

A Case for the Ongoing Formation of the Diocesan Clergy

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Introduction

The Ongoing Formation of Priests is an area of increasingly critical importance to each diocese, and to the church universal, in the years since the Second Vatican Council. The document "*Prsebyterorum Ordinis*" had only given some broad outlines on this specific topic of ongoing formation, especially emphasizing on spiritual and intellectual dimensions of formation. But in recent times, Pope John Paul II had placed a greater stress on this question of ongoing formation for priests, most particularly in his apostolic exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*" (John Paul, 1992) and in the Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests (Congregation for the Clergy, 1994).

Traditionally we held a view that problems by which our priests were agonized could be resolved by persevering prayer, a sincere, sorrowful comprehensive Confession, and tough penance. A refreshing extended vacation far away from sources of temptation could have also helped. A transfer to another assignment was a common helping measure. Another solution was an extended spiritual, theological, pastoral updating course. In very serious cases, we would also recommend a holy and God-experiencing thirty-day retreat. Solitude and prayer, we were convinced, could resolve

the most serious problems (Quevedo, 2009). We now know, more than ever, that careful discernment of the whole process related to vocation such as attending closely to personality traits, family, upbringing, and environment are of prime importance. These have great impact on the recruitment and selection of candidates to the priestly and religious life, their initial formation and their on-going formation.

A. The Present Scenario of the Church and the Need for Ongoing Formation

Many studies have been undertaken in various parts of the world on psychological and developmental aspects of seminarians and newly ordained priests (Hemrick and Hoge, 1991; Dwyer, 1990) in recent years. These studies confirm that over the two to three decades an ever-growing number of both candidates for the priesthood, and those ordained to the priesthood, enter seminaries with seriously problematic, one could rightly say “dysfunctional,” family backgrounds. The ever growing numbers of divorced marriages and consequent single-parent households (even in India), or single-parental family situation due to economic reasons (fathers/husbands working abroad), alcoholism, domestic violence and even sexual abuse at home and related conflicted family situations have compounded the need for seminary formation curriculum which engage candidates on a deeply emotional and relational level as well as attending to their spiritual maturity and theological education.

Moreover, with the progress of Mass media, cell-phones, and T.V, more of our candidates and then priests come from families with little active practice of faith,— they bring with them seriously underdeveloped catechetical and spiritual backgrounds, and they have much less familiarity with ordinary parish and church life than could frequently be assumed in past years. However well-

intentioned are their motivations, and however genuine are their personal dedication to the church and their concern for society, the priests of our time need a comprehensive and well-designed programme of ongoing formation to build upon and sustain the formation begun in their seminary years (Bevilacqua, 1995).

There has to be a vision of ongoing formation within which individual courses and even processes become desirable, necessary, relevant, and useful for the priests in their particular situation. But a vision of ongoing formation depends very much on the vision of priesthood that we need to have. By the same token, we need to have a vision of formation that would be quite particular to Asia, and even to different regions and dioceses in Asia. It is in the perspective of this vision of Church, and of priesthood that we can integrate our seemingly disparate activities in the ongoing formation of the clergy, such as monthly spiritual recollections, monthly pastoral meetings, annual retreats, occasional theological and pastoral conferences, visits to priests, pastoral seminars, etc. All these are towards a particular vision of Church and priesthood—a holy Church with holy priests (Quevedo, 2009).

Pope John Paul II affirmed the good news of a deeper awareness of the dignity of the human person, a powerful thirst for peace and justice, a more open search for truth and the opening to unexpected possibilities for evangelization and rebirth of religious values in many parts of our world. At the same time the Pope also warned us of problematic or negative elements in modern society, including an overly personal subjectivity and the sustained allurements of materialism and hedonism. He gave special attention to the breakdown of the human family and the distortion of the true meaning of human sexuality (PDV. 6-7).

All too common in our day is the proclivity of the laity to criticize priests irresponsibly and to consider themselves “good

Catholics” despite their rejection of certain magisterial teachings. Others no longer respect any priest because of the notoriety of the cases of sexual abuse of minors by a few clergymen or sometimes a few cases of heterosexual involvements, and a few cases of alcoholism. Moreover, as fewer and fewer of our parishioners are committed to the regular practice of the faith (not in the sense of only attending Sunday Mass, but practicing faith in all aspects of their lives), priests find themselves saddened, dispirited and at times filled with a sense of malaise. All their efforts to enliven the faith of their people appear to be in vain. There is at the same time a greater expectation placed upon priests, both to respond to a call for more effective collaboration with the laity in carrying out the mission of the church and also to provide a courageous spiritual and moral leadership of the faith community in engaging the modern world (Bevilacqua, 1995). Indeed, much more is being demanded of our priests today, both within the church and in society as a whole.

