# SYNODALITY: DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, FORMATION AND INTER-GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IN CONSECRATED LIFE

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# CATHOLIC VOYAGE

## African Journal of Consecrated Life

THEME:

**SYNODALITY: DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, FORMATION AND INTER-GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IN CONSECRATED LIFE**

Motto: *Witness to Truth and Mercy through Love and Service with Faith and Reason*

  "*The Catholic Voyage-Africa*"

iii

# Contents

# EDITORIAL

S ynodality, formation, and spiritual direction closely relate to Consecrated Life and the priesthood. This edition of *The Catholic Voyage* (TCV-Africa) highlights some important aspects of these themes. It opens with the study of the Vatican's document, *Vademecum for the Synod of Bishops on synodality*. The word "Synod" means "journey together", a journey of the Church-as-family of God. It is often assumed that we, as members of the Christian community, can walk and work together, but the question is asked: *How* can we journey together? The Carmelite Fr. Innocent Igbokwe addresses this question. He notes that the synodality presented by Pope Francis comes with "excitement, misgivings and misconceptions". The fears, anxiety, tensions, joys, and excitement this synod has generated seems unprecedented in the recent history of the Church. While acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is certainly the principle of communion and mission in the Church, and the principle of synodality, the author argues, however, that the processes of this synodality will determine the shape of the future of the Church. Therefore, he explores the virtues and vices that can make or mar the processes and, then, offers some recommendations.

Decision-making in the synodal process is a complex and delicate issue. In the synodal journey of the Church-as-family of God, at some point, decisions must be made, in one way or another, by someone on some matters. A synodal journey is neither aimless nor guideless. Rather, it wants to strengthen communion, participation and mission of members of the family of God. It wants to lead people to life, not death, and walk in truth and charity following the path of Him who is the Way, the Truth and Life (cf. Jn 14.6). In the specific case of the institutes of Consecrated Life, a religious Superior is one who through appointment

or election assumes the responsibility of being God's representative to guide other members of the institute in their commitment to seek, find, and do the will of God. Thus, leadership or exercise of authority in a religious institute is a spiritual reality with a social implication. Reflecting on this issue, Agnes Okoye, DDL, claims that the exercise of authority is a question of service, empowerment of others for maximum utilization of their potentials and talents, and the attainment of the goal of the institute. With Vatican Council II there is a *novum* (newness) in the mode of exercise of authority and decision-making in a religious institute. She explains the newness in the exercise of authority and the process of decision-making from the perspective of canonical legislation and in the light of the principles of the Synod on Synodality. The Synod on Synodality is a call to rediscover the synodal roots, and the deeply synodal nature of the Church. This involves a process of learning together how God is calling us to be and live as Church-Family in our time and place. Moreover, the exercise of authority should be done in a synodal way such that it does not cancel the role of religious superiors as a guide of their brothers and sisters in seeking and doing the will of God in achieving the purpose of their profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are the perfection of charity or union with God (cf. can. 573), and the purpose of their living life in common.

Michael Songu's reflection turns attention to consecrated life in the global South of the world. He highlights the call to faithfulness and fruitfulness. Consecrated life shaped many of the Church's efforts in engaging worldly reality. From the earliest centuries, witnessing the Gospel message and promoting the Catholic faith, Institutes of Consecrated Life break newer grounds and provide newer solutions in many areas of society (e.g., Agriculture, education, healthcare, social communications, and charity). However, Consecrated life itself is not insulated from the general currents in the Church and society. Like the

many other Conciliar documents before it, Vatican II documents (e.g., *Lumen Gentium*, Perfectae *Caritatis, Gaudium et Spes)* are, in part, responses to social and ecclesial changes. Songu's study focuses on the teaching of Pope Francis concerning effective religious life in the 21st century following the Spirit of Vatican II, especially as it relates to the global south. He presents the context of the Pope's message and re-enforces its relevance. Lessons are drawn from the Papal message itself. Consecrated persons are called to faithfulness and fruitfulness. The commitment to responding to this call ought to involve liberation and inculturation, as well as the adoption of a synodal way of life within Institutes of Consecrated Life.

In seeking faithfulness and fruitfulness in living Christian life, the formation and animation of clergy and lay faithful must recognise the vital role of the ministry or practice of spiritual direction (or accompaniment). This ministry is particularly important and urgent today in the formation or training of priests; in most cases, they are called upon to give spiritual accompaniment. Drawing from a Sudanese background, John Ujang investigates the training of spiritual directors for the effective spiritual development of candidates for the priesthood. He recognises the several objectives of this training. It is important, he suggests, to train spiritual directors before beginning their pastoral assignment. In Seminaries or Formation houses, it is necessary to equip them with the needed skills to help the candidates. In addition to the training of spiritual directors, the spiritual development of candidates for priesthood depends on the personality and experience of Spiritual directors themselves. The choice of who is assigned to be the Spiritual Directors in seminaries and formation houses, therefore, is of critical importance.

Inter-generational dialogue in institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of apostolic life is another critical issue. Wenceslaus Madu**,** CMF, addresses this matter, in the paper in which he originally

presented at a joint meeting of major superiors (male and female) in Nigeria. He attempts to provide some frameworks for discussion on how consecrated persons could exploit the rich diversity among the different generations in the membership of institutes of Consecrated life. The reflection encourages the building of synergy or collaboration in Consecrated Life, since this can enhance effective witnesses as consecrated persons. Members of institutes of Consecrated life, in living community life, ultimately should seek a fruitful exchange between young and old, "never discarding whole generations."[1] Pope Francis says,

> "An institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And constant encounter."[2]

Religious communities favouring such fruitful encounters and communication do much to console their elders, enrich their younger members, and give convincing, prophetic witness of communion to a world increasingly afflicted by intergenerational apartheid.

The need for dialogue and collaboration in religious communities, especially in Formation houses and in seminaries, appears also in relation to the use of a smartphone. The Catholic Church accepts and welcomes the prudent use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news, in the context of her social teachings on the means of social communication. All communications media applications could be effectively used for evangelization and authentic human liberation.

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[1] Pope Francis, "World Day of Consecrated Life Homily (WDCL)," 2018.
[2] Pope Francis, "WDCL Homily," 2018.

The study that Lettekidan Tesfa and colleagues offer here focuses on the benefits or opportunities and challenges of using a smartphone, and some other social media, in the holistic formation of religious women and men. Tesfa proposes alternative methods for effectively utilizing the benefits of smartphones for the holistic formation of the religious men and women. The identified benefits and challenges of smartphones and social media probably go beyond any small geographical region. Since the use of a smartphone can influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user and mode of usage, the authors offer important recommendations.

Therefore, readers are invited to cease this opportunity to appreciate and, hopefully, further reflect on the main issues the TCV-Africa here touches upon, namely: the attitudes and ways to walk and work together in the Church-as-Family of God; the exercise of authority in the process of decision-making; the promotion of inter-generational dialogue; the formation on the appropriate use of smartphones in religious communities; the training of spiritual directors; the role of Catholic schools in the moral development of society; and the need for faithfulness and fruitfulness in Consecrated life.

Enjoy reading!

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# Vademecum on Synodality:
# How Can We Journey Together?

**Innocent Joshua Chiawa Igbokwe,** OCD, PhD[1]

## Abstract

*The synodality of Pope Francis comes with lots of excitement, misgivings and misconceptions. Some have asked whether it is a product of coercion or freedom. Some have wondered whether it is a true renewal or a disguised trap. Some have questioned the intention of this synod. It is factual that every synod is shrouded in mystery and the Holy Spirit is the principle of communion and mission in the Church, the principle of synodality. The fears, anxiety, tensions, joys and excitement this synod has generated seems unprecedented in the recent history of the Church. The processes of this synodality will determine the 'shape of the future of the Church. We shall therefore examine in this paper the virtues and vices that can make or mar the processes.*

Keywords: Church, Journey, Synod, Synodality.

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Synodality is the invitation of Pope Francis for the universal Church to gather together and discuss how we are to stay together today in the world in the light of the Gospel. This is not the meeting of the collegial government or episcopal collegiality but the ecclesial communion, the entire people of God. It is the gathering of the people of God who constitute the Church of Christ: the clerics and laity. The greatest aim of the synod is to listen and discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church, how we can live together today. It is to listen and discern the image of the Church envisaged by Christ. The way of the synod is the way of collective discernment, collaboration, sharing, participation and communion. The idea of synodality has increased mixed feelings of fears, suspicions, hopes, excitement and more in the universal Church.

However, no matter what one thinks about the synod and the outcome of the synodal process, the potential dangers and abuses, the enormous promises of the synod cannot be ignored. Therefore, Catholics, both great and small, rich and poor, saints and sinners are encouraged to give in their best of bests and engage actively, passionately, prayerfully, wisely, and honestly on the synod and the synodal process. This will bring about a purified, balanced and enriched outcome for the Church. What is important is to religiously follow the virtues of the Church in a journey together and overcome the tendencies to slack towards the vices.

## Virtues of the Church in a Journey together

These are the virtues of the Church in a journey together that makes the journey the symbol and characteristic of a pilgrim Church. The Vademecum for the synod on synodality views it as the principles and attitudes of synodality.

