

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PREAMBLE

A vocation is a mystery of God encountering His people. This meeting takes place through a variety of experiences including models that our Province proposes with the witness, spirituality and apostolate of each individual Missionary. We are heralds and witnesses of the Word of God. The example of our common life will be the best witness and the best invitation to enter into following Christ who redeemed us with his Blood.

Conscious, therefore, that our vocation is a continuous dialogue and progressive growth, along our path, we feel led to open our hearts and guide each person to welcome the gift of the call and to respond to it with the greatest possible freedom and responsibility.

Both individually and as a community we want to bear witness to a common life by living as Christ, in poverty, celibacy and obedience.¹ Even though we do not formally take vows, we give testimony through the bond of charity after the example of Christ who gave his Blood for the love of humanity.

For this reason, the Formation Program of the Atlantic Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood strives to observe all applicable norms of the Holy See, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Normative Texts and General Statutes of our

¹ Constitution

C17 - Just as the individual members give witness of poverty, so does the Congregation as a whole, being careful to avoid whatsoever may offend those we serve. The Provinces of the Congregation share their resources with one another, those which are better endowed assisting those which suffer need. The acquiring, possessing, administering and alienating of temporal goods by the Congregation is governed by canon 741.

C18 - Because of our love of Christ, our members undertake to observe perfect continence in celibacy, which is a form of life of proved worth in the Church. It makes them free for God and for service to their neighbour as they await their resurrection in Christ. In community life, characterized by mutual understanding and fellowship, this charism finds protection and development.

C19 - In imitation of Christ who shed his blood, the members are obedient to the Father's will, primarily as manifested in the Gospel. This implies a sacrifice of the will of the member in order to cooperate in community life and in service to the people of God. This obedience finds a practical expression in our observance of the Constitution and of our norms and regulations, as well as in our obedience to the lawfully constituted authority in our Congregation and obedience to the Supreme Pontiff as highest superior (canon 590 §2).

Congregation for defining and realizing our mission in today's world.

The primary purpose of formation is to prepare candidates for incorporation either as brothers or priests in the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood for the Roman Catholic Church.

The formation of candidates includes two particular times and places: initial formation in a house of discernment and special formation at the Merlini Study Centre.

In order to achieve the goals of formation as a Missionary of the Precious Blood, the Atlantic Province's formation program seeks to establish the following practical guidelines:

An aspirant is a resident of our house of discernment or Merlini Study Centre who is completing Initial Formation.

A candidate is a person in formation who has completed initial formation and is resident in the Merlini Study Centre and completing special formation.

A man who freely chooses to start formation with the Atlantic Province must also freely accept and respect its requirements.

The general demands and rewards of life in community lived in the bond of charity, expand self-knowledge and self-control, and cultivate generosity of spirit.

PART I - TIMELINE FOR FORMATION

TITLE I INITIAL FORMATION

“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him.” (Sirach 2: 1-11)

Initial formation focuses principally on helping candidates adjust to community life within the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood and specific the Atlantic Province. This process is guided by the Director of Initial Formation who may be the Director of Vocations and is assisted by the Vocation/Formation Committee. The duration for this level of formation is six months.

Advancement to special formation is based on the following criteria:

- a. Age of the candidate (maximum 45)
- b. Capability to live in community
- c. Recommendation by the Director of initial formation and the Vocation/Formation Committee stating that the candidate has sufficiently met goals related to personal growth and spiritual growth.

Candidates for priestly formation are required an undergraduate degree and to complete a minimum of eight philosophy courses before they begin their theological studies at the Merlini Study Centre.

The House of Discernment

Initial formation is an indispensable period of preparation, probation and acquiring a better understanding of the community, and apostolic life of the Atlantic Province.¹

Aspirants for initial formation are evaluated by the Director of Vocations upon recommendation of his pastor, workplace (current or previous) and a teacher. If the potential aspirant has been in another formation program, a recommendation from either a seminary rector or religious superior is also required.

Upon completion of his application, the potential aspirant will be approved by the Vocation/Formation committee and notification given to the provincial council.

The aspirant will then be informed of the date on which initial formation is to begin. Upon completion of initial formation and the recommendation of the Vocation/Formation Committee, that aspirant may enter special formation.