B. Content—Documents of the Church Concerning Ongoing Formation

Both *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) and the *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests* (1994) open their discussions on ongoing formation with reference to Paul’s words to Timothy:” I remind you to rekindle the gift that God is within you” (2 Tim.1/6). Both documents clearly affirm that ongoing formation, like all priestly formation, is first of all a work of God’s spirit within the life of each individual priest, calling him to ever more complete rebirth in Christ.

Ongoing formation is founded upon the profound truth that every Christian believer, and most especially the priest-believer, is called to continual rebirth into the fullness of life in Christ. Each

experiences that process of rebirth not only in a general way, but also within the very specific mode of Christian life which is expressed in the particular vocation to which each has responded. Indeed, ongoing formation is in reality the very living out of the priestly vocation which, for the priest, is the way in which he will live the fullness of his union with Christ (Bevilacqua, 1995).

Ongoing formation for the priest is necessarily a lifelong process of ever-deepening personal incorporation in Christ. For it is our shared belief that Jesus, the Son of God, by his crucifixion and resurrection has transformed our lives in a way most wonderful, yet not easy to understand. We have been reborn, made anew, redeemed from our sins and brought into union with the life of the triune God. What seems most amazing is perhaps this: Like the first disciples (Rom.6-8), we too are truly reborn and yet at the very same time are still in process of being reborn (Bevilacqua, 1995). The priest, from ordination until death, is involved in a life-giving and creative formation process that is essential both to him and to the church. So the Congregation for the Clergy, reiterating the apostolic exhortation, affirms:

“The activity of formation is based on the dynamic demand intrinsic to the ministerial charism which is permanent and irreversible in itself. Therefore this can never be considered finished, neither on the part of the church which imparts it, nor on the part of the minister who received it” (Directory, No.73).

There are, of course, purely human reasons for such formation. Every profession requires a constant updating on the part of its participants, and we must demand no less of those who are ordained to the priesthood. There is constant need for intellectual renewal, and this is reality that must not be underestimated. Even the long years of academic preparation in the seminary are but the beginning of a lifetime of learning. In this process ongoing of

formation, we need to remember that new knowledge is constantly needed, and already acquired knowledge must be deepened, beneath both is this further demand: Continued formation in the priesthood fundamentally entails a spiritual deepening and revivification as well, for this formation is rooted in the very identity of the priest himself (Bevilacqua, 1995).

This ongoing formation is part of the very life and reality of the priest, as “the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the seminary or the religious house with the training programme which aimed at ordination”(PDV, No.71). It is equally critical that seminary formation programmes instill in each seminarian the realization of his own need for ongoing formation, and a personal commitment to continue his priestly formation after ordination.

The priest’s continuing formation is not simply a matter of developing professional techniques. Rather, its aim must be that of promoting a general and integral process of “constant growth, deepening each of the aspects of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral—as well as ensuring their active and harmonious integration, based on pastoral charity and in reference to it” (PDV, No.71). Hence the church proposes a very specific and well-focused goal; that is, “ongoing formation presents itself as a necessary means to the priest of today in order to achieve the aim of his vocation: the service of God and of his people”(Directory, No.71). Programmes of ongoing formation, whatever their particular focus and format, are intended to assist the priest in developing his identity and vocation within the church, and in sanctifying himself and others through the exercise of his pastoral ministry (Directory, No.71).

In the spirit of the above two documents (PDV & Directory), the programmes of ongoing formation designed in each diocese needs to include and harmonize these four essential dimensions of formation—the human, the spiritual, the intellectual and the pastoral. The integration of these four aspects of formation must be carried out in such a way as to assist each priest in the development of a full human personality matured in the spirit of service to others, intellectually prepared in the theological and human sciences, spiritually nourished by his communion with Jesus Christ and his love for the church, and engaged with zeal and dedication in the pastoral ministry to which he is assigned (Directory, No.74).

C. Design—Developing Integrated Programmes for Ongoing Formation

The ongoing formation is nothing more, and nothing less, than a fundamental part of the life-time formation of priests towards holiness and effective ministry. We need to be more fully aware of this since various aspects of the human formation of priests which, come up again and again after seminary formation, such as:

- self esteem and self-giving
- attitudes towards authority
- celibate chastity and sexuality
- detachment and a lifestyle of simplicity
- motivational maturity
- a sense of justice
- a moral conscience.

