

## **2. GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES**

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### **2.1. FORMATION OF THE FORMATION GUIDES FOR INITIAL FORMATION**

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During the last six-year period, around the Congregation an assessment was carried out into the quantitative and qualitative consistency of the formation communities. Following this, the Rector Major with the General Council approved the “Guidelines for Initial Formation” in relation to each of the eight Regions. In this way a process began which is still being implemented, and which is bearing among its fruits a more determined process of inter-province collaboration and a more serious commitment to the setting up of strong teams of formation guides.

At the same time each Province has undertaken a study into vocation frailty. This has fostered greater attention to the causes and the expressions of this phenomenon; but so far the problem continues to be unresolved. Frailty cannot be solely attributed to the subjective state of the young men who nowadays are coming into Salesian consecrated life; it also depends on the weakness of the formation procedures and for it to be overcome there is a need for formation guides who are able to face the challenges to formation coming from post-modernity and from relativism.

At the beginning of the new six-year period a further decisive step needs to be taken in which we will be engaged in the formation of formation guides. We have only to think that in 2008 the Congregation had 515 novices; 220 perpetually professed, of whom 20 Salesian Brothers and 200 Salesian clerics; 222 priestly ordinations. The figures indicate the vast task of the considerable number of formation guides involved in initial formation. These make a notable contribution to the formation of the younger generations of Salesians and provide a valuable service for which we are grateful.

On the other hand, we are aware that to carry out such a crucial task careful formation of the formation guides is more than ever needed. If, for example, we think about the phenomenon of “those leaving” we become aware of the new and urgent challenges to formation. In 2008, 109 novices, 216 temporarily professed, 19 perpetually professed clerics and brothers left the Congregation while 62 Salesian priests joined the diocesan clergy or were dismissed or dispensed from celibacy. Therefore it is to foster the appropriate formation of formation guides that these guidelines and suggestions are offered.

### **1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

Every Salesian, because of his familiarity with accompaniment, with educational matters, his ability to create situations for making suggestions, which he has acquired while working with young people, is potentially a formation guide. The task of formation therefore is not entirely unknown to him, in that it has a certain affinity with apostolic work. Such a task however, requires greater commitment and skill, because what is involved is the formation of consecrated Salesian vocations. It is a matter of a great responsibility which requires suitability and preparation. It is the task of Province government and of the various “Curatoria” to ensure that suitable formation guides

are chosen and sound teams are set up. These two requirements come before any formation for formation guides which sets out to be effective.

*Selection of suitable formation guides.* There are many gifts required for [someone who is selected as] a formation guide. Nowadays the following are essential: a spirit of faith, a pastoral sense, a desire for communion, a tendency towards collaboration, human maturity and mental balance, an ability to listen and for dialogue, a positive yet critical approach to culture.<sup>1</sup> It is a question of gifts of both nature and grace, innate one might say; and at the same time of attitudes be gradually matured through study, discussion, experience and the spiritual life. All these gifts are necessary but today's challenges require about all a capacity for communication, able to reach the person being formed in depth. Formation guides therefore should be carefully chosen on the basis of these requirements. Each Province ought to have its own group of formation guides; they ought to constitute almost a shared "school of thought and practice. In fact, only the creation of a shared mentality, methodology, contents and criteria regarding formation, in other words a Province formation culture, guarantees the quality and the continuity of the formation procedures.

*Setting up teams which are strong, stable and motivated.* The other necessary requirement in order to have good formation communities and qualified study centres, is the setting up of strong, stable and motivated teams of formation guides and of teachers<sup>2</sup>. There is often a way of thinking in initial formation which attributes excessive importance to personal conversation between the formation guide and the one in formation. There is no doubt that the spiritual guide plays a crucial role, but that should in no way minimise the need for a team of formation guides. It is only together that they contributed to the integral and harmonious development of the individual in formation, to the suitability of the formation plan, to consistency in the criteria of discernment. In addition one cannot ignore the fact that formation also depends on the formation atmosphere, which the formation guides with their way of living and interacting are able to create. It should be noted that in the pre-novitiates and novitiates often real formation teams do not exist, since the work of formation is entrusted to an individual; in these cases there are dangers especially regarding vocational discernment. It is necessary therefore to set up real teams.

