



# CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS

Superior Generalis

Prot.: 0000 180/2024

Rome, September 26, 2024

Memorial of Blessed Gaspar Stanggassinger

*Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer*

## **YEAR DEDICATED TO MISSION FORMATION**

*The Lord who instructs us to rekindle the gift of God that dwell within us*

Const. 77-90, EG; 050-085; Mt 10:5-15, Lk 9:1-6, 2 Tm 1:6

*"I want to listen to everyone with pleasure as if I have nothing to do."*

(Gaspar Stanggassinger)

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DEAR CONFRERES, FORMANDI, OUR LAY ASSOCIATES IN THE MISSION AND, IN A SPECIAL WAY, ALL THE FORMATORS OF THE CONGREGATION:

1. Dear Confreres, Formators, by means of this letter, on the feast of Blessed Gaspar Stanggassinger (1871-1899), formator, and in this year dedicated to Formation for Mission, *I want to thank you for your hard work in service of Redemptorist formation.* In the context in which we live, with so many challenges, being a formator is not an easy task. Still, neither is it impossible when there is openness to the Spirit, teamwork, listening to the formandi, creativity, and readiness for new learning through a personal program of ongoing formation that enriches the spiritual life and helps in carrying out the mission. *This letter can serve at Formators' meetings in the (Vice) Province/Region to open reflections on our Redemptorist formation: Who are we forming? How are we forming? For what are we forming? How do we need to form to respond to our charism today? Does our formation process help those in formation discern and acquire a profound vision of Redemptorist identity?*
2. *The formator is a missionary!* Whoever thinks that those in a formation house are not on mission, or the formator who thinks that his work is not missionary, is mistaken. "For formators, the task of formation is their most important apostolate" (*Ratio Formationis Generalis*=RFG 2020 n. 60). The word mission comes from *mittere*, to send. To send or



be sent to carry out an office or perform a specific task is almost always of particular importance. To send (*mandare*) is to entrust, to give a hand, a helping hand. The envoy receives a mandate and has the confidence of someone or of the community. He does not go on his own. The mission is carried out in the name of Jesus, who was sent by the Father and fulfilled his mission in his name until the end (cf. Jn 20:21). Thus, the formator is a missionary who, with his humanity, frailties, and virtues, collaborates in the redemptive work of the Father by forming people to work in his harvest (cf. Lk. 10:1-2).

3. It is important to remember that the Tridentine model, which lasted until the Second Vatican Council, was a process of mass formation. This process no longer holds true today. Forming persons then was not as complex as today because external influences within the formation house were less. Today, formators must compete with social networks and so many media, "other formators" with backward, clericalist, and closed theological and ecclesiastical conceptions, which are not in tune with Vatican II and all that it means for the Church. Some of these conceptions are not in communion with the Church itself...if in the past the candidates came from Catholic environments, today they often come from realities in which they have had almost no contact with the Catholic faith or experiences in pastoral communities, with dysfunctional family realities in which many traumas and wounds are present. I believe that, in this art of forming people, the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37), together with the words of *Amoris Laetitia* in chapter 8: "accompany, discern and integrate fragility", can be enlightening for formators in many situations, especially in the house of formation.

Therefore, being a formator today, and in this challenging context, requires some preparation:

- a) *Create spaces of trust. It is only possible to form an atmosphere of trust where persons are free to express themselves without fear of punishment.* If there is no climate of trust, a culture of superficiality and appearances is created that can hide harmful realities for the person and consecrated life. If we want to form Redemptorist persons and missionaries, fraternal dialogues should be spaces of welcome and accompaniment where the formandi can present themselves with their frailties and strengths and make a profound process of discernment that leads them to opt for what is fundamental for their lives. If we want perfect formandi, we definitely can close our formation houses. Formation is a process of prayer, discernment, and decision-making to say "yes" or "no" (cf. RFG n. 64).
- b) *Work individually with the person.* Each formandi has his individuality and his formation needs. In this sense, regular fraternal dialogues help identify each person's needs, and from there, it is possible to accompany the candidate, providing the necessary support or even therapeutic accompaniment. This



individual work is important to discover the fragilities and potentialities of each young person.

- c) *Accompany the individual within the context of the group.* The Redemptorist mission is carried out in community (cf. Const. 21-45). It is not enough to work with the individual, but it is necessary to work in community. Therefore, young people need to know each other's personal and vocational history, work as a team, choose leaders among themselves, and take turns doing small administrative tasks, such as going with the formator to the supermarket to do the household shopping, helping with the bills, etc. These are ways of doing group work and awakening the young people to reality, so that they are not alienated, reinforcing their sense of belonging and exercising leadership. Group work is important for people to develop their group skills. For us, the ability to work in community is very important because we are a community of persons (cf. Const. 34-38), of prayer (cf. Const. 26-33), of conversion (cf. Const. 40-42), open (cf. Const. 43) and organized (cf. Const. 44-45).
- d) *Creating a culture of care.* As we know, today the situation of abuse is a sore point in the Church. Much emphasis is placed on sexual abuse, which is an undeniable reality, *but we cannot forget other types of abuse: psychological and spiritual, moral, and economic.* In this sense, *it is important to create a culture of care for others in the house of formation and our religious communities, which implies respect and not harming others, whoever they may be.* Including other professionals in formation will help us in this important process because we are consecrated and are called to care for people, especially the most vulnerable.
- e) *We are formed to be Redemptorist missionaries. Our formation is not for diocesan life or to work in an NGO, and our formandi should be aware of what this implies.* We are formed for consecrated life, and they should be aware that our way of life implies two ways of being: priests and brothers! First of all, we are consecrated missionaries, and the vocation of the Brother must be considered. It is no less than that of the priest! We cannot run the risk of creating or reinforcing a clericalist vision within Redemptorist consecrated life. Clericalism is the distortion of priestly ministry, which is clothed in authoritarianism, spiritual emptiness, and narcissism as a way of maintaining the *status quo*, which annihilates pastoral creativity and community life and does so much harm to the Church, the People of God.
- f) *Spirituality sustains our consecrated life and our mission.* It is important to remind those in formation that Redemptorist spirituality is a source of living water to nourish their vocation. Our spirituality is Christ-centred, and there is no need to look for other spiritualities. Consecrated life and Redemptorist mission depend on a deep spiritual life. If this does not exist, our proclamation will be empty of