### *Listening and Dialogue*

This is the key to the synodal journey. We must listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit if this synod is going to be truly the Church in a journey. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria affirms this in a recent document, "This Synod is a dynamic process of convergence that call for listening and dialogue, leading to greater collaboration, a more profound sense of communion and participation in Church life at various levels."[4]

Pope Francis on his address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops on 7 October 2015 says that "dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. Indeed, God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount. We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking." The question is: Is the Church ready to listen? Is the Church interested in dialogue? Maybe! Let us see an example. On the 10th of January, 2022, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) posted a question to help the discussion on the synodal journey in her twitter handle and requested for comments from the public. This is it: "Here are seven attitudes we can all adopt as we continue our synodal journey together. Which one inspires you the most? Let us know in the comments below." The seven attitudes listed graphically in a vertical descending order are:

- Innovative Outlook
- Inclusivity
- Open-Mindedness
- Listening

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[2]   Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). Human Fraternity: Path to Building Sustainable Peace in Nigeria. The First Plenary Meeting Communique, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja, 5 -11 March 2022.

- • Accompaniment
- • Co-Responsibility
- • Dialogue

In splits of moments, comments flashed instantaneously but colossally against the so called inspirational words. The negative reactions were unbelievable. Even though some of these comments were beautiful Christian alternate proposals, at one point, the USCCB Twitter handler turned off the comment button. Listening and dialogue? Commenting on the entire saga, Stephen White, "as a whole, they only serve to convince Catholics (and plenty of non-Catholics looking on, by the way) that the whole Synod process is precisely the sort of bureaucratic, political enterprise the Holy Father keeps insisting it must not be".[3]

One would have expected the USCCB twitter handler to lead by example. One would expect the USCCB to keep to the rules of engagement: listening and dialogue, but the reverse was the case. Turning off the comment session was resisting the core values of the synodal journey. It was opposition to listening and dialogue. If this happened in a country, the most acclaimed democratic nation on earth where freedom of expression is uppermost regardless of religion, imagine what could happen in countries in Africa, Asia, South America and so on, where the order of the day is suppression and domination. One may ask, "is the fruit (final document) of this synod on synodality going to be hijacked or staged managed by the hierarchy and wrapped with the paper of the laity to give it imprimatur and coloration of the people of God, the case of Esau's hand and Jacob's voice?"

If this synod is going to be the Church in movement, in a journey together, then the entire Church must move together. Nobody should

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[3]   Stephen P. White, "What's at Stake with the Synod?" *in   Ethics and Public Policy Centre.* (January 13, 2022). Retrieved from https://eppc.org/publication/whats-at-stake-with-the-synod/

be left out; otherwise, it becomes a mere movement or journey in the Church by a few, an attitude that runs contrary to the intention of the Pope for this synod. In this context, the part cannot truly represent the whole. Beyond this, the Church in a journey together must be ready to listen to the excluded, the victims of war, of poverty, of abuse, the physically challenged, the oppressed, the divorced, the remarried, the marginalized and women. It is obvious that "listening to those who have the same views as we do bears no fruit. Dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. Indeed, God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount".[4] In this synod, everyone in the Church has right to speak and to be listened to. God speaks through each of us.

### Openness[5]

Openness is a function of truth and transparency. It is a value against rigidity. It is one of the greatest virtues of the Church in a journey together. One who engages in dialogue must be open to change. The people of God who are actively involved in the synod on synodality must be willing to accept the better and new ways of living out the Gospel in our time. Openness improves transparency and makes truth attractive. Without openness, listening becomes superficial, dialogue becomes fruitless and discernment becomes impossible. We must be willing to embrace newness of insights, ideas, methods and things. We must be open to accept new ways of doing things and new ways of staying together. According to Vademecum,

Dialogue leads us to newness: We must be willing to change our opinions based on what we have heard from others. Openness to conversion and change: We can often be resistant to what the Holy

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[4] *Vademecum*, 2. See also, Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

[5] Cf. O. Rush, 'Inverting the Pyramid: The Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church'. *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), pp. 299–325, at p. 311.

Spirit is trying to inspire us to undertake. We are called to abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past. Synods are an ecclesial exercise in discernment: Discernment is based on the conviction that God is at work in the world and we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us. We are signs of a Church that listens and journeys: By listening, the Church follows the example of God himself, who listens to the cry of his people. The Synodal Process provides us with the opportunity to open ourselves to listen in an authentic way, without resorting to ready-made answers or pre-formulated judgments.

### *Inclusiveness and Sharing*

The Church in a journey together is a process of inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is a beautiful way of giving voices to those whose voices are hardly heard in the Church. This process of this synod must be willing to give opportunity for the people of God to get adequately involved in the administration and governance of the Church. The synod will be able to suggest how far the laity can go in this direction today in the light of the Gospel. It will consider opening more spaces for women and physically challenged.

No matter the state of the people in the Church, the Spirit of God is present in all. The Pope maintains that "all the members of the Church are active subjects of evangelisation and 'missionary disciples'"(EG §120). Therefore, the process of the synod must find ways of overcoming the excuses that prevent the lay people from sharing the charisms in the service of the Church and stop the adverse of effects of clerical complex or "an excessive clericalism which keeps them [the lay people] away from decision-making" in the Church (EG §102). The synod must empower the lay people with those roles that do reflect "a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political, and economic sectors", tasks with "a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society" (EG §102).

Again, efforts should be made to re-examine the role of women today in the light of the Gospel. This synod must make legitimate spaces for women in the heart of the Church. We must find ways of overcoming the tendency to exclude women in some cultures, in the decision making and administration of the Church. Pope Francis acknowledges "that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection." He adds that, "we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because "the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace" and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures".[6] The Vademecum for the synod captures it well: "Being synodal requires time for sharing: We are invited to speak with authentic courage and honesty (parrhesia) in order to integrate freedom, truth, and charity. Everyone can grow in understanding through dialogue"[7] and "it is vain to try to impose one's ideas on the whole Body through pressure or to discredit those who feel differently".[8]

### Respect

The aim of the synod is to find the truth of the Gospel so as to apply it appropriately in our time. This cannot be done in disorder and violence. The Church in a journey together must make the journey together in peace, love and fairness. This is to say that the process of the synod must be protected with the virtue of respect. Rights and dignity of people must be respected. We must respect one another as we journey together. We must speak our mind in love and listen what others have to say. Everyone has something to say.

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[6] *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 103.

[7] *Vademecum*, 2.3.

[8] *Vademecum*, 2.4.

In this journey together, disagreement and argument are bound to occur from time to time. We must not allow our anger rise to high as to speak without respect. We must not attack anyone with different opinion as we walk along. Dialogue is defeated if we all have the same opinion. It is through dialogue that we can discern who we are, what we ought to do and where we need to stand in the changing world of our time. It is through dialogue done in love and respect that we can discern where we have deviated from the Gospel. The Vademecum says, "We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking".[9] Nobody should be disrespected or discountenanced. Everyone is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

### *Discernment*

Discernment is another important virtue of the Church in a journey together. The processes of the synod on synodality must be coated with the fruits of discernment. One can describe the disciples' journey together on the Road to Emmaus as a classical example of synodality. It was a journey of doubts, tensions, and questions. They did not know what was going to be the outcome. But they were ready for surprises. It was a process of discernment. The revelation, insight, awakening and awareness came at the moment of prayer. At the celebration of the Eucharist, the process of discernment yielded result. Let us say that the two disciples withdraw for a retreat. To think about what was happening and see if they could understand it. Surprisingly, during prayer, the revelation came. The process of this synod must not take prayer for granted. There is no revelation, no discernment without prayer. Church communities must organize sessions for prayer, reflections or practice of silence. If possible people should go on retreat or have a quiet time. It is then that one can recognize the Spirit when it

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[9] *Vademecum*, 2. 2 See also, Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

speaks. It is then that one can effectively listen to God and understand what others are saying. According to Vademecum:

> The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment. It requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: "to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us."[10]

### *Freedom*

One of the fundamental virtues of the synod is freedom. The freedom of the people of God in Christ must be requirement for every contribution in this synod. There must be no coercion. None should be forced to speak. None should be made to say anything under duress. This is how the Brazilian Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, puts it "Pray, reflect, discuss and share your experiences, insights and desires. Do it with the freedom of those who place their trust in God and are thus able to overcome timidity, a sense of inferiority or worse still, reproaches and complaints".[11] Discussions and sharing of experiences, desires, and proposals should be made in freedom.

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[10] *Vademecum*, 2. 2

[11] Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, "To dream together, to pray together and to work together." Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l6b-nFftfRNsTCltqGuL5xYH0yLGG2AS/view

*Humility/Simplicity*

Cardinal João Braz de Aviz encourages that the synod discussions and sharing be done in simplicity, without arrogance: "Let it be done in all simplicity, moved by the Holy Spirit, avoiding arrogance, without presumption but always having a sense of co-responsibility".[12] As has been expressed so far that listening is the method and format is dialogue through participation. Listening, dialogue and participation cannot bear fruit without humility.