## **2. PRIORITY TASKS OF FORMATION GUIDES**

### **1. Helping in the transformation of an individual**

Looking at the formation communities, one can see that a considerable amount of time and effort is taken up with conferences, lessons, studies, investigations, exams. These are things formation demands, but often they are reduced to no more than the teaching or the learning of ideas or simple facts. Certainly, in this way minds are stretched, useful things are learned; one acquires a new way of looking at life. It cannot be said, however, that this brings about in those in formation a change in mentality.

In fact, it is not enough to know more. What is needed is to reach the inner individual, his heart. "Formation should therefore have a profound effect on the individual"<sup>3</sup> helping him to bring about a change of attitude, of convictions, of motivations, sentiments and feelings. It is necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Directives on the preparation of educators in seminaries*, Rome 1993, 12-20.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. FSDB 239. It should be observed that not all formation guides are teachers, but on the other hand that all teachers are formation guides; the group of teaching staff therefore ought to give more importance to the formation of its members. It is also worth pointing out that it is not necessary and sometimes it is not appropriate for all the teachers of a centre of studies to belong to the formation community; while having time for study they can also live and work in other communities.

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, 65.

therefore that the subject matter proposed, the methods used and the experiences gained foster the transformation of his inner self and his conversion.

For example, it is possible to have brilliant conferences or lectures about the theology of prayer, but if this does not help in producing a love for prayer, in encouraging participation in community prayer, of infusing work with a spirit of prayer, in evoking a lively desire for personal prayer, one can legitimately question the formative effectiveness of the process. Facts are not enough therefore; a way of transformation has to be found.

Obviously the main responsibility for someone's own interior transformation rests with the person in formation. He alone can be aware of his personal convictions, interpret his own life-story, listen to the voice of his own conscience, bring about the transformation which he sees to be necessary in his own life. This is why one can say quite correctly that only the individual can form himself. Formation "is ultimately a self formation. No one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons."<sup>4</sup>

In this process of the transformation of the one in formation, the teachers who are called by the "Ratio" "true formation guides"<sup>5</sup>, have an important role. Learning demands study, revision, reflection and personal synthesis. Teachers know that there is a danger that lectures encourage in those in formation a passive listening attitude, but that they have a determining function when they involve those taking part, offer motivation, mature convictions, engage the affections, speak to the heart. On account of this the teachers, using "active teaching methods",<sup>6</sup> help the one in formation to look at himself, to assess his own ideas and attitudes, to cultivate criteria for making judgements, to adopt values, to acquire a culture which is consistent with the Gospel and with the Salesian consecrated vocation.

## **2. Accompanying the indepth work of the individual**

To assist with the transformation of the one in formation, nowadays in Salesian formation we need to give priority to the method of personalisation, for which unfortunately we are not yet sufficiently prepared. The change in the way of thinking on the part of the formation guides and those in formation and the acceptance of a formation practice which is consistent with this method are just at the beginning. Personalisation consists mainly in assisting the one in formation to take responsibility for his own formation, and to act through personal conviction and not in order to conform with the surroundings, to overcome formalism and fear and especially to work in giving depth to his own motivation, attitudes and affections. Sometime on the other hand formation still concentrates too much on control and not on accompaniment.

The taking up of this method by formation guides and those in formation is especially necessary, given vocational frailty, the complexity of the state of society and the challenges posed by post-modernity. It is necessary to help the one in formation to take a look inside himself, to examine his inner world, to interpret his own states of mind and to understand where these are coming from.. The inner journey is a long and difficult one and today's culture in no way offers it any encouragement; and yet it is the most effective for a person's formation. With the help of grace and of the formation guides, the one in formation comes to know himself deeply, and to accept himself with serenity, to work on his weaknesses and immaturity, to strengthen his conscience, to take on responsibility and to make decisions.

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> FSDB 240.

<sup>6</sup> FSDB 241. Cf. also FSDB 133, which speaks about "a method of teaching [...] that fosters assimilation and synthesis."

To help in this various means are useful, all aimed at the “management” of the inner world: personal prayer, in which the one in formation opens himself to the action of God in the depths of his own heart; the daily examination of conscience, which helps with “confessio laudis, vitae et fidei”<sup>7</sup> and is preparation for the frequent celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation; personal reflection, through which he makes his own motivations and convictions; the ability to find moments of silence during the day, which help recollection and concentration on oneself; self-discipline in organising one’s time especially in time-tabling the evening hours of rest and getting up in the morning, which re-enforces the capacity to make personal decisions; communication of the faith and the sharing of spiritual experience, which leads him to face up to his own inner self; the personal plan of life, with which he accepts responsibility for his own formation; the assessment of various experiences including those of the apostolate which help him to know himself better and to plot the progress he has made; the friendly chat, spiritual direction and the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, which demands that he faces up to himself in the different aspects of his life; personal study also undertaken reflectively which brings added dimensions to his spiritual and apostolic life. It is up to the formation guide to know how to help the one in formation to make good use of these means, in such a way that he draws profit from them for his own vocational development.