For this reason the place of ongoing formation is crucial. This is made more so by the complexity and busy schedule of an evolving pastoral ministry, the rapid advances of culture and

technology in the midst of tradition resisting social change, the increasing role of priests in the formation of the laity, the challenges of building community, the needs of integral evangelization, and the inadequacy of traditional modes of on-going formation (e.g., recollections, retreats, updating conferences and courses). In brief, what is needed today is a systematic program of ongoing priestly formation, with a full support system (resource persons, finances). These programmes must take into account all four aspects of formation stressed by *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) and the Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests (1994), namely, human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation and pastoral formation (Quevedo, 2009).

1. Human Formation

Many of us are more accustomed to thinking of ongoing formation in terms of continuing education programmes for the updating of the priest's theological knowledge and pastoral methods in confronting a rapidly changing world. Given today's circumstances and the backgrounds seminarians and priests, greater attention must be given to the human dimension of continuing formation as Pope John Paul II clearly taught in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation" (PDV, 43).

This human aspect provides the basis and ground for all the other dimensions of formation. It is an essential dimension, for it is precisely the human which is transformed by grace and brought into fullness of life in the Trinity. Far from understanding a priestly vocation as a suspension or denial of our humanness or as some form of aloofness from, or superiority over the rest of men, the council fathers had already noted in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*:

“Priests, while being taken from among men and appointed for men in the things that appertain to God that they may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, live with the rest of men as with brothers..... They are set apart in the midst of the people of God, but this is not in order that they be separated from that people or from any man, but they should be completely consecrated to the task for which God chooses them... They would be powerless to serve men if they remained aloof from their life and circumstances. Their very ministry makes a special claim on them not to conform themselves to this world, still it requires at the same time that they should live among men in this world.”(P.O, 3).

Maturity in human formation entails a twofold demand. First, the priest must come to know and continue to deepen his knowledge of himself in all his humanness as a creature of this world with particular strengths and weaknesses, so as to understand in the depth of his interior self the God who has created him, and there speaks to him most intimately. This means that he must look honestly at the reality of his own experience and reflect on that experience in order to discern within it God’s ongoing call to daily priestly living (Bevilacqua, 1995). Second, genuine human formation is not simply internal to the individual, but must be understood within the framework of the relationships. As the priest grows both in his knowledge of himself and in his relationships with others, he will be more deeply formed into his priesthood. This is why Pope John Paul II had said:

“Through his daily contact with people, his sharing in their daily lives, the priest needs to develop and sharpen his human sensitivity so as to understand their needs, respond to their demands, perceive their unvoiced questions and share the hopes and expectations, the joy and burdens which are part of life: Thus he will be able to meet and enter into dialogue with all people” (PDV,

72). The Directory (1994) too endorses the same as the *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (3) and *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (72)—the priest is called upon to “practice goodness of heart, patience, kindness, strength of soul, love for justice, even-mindedness, truthfulness to his word, coherence in the duties freely assumed, etc.”(Directory, 75). These are the virtues which must be reflected in the priest’s relationships and friendships.

For the priest, the process of coming to know himself is in many ways one with the process of knowing others. It is in and through his loving service to his people that he will come even more deeply to know himself. If the priest is to be truly involved in his own human formation, then he must grow in truly holy friendships, and he must both love and allow himself to be loved by his people—something that sounds both evident and easy, and yet is for many of us not so easy at all. Without the bonds of loving relationships with other people, he will be all the more drawn away from the real love of God. In an effective programme of human formation, each priest is challenged to exercise his priestly vocation with keen awareness of the reality of his human strengths and weaknesses, his loves and his relationships, all of which reveal to him the hand of God in his daily life.

Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua (1995) emphasized that special attention has to be given, in any programme, to the need to develop more effective ways of living and working together with other priests and with the people of the parish community. Moreover, a growing number of our priests are becoming more aware of the critical need for priests to tend to their physical and emotional health, to their relational abilities and to their friendships with other priests and with lay persons, all with the conviction that the more effectively priests live a mature human life, the more fully enriched will be their pastoral ministry to God’s people.