An important virtue that helps us to journey together is humility. People of God must be humble and simple. These are good attitudes for the synod. Only a humble person can listen to others and listen with sincerity. Only a humble person knows that others may have better opinions. Only a humble person can respect the views of others. Only a simple person is able to honestly engage others in dialogue. The Vademecum puts it this way:

> Humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking: Everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak. Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate to convince others. Rather, it is welcoming what others say as a way by which the Holy Spirit can speak for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:7).[13]

## Vices of a Journey in the Church

The vices of a journey together in the Church can be seen as various stumbling blocks to our achieving the goodly desires of the synod on

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[12]Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, "To dream together, to pray together and to work together." Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l6b-nFftfRNsTCltqGuL5xYH0yLGG2AS/view

[13]*Vademecum*, 2.3.

synodality. The Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality captures these vices as temptations or pitfalls that we must do well not to fall into during the process of this synod.

### *Clericalism and Bureaucracy*

One of the dangers or stumbling block that the synod on synodality will face is the tendency to undermine the laity. The aim of the synod will be defeated if the laity is not fully carried along. It is when all the sons and daughters participate in the process of the synod that the fruits of the walking together will be fully realized. This is no time for excessive bureaucracy or hierarchical clericalism. We cannot say that the synod is the Church in a journey but a journey in the Church if it is hijacked by the hierarchy and clerics. The synod should neither be dominated by the clerics nor by the laity. The Vademecum pleads:

> Overcome the scourge of clericalism: The Church is the Body of Christ filled with different charisms in which each member has a unique role to play. We are all interdependent on one another and we all share an equal dignity amidst the holy People of God. In the image of Christ, true power is service. Synodality calls upon pastors to listen attentively to the flock entrusted to their care, just as it calls the laity to freely and honestly express their views. Everyone listens to one other out of love, in a spirit of communion and our common mission. Thus the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in manifold ways in and through the entire People of God.[14]

### *Labelling and Stereotyping*

Another vice that the participants of the synod on synodality must overcome is the tendency to label and stereotype people and places. The Church in a journey together walks in unity and not in disorder.

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[14]*Vademecum*, 2.3.

Labelling and stereotyping puts people or places in categories and creates divisions. The synod is to enhance peace and not to create crises. No one should be condemned or perceived as irredeemable. The Vademecum for the synod on synodality warns: "Leave behind prejudices and stereotypes: We can be weighed down by our weaknesses and sinfulness. The first step towards listening is freeing our minds and hearts from prejudices and stereotypes that lead us on the wrong path, towards ignorance and division".[15]

### *Secular Humanism*

One of the vices that may rise up during this synod is the tendency to give opportunity to secular humanism while every attention will be on the human person and thereby overlooking the work of the Holy Spirit. Synodality is actually the revelation of the Holy Spirit. It is centred on listening to the Spirit. There may be temptation to shift the attention to ourselves and try to direct ourselves. Such temptations must be avoided. Otherwise, the synod may just end up as a mere journey together in the Church and not the Church in a journey. The Vademecum admonishes on what to avoid:

> The temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God. Synodality is not a corporate strategic exercise. Rather it is a spiritual process that is led by the Holy Spirit. We can be tempted to forget that we are pilgrims and servants on the path marked out for us by God. Our humble efforts of organization and coordination are at the service of God who guides us on our way. We are clay in the hands of the divine Potter (Isaiah 64:8).[16]

### *Myopism*

Another vice of a journey in the Church is what the author calls the vice of myopism. A journey in the Church usually focuses on matters of

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[15]*Vademecum*, 2.3.

[16]*Vademecum*, 2.4.

immediate concerns. The synod on synodality is like to fall into the temptation of defective narrow minded vision. The synod is not just about matters of few weeks to come. It is a journey of foresight. It is the journey of the future, the journey of eternity. It must not be reduced to matters of immediate concerns. The emphasis of the synod must be to discern the 'shape' of the future Church and not just the Church of few hours. This synod must have foresight and think long-term concerns. The Vademecum has something to say:

> The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from other points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries. This requires us to think long-term. This also means broadening our perspectives to the dimensions of the entire Church and asking questions, such as: What is God's plan for the Church here and now? How can we implement God's dream for the Church on the local level?.[17]

*Reductionism*

Reductionism is a vice of a journey in the church that entails reducing the intention of the synodal journey to something else. It could be in form of reducing the synod into mere problems fixing project or structural re-organization project or undermining the objective altogether. The Church in a journey together does not focus on fixing problems or building structures or forget that its aim is to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church. It does not overlook problems or structure, its aim is essentially to lead to a renewal or conversion experience in the lives of the people of God that will reset the image of the Church the way it was originally designed by Jesus. The Vademecum admits:

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[17]*Vademecum*, 2.4.

The challenges, difficulties, and hardships facing our world and our Church are many. Nevertheless, fixating on the problems will only lead us to be overwhelmed, discouraged, and cynical. We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness. Instead of focusing only on what is not going well, let us appreciate where the Holy Spirit is generating life and see how we can let God work more fully. …The Synodal Process will naturally call for a renewal of structures at various levels of the Church, in order to foster deeper communion, fuller participation, and more fruitful mission. At the same time, the experience of synodality should not focus first and foremost on structures, but on the experience of journeying together to discerning the path forward, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The conversion and renewal of structures will come about only through the ongoing conversion and renewal of all the members of the Body of Christ.[18]

### *Exclusion*

Exclusion is one of the vices of a journey in the Church whereby a cross-section of the Church is entirely overlooked in collective discernment and decision-taking. This is what the synod on synodality must avoid. It must overcome the tendency to listen to some persons, people and group and overlook others.   There must be wilder consultations. This is the intention of the pope.[19] It must overcome the temptation to forget the contribution of those who are less active in the Church. It must avoid the tendency to exclude non-Catholic who have invaluable contributions to make on the basis of their expertise and

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[18] *Vademecum*, 2.4.

[19] See Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution. Episcopalis communio (15 September 2018)*, no. 7. Cf. Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 07.09.2021. For a Synodal Church:Communion, Participation, and Mission, no. 31. This consultation is with "the Priests, Deacons and lay Faithful of their Churches, both individually and in associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer"

knowledge. Even the Vademecum speaks against such tendency that may harm the process of the synod on synodality. It says: "Synods are a time to dream and "spend time with the future": We are encouraged to create a local process that inspires people, with no one excluded to create a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel"[20] and again, "a Synodal Process is a time to dialogue with people from the worlds of economics and science, politics and culture, arts and sport, the media and social initiatives. It will be a time to reflect on ecology and peace, life issues and migration. We must keep the bigger picture in view to fulfil our mission in the world. It is also an opportunity to deepen the ecumenical journey with other Christian denominations and to deepen our understanding with other faith traditions".[21] The synod must overcome the vice of exclusion.

## *Politicization*

This vice of a journey in the Church is the temptation of viewing every discussion and processes of the synod from political point of view. We must avoid the tendency to turn the synod into political in character. The tendency to categorize the participants as winners or losers, create factions and divide the people of God. In the words of the Vademecum, we must not "treat the synod as a kind of parliament. This confuses synodality with a 'political battle' in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other. It is contrary to the spirit of synodality to antagonize others or to encourage divisive conflicts that threaten the unity and communion of the Church".[22] The synod should be a time to build bridges beyond the walls that divide us.

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[20] *Vademecum*, 2.3.

[21] *Vademecum*, 2.4.

[22] *Vademecum*, 2.4.

**Conclusion**

By and large, if this journeying together in synodality is going to be a lasting work of the Holy Spirit, we must try to discern and practice together the virtues of the Church in a journey and prevent the vices of a journey in the Church. In any case, our faith and assurance is that divine providence will not allow the fruits of our synodal aircraft to be hijacked by unscrupulous elements within and outside the Church to a scandalous demonically arranged airport. Afterall, the Holy Spirit is in each of us and this Spirit is the principle of communion and mission. This is the faith of the Church. This we must confess with confidence and great expectation.

# Synodality, the Exercise of Authority, and Decision-making Processes: Who gets to Make the Decisions?

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## Abstract

*A religious superior is one who through appointment or election assumed the responsibility of being God's representative to guide other members of the institute in their commitment to seek out and do the will of God. Hence, leadership or exercise of authority in a religious institute is a spiritual reality with social connotation. Ecclesiastical offices are established in stable manner for spiritual purposes (cf. can.145, 1). Exercise of authority within the religious domain is not a question of wielding power over other members but service, empowering others for a maximum utilization of their potentials and talents for their personal fulfil, and for the attainment of the goal of the institute for the glory of God. With the second Vatican Council, there is newness in the mode of exercise of authority and decision making in religious institute. This write up is an attempt to expatiate the novum in exercise of authority and process of decision making from the perspective of canonical legislation and in the light of the principles of the Synod on Synodality. Pope Francis initiated the Synod on Synodality in October 10, 2021 to end in October 23, 2023. With this Synod he is calling the Church to rediscover its deeply synodal nature. "This rediscovery of the synodal roots of the Church will involve a process of humbly learning together how God is calling us to be as the*

*Church in the third millennium." (Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality 2022). Exercise of authority also is to be done in a synodal way without however cancelling the role of religious superiors as guide of their brothers and sisters in seeking for and doing the will of God and achieving the purpose of their profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience which is the perfection of charity or union with God (cf. can. 573).*

## Introduction

Religious life is a life of total dedication and commitment to the service of God, which constitutes a special consecration that is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and expresses it more fully (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 5a). It entails practice of evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in imitation of Christ who was poor, chaste (cf. Mt 8: 20; Lk 9: 58), and who redeemed and sanctified men through obedience even to the death on the cross (cf. Phil 2: 8). Religious men and women, "driven by love with which the Holy Spirit floods their hearts (cf. Rm 5:5) they live more and more for Christ and for his body which is the Church (cf. Col. 1: 24). The more fervently, then, they are joined to Christ by this total lifelong gift of themselves, the richer the life of the Church becomes and the more lively and successful its apostolate" (*Perfectae Caritatis* 1c).