Guidelines

In order to achieve the goals of the initial formation, aspirants focus on three areas: Community life, Spirituality and Mission. The following practical guidelines assist in this process:

Community life

- dinner in common
- Participating in community gatherings
- Getting to know the members of the Province

¹ General Statutes S19 - Safeguarding the norms of Common Law (canon 735 §2) and of our Congregation in regard to the acceptance of candidates for priesthood or brotherhood, they are admitted to the formation referred to in article C35 of the Constitution after a period of adequate preparation and probation according to the accepted formation program of the Province, Vicariate, or Mission.

Spirituality

- Prayer in common including Mass and Liturgy of the Hours
- Participation in Precious Blood devotions
- Joining with those in special formation for Advent and Lenten retreats
- Weekly presentations on vocational discernment and the life of St. Gaspar.

Mission

- Engaging in an approved ministry
- An understanding and appreciation of the Union of the Blood of Christ (USC)
- Inviting others to learn about the Congregation and its mission.

Room and board and necessary transportation costs will be provided by the Atlantic Province to candidates in initial formation².

² Provincial Customary Title II C

To candidates in Initial Formation: i) Room and board; ii) Necessary transportation.

TITLE II SPECIAL FORMATION

“Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message”. (Mark 3,13-14)

This level of formation is done at the Merlini Study Centre for a minimum of three years duration or a maximum of four years duration.

The Rite of Admission to Special Formation is celebrated on and or near May 24th, the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians.

Candidates are evaluated on the following criteria with specific goals established for each of them at the beginning of every semester:

- Personal growth
- Spiritual growth
- Academic progress

Regarding completion of the academic degree required for ordination (M.Div), the following criteria apply:

- The Director of Formation approves all course selections prior to registration.
- A minimum grade of C+ is required for all classes.
- Candidates in danger of receiving a grade lower than C+ for a course must notify the Director of Formation before a failure is irreversible.
- The Director of Formation receives all final grades for course work completed at the end of each semester.

- Any commitments to apostolic works and/or field placements are to be approved by the Director of Formation in consultation with the Vocation/Formation Committee.

If a holy orders candidate has already completed the Master of Divinity degree or significant credits toward its completion, an alternative program will be designed in consultation with the Direction of Formation.

Brother candidates receive a theoretical and practical formation appropriate to their recognized spiritual needs and personal aptitudes.

They are encouraged to pursue some academic studies, a professional accreditation or a technical skill during the three-year period of Special Formation.

Candidates are provided with:

- Room and board.
- Transportation allowance as needed.
- Health insurance premiums for those not covered.
- Approved tuition and books.
- Personal allowance - \$150.00 per month in the currency of the country of residence.³

³ Provincial Customary Title II B

To candidates in Special and Advanced Formation: i) Personal allowance - \$150.00 per month; ii) Transportation allowance as needed; iii) Health insurance premiums for those not covered; iv) Approved tuition and books; v) Room and board.

Special formation proceeds according to the following schedule:

Year 1

- Presentations are given on the charism and writings of St. Gaspar and on the Bond of Charity.
- Presentations are given on theology and spirituality of the Precious Blood.
- Candidates familiarize themselves with the various apostolates of the Atlantic Province.

Year 2

- Presentations are given on the Normative Texts, Provincial Statutes and Canon Law concerning Societies of the Apostolic Life (SAL).
- Presentations are given on the Circular Letters of Venerable John Merlini.
- Candidates make a cross-cultural experience whose location(s) will be determined in consultation with the Director of Formation.

Year 3

- Presentations are given on the history of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the Atlantic Province and the USC.
- Presentations are given on other relevant topics.
- Following the completion of the academic degree, candidates complete a course either in CPE or PCE.

After submitting a written request to the Provincial Director, the rite of candidacy is celebrated in conjunction with the rite of admission to special formation.⁴

⁴ Can. 1034 §1 - A person aspiring to the diaconate or presbyterate is not to be ordained unless he has first been enrolled among the candidates through the liturgical rite of admission by the authority mentioned in cann. ⇒ 1016 and ⇒ 1019; his petition is previously to have been written in his own hand, signed, and accepted in writing by the same authority.

Similarly, the rites of installation to the ministries of lector and acolyte are celebrated at the end of the second and third years of special formation respectively.

