

Constitution 6

Formation and Transformation

56. The disciples followed the Lord Jesus in his ministry of proclaiming the kingdom and healing the afflicted. Jesus also spent long days alone with his disciples, speaking to them of the mysteries of his kingdom and forming them to the point when they too could be sent on his mission. Later they would return for his comment and for a deeper hearing because of what they had experienced. Later still they were visited by the fire of his Spirit, who transformed their understanding of all he had ever taught them. We too are sent to his mission as men formed and in need of lifelong formation for his service.
57. We pronounce our vows in a moment, but living them for the sake of the kingdom is the work of a lifetime. That fulfillment demands of us more than the mere wish, more even than the firm decision. It demands the conversion of our habits, our character, our attitudes, our desires.
58. It is so with our commitment as Christians. Our consecration in baptism is a departure on a journey that requires us, as it does all his people, to be refashioned by the Lord's creating grace over and over again. Likewise with our lives in a religious community, we must have formed in us by God's enablement the living likeness of Jesus Christ.
59. The journey begins before our profession and ends only at our resurrection. We would be created anew to the point when we can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." It is the Lord who gives us both the desire and the accomplishment. For our part we must submit to the wisdom and the discipline that will purify us of our selfishness and will make us wholehearted in the service of his people.
60. Our experience in Holy Cross is demanding. It is joyful as well. And so it should give us a life to which we would happily invite others. The Lord's call will be heard in our steadfast witness to the gospel, the companionship we offer one another, the cheerfulness with which we serve in our mission without counting the cost, and the sincere welcome we openly offer men who join us. If we delight in our vocation, we will share it with others.
61. Candidates who come to the congregation deserve from us the cultivation of their maturity, faith, generosity, learning and ability to live in community. With them we assess their character and growth as Christians, and we both discern and assist them to discern whether they are disposed and able to move towards joining our congregation. The duration of each one's candidacy is determined by the provincial, and it is he who admits candidates to the novitiate.

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62. The novitiate is the beginning of life in the congregation. Novices are helped to form themselves in meditation and prayer, in the mutual services of a common life, in apostolic service, and in knowledge of the history and spirituality, character and mission of Holy Cross. In short they are challenged and helped to open their hearts to the gospel, to live under the same roof with one another, and to create a brotherhood of disciples. The novitiate is their apprenticeship in celibacy, poverty and obedience. The director, or master of novices, appointed by the provincial and under his authority, has full personal responsibility for the formation of the novices.
63. The provincial reviews the qualifications of candidates for valid admission and with the consent of his council admits them to the novitiate. He determines as well the date and the manner in which the novitiate period begins.
64. The novitiate takes place in a house designated by the superior general with the consent of his assistants. Its duration is at least twelve months in the novitiate house, and no more than two years, including brief periods of active ministry. Absences are regulated according to canon law. The novitiate concludes with profession of temporary vows, to which a novice is admitted by the provincial. His vows are received, as at every later state of profession, by the provincial or his delegate, unless the superior general receives them.
65. Prior to his profession the novice freely cedes the administration of his goods to whomever he wishes, and disposes of their use and benefits for the entire period of vows. This he does in written form, valid under civil law, with the stipulation that it is revocable.
66. No one admitted as a novice for one society in Holy Cross may transfer to the other society except by agreement of the provincial(s) concerned with the consent of the provincial councilors and by permission of the superior general given with the consent of his assistants.