The "ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels" *(Perfectae Caritatis* 2a). Hence, the essence of religious life lies in living the life of Christ of total self-emptying (cf. Phil 2: 7), life in the Spirit (cf. Rom 8: 1-13), listening to his words (cf. Lk 10: 39) and being solicitous for the things of Christ (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 5c).

Exercise of authority in religious institute is at the service of the religious life of the members and the mission of the institute to see to its

fulfillment; and to care for the integral goods of the members called to the mission. How is one conferred with authority expected to carry out this duty in this third millennium? In this write up we set out to expound the new modality of exercise of authority and process of decision making in a synodal way as established in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. But first of all, we shall begin by delineating briefly the root of the office or function of religious superior.

## Brief Survey of the Origin of the Office of a Superior and Function

Every ecclesiastical office has duties attached to it for which it is created and not for the exaltation of the office holder. The exercise of authority in religious life by a religious superior involves carrying out the teaching, sanctifying and governing functions. The function of a religious superior originated from the time of early monasticism from the role of the abbot.

The term abbot came from the Hebrew word *abba*, which means father. This word was used in the early 4th century to describe the role of some of the Egyptian hermits as guides and teachers of religious life for younger monks who came to live under their direction. The original ideal of the abbot's spiritual fatherhood of his monks developed ultimately into the juridical office of abbot, vested with authority as set forth in the Benedictine Rule. (P. VOLKY 2003).

In the monastic institution, the figure and function of abbot is of fundamental importance and it was a common conception that monastic community cannot exist without the abbot. He is seen as the foundation on which the monastic edifice is built (cf. T. LECCISOTTI 1978**).** He is the principle of unity and mediator of *koinonia*. The primary and fundamental function of the abbot is centered on spiritual direction, a function for which he has to render account to God. As the father of the community and for each single monk, the abbot also takes

care of the entire spiritual and material needs of the community and each individual monk.

The curre.nt canonical legislation does not explicitly attribute to a religious superior the obligation of spiritual direction for the members. Nevertheless, the series of obligations attached to the office of superior in the code point to superior as spiritual guide and animator. The legislator encourages the members to approach their superiors with trust and confidence and to open their minds freely and spontaneously to them (cf. can. 630, 5).

The office of a religious superior as an ecclesiastical office is created for the teaching, sanctifying and governing functions laid down in different parts of the 1983 code.  Religious Superior are given authority for them to carry out the functions attached to the office. This authority is not to exercised arbitrarily but according to the prescriptions of the universal and proper law (can. 617) in a synodal way.

The word Synod is from Greek word *Syn-hodos* which means the same way or the same path. A Synodal Church is a Church that walks the same way or the same path listening to one another and to what the Holy Spirit is telling her. The Church of the third millennium treads the path of synodality, and it is hoped that through this path, the Church will be renewed and reconstructed to its original model envisaged by Christ and in the model of early Church (GEEVARGHESE KAITHAVANA 2021). Pope Francis believes God wants the Church to walk the path of synodality in this third millennium (Vademecum 1.2).

## The New Way of Exercising Authority in Religious Institute

In the past with much emphasis on "blind obedience", there was less involvement or engagement of the members in dialogue before final

decision is made. Dialogue was not all that part of authority obedience relationship. (cf. L. J. SUENENS 1968). The Mother Church taking cognizance of the changed circumstances of time in which religious life is lived today, in her wisdom prescribed new modality of exercising authority which when followed may help to eliminate the conflict being experienced at times between the person in authority and the governed.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Perfectae Caritatis* no 14, laid down new method of governance in religious institutes that is more dialogical, emphasizing the application of the principle of subsidiarity and co – responsibility. The doctrine of Vatican II on religious governance is expressed in juridical form in the current 1983 code of canon law as follow:

The authority which Superiors receive from God through the ministry of the Church is to be exercised by them in a spirit of service. In fulfilling their office, they are to be docile to the will of God, and are to govern those subject to them as children of God. By their reverence for the human person, they are to promote voluntary obedience. They are to listen willingly to their subjects and foster their cooperation for the good of the institute and the Church, without prejudice however to their authority to decide and to command what is to be done. (can. 618).

When the legislator talks about the superior promoting the voluntary obedience of the members and listening willingly to their subjects and to foster their cooperation for the good of the Church and institute, he is referring to the need for the superior to engage the members in a fraternal dialogue before arriving at final decision in order to hear the opinion of the members. It is only when the superior enters into dialogue with the members that she will be able to know their feelings and thoughts on a given matter and that will help too in the search for the will of God and for her to make right decision. Members are to be

engaged in dialogue because they are free human persons with intellect and will endowed with different gifts of grace and nature with which they can impact positively on the life of the institute.

Before the Second Vatican Council, there was no juridical obligation of dialogue with the members before the superior gives order on what is to be done. Canonical legislation requires that one exercising authority carry the members of the institute along by involving them in the decision making and not just to give order without first trying to know the mind and feelings of the members of the institute through dialogue for communal discernment of the will of God for the institute and members.

## The Significance and Procedure of Dialogue in Decision Making

Dialogue implies interpersonal relationship that comports certain reciprocity as each of the person in dialogue receives and gives and is enriched by this exchange. Hence, it is distinct from controversy, from simple exchange of ideas from any form of inequality in which one part gives and the other receives (cf. C. BROVETTO 1969).

Authentic dialogue requires attentive listening of both persons engaged in dialogue to one another. The service of authority implies the obligation of listening, which is among the principal ministries of superiors, for which they must always be available. Listening comports an unconditional acceptance of the other person, allowing him or her space in one's heart; it requires affection and understanding, appreciation and consideration of the other person's opinion (cf. Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life (=CICLSAL, The Service of Authority and Obedience, 2008, n. 20a**).**

## The Importance of Dialogue/Communal Discernment

Dialogue and communal discernment is of great importance as it helps to promote sense of belonging among members of a religious institutes and respect for the persons who are all concerned in pursuing one goal of seeking and doing the will of God. Both the superior and the members through dialogue try to know and to do the will of God. The Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life underline this fact thus:

> In consecrated life, everyone must sincerely seek the will of the Father, because otherwise the reason itself for the choice of life would disappear; but it is equally important to carry out such a search together with the brothers or the sisters because it is properly that which unites them, "making them a family united to Christ." Persons in authority are at the service of this search to ensure that it occurs in sincerity and truth…With the intention of doing God's will. (CICLSAL, Service of Authority 2008, n. 12).

The need to carry out together with the brothers or the sisters the search for the will of God is indicated in the above passage. Discerning the will of God through dialogue serves as source of unity and make the consecrated persons one family in Christ. The one in authority has the responsibility to ensure that the communal search for the will of God is done in sincerity and truth that is, to ensure an objective search. The essence of community discernment is to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the community through individual prayer and communal reflection to choose together what is right and pleasing to God (Cf. CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience, n.* 20e).

A religious institute is a family of spiritual order created by the possession of one common spiritual gift or charism. This serves as the source of the unity and communion of the members. The fact of being a

spiritual family with one mission and one purpose is a premise for communal discernment. The fundamental role of a superior within such a group is to construct together with the members a fraternal community. He or she does this through the service of listening and dialogue, creation of a favourable atmosphere for sharing and co-responsibility, soliciting the participation of everyone in the concern of each one, favouring individual and communitarian dialogue, and promoting harmonious living.

In a communal discernment, the one in authority is to serve as "a focus for the searching and questioning of the community and to be a catalyst sharing questions, expectations, lifting and inspiring. Such a role makes possible the strong docility which must accompany all responsible freedom" (F. B. ROTHLUEBBER 1970).

In Community life which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with the others in order to discover the Father's will. At the same time, community members together recognize in the one who presides an expression of the fatherhood of God and the exercise of authority received from God, at the service of discernment and communion." ( ST. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consacrata* 1994, n. 92).

The importance of authentic dialogue and listening to the other lies in the fact that it affords the superior the opportunity for a better coordination of the spiritual gifts of the members of the community, and opportunity to have a view of the limitations and difficulties of the members when making decisions. Furthermore, listening can help to prevent difficulties on individual and communitarian basis (CICLSAL, Service of Authority and Obedience n. 20 a). A superior engages the community and/or individual in dialogue because each and every member of the institute is differently gifted and can contribute personally to the mission of the institute, and is also a channel through which the will of God can be discovered.

The importance of dialogue cannot be over emphasized as it helps to unite members of the community as one family in Christ and it affords the community opportunity for the members to contribute their gifts for common good. The role of the superior in the communal discernment or dialogue is to see that it is carried out in all honesty and disposition to seek and to do the will of God, which is the essence of religious vocation.

Listening and dialogue is the key to the synodal journey which brings about "greater collaboration, a more profound sense of communion and participation in Church life at various levels" (Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, 2022). The authority attached to the office of superior is for her to foster communion among the members of the institute and    their participation in the pursuit for the mission of the institute. She can only achieve this aim by carrying the members along by listening to and engaging them in dialogue.