### 3. Fostering the primacy of the spiritual life

The personal effort at inner transformation and the in-depth work undertaken by the one in formation have a goal, a focal point: the “putting on of Jesus Christ,”<sup>8</sup> In fact “formation is the process of becoming more and more a disciple of Christ, growing in union with and in configuration to him. It is a matter of taking on increasingly the mind of Christ, of sharing more deeply his gift of himself to the Father and his brotherly service of the human family.”<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore necessary that the formation guide is in love with Jesus and that he knows how to communicate this experience. He needs to arouse in the one in formation a fascination with the person of Jesus, the desire to be identified with Him and a commitment to share his sentiments. It is the fire of the love for Jesus which begins and sustains the whole transformation process of the life of the one in formation. Human formation becomes growth towards Jesus, the free and perfect man; spiritual formation is the progressive construction of union with God; intellectual formation consists in a cultural preparation capable of contributing in an effective manner to the mission of Jesus; educative pastoral formation is achieved in becoming a good shepherd of the young following Jesus. The unifying centre of formation is always Jesus; in this way we become believing disciples and believable apostles of Jesus.

While, on the one hand, the person in formation is the “necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation,”<sup>10</sup> on the other the Spirit is *par excellence* the one who forms someone who consecrates himself to God. In this way formation becomes participation by the one in formation in the action of the Father who through the Spirit, fashions in his heart the sentiments of the Son.<sup>11</sup> This means that the first place in formation belongs to the grace of God and to the action of the Spirit. Mary allowed herself to be formed by the Spirit, in promptness and obedience, in this way becoming the mother of her son Jesus; in this she is the model those who freely allow the Spirit to

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. CHÁVEZ, “*Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*” *Word of God and Salesian Life Today* in AGC 386, Rome 13 June 2004, pp. 40-42

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rom 13, 14; Gal 3, 27; Eph 4, 24.

<sup>9</sup> CIVCSVA, *Essential Elements in the Church’s teaching on Religious Life*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Vita Consecrata* 66. A similar expression is found in the Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* 69 where it is said that the candidate “in the first place, must grow in his awareness that the agent *par excellence* of his formation is the Holy Spirit, who by the gift of a new heart configures and conforms him to Jesus Christ the good shepherd.”

form them. It is precisely the Spirit, who working invisibly in hearts as the master of the interior life, who also makes use of visible human instruments: formation guides.<sup>12</sup> Through them He accomplishes the work of forming Jesus in the one who is called to follow him more closely.

The formation guide therefore, aware of his “spiritual” task and sensitive to the promptings of grace, helps the one in formation to make himself available and to allow himself to be formed by the action of the Spirit. He points out to him the less obvious obstacles, suggests how he might overcome his hesitations and fears, and above all shows him the beauty of following the Lord Jesus. The formation guide accompanies the one in formation, living as a brother at his side in daily life in cordial collaboration and helping him to assess the progress made, discern his own vocation and grow in it.

Precisely for this reason the formation guide is careful not to impede the motions of the Spirit in his own life, so as to be able to be his docile instrument in the delicate task of formation. Obviously he is not called upon to have the specific skill of a psychologist, but to be a man of the spirit, an expert in the path of seeking God, so as to be able also to accompany others in this journey. In the light of spiritual and anthropological wisdom, he does however know how to bring together the contribution of the psychologist and the helps offered by the human sciences when these can be of use.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Communicating Don Bosco’s charism**

For us Salesians, the characteristic way of conforming ourselves to Christ consists in our identification with Don Bosco: “Our living Rule is Jesus Christ [...] whom we find present in Don Bosco”.<sup>14</sup> For us the words of Paul can be applied to Don Bosco: “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> He was a good shepherd; he knew how to win everyone over with meekness and the gift of himself; he expended his whole life for the young. The Salesian charism, “while it effects a particular configuration to Christ, creates a distinct Gospel awareness that permeates a Salesian’s entire life, his style of holiness and the accomplishment of the mission.”<sup>16</sup> Then the Constitutions, which are the presence of Don Bosco among us,<sup>17</sup> spell out our way of living the Gospel and of identifying ourselves more and more with the Lord Jesus. Even our style of life and action “finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father.”<sup>18</sup>

The formation guide therefore cultivates a deep affection for Don Bosco; he studies him, he holds him in esteem, he prays to him. He has a clear perception of his own Salesian identity and a strong sense of belonging to the Congregation. He appreciates and sounds the depths of the spiritual and pedagogical wealth of Salesian tradition. His is a lived and joyful experience of the Salesian charism.