***Sexuality and Celibacy—an issue of human formation**

One of the issues that need to be seriously considered as regards human formation of priests is the issue of sexuality and celibacy. The sexual misconduct of priests has made headlines around the world whether it deals with pedophilia in the United States or the sexual abuse in Asia or Africa and so forth. The institutional church was to show off the mark in addresses these issues, but now in many places pastoral guidelines are being put in place to try to confront these problems more effectively. But the critical question remains whether it is going beyond responding to this or that particular case, and actually looking at the root of these problems.

Poor information is one issue. The relative isolation of priests is another. Men in the diocesan priesthood are often much on their own, living without family around them, and without an outlet to express their feelings. The absence of normal feeling outlets can lead to repression of those feelings which can be followed by their explosive release in outbursts of temper, or in some form of destructive behaviour like alcoholism. Priestly culture, itself, provides little guidance on how to deal with the question of the feminine. Those in charge have suffered from the same deficient formation and are not equipped to deal effectively with psychosexual problems. Therefore, they take refuge in denial or repression.

2. Spiritual Formation

The Council Fathers, in *Prebyterorum Ordinis*, quite pointedly had stressed the need of personal holiness and other spiritual requirements in the life of the priest. In discussing helps toward fostering the interior life and the continuing sanctification of the priest, the council documents highlights the nourishment which

a priest draws “through the word of God from the double table of Holy Scripture and the Eucharist,” and recommends fruitful reception of penance, faithful devotion to the Blessed Virgin, daily conversational prayer with Christ the Lord, and regular time for spiritual reading, a personal retreat and regular participation in individual spiritual direction” (PO.18).

Both *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and the Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests emphasize an integral relationship between the priest’s personal spirituality and his pastoral ministry. As expressed in the Directory: “This means that priests must avoid any dualism between spirituality and ministry, for it is the origin of some profound crises” (Directory, 71). The priest may never become so immersed in what he does for others that he ends up losing his vision of what he himself should be in his life with God. Indeed, it is this necessary attention to his union with God that makes it possible for the priest to be able to devote himself to others. So it is with the prayer-life of the priest as well. He does not pray so as to become adept at techniques of prayer. Rather, he prays so that he can, without reserve, put his life totally into the hands of God and trust in the strength of those hands even when he feels most helpless. If the priest is to share his priesthood in the mission of the Son, then he himself become with Jesus both servant and sacrifice.

The forms of prayer, methods of prayer, the insights of prayer and even the consolations of prayer are never an end in themselves. They are all but part of the means leading to that final loving union of the oneness of will with that of the Father. And that oneness of will can never come to be if the priest is not faithful daily to the prayer of the Mass, Hours, adoration of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, devotion to Mary, meditation and the simplest prayers of heartfelt adoration, thanksgiving, contrition and petition. The

essential significance of spiritual formation is also reflected in the priests' need to commit themselves to more regular spiritual direction and sacramental reconciliation; regular opportunities for groups of priests to gather specifically for prayer and spiritual reflection; they need to call for workshops on prayer and priestly spirituality; and more community prayers in the priests' houses (cf. Directory, 84-85). This same spiritual hunger fills hearts of many priests today, as they search for a continuing formation programme which addresses their spiritual maturity in Christ.

3. Intellectual Formation

The Council Fathers insisted that the true sources of a priest's "maturity in knowledge" are drawn "primarily from the reading and meditation of sacred Scripture" and "fruitfully nourished by the study of the fathers and doctors of the church and other ancient records of tradition" (PO 19). The teaching of Theology is no mere academic enterprise, for it "must lead to an authentic formation: toward prayer, communion and pastoral action" (Directory, 77). The council called priests to renew themselves through academic courses and pastoral studies, so as to continue to develop in the methods of evangelization and the apostolate. For this each priest must make a commitment to a personal discipline of reading and study.

The Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests builds upon the vision of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* in insisting that the intellectual component of continuing formation must include not only the study of the revealed truths of the faith, but also a greater knowledge of scientific advances, cultural and ethical debates in light of the church's social doctrine, and the use of the means of social communication (Bevilacqua, 1995). Those areas of ongoing education highlighted by priests during some ongoing programmes

include, naturally enough, topics such as sacred Scripture and theology, the sacred liturgy and sacramental preparation for adults. At the same time special attention was to be given to social justice and other moral teachings of the church, and to a variety of pastoral concerns such as leadership skills, time-management, listening and confrontational skills, interpersonal skills and administrative skills. In short, from the above proposals, it becomes clear that both human and intellectual aspects of development are essential to continued growth in the life of the priest.