Upon the recommendation of the Director of Formation, Brother candidates may also be installed in the aforesaid ministries.

Upon recommendation of the Director of Formation and completion of the Program of Special Formation, a candidate may be definitively incorporated in accordance with the Normative Texts and the Provincial Statutes.

Definitive Incorporation is celebrated on December 3rd, the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

Prior to definitive incorporation, candidates make a five-day retreat at a place approved by the Director of Formation.

Merlini Study Centre

Formation takes place in a setting where candidates can grow in intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ. This process is guided by the Director of Formation and other responsible personnel.

In this way, the formation house can become *"a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy."*⁵

A common rule, based on mutual respect and responsibility provides direction and guidance for this special time. It is characterized by a regular schedule that seeks to develop habits and behaviours that reflect Gospel values as taught by the Church and exemplified by St. Gaspar Del Bufalo and other exemplary missionaries.

The formation community offers ample opportunity to deepen the bond of charity. Various tasks within the house, ministries and community events allow the candidates to grow in the care of others and the good of souls.

The Director of Formation serves as a Local Director of the Merlini Study Centre. His role is to foster a spirit of co-responsibility and communion and to oversee all aspects of the formation program. He is assisted by the Vocation/Formation Committee and the Formation Team as his closest collaborators.

As recommended by Canon Law a Spiritual Director it may be appointed by the Provincial Director.⁶

⁵ Pastores Dabo Vobis N 60

⁶ Can. 239 §2 - Every seminary is to have at least one spiritual director, though the students remain free to approach other priests.

Admission to Special Formation

The criteria for admitting a person to priestly formation are governed by the Code of Canon Law.⁷

To these general criteria are added other specific norms for the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood as found in the General Constitution, Fundamental Principles, Title III, from C28 to C44. This applies equally to all candidates.

Candidates are to meet the following criteria:

- a positive recommendation from the Director of Initial Formation attesting to the applicant's suitability and positive results of a behavioural assessment.
- a written request to the Provincial Director.
- positive results from psychological assessment.
- a medical report attesting to the applicant's physical health.
- transcript from previous academic studies.

⁷ Can. 241 §1 - A diocesan bishop is to admit to a major seminary only those who are judged qualified to dedicate themselves permanently to the sacred ministries; he is to consider their human, moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities, their physical and psychic health, and their correct intention.

PART II - DIMENSIONS OF FORMATION

TITLE I: COMMUNITY LIFE

Community life centers on the ways we come together, as brothers in Christ to support, nurture and encourage one another in our vocation. As such, it fundamentally involves respect for the rights of others in the house, a commitment to meals and prayers in common, hospitality toward visitors, and a commitment to participating in the monthly house congressus. The Director of Formation approves any absence from community events, particularly meals and prayers.

Residents of the house are co-responsible for meal preparation, hospitality, maintenance of common rooms, personal rooms, laundry area, kitchen, library and Chapel.

The Director of Formation assigns particular responsibility.

Alcohol and Drugs

It is never appropriate for one preparing for public ministry in the Church to improperly or excessively use alcohol. No opened bottles of alcohol are permitted in any candidates' rooms. The use of drugs other than for medicinal purposes is unacceptable. The use of marijuana is prohibited at all times. If chemical dependency or problematic use of alcohol is observed, this matter will be brought to the attention of the candidate immediately. After prompt review of each individual case of abuse in these matters, the Director of Formation will determine whether treatment and/or dismissal are an appropriate response for the candidate in question.

Technology

Inappropriate use of technological devices is not permitted during meals and chapel services.

TITLE II - ACADEMIC LIFE

Academic life centres on obtaining the necessary skills and training to be an effective minister of the Church and Missionary of the Precious Blood. As such, academic studies should be undertaken with diligence and dedication to learning.

Study Time

All candidates are expected to spend sufficient time studying for their courses and researching topics for assigned papers.

To foster an atmosphere of study, a period of general silence is observed in the house from 10:00 pm - 9:00 am. This period of silence means that no loud music is to be played and that the community TV/DVD must be turned off during the aforementioned times. The Director of Formation can make exceptions.

TITLE III - SPIRITUAL LIFE

Spiritual life centres on a constant striving to develop a greater intimacy with God and finding the courage to respond to God's call. A strong spiritual life is the living stream of any ministry.