He infuses in these in formation his love and enthusiasm for Don Bosco. He leads them to take as their own the motto *Da mihi animas cetera tolle*, echoing the yearnings of Christ the Redeemer.<sup>19</sup> He communicates in a vital and attractive manner his own experience of Salesian life, accompanying it with the teaching of the Constitutions and Salesian spirituality, of the customs and the history of the Congregation. He provides Salesian experiences which foster appropriate attitudes

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<sup>12</sup> Article 104 of our Constitutions calls formation guides “instruments through whom the Lord is working.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, 66. Cf. also CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, Rome 29 June 2008

<sup>14</sup> Constitutions 196.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 11,1.

<sup>16</sup> FSDB 28.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Introduction to the Constitutions.

<sup>18</sup> Constitutions 11.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. FSDB 30.

and behaviour. Serious study of Salesianity in all the phases of initial formation requires well qualified teachers. The identity of the Salesian Brother and of the Salesian priest which is being formed needs to be, finally, ever more characterised by the charism of Don Bosco.

In this way the contribution of the formation guide ensures that “called to become like Christ, in the footsteps of Don Bosco, every Salesian must nurture a relationship with our Founder, take the Constitutions as his “book of life”, keep himself attuned to the Congregation’s understanding of its charism, be acquainted with and follow its guidelines, particularly those of General Chapters and of the Rector Major and his Council, and strengthen his sense of belonging to his Province.”<sup>20</sup>

## **5. Working as a team in a spirit of communion and with co-responsibility**

From what has been said so far and from a comprehensive view of formation, it is quite clear that the field of formation is a vast and complex one and that no individual formation guide, no matter how gifted and prepared, can expect to be capable of competently managing all the aspects of formation on his own. It therefore really is necessary that the formation guides in a formation community, inspired by a “spiritual experience of communion and cooperation,”<sup>21</sup> show a spirit of cohesion and collaboration. They act as a team, cooperating with complementary roles and contributions and “ensuring a unified and complete organization at the service of formation.”<sup>22</sup>

The formation guides within the team and their role are moreover linked to the various aspects of the formation experience: the human and fraternal, the spiritual, the intellectual, the educative and pastoral. Therefore of particular importance are the roles of the animator – the one in charge of fraternal and community life, of the liturgical and spiritual life, of the studies, of pastoral experiences and naturally of the economy. These animators – the ones in charge carry out their responsibilities as a form of team-work, in other words, in a spirit of co-responsibility for decisions taken and for the agreed criteria under the guidance of the Rector.

Important aspects of team-work are planning the processes of formation, the implementation of formation procedures and itineraries, reflection on what has taken place, formation assessments through scrutinies, discernment and admission procedures. Nowadays one of the weaker aspects of team-work is the failure to give sufficient attention to or the inability to prepare adequate courses of formation, in particular those which regard affective life, prayer, poverty and a simple life style, “personal media.” Another element that is also neglected in team-work is the practice of discernment; we have excellent “Criteria and norms” but they are not always known and not always used as points of reference for a serious vocational discernment process.

## **3. NEED FOR THE FORMATION OF THE FORMATION GUIDES**

In the light of the priority tasks of the formation guides indicated above, it is observed that nowadays in the Congregation most of the formation guides have not received and currently are not receiving any or scarcely any specific preparation for formation. Often the Provinces prepare formation guides by getting them to obtain a degree in some particular field of study; this sort of qualification is necessary for the culture of the formation guide and as preparation for his teaching role, but it is not sufficient for his formation task. In most cases, after their studies the confreres are immediately placed in the formation teams without adequate preparation.

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<sup>20</sup> FSDB 47.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> FSDB 234.

The lack of personnel who are prepared is especially evident in the pre-novitiate phase which continues to be the most sensitive and difficult phase because of the challenges that have to be faced. In not a few cases it happens that those who are appointed as Rectors or in charge of the pre-novitiate have not received the preparation needed. There is no doubt that life is a great teacher; a great deal can be learned from daily experience. However, the fact remains that the quality of formation would be much higher, if there had been an adequate preparation. One comes across a similar lack in the preparation of formation guides as spiritual directors. One also sees little attention given to the formation of the formation guides in practical training, which in this area is the formation phases most neglected.