The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called by virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world. As the Church embarks on this synodal journey, we must strive to ground ourselves in experiences of authentic listening and discernment on the path of becoming the Church that God calls us to be (Vademecum For the Synod on Synodality 2021).

## Conditions for Fruitful Dialogue/Communal Discernment

Fruitful communal discernment requires fulfilment of certain conditions by the Superior. These conditions are: 1) creation of an atmosphere of trust and recognizing the abilities of the members; 2)

listening attentively and encouraging free and sincere dialogue; 3) readiness to accept the possible problems that accompany communal search, and trying to find out the causes of the possible uneasiness and misunderstandings; 4) knowing how to propose solution and being ready to accept others contributions; 5) encouraging and motivating the subjects to use their individual gifts for the community by making their own contributions; and 6) should have the ability to take final decision after evaluating the member's free contributions (cf. CICLSAL, The Service of Authority and Obedience n.20 e) .

Furthermore, successful communal discernment also demands from the person governing and the governed the determination to seek nothing but divine will, openness to recognize in other members the ability to discover the truth, attention to the signs of the times, "freedom from prejudices, from excessive attachment to one's own ideas, from perceptual frameworks, which are rigid or distorted and from strong oppositions, which frustrate the diversity of opinions," and firm determination to maintain unity irrespective of what the final decision might be (CICLSAL, The Service of Authority and Obedience n. 20 e.).

One challenges that might occur despite the effort of the superior to engage the members of the community in a communal discernment is the attitude of closure and unwillingness on the part of some members to share and make their contributions in the communal exchange of ideas for the good of the community or to see moment of dialogue and communal discernment as opportunity to attack the superior or anyone else. Where this is the case, the one in authority should not for this reason withdraws from further dialogue and communal discernment but should exercise patience with such members and keep on praying to God for their change of heart (cf. CICLSAL, Service of Authority, n.20C).

## Matters for Communal Discernment

One question that need to be addressed as we talk of the need for dialogue and communal discernment is whether every matter in a religious community actually requires communal discernment and dialogue. The issues that require communal discernment depends on its importance for the life of the community or for the life and work of an individual religious. Nevertheless, the general principle is that superior should consult the members of the community on affairs of community concern.

It is the importance of the question at issue that will determine if it should be subjected to communal discernment or not apart from the cases already specified in the proper law. However, "the spirit of discernment ought to characterize every decision-making process that involves the community. A time of individual prayer and reflection together with a series of important attitudes for choosing together what is right and pleasing to God should never be missing prior to every decision (CICLSAL, The Service of Authority and Obedience, n.20 e).

The proper law of every religious institute ought to specify matters that require consultation of members by superiors in their different levels of governance. The more an issue is of great importance to the life of the members the more the necessity to carry them along before decision is made on that. Every affair that concern the community must be subject to communal discernment in a spirit of prayer to be enlightened by God on what accord with his will in a particular matter. Example of affairs that requires dialogue is community time table, menu, and other important activities of the community.

## Taking Final Decisions: Whose Responsibility?

After dialogue what happens? Dialogue has three stages: in the first stage the superior presents issues to be deliberated upon, second stage

comprises engagement in dialogue with the members; and the third stage of taking final decision on what is to be done based on what is discovered in dialogue and in personal prayer of the superior. Superior's obligation to dialogue with the members does not imply dialogue in perpetuity (*ad infinitum*). Final conclusion must be reached and directive given on what the community or individual should do, and that is the responsibility of the superior. The labour of seeking together "must end, when it is the moment, with the decision of the superiors whose presence and acceptance are indispensable in every community" (PAUL VI, *Evangelica Testificatio* n. 25).

The Synodal process by which the consultation of the People of God is demanded "does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority" (Vademecum 2021). In religious life too, there is no democratic system of governance and religious superiors have personal executive power which is power of decision to direct the members for the fulfilment of the goal of their religious vocation and the attainment of the goal of the institute. Of course such decision cannot be arbitrarily made as she is to command action to be done in accordance with the constitution and the universal law (cf. can. 617).

Apart from the occasion of general chapter which is a collegial body with highest authority in religious institute (can. 631), whereby final decision is based on the absolute majority votes of the member of the chapter delegates (cf. can. 119, 10), in the case of community, after the process of dialogue and communal discernment, and superior's engagement in personal prayer to hear from God the right thing to do, it is the responsibility of the superior to take final decision and command what is to be done that accords with the will of God.

A good religious' leader should have the courage after listening to the community or to individual religious to command what is to be done without fear or self-interest. The only motive for such decision should

be the good of the individual and the common good of the institute. The demand to dialogue with the members does not remove the obligation of superior to take final decision and see to its implementation. The Council Fathers emphasized this saying: "And so superiors should gladly listen to their subjects and foster harmony among them for the good of the community and the Church, provided that thereby their own authority to decide and command what has to be done is not harmed" (Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* n. 14 d).

The fact that the final decision is the obligation of the Superior and she is to take decision that accord with the will of God is also underlined by the Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life thus:

> Community discernment is not a substitute for the nature and function of persons in authority, from whom final decision is expected. Nevertheless, persons in authority cannot ignore that the community is the best place in which to recognize and accept the will of God. In any case, discernment is one of the peak moments in a consecrated community where the centrality of God, that ultimate end of everyone's search, as well as the responsibility and the contribution of each one in the journey of all towards the Truth, stand out with particular clarity. (CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience,* 20e).

Still on the same idea the Congregation continues: "Despite the obligation of going through the delicate process of communal discernment and listening, the superior is to be firm in demanding the implementation of the decision taken. Authentic love for the community makes the superior able to reconcile firmness, listening to each one and courage to make decisions" (CICLSAL, The Service of Authority and Obedience n. 20 f).

Once the superior takes final decision after dialogue, the members are bound to obey and do what is commanded and if anyone has serious

reason not to do what is directed, she is to humbly approach the superior and respectfully let her know her personal problem concerning the order given. If the superior after listening to her insists on her original command, the religious at this juncture, imitating the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to do the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34; 5: 30; Heb 10: 7; Ps 39: 9), assumed the nature of a slave (Phil 2:7) "learned obedience in the school of suffering" "(Hebrew 5: 8), "under the motion of the Holy Spirit" is to subject herself in faith to the superior "who hold the place of God."   (Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* n. 14 b). Religious imitate Christ in his self-emptying by their exercise of the virtues of humility, obedience, fortitude and chastity (cf. Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* n. 5d).

"The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all. Because of the holy service they have professed, or because of dread of hell and for the glory of everlasting life, they carry out the superior's order as promptly as if the command came from God himself. The Lord says of men like this: No sooner did he hear than he obeyed me (Ps 17/[18]: 45; again, he tells teachers: Whoever listens to you, listens to me (Lk 10: 16). Such people as these immediately put aside their own concerns, abandon their own will, and lay down whatever they have in hand, leaving it unfinished. With the ready step of obedience, they follow the voice of authority in their actions. Almost at the same moment, then, as the master gives the instruction the disciple quickly puts it into practice in fear of God; and both actions together are swiftly completed as one" (THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT in Latin and English with notes, 1981).

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council underlined the need to obey the directive of the superior when they affirm: "Religious, therefore, in the spirit of faith and love for the divine will should humbly obey their superiors according to their rules and constitutions. Realizing that they

are contributing to building up the body of Christ according to God's plan, they should use both the forces of their intellect and will and the gifts of nature and grace to execute the commands and fulfil the duties entrusted to them. In this way religious obedience, far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity" (Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* n. 14 C).

Superiors and subjects form one body, and this body is called to do the will of God. "If a superior makes decision, she should make it in obedience to the will of God; because God wants her to make that decision. If a subject has to carry out an order, she should do so in union with Christ who is obedient to His Father" (Daughters of Divine Love Constitution, Art. 48).

Every human group or organization that gather for a purpose to attain needs order and discipline and someone to lead others towards achievement of the end of the organization. The authority invested on the superior is for her to be able to give directives that accord with the will of God for common good and for the realization of the goal of religious life and mission of the institute. True and authentic dialogue or communal discernment entails ardent search for what is pleasing to God in a given circumstance, divesting oneself of prejudice and attachment to personal interest. The final decision of the superior is not based on what she wants but what God wants or the will of God which is always for our true happiness and salvation.

The Refusal to obey the final decision of the superior "often involves serious loss for the common good." The superior's final decision must be obeyed by all apart from an order manifestly contrary to the laws of God, or the constitution of the institute, or one involving a serious and certain evil in which case there is no obligation to obey the superior's decision concerning a field in which the calculation of the greater good can vary according to the point of view (PAUL VI., *Evangelica Testificatio* 28).

At profession religious assumed the commitment to do the will of God all the days of their life making total offer of their own will as sacrifice to God to be "united permanently and securely to God's salvific will" (Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* n. 14a). Hence, it is the responsibility of superior and subjects to seek nothing but to know and do the will of God in every circumstance.

To carry out her responsibility as mediator between God and the members effectively, a religious superior is expected to know and love the members for whom she mediates; to have profound experience of God for her to be able to distinguish God's voice from her personal passion or worldly spirit; and to have knowledge of the social and ecclesial reality and command according to rules and constitutions (Cf. P. C. PALMES 2003).