Among suitable means to achieve a mature spiritual life are: the Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio Divina, spiritual reading, lives of the saints, participation in the Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, CPPS devotional practices, meditation, eucharistic adoration, the rosary and spiritual direction.

The evangelical counsels of obedience, celibacy and poverty foster total availability for following Christ and serve as a sign of the total gift of self.

Prayer

The schedule for prayer is determined by the Director of Formation at the beginning of each semester, attendance at which is mandatory.

Those in Special Formation must choose a spiritual director whose name is provided to the Director Formation.

Retreats and Days of Recollection

Two annual retreats, one during Advent and the another during Lent will be arranged.

TITLE IV - PERSONAL LIFE

Personal life centers on individual goals and expectations which enable the candidates to become all that God wills. This dimensions of human formation guides the candidates to acquire psychological maturity, a sense of responsibility and authentic freedom, self-control and the exercise of those virtues that are most esteemed by all: affability and kindness, a sense of hospitality, constant respect for justice, fidelity to one's word, balanced judgment, consistent behaviour, sincerity of heart, prudence and discretion, generosity and availability, fraternal relationship, ready understanding, forgiveness and consolation following the example of Saint Gaspar.⁸

Legal Status

Non-Canadians must have a student visa to pursue full-time academic studies in Canada. The visa has to be requested from one's Country of origin before coming to Canada.

The Atlantic Province provides the necessary documentation to apply for a student visa. No funds will be given for this purpose unless it is reimbursed to the Province.

Health

Non-Canadians enrol in UHIP (university health insurance plan) to cover any medical expenses.

Candidates are expected to exercise regularly and keep physically and mentally fit.

Free Time

Candidates are entitled to free time on Sundays and one weekend per semester. The Director of Formation must approve any absences.

⁸ Constitution C29 - Their human formation aims at acquiring psychological maturity, a sense of responsibility and of authentic freedom, self mastery and the exercise of those virtues that are highly regarded among human beings: sincerity of heart, constant concern for justice, fidelity to one's word and courtesy of manner.

Reasons for dismissal

Certain behaviours are unacceptable and may be a cause for dismissal. Such a decision is made by the Director of Formation in consultation with the Vocations/Formation Committee who will strive for consensus before informing the Provincial Director and his council.

The following matters may constitute grounds for dismissal:

- Slander, calumny, or detraction
- Stealing, lying or cheating
- Sexual harassment or misconduct
- Inappropriate use of electronic devices for unhealthy, illegal, or immoral purposes
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Criminal offence
- Significant psychological disorders

TITLE V - APOSTOLIC LIFE

Apostolic life centers on putting into practice what is learned in the academic arena through ministering to persons and situations needing a liberating message of the Gospel. Candidates are encouraged to explore a variety of apostolic ministries while respecting the requirements and obligations of their specific program.

Such ministries include service in parishes, schools, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, foreign missions, etc. The apostolic dimension of formation assists candidates in acquiring missionary zeal, especially toward the poor, the sick, the sinner, the non-believer and the stranger.

The Ministry of the Word holds a significant claim upon the formation of a Missionary of the Precious Blood along with collaboration with the laity. Courses in scripture and preaching are especially valued as is working with the Union of the Blood of Christ and other means for sharing the Spirituality of the Precious Blood.

The Director of Formation must approve any apostolic undertaking.

EVALUATION

The Director of Formation meets with each candidate at least once per semester to monitor his progress in meeting the goals of the several dimensions of formation.

The Director of Formation writes an annual evaluation and reviews with each candidate areas of strength and weakness with accompanying recommendation.

CONCLUSION

The first impulse, from which should move a candidate is to unite himself more closely to Christ, to humbly accept his teachings, and to apply them in all the moments of his life, so that faith will always enlighten his path and his conduct will always be a reflection of his faith.

The intent of this formation program is to accompany candidates on their journey toward the priesthood or brotherhood.

It seeks to be a real itinerary marked by precise steps which allow the gradual assimilation of various elements including the human, spiritual, theological and pastoral qualities expected by the Catholic Church and our CPPS heritage.

This itinerary is characterized by a progressive purification of motives, moments of validation and means calibrated to the needs of each candidate.