4. Pastoral Formation

All of the aspects of ongoing formation discussed above—human, spiritual and intellectual—are geared toward the pastoral focus of priestly ministry. Every priest is a priest not for his own sake but for the sake of God's people. Thus ongoing formation must be pastoral: The formation of the priest must lead him to follow in the footsteps of the good Shepherd. This means that whatever maturity and development a priest attains humanly, spiritually and intellectually, this must not simply bear fruit in the perfection of the priest himself, but equally bear fruit in the service of God's church (Bevilacqua, 1995). It is to this end that Pope John Paul II speaks of "pastoral charity" (PDV, 70, more specifically explained in Nos.21-23).

Pastoral Charity is the summation of "the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church" (PDV, 21). This means that "the authority of Jesus Christ as head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total humble and loving dedication on behalf of the church" (PDV, 23). The priest is called to accept and exercise within himself the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ. This implies a great gift, but it just as surely implies a tremendous responsibility. It must be this way

with the priest. What he has been given is for others and never simply for himself. Ongoing formation is a necessity if the priest is not to find the press of everyday activities causing him to become wrapped up in the details of all that he is required to know and to do that he begins to forget why he is doing it (Bevilacqua, 1995).

While we talk about ongoing formation so intensely in recent years, one thing to be remembered is that the bishop of a diocese must in most definite ways involve himself in ongoing formation of priests. This article will in a short way articulate the role of the bishop in ongoing formation of priests.

***Role of the Bishop in the Ongoing Formation**

The motivation for both priest and bishop to continue formation surely flows from a commitment to continued service in and through Jesus Christ. At the Chrism Mass, the bishop asks priests if they are "ready to renew their own dedication to Christ as Priests of his new covenant" and later beseeches the faithful to pray for him that he "may become more like our High Priest and Good Shepherd, the teacher and servant of all." Thus the task of formation seeks together to ground priestly Episcopal commitment in concrete steps. Some well-meaning bishops take seriously to update themselves in order to be better helpers of their priests and people. This type of Episcopal living is found among many bishops of Asia who take good advantage of seminars conducted by FABC-Office of Clergy (and other FABC-Offices) during the last four years in Thailand. The quiet presence of the bishop, often learning along with the priests of the presbyterate, is a powerful way to promote ongoing formation.

D. A Model of Ongoing formation of Priests in General

Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo (2007) presents a model of ongoing formation which is widely used in the Philippines. We could take this model as an example and develop a more suitable programme for our country.

The Archdiocese of Manila designed a prototype five-week program of ongoing priestly formation, entitled “Intensive Renewal Program for Priests.” Its objectives were:

1. To experience real and meaningful fellowship among priests;
2. To process pastoral and human experiences for greater integration of personal life and priestly ministry;
3. To be updated in theology and spiritual-pastoral areas of priestly life and ministry; and
4. To experience spiritual deepening through the integration of the whole renewal experience.

The content of the five-week program included:

First Week Community Building—to make the participants aware of the need for community among themselves through human relations training on self-discovery, stress and conflict management, effective communication skills, problem solving techniques and teamwork.

Second Week Human Formation—to focus on issues and concerns related to the priest’s personhood, in the light of the humanity of Jesus. Topics include human development, affectivity, intimacy and sexuality.

- Third Week** Christology—with particular emphasis on the priest's configuration to Christ, Head and Shepherd.
- Fourth Week** Ecclesiology—focusing on the priest's role as servant-leader within the Church from the perspective of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines.
- Fifth Week** Integration—to synthesize and integrate the whole process by giving the participants the basic principles of pastoral leadership and management. This period includes a Holy Retreat spent in prayer and solitude. Planning and a re-entry process into active ministry concludes the program.

Following *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the approach taken by the Programme is the integration of the total formation of the clergy—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

Priests were classified for this purpose according to age brackets: Young Clergy (1-5 years in the ministry), Junior Clergy (6-10 years in the ministry), Middle Clergy (11-24 years in the ministry), and Senior Clergy (25-and above in the ministry). Many dioceses followed these modules with adaptation to their own circumstances.

The programme for the young clergy consisted of a residency programme during their period of transition from seminary to parish ministry. A Spiritual Director would “accompany” the young priests. They were guided by a yearly theme which would be the topic of their regular Spiritual Direction. The second part of the program is on “Skills Training in Pastoral Ministry.”

The programme for the Junior Clergy recommended a process of value-clarification, since the first years of pastoral ministry are a period when values are gradually imbibed and begin to take root. They are challenged to test these values in light of gospel values and the gift of the priesthood. Group sharing and peer counseling would clarify the values and subject them to testing and affirmation if so desired. In the process a sense of accountability to and stewardship for each other is developed. Some topics for value clarification are: Priestly Communion, Material Possessions, Intimacy, Mission, and Prayer in the Ministry. A vicar for the clergy would help in facilitating the process.