## Conclusion

The difficulty witnessed today some times in religious institutes as regards governance could be attributed to exercise of authority that is in some cases less authoritative or on the contrary too authoritative and obedience that is not always responsible or animated by the spirit of faith being contaminated by individualism and secularized mentality of our present time (cf. CICLSAL 2005)**.** Adoption of the new dialogical method in religious governance will go a long way to minimize the conflict which comes up at times between the superiors and subjects. When a superior engages the members in sincere dialogue it will make them feel respected and carried along in affairs that concern them and they will be more disposed to give their voluntary and responsible obedience to the orders or directives of the superior.

As God's representatives and spiritual guides of other members of the institute, superiors are to exercise their authority in the spirit of service

by engaging them in dialogue to seek the will of God before taking final decision that affect their life. This is the new way of exercise of authority demanded by the Mother Church.

The use of dialogue and communal discernment in exercise of authority is of great importance as it helps in promoting voluntary and responsible obedience of the members. When members are involved and carried along in the affairs of the community or the institute, they will more easily identify and be more docile to the decisions made for the common good. Engagement in dialogue with the members shows the respect one in authority has for them as adult and free persons endowed with different gifts and who can contribute for the development of an institute in which they belong. Members of the institute are to be carried along in decision making because every member matters and is also a channel through which the Holy Spirit can speak to the institute.

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# The Consecrated Persons of the Global South in the 21st Century: A Call to Faithfulness and Fruitfulness

## *Fr. Michael Songu, OMV* [1]

## Abstract

*This Paper addresses the question of Consecrated life in the global South. It highlights the call to faithfulness and fruitfulness. Over the centuries, Consecrated life shaped many of the Church's efforts in engaging worldly reality. It witnesses the Gospel message and promotes the Catholic faith: in this way, institutes of consecrated life break newer grounds and provide newer solutions in many areas of society. However, Consecrated life itself is an integral part Church, not insulated from the general currents in her. Vatican II documents are responses to social and ecclesial changes. Songu's reflection focuses on the teaching of Pope Francis on effective religious life in the 21ˢᵗ century following the Spirit of Vatican II as it relates to the global south. He presents the context of the Pope's message and re-enforces its relevance. Lessons are drawn from the Papal message itself, and proposes a way forward.*

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## Prelude

Consecrated life has shaped most of the Church's efforts in engaging worldly reality. From the monks and mendicants of the middle ages to the 19th century missionary societies, institutes of consecrated life have carried the banner of Catholicism in breaking newer grounds and providing newer solutions in areas like Agriculture, education, hospitality, healthcare, and charity. However, consecrated life itself is not insulated from the general currents in the Church.

In chapter six of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium, and the Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life: *Perfectae Caritatis* the essential Conception of consecrated life is set forth. Both documents are products of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican which, like the many other councils before it, was responding to social changes.

A main aim of Vatican II is captured by the Italian word *aggiornamento*.[2] It means bringing up to date. The world wars, colonization and decolonization, the key discoveries and inventions of science, technology and medicine had all happened. The information revolution was also underway. A lot had happened since the close of Vatican I.

The reality of councils illustrate mother Church's desire to be alive to the signs of the time.it is worth mentioning that, in the time since Vatican II, the desire and effort for update has not died down, even as the world has entered a stage of greater advancement.

This Paper intends to highlight Pope Francis' Recent teaching on effective religious life in the 21st century. By way of proceeding, the paper will outline the background of this message in the hope of re-

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[2] Odilio Engels, "Council: History", in *Encyclopdia of Theology: a Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Edited by Karl Rahner (New Delhi: St Paul's, 2004), 397-308: 307.

enforcing its relevance, after which it draw lessons from the message itself.

## The 21st Century: A Background Highlight

Terrorism, pandemics and epidemics might have dominated global attention in the last few years, still what will change life as we know it is happening in the background. As the 21st – century rolls into a third decade, a fourth industrial revolution is building in the shadows.

Three economic revolutions have happened in the world so far.[3] The steam engine enabled the first industrial revolution in which mechanization was archived. The second was based on electricity which created Mass production. In the third revolution, electronics and information were used to automate Mass production. The fourth industrial revolution is building on the third,  is characterized by "a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres.".[4]

Precisely, increases in computing power have pushed great advancements in AI. This is made all the more intense by increases in computing power and by the availability of vast amounts of data. The impact of this growth can already be seen in software solutions which are now been used used to discover new drugs, and even the algorithms used to predict our cultural interests, observes Schwuab in an article for the World Economic Forum.[5]

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[3]Terry Breverton, *Breverton's Encyclopedia of Inventions: A Compendium of Technological Leaps, Groundbreaking Discoveries and Scientific Breakthroughs* (London: Quarks Pub, 2012; Kindle Edition).

[4]Klaus Schwuab, "The Fourth Economic Revolution: What it Means, How to Respond," https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/. Accessed on May 1st, 2022

[5] Klaus Schwuab, "The Fourth Economic Revolution: What it Means, How to Respond,"

Again, vast mobile internet connections with increased storage and processing power is opening huge possibilities. These possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of things,[6] autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology,[7] biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, quantum computing, web 3, and block chain.

Meanwhile, digital fabrication technologies continue interacting with the biological world on a daily basis. Engineers, designers, and architects are combining computational design, additive manufacturing, materials engineering, and synthetic biology to pioneer a symbiosis between microorganisms, our bodies, the products we consume, and even the buildings we inhabit.[8]

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[6] According to Alexander S. Gillis, an Editor Tech Target, "The internet of things, or IoT, is a system of interrelated computing devices, mechanical and digital machines, objects, animals or people that are provided with unique identifiers (UIDs) and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction." More precisely, "A thing in the internet of things can be a person with a heart monitor implant, a farm animal with a biochip transponder, an automobile that has built-in sensors to alert the driver when tire pressure is low or any other natural or man-made object that can be assigned an Internet Protocol (IP) address and is able to transfer data over a network." Cf https://www.techtarget.com/iotagenda/definition/Internet-of-Things-IoT. accessed 2nd April, 2022.

[7] **Nanotechnology**, according to S. Tom Picraux, is "the manipulation and manufacture of materials and devices on the scale of atoms or small groups of atoms. The "nanoscale" is typically measured in nanometres, or billionths of a metre (*nanos*, the Greek word for "dwarf," being the source of the prefix), and materials built at this scale often exhibit distinctive physical and chemical properties due to quantum mechanical effects." For instance, "billions of microscopic "nanowhiskers," each about 10 nanometres in length, have been molecularly hooked onto natural and synthetic fibres to impart stain resistance to clothing and other fabrics; zinc oxide nanocrystals have been used to create invisible sunscreens that block ultraviolet light; and silver nanocrystals have been embedded in bandages to kill bacteria and prevent infection." CF https://www.britannica.com/technology/nanotechnology. Accessed on May 2nd, 2022.

[8] I.e establishments like Elon Musk's Neuralink are pioneering research in the integration of mechanics and the human brain, while technologies like CRISPR are making it possible for the eradication of hereditary defects or ailments.

Never the less, even though much has been achieved in the evolution of the internet's potentials in trade, commerce, banking, logistics and knowledge sharing, much of its resources have been owned and controlled by a few: the so called big tech. An ongoing decentralization is changing this narrative. With the arrival of block chain and web 3, control of internet resources is becoming more spread as critical support infrastructure are now able to be owned by individuals as crypto currencies and non fungible tokens (NFTs).[9] The decentralization of the resources essential for human togetherness is already happening.

In sum, like the First Industrial Revolution's steam-powered factories, the Second Industrial Revolution's application of science to mass production and manufacturing, and the Third Industrial Revolution's start into digitization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution's technologies are rapidly changing the way humans create, exchange, and distribute value.

Suffice it to say that the fourth industrial revolution will profoundly transform institutions, industries, and individuals. More importantly, this revolution will be guided by the choices that people make today: "the world in 50 to 100 years from now will owe a lot of its character to how we think about, invest in, and deploy these powerful new technologies," predicts Klaus Schuab in an entry for Britannica Online.

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[9] Writing for Coindesk, an online crypto newsletter, on March 17, 2022, Mark Stevens defines web 3 as "the next iteration of the internet that promotes decentralized protocols and aims to reduce dependency on large tech companies like Youtube, Netflix and Amazon." Cf https://www.coindesk.com/learn/what-is-web-3-and-why-is-everyone-talking-about-it/.

## The Voice of Peter in The Midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Pope Francis' Counsel for Persons in Consecrated Life

On February 2nd, 2022, the Feast of the Presentation, the World Day of Consecrated Life was marked for the 26th time. Instituted in 1997, as a day for men and women in Consecrated Life by John Paul II, this year's celebration was distinguished especially by a homily of Pope Francis during a concelebrated Mass to mark the day in St Peter's Basilica.