For a number of years the Congregation has been experiencing a fall in vocational fidelity; there are a considerable number of confreres who are leaving after perpetual profession and priestly ordination. There are a variety of reasons for this phenomenon; they also raise questions about the process of vocational discernment and initial formation. Nowadays there are certainly challenges to formation that are new and previously unheard of, but it is also true that quite a number of formation guides often find themselves unprepared and incapable of dealing with them, especially when it is a question of helping those in formation to cope with their inner world of emotions and fears, attitudes and motivation and to build up a psychological maturity, an affective balance, a firm faith.

In addition one has the impression that after many years of initial formation, the final result of the formation process does not match expectations and the efforts made, especially in terms of a sound cultural foundation, of spiritual depth, of human maturity, of apostolic passion. For example, it is significant that in formation communities the personal plan of life is a common practice; whereas on the other hand, during practical training and especially after perpetual profession and priestly ordination it is given up by a good number of confreres. The completion of the course of studies or the transition to the next phase of formation are not sufficient to ensure a good formation; what is needed on the part of the formation guides is the appropriate methodology for a personalised formation, one that forms long-term convictions and helps those in formation to take on board responsibility for formation.

Initial formation is the fundamental resource for the future of the Congregation, but for it to be effective, investment in the formation of the formation guides is urgent. It is necessary to learn the art of formation and to qualify oneself for the task of formation; but it is especially the formation guide himself who needs care and attention. He needs to know himself, to identify the weak areas of his own personality, to be aware of his own vulnerability, to know how, as far as is possible, to make up for what is lacking. Otherwise he runs the risk of projecting his weaknesses onto the one in formation and not being capable of helping him to face up to his inconsistencies. He is called upon to be a witness to that maturity he is recommending to the one in formation.

Therefore the formation of the formation guide has a twofold and fundamental purpose: providing care and attention for the formation guide himself and at the same time making him capable of carrying out his task of formation, going beyond a mere essentialist or functionalist view of him. It is a question of ensuring that there be an appropriate rapport in the formation guide between life and action, for if it is true that action flows from life or being, it is equally true that his actions shows the sort of person he is.

#### **4. OCCASIONS FOR FORMATION**

There are particular occasions which together contribute to the formation of the formation guides. These are important for every formation guide, every formation community, Province and Region. While care must be taken to form the individual guides, their formation as a team must not be neglected; this requires the acquisition of a formation culture at the level of the community,

province, region and congregation. These are particular and specific moments to be coordinated, so as not to clash with each other or lead to useless repetition, but they are all necessary.

### **1. Self-formation on the part of the formation personnel**

The formation of the formation guides requires above all that they be well-motivated so as to undertake their own ongoing formation and prepare themselves better for their task. We are not speaking here of their being up-to-date in their teaching, which nevertheless is a duty to be fulfilled. However, without their being well-motivated no effort regarding the formation of the formation guides will be successful. It is therefore necessary that they look at themselves, examine their own attitudes and question themselves about their ongoing formation. It can be seen that often they have a variety of commitments; even during the holidays they generously accept the many forms of apostolate asked of them. However, if they are convinced of the need for their own self-formation or for a better preparation for their role as formation guide, they need to be able to make space for themselves, perhaps during the holidays, to attend some course or programme that could help them with their formation. It should not be forgotten that without their good example it becomes very difficult to persuade those in formation to pursue their self-formation.

### **2. Formation of the formation guides within the formation community**

It is also important for the guides in a formation community to meet together periodically, under the guidance of the Rector to reflect and share about themselves as guides, about the subject matter and methodology of formation and the formation process. It is advisable to plan an annual programme for such meetings with specific dates and topics. These are different from the times required by the normal work of formation such as the planning and assessment of the formation procedures, the planning for the year, the scrutinies or the admissions; it is a question of occasions for real formation. They help the formation guides to further study their roles and profit from each others' experience; especially they serve to create and strengthen a sense of there being a community of life and of their being a formation team. The formation guides learn to work "according to the mind and practice of the Congregation and the Province, as described in the present *Ratio* and the Provincial Plan; they make their own the overall view of formation as a gradual, continuous, structured and unified process to be implemented in a Salesian manner";<sup>23</sup> they bring together the criteria of formation and of discernment.