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67. This profession of vows is ordinarily followed by a program of formation that involves new members in further study and internship directed towards their eventual form of service and the needs of our mission. All members are given theological and pastoral training for a lay or ordained ministry. They are encouraged to reflect upon their apostolic, community and life experience in the light of the gospel and systematic theological inquiry. They are likewise brought to a deepening of their spiritual life and prayer, especially through the relationship of regular spiritual direction. In the meantime the maturity, judgment and generosity needed for mission and common life are both cultivated and evaluated. Thus each time the provincial admits a member to renewal of his vows, it represents our affirmation of his growth towards a character that is soundly human, explicitly Christian and better prepared for a lifetime in Holy Cross.
68. The period of initial formation in annual vows after the novitiate is for at least three years and ordinarily no more than six years. It may be extended in individual cases up to another three years by the provincial. It concludes with the profession of perpetual vows, to which a member is admitted by the superior general. This profession is preceded by a time of immediate preparation determined by the provincial.
69. Before pronouncing these vows, the member makes a will which must be valid according to civil law and provide for all present or future property. Any change in this will or in his earlier cession of administration and disposition of benefits requires the permission of the provincial. Permission of the local superior or director suffices for a change in one's will when urgency does not allow recourse to the provincial, for routine acts required by civil law, and for the disposition of property. If a religious leaves the community, this cession of administration is thereby nullified and his will is returned to him.
70. Those who come to us from other religious institutes, if they are in perpetual vows, follow a program of at least three years determined by the provincial in accord with canon law.
71. All should be provided the opportunity for the best pastoral and theological training and advanced education that is appropriate and that, as a community committed to poverty, we can provide. But since everyone in the congregation should, for the benefit of his ministry and of himself, cultivate an inquiring and well-nourished mind broadened by his experience and reflection, there is no age when we can lay aside further systematic or experiential learning, or continuing education.

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72. We should give members in initial formation access to the distinctive benefits of being in the Congregation of Holy Cross. We are a community of clerical and lay religious. Initiation for members of each society is more complete if they have some experience of the other society. Cooperative formation programs between societies and provinces and, if feasible, with our sisters in Holy Cross make these advantages even more accessible. Also, since we are a worldwide congregation, there is benefit when some can receive a portion of their formation in other provinces or districts or cultures.
73. Opportunity for direct supervised experience of the life, suffering and hopes of the poor should be provided during initial formation and for the sake of ongoing formation as well. For religious of every age this can be an experience that is both formative and transforming.
74. Initial formation is supervised and principally provided by members of the congregation in perpetual vows. The staff of a house of formation shares the responsibility with the superior for the development of all the members in the program. They should be effective educators in the faith, have extensive experience of life and ministry in Holy Cross and be adequately prepared for their tasks. They work together as a team and live in one community with those in formation. The formation programs are arranged to permit each person to assume appropriate responsibility for his formation and to allow both him and the congregation to discern the reality of his vocation.
75. At the completion of initial formation the supervision proper to that period comes to an end. But it is precisely at this time of transition to more autonomy, when we feel less accountable for our personal, communal and apostolic lives, that we form habits that are long-lived. The provinces provide for this transition in the life and work of members so that formation truly continues.
76. It is commonly imagined that our formation is most extensive when we are beginners. But often our most radical formative experiences come upon us when we are well into adulthood. Indeed, we can better grasp and accept profound self-scrutiny, the questioning of our established assumptions and ambitions, and deepening initiation into Christ when we have walked the path of adult experience and responsibility. Programs of continuing renewal in the community are one very helpful way of sharing that lifelong formation.

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77. Lifelong formation is lifelong growth. As a daily aid for self-knowledge and self-governance, the examination of conscience allows us to find how we succeed or fall short in both our common life and our mission. A grace more powerful still is given in appropriately frequent sacramental confession, whereby each of us opens his conscience to the Lord, to the Lord's minister and to himself and there finds reconciliation with his neighbors and pardon from the Lord, who gave his life lest any of us be lost to him. Spiritual direction becomes even more advantageous as we grow older in the congregation, for as we gain in seniority and responsibility in our work, we may find it more difficult to account honestly to ourselves in God's sight for what we are doing with our life and why. All of these practices are part of ordinary and desirable formation throughout our lives. And all of them assist us to fasten our minds and our hearts more attentively and more generously upon the Lord and our service to his people.

78. Notwithstanding our concern that every priest and brother in Holy Cross benefit from a lifelong formation into Christ, we also know that some of the most decisive transformations are God's gracious gift to us not when we conform to his will but when we have gravely failed him. For one man the crisis may come as a breakdown, a failure to negotiate one of life's passages. For another it may be a long course of self-indulgence and deception ended by collapse. However the benefits of our formation may disintegrate, however we may fall, we need the supportive confrontation and sensitive encouragement of our confreres for us to be rehabilitated. This is the way some of the wisest and strongest men in our community have, by God's grace, been raised up among us. Similarly Peter became the Lord's true and reliable disciple not during the days he followed in Galilee but after he disowned his Lord and wept and was given the opportunity not to become as he once was but to serve as he never had served.

79. Thus we learn that formation and transformation are both the Lord's gifts which we as a community can help one another to receive.