Reflecting on Luke 2:22-40, the Holy Father invited all consecrated persons to "cultivate a renewed vision after the example of Simeon and Anna. He then urged consecrated persons to think over three questions: What moves us? What do our eyes see? Who do we take in our arms? In considering his own responses to these questions, the Pope encouraged religious to be hopeful in the midst of crises, to continue to be open, and to never become rigid;

Brothers and sisters, the Lord never fails to give us signs that invite us to cultivate *a renewed vision* of consecrated life. We need to do this, but in the light of the Holy Spirit and docile to his movements. We cannot pretend not to see these signs and go on as usual, doing the same old things, drifting back through inertia to the forms of the past, paralyzed by fear of change. I have said this over and over again: nowadays the temptation to go back, for security, out of fear, in order to preserve the faith or the charism of the founder… is a temptation. The temptation to go back and preserve ""traditions" with rigidity. Let's get this into our head: rigidity is a perversion, and beneath every form of rigidity there are grave problems. Neither Simeon nor Anna was rigid; no, they were free and had the joy of celebrating: Simeon by praising the Lord and prophesying with courage to the child's mother.[10]

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[10] Pope Francis, "**E**ucharistic Concelebration With The Members of The Institutes of Consecrated Life And The Societies of Apostolic Life: *Homily Of His Holiness **Pope Francis,"***St Peter's BasilicaWednesday, 2 February 2022. CF https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2022/documents/20220202_omelia-vitaconsacrata.html. accessed on 25th April, 2022.

The holy father ended by urging religious to take Jesus into their arms.

In effect, the successor of St Peter was urging the consecrated to wake up to the challenges of the time.

## Challenges Before the Religious of the Global South in the 21st Century

Consecrated persons of the developed world might be battling with so many morally visible challenges (abortion, homosexuality, loneliness, euthanasia, child and sexual abuse and even attrition) but religious of the south have to face up against upheavals peculiar to the third world's political, social and economic ecosystems. They range from, leadership, fanaticism, income inequality, access to health, and education, brain drain. All of these are exacerbated in the context of the fourth industrial revolution.

Someone once said, instead of natural disasters, God gave Africa political disasters. Corruption, visionlessness, greed and avarice have turned most of Africa into a factory of misery.

The numbers are there and they don't lie. "The continent of Africa loses over $50 billion a year through illicit financial flows, according to a 2015 report by a UN High Level Panel led by former South African president Thabo Mbeki."[11] In 2021, The Global Hunger Index said 1 in 5 Africans face hunger. The numbers for unemployment, access to education, healthcare, and shelter are not any different. All except one of the countries on the low human development index table in the 2020 Global Human Development Index (HDI), which measures the quality of countries based on human development indicators, are African.

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[11] Ntibinyane Ntibinyane, "African Leaders and the Panama Papers", published on Good Governance Africa https://gga.org/african-leaders-and-the-panama-papers/, accessed May 5th 2022.

Nearer home, in Nigeria, the situation is not any different. The country seems to be on the fast lane to political disaster. Terrorism in most of the Northern states, hunger, and unemployment have all been successfully institutionalized. Terrorist and other have taken over swaths of Nigeria's territory and almost all its highways. Inter city and inter regional movements have been greatly affected as much as farming and other key commercial activities.

Economically, there is the constant threat of the monopolists. For instance, with the opening of Dangote's refinery, the fate of Nigeria's economy will be firmly in the hands of one man. Success rates for startups are worsening. The only thing that seems to be working in Nigeria is entertainment: film and music.

Demographically, high fecundity in the Muslim north in the face of mass migration and low fecundity, delayed reproductive age in the Christian south will tip the scales of power in overwhelming north. The Nigerian religious of the mid 21$^{st}$ century, would be dealing with a world dominantly shaped by an over-whelming Muslim majority.

Meanwhile, ritual killings, terrorism, kidnapping, drug peddling, internet fraud, dehumanizing prostitution, trafficking in persons and children are dominating the Nigerian Story. It is as if the ordinary Nigerian is daily losing hope in fairness, truth, and justice and is prepared to "get rich or die trying." This is a cocktail for a disaster.

It is predicted that ultimately, "the ability of government systems and public authorities to adapt will determine their survival. If they prove capable of embracing a world of disruptive change, subjecting their structures to the levels of transparency and efficiency that will enable them to maintain their competitive edge, they will endure. If they cannot evolve, they will face increasing trouble."[12] With central

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[12] Klaus Schwuab, "The Fourth Economic Revolution: What it Means, How to Respond,"

regulation in law and commerce falling apart the world is entering a phase where individual conscience will drive the narrative. The question is are we ready as individual religious and institutions for a change in the balance of power?

## A Cultivated Response

As observed in the beginning, the Church's engagement of contextual reality has always been dominated by the efforts of those in consecrated life. This is what our many charisms and apostolates are for. The sheer magnitude of what is ahead validates the call of the Vicar of Christ. Inertia is dangerous in this time; the imperative for action must not be lost. The onus falls now on consecrated persons and institutes to readjust for more effective witness individually and institutionally.

Personally, sincerity of purpose is indispensible. We all have initial motives for joining consecrated life. These may change as time proceeds. However, the question of Francis remains important: "what moves us?" Apart from the Holy Spirit, there are many things that can move us. Money, comfort, prestige, respect, malice; whatever might be motivating us needs to be replaced by the Holy Spirit.

The quality of any institution lies in that of its members. The greatest assets of an institution are its personnel. This is a dynamic that needs to remain in the formation of future religious. The situation where structures are employed to mentally injure religious is not going to be so productive in the long run. The spiritual, emotional and physical welfare of members must not be sacrificed. A happy religious, is a productive religious,

Institutionally, consecrated life needs to give greater priority to merit and competence in recruiting personnel both into office and formation. Sentiments may be important, tribalism also, or maybe cronyism, or

nepotism, but they may not give us the best that is critically needed for the challenges of this time.

Even as most institutes are doing well in the area of formation - acquiring, as they are doing, specialized formation - more resources have to be allocated to this specialization. It must not be compromised.

Again, creative fidelity needs to be employed. The pope himself warns against the error of rigidity. Newer avenues for consecrated witness emerge daily. Our response to those situations in fidelity to our original charisms must not only be constant; it must be relentless for this life to be effective.

## Conclusion: Called to be faithful and fruitful

Consecrated life, no doubt is a call to follow Christ more closely in the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity poverty and obedience. Yet, even as the impression has been peddled in some quarters that the call of Christ is to be faithful not fruitful, the point needs to be made that fruitfulness distinguishes a true call. By their fruits, you shall know them, Christ says in Matthew (7:16). He also caused a fruitless fig tree to wither (Matt 11:11-26). In addition to fidelity, fruitfulness is necessary.

Accepting the challenges presented by a changing world is the sure path to effective witness. In a Mass celebrated on the 24th of March,2020, Pope Francis is quoted to have said, inertia is a "seed of sin."[13] It eventually ends in fruitlessness and lose of relevance. Hence the necessity of a Christ centered action becomes evident.

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[13]Carol Glatz, "Complaining, inertia are seeds of the devil, pope says," Catholic News Service, March 24th, 2020, https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-chronicles/complaining-inertia-are-seeds-devil-pope-says. Accessed on May 10th. 2022.

Before conclusion, I want to tell you a story. A drunk man arrived home to the welcome of his son. In excitement, he lifted and threw the child up in mid air. In that moment something happened.  The drunken state, he could see three children in the air. He became confused on which of the children in mid air was his.

If we are inspired by the right things, we would see Christ, hold him in our arms and bring him to a world that is forgetting its need of him. The effective witness to the Gospel will only be possible with a right response to the signs of the time.

# Training of Spiritual Directors for Effective Spiritual Development of Candidates to the Priesthood in St. Paul's Major Seminary Juba, South Sudan

## John Andrea Philip Ujang[1]

## Abstract

*This study examined the training of spiritual directors for the effective spiritual development of candidates for the priesthood at St. Paul's Major Seminary, Juba-South Sudan. The objectives of the study are: To explain how the current spiritual directors in St. Paul's Major Seminary acquire interpersonal skills for facilitating spiritual development of candidates to priesthood; to state what guides the current spiritual directors in St. Paul's Major Seminary in Juba, to arriving at right discernment that promotes the spiritual development of candidates to priesthood; to expose the personal experiences of spiritual life of current spiritual directors which promotes spiritual development of candidates to priesthood; and to suggest approaches that could promote training of spiritual directors for effective spiritual development of candidates to the priesthood. The study was anchored on James Fowler's theory of faith development 2005 Convergent parallel mixed method research design was used in this study. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and presented using tables and figures. Qualitative data was analyzed and presented in narrative form. The main findings suggest that it is important to train spiritual directors before their assignment. In the formation houses, in order to equip them with the needed skills to help the candidates. In*

*conclusion, the spiritual development of candidates to priesthood does not only depend on the training of spiritual directors, but also on the personality and experience of directors.*

**Keywords:** Training, Spiritual Directors, Effective Spiritual Development, Candidates, Priesthood, spiritual direction, Directees

## Introduction

The study was prompted by the continual appointments of Ordained Catholic Priests as spiritual directors in St. Paul's Major Seminary in Juba, South Sudan without formal training in the field of spirituality. The Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education in its Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators says that the World's Catholic Seminaries currently face a shortage of educators, the responsibilities of seminary formation have become more difficult and for that same reason the criteria for selection of educators are very demanding. The directives examine the qualities seminary educators need, the specific roles of the rectors and spiritual directors.[2] This implies that the need for a qualified spiritual director who is able to guide the candidates effectively along their path of spiritual development to the priesthood is timely.