For the Middle Clergy, the five-week intensive Renewal Programme. It is designed to be both a renewal and updating course, providing a holistic approach to the needs of the clergy.

The Senior Clergy are divided into two age groups: group 1 (25-33 years in the ministry and are still active), group 2 (36 and above in the ministry, who can still be active or available for ministry).

Group 1 members are invited to have a second look at their priesthood, the gifts they have received, the quality of the gift of priesthood and their gift of self in the ministry, the challenges that they experienced, what the priesthood has done to their person. They also look forward to prepare for the next phase of their ministry as members of the senior clergy.

Group 2 members require a new kind of affirmation and a sense of relevance in light of the blessings they have found in their lives. They focus on the growth of the parish or diocese to which they have contributed.

F. The Assist Programme: "Caring for Priests with Special Difficulties"

A second intensive renewal programme was introduced in the latter half of the 1990s, through the expertise of the Servants of the Paraclete. This is the Assisted Intensive Renewal Program (AIR Programme), or simply ASSIST Programme. It is intended for priests and religious who have special human, emotional, spiritual and vocational needs and issues, having affective or feeling component such as depression, anxiety, anger, personality and vocational issues. These include psychosexual issues that might or might not involve abuse and boundary violation of others. For those involved in boundary violation of others, the program offers a qualified recovery program in accordance with generally accepted professional standards and authentic Catholic teachings on sexuality and celibacy (CBCP, 2006).

The ASSIST programme has three phases

1. **Assessment Phase:** this lasts for three days, with the use of psychiatric, medical, psychological and spiritual evaluation. This helps the individual to make a decision regarding entry into the second phase of the program.

2. **Residential Phase:** this is a three-month intensive, residential programme that helps participants to work on their issues in the atmosphere of caring, safe, faith-filled community. Participants go through three stages:

- a) Initial awareness and acceptance of issues to be dealt with;
- b) In-depth exploration of issue(s);
- c) Implementation or working out of the plan for recovery.

Towards the end of the residential programme, the Bishop or Religious superior or Vicar participates in a planning conference. An accountability partner, chosen by the participant and approved by the Bishop or Religious Superior, also joins the planning conference.

The components of the Residential Phase include:

- 2.1. Individual Counseling: twice a week which usually runs from 45 to 60 minutes per session;
- 2.2. Group Counseling: Thrice a week which usually runs from 2 to 2 ½ hours per session;
- 2.3. Individual Spiritual Direction: twice a week which usually runs from 45 to 60 minutes per session;
- 2.4. Group Spiritual Direction: twice a week which usually runs for 2 to 2 ½ hours per session;
- 2.5. Conferences, workshops and therapeutic readings;
- 2.6. Spiritual exercises and communal celebration of the Liturgy;
- 2.7. Medical Check Evaluation and other health care services.
- 2.8. Community Activities and bonding.

For those who need longer care, an Extended Care programme is available.

3. Continuing Care Phase: this consists in implementing the plan decided on at the end of the Residential phase. Typical of the recommendations for continuing care are individual counseling and/or spiritual direction, the help of a support group, re-entry visit by an ASSIST Staff member, return workshops, continuing psychiatric consultation. Other recommendations depend on the needs of the individual. The continuing care phase normally lasts for two years.

The success of the programme depends very much on the openness and cooperation of the participant, the quality of community life and support group established, the renewed prayer life of the participant, the quality of counseling, psychiatric help, and spiritual direction, and the kind of continuing care monitored and facilitated by the accountability partner.

G. A Final Word

The fourfold model of ongoing formation—the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral—so familiar to us from the texts of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and the Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests, finds its true ground in the vision of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, where the Council Fathers asserted that an integrated programme should be designed (Bevilacqua, 1995) “to give priests an opportunity of increasing their knowledge of pastoral methods and theological knowledge, and at the same time strengthening their spiritual life and sharing their pastoral experiences with their brother priests” (P.O.19). The ongoing formation of our priests and the full realization of their priestly calling will only be complete with this final redemption of the whole body of Christ which is the church. It is a lifelong process by which we discover the emptiness that is ours when we think that we are self-sufficient and the fullness that comes to be when we open that emptiness to the Lord and allow him to fill it (Bevilacqua, 1995).

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