content and meaning. It is not only in the Novitiate that we deepen our spirituality; it is a gradual process according to each stage of formation and must continue for the life of the consecrated person. Spirituality helps to consolidate our identity as Redemptorist missionaries and sustains perseverance.

- g) *Awareness of ongoing formation.* Those in formation must become aware that ongoing formation begins the day they enter the house of formation. It shapes the Redemptorist being. It is not only something intellectual but embraces the totality of the person so that he may know himself, help in the process of maturing in the face of life, be aware of the world, possess hermeneutical keys to read the signs of the times and instruments to render good service to the People of God, especially regarding the formation of conscience. The witness of professed members who take it seriously is fundamental for young people. We must remember that responding to new questions with answers not adapted to the new times distances us from our mission in the Church. For their part, formators should not neglect their ongoing formation to be able to exercise their mission well. This does not exclude specialized formation in this area.
- h) *Teamwork.* RFG n. 85 reminds us of the importance of formators working as a team. There are many cases in the Congregation where, for one reason or another, there is only one formator in the formation house. The discernment process cannot be one-sided; having other perceptions for a healthy and just discernment is important. In these cases, it is important to listen to the professed members of the community to have a broader vision of the candidate.
4. Another aspect that we cannot neglect in the formation process of the candidates is pastoral formation. We are missionaries, and our entire formation is in view of this perspective! *It is important to consider the graduality of the processes and realities of the young people who are in our formation houses at each stage.* What happens in our formation communities is that we often receive young people who were enthusiastic and daring, who before had an intense life in the pastoral field. When they are at the doors of religious profession and ordination, they are disenchanted by the mission and by pastoral work. In some cases, there is even a decrease in the quality of the service they render. It is assumed that the young man who is about to make perpetual vows or to be ordained is capable of an understanding of his being and his missionary identity, as well as of the qualitative service he should render to the People of God. Graduality is important so that there is no divorce between being and doing, between theory and practice.
5. *It is important to think of pastoral care within the formative project and with accompaniment so that pastoral care be "prioritized, involved, accompanied, fruitful, and celebrated"* (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 24). Formators should be involved, yet not control, determine, or impose their pastoral concept, but to help in pastoral discernment so that young people may advance "along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion" (EG 25) to be close to the people,



especially the poorest and most abandoned. Often, formation houses are so far removed from reality, and many pastoral projects in formation are fragmented and left to the responsibility of parish priests and vicars who do not support the formandi and formators because they see themselves outside formation. *Formation is a joint effort and requires the collaboration of all!*

6. Formation is not only the responsibility of the formators. *It is also the responsibility of religious communities since they form by their example of fraternal life, spiritual life, apostolic zeal, and missionary zeal.* In this sense, just as each confrere must be responsible for vocation promotion (Const. 79), he is also responsible for formation. *Formation here does not mean sponsorship or preferences for those in formation, but witness of consecrated life, sense of belonging to the Congregation, joy in consecration, dedication to the apostolate, and encouragement for those who arrive to persevere.* Therefore, the religious communities of a (Vice)Province/Region have a great responsibility in the formation of future members and should also support and encourage the formators in their mission.
7. Dear formators, *formation is the art of forming, first of all, persons. Then, Redemptorist Missionaries with a profound humanity first experience Redemption and communicate it in their apostolic life.* This requires the patience of a craftsman who takes fragments and makes them shine skilfully after a long process in consecrated persons who reflect the face of the Redeemer. Do not be afraid to accept fragility and fragmentation. With welcome, wisdom, and patience, the formandi can be integrated into this work of art. *Many thanks for the service you render, believing in the person and in his ability to seek a path of holiness in our midst, and share with each one the way so that each may drink from the wellspring of the Redemptorist charism!* Do not be discouraged by criticism, especially when, after intense work, some candidates withdraw from the formation process offered by the Congregation. In the face of this, it is important to be self-critical, open to the Spirit, evaluate and improve the work, and continue forward.
8. May our Mother of Perpetual Help, the great Formator of the Redeemer, and Blessed Gaspar enlighten everyone in this art of forming persons and consecrated Redemptorists to be missionaries of hope and to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer. Go forward with joy and enthusiasm in this mission!

Faternally,



*Rogério Gomes, C.S.R.*  
Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R.  
Superior General

*Original: Spanish*