Vatican II Decree on the Training of Priests *Optatam Totius* declares that major seminaries are necessary for priestly formation. In them the entire training of the students (candidates) should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ as teacher, priest and shepherd.[3] According to this document, religious formation of candidates to the priesthood should cover the three-fold functions of Christ as king, priest and prophet. That means that candidates should be trained in the ministry of the word as the basis for their prophetic function, to the ministry of worship and

sanctification, in signifying their priestly function and to the ministry of shepherd which symbolizes their kingly function. Further, the same document asserts that, educators (spiritual directors) in seminaries be prepared in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience, and special training in spirituality and teaching methods.

The researcher strongly believes that such training and formation of candidates could only be actualized if the spiritual directors in charge of spiritual formation are trained on what spiritual direction is, and how they can assist candidates grow spiritually in their vocations to the priesthood. John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states that specific preparation of seminary educators holds the first place. Seminary educators occupy the key position that determines the spirit and efficacy of the work of formation. It points out clearly that, "The bishops, therefore, as those responsible for the progress of seminaries, should bear the grave responsibility for the formation of those who have been given the task of educating the future priests.[4] This suggests that assignment of Ordained Catholic Priests as spiritual directors without training in spirituality is against the spirit and efficacy of the spiritual development of candidates to priesthood.

Pope Francis while addressing the religious people of the Diocese of Rome underscored the importance of training spiritual directors within religious communities. Francis encourages religious superiors of both men and women to identify members of their congregations who are good, wise, and patient, to get them training in spiritual direction. The Holy Father also acknowledges that training to become a priest, a nun or a monk is not sufficient to assume the important role of a spiritual director.[5] The same is true for bishops in charge of St. Paul's Major Seminary they needs to follow the instructions of the Holy Father on the training of the spiritual directors prior to their assignments.

Still on the training of spiritual directors, St. Theresa of Avila, one of the greatest spiritual masters of all times, once remarked that "a person

who aspires to be a spiritual director should be well-trained. He or she needs not necessarily to be a priest, or religious but nevertheless ought to possess a thorough grounding in theology, especially Christian spirituality and scripture. Besides that, some knowledge of basic counselling techniques as well as familiarity with some of the more common mental problems should be present. This comes as the result of what she experienced in the hand of her directors who were not trained.[6] The same is true of the candidates in the formation houses today whose spiritual directors are not qualified.

In his article *Priestly Formation in Nigeria in the Face of Contemporary Challenges: Lesson for consideration in Auchi Diocese*, Anselm argues that staffing the seminary goes beyond just sending priests to join the seminary staff; seminaries should be staffed with priests who are trained in specific academic disciplines required in the seminary and above all, priests who in the judgment of their bishops are tested and trusted.[7] A rector of a diocesan seminary in Burma exclaims "I'm appointed as formator in the seminary, but I have no training for it!" Hoare. We are expected to help young men to become spiritual leaders, but we do not know how to go about it"[8] The researcher hypothesized that many priests who are assigned roles as spiritual directors in formation houses, without formal training encounter severe challenges in accompanying the candidates effectively.

St. Paul's Major Seminary was founded in 1956 by the Comboni Missionaries in River Touré in the Catholic Diocese of Yei in Sudan. It is the only major seminary which the Catholic dioceses in Sudan and South Sudan depend on for the priestly formation of their candidates to the priesthood. The seminary is divided into philosophy and theology sections, each with its own administrative structures. In the year 1964, this seminary was closed after the expulsion of the foreign missionaries by the Sudan government. Consequently, it has been moving from one

place to another within and outside the country, specifically to Uganda due to the first and second civil wars that occurred in Sudan: 1953-1972, and 1983-2005 respectively.

After the separation of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011, the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference (SCBC) in consultation with the Vatican authorities moved the seminary from Khartoum to Juba the new capital city of South Sudan in 2012. With growing harassment and repression of southerners and Christians in the mostly Islamic North, the church leaders decided to move the students to Juba. Most of the seminarians were from South Sudan, and seminary staffs were worried whether they would be granted visas if the seminary continued to operate in Khartoum. From the time it was transferred until now, the spiritual formation of the candidates to priesthood in this seminary has been under the care of priests who are not formally trained as spiritual directors. These priests are assigned by their ordinaries based on the belief that they are already spiritual directors by virtue of their priestly ordinations.

Taking into considerations, the above findings from the literature reviews on the training of spiritual directors and its importance for the spiritual growth of candidates to the priesthood, the researcher is of the view that assignments of Ordained Catholic Priests as spiritual directors without formal training in the field of spiritual direction affects spiritual growth of candidates to the priesthood. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the training of spiritual directors before their assignments to the formation houses, especially to St. Paul's Major Seminary in Juba, South Sudan. This needs to be done if effective spiritual development of candidates to the priesthood will be attained in South Sudan.

## Literature Review on Training of the Spiritual Directors

Although training does not give all the qualities that one needs in order to be an effective spiritual director, it is absolutely important for one to

become an effective spiritual director. Several authors underscore the importance of formal training of spiritual directors and its implications on the spiritual development of candidates to the priesthood in the formation houses. On the characteristics of trained spiritual directors, Demos summarizes the qualities of trained formators (*spiritual directors*) in the following three points: the technical qualities, the intellectual and human qualities.[9] In the same line of thought, Pope Paul strongly appeals for proper training of those appointed to formation houses saying:

> It is evident that much of the effectiveness of the training offered depends on the maturity and strength of personality of those entrusted with formation, both from the human and from the Gospel points of views. The synod fathers were very aware that the future of the preparation of candidates for the priesthood depends on the choice and formation of those entrusted with the work of formation.[10]

To be a spiritual director in a formation house requires having essential qualifications. This is equivalent to saying that no one is born a spiritual director, implying that a person becomes a spiritual director through training in the field of spiritual direction. According to Maestro, training is necessary for a person who wants to pursue any career. Unfortunately, up to now, many priests are appointed to be spiritual directors in formation houses without formal training in spiritual direction. As a result of this, they are unable to help the candidates effectively. He recommends that formators (*spiritual directors*) need to have a solid pedagogical knowledge in order to be able to manage different personalities and deal with the difficult situations that occur in formation.[11]

De Souza said that a well-trained formator is someone who seeks to develop the wisdom and understanding of different aspects of human life and who has an open mind on all dimensions of human life.

Knowledge is regarded as a major component among the qualities of a good spiritual director.[12] This can be applicable to spiritual directors in the seminary in South Sudan, in the sense that having a profound insight about spiritual direction is fundamental for their professional qualification as directors, and this can best be done through attending formal training the ministry of spiritual direction.

Namuddu maintained that the qualifications of formators in the religious life. She says that they need to be trained and that a well-trained formator is a person who knows himself through self-awareness, self-esteem and self-love which helps the formator to better understand the candidate in formation.[13] This means that spiritual directors must be holistically prepared to be able to effectively assist the candidate's holistic development.

UcDavis a well-trained formators/ directors demonstrates self-esteem through the characteristics listed by confidence, self-direction, non-blaming behaviors, an awareness of personal strengths, an ability to make mistakes and learn from them, an ability to accept mistakes from others, optimism, an ability to solve problems, an independent and cooperative attitude, feeling comfortable with a range of emotions, an ability to trust others, a good sense of personal limitations, and self-care. Self –knowledge implies the acceptance of oneself before ministering to others.[14]

This enables trained formators/directors to minister objectively as fully functioning persons. This implies that, in order to demonstrate competence in the spiritual accompaniment of candidates to the priesthood, spiritual directors need to receive formal training in the field of spiritual direction before being sent to formation houses. Those who have not been trained before being sent encounter various difficulties. Personal issues as well as issues pertaining to interpersonal relationships at times clog their ministry, which is a sign of professional incompetence. Therefore, the researcher agrees with the

authors who are proponents of the idea of training of spiritual directors prior to their assignments as the best way for enhancing the spiritual growth of candidates to the priesthood.

Lespinay attests that formation is a ministry and a task which requires holistic preparation of formators (spiritual directors).[15] The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life through the instruction Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation sees formation as an aspect of Church Ministry that requires special training because it is an art. Religious Congregations warn that spiritual formation of candidates to the priesthood requires proper training of spiritual directors.[16]

The Directory for the Ministry and the life of Priests asserts that "no formation is possible without both the person who is to be formed and the person who forms. The quality and effectiveness of a plan of formation depend in part on the relative structures, but mainly on the quality of the formators[17].Thus, it is necessary that spiritual directors be given a chance for formal training. It is not possible to give what one does not have.

This implies that, the spiritual director who guides candidates on their journey of spiritual development must be adequately trained and experienced, and thus competent in the art of spiritual direction. The aim of the training of spiritual directors, apart from guiding the candidates appropriately, is also to help them know themselves and equip them with necessary knowledge and skills for administering spiritual direction confidently.

Ciallanza suggests that it is important for formators to be professionally prepared for the ministry of religious formation. Even though the Church has consistently given primary importance to the ministry of formation, it is not uncommon to hear formators comment on their lack of personal and professional preparation for the ministry.

Even those who were informed well in advance of their appointment often note that whatever preparation they had was self-initiated or minimal. For many, the appointment to the formation ministry comes as a surprise.[18] This highlights the importance of training of spiritual directors in the formation