### **3. Formation of the formation guides within the Provincial community**

The annual meeting which lasts at least two days, for an exchange of ideas and the updating of all the formation guides in the Province is likewise valuable. Chaired by the Provincial Delegate for Formation this meeting can become for the formation guides "a true and proper school for their ongoing formation."<sup>24</sup> In fact it is an excellent opportunity in which to give further thought to formation topics, reflect on the positive and the negative aspects of the formation process, get to know the "Ratio" and the "Criteria and Norms," develop a unified approach regarding the criteria for vocational discernment and for admissions in the Province, foster continuity in methodology and in accompaniment among the different phases of formation. Sometimes this meeting can take on an inter-provincial character where there exist forms of collaboration in formation.

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<sup>23</sup> FSDB 235.

<sup>24</sup> FSDB 239.



#### **4. Formation of the formation guides at Regional level**

Formation at Regional level also has its importance, since it provides a valuable opportunity for an exchange of ideas between the formation guides from different Provinces concerning problem areas in the formation field and the variety of experiences. It has been asked for from every Region in the Project of the Rector Major and the General Council for this six-year period. It is a useful form of support and mutual help in further reflection on formation issues, in the preparation of initiatives and aids, and in the drawing up of common. Criteria. The success of these meetings depends on a good preparation and on the systematic planning of topics which are of interest to the formation guides. The need is felt for this meeting to be annual one. In some Provinces most of the formation guides are able to take part; in others the distances involved suggest that meetings be limited to those responsible and to formation guides from two or three successive phases. It is advisable that these meetings take the form of work-shops. The Regions and the Formation Department take responsibility for holding them.

#### **5. Formation of the formation guides at Congregational level**

We have seen that it is necessary to pay attention to the Salesian identity of our formation; for this reason it really is important to form the formation guides where this identity is assured and deepened. In particular our Salesian Pontifical University, precisely because of the accompaniment and the responsibility of the Rector Major and also the closeness of the Councillor for Formation with its courses seeks to guarantee charismatic identity in formation. It regularly offers two courses specifically for the formation of formation guides.

The first is an up-dating course; it takes place every year from the middle of February until the end of May; with the title “Course of ongoing formation for formation guides,” its aim is to make those who are already formation guides and want to update their preparation pedagogically and spiritually suited. The other course of “formation for formation guides,” lasting two years, is provided in collaboration by the Faculties of Theology and of Education, with the award of a Licence in Spiritual Theology or Education; it provides theoretical knowledge and a study of methodology but also practical exercises in undertaking the tasks of guidance, discernment, formation, ‘counselling’ and vocational accompaniment; it also draws on the expertise associated with spiritual and moral theology, pedagogical methodology and psychology.

These two courses are an indication of the desire and the commitment of the Congregation to prepare its own formation guides. It is up to the Provinces to take account of their need to ensure that there are personnel adequately prepared for the formation communities, and therefore to take advantage of these two courses.

During this six-year period we have also decided to take practical steps to provide a school for the formation of spiritual directors, which while dealing with accompaniment will develop the subject matter and the methods proper to our own Salesian tradition, updated to meet current needs. We also recognise the urgent need to prepare Salesian psychologists to back up the work of the formation guides and help those in formation in their development; in this area too the UPS offers sound academic courses for the preparation of professional psychologists.

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In the letter the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal Franc Rodé, sent to the Rector Major after the GC26, with regard to formation in our Congregation he says “It is good to note how the new formation challenges are

being accepted and especially how knowledge and a more faithful implementation of the Salesian 'Ratio formationis' are making progress so that in formation communities there should not develop a plurality of criteria which do not contribute to a correct application and a convergence of views at the time of admissions. (cf. *Relazione del RM al CG26*, p. 36)".

In addition, in this letter it is said: "The most complex challenge that the Congregation needs to face demands a serious search for a method of formation focused and effective, especially for the initial phases of formation. The Magisterium of the Church constantly indicates commitment to formation as a priority for every Institute, recommending that 'formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God' (*Vita consecrata* 65). The presence of many varied cultures in the Salesian Society without doubt makes the search more complicated and discernment more demanding."<sup>25</sup>

These suggestions too offer us a clear view of the main problems we need to face up to in initial formation and at the same time provide an encouragement and stimulus for our commitment to the formation of the formation guides. We are aware of this and so we accept the responsibility.

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<sup>25</sup> F. RODÉ, *Letter to the Rector Major of the Salesians after the GC26 on the state of the Congregation*, Rome, 22 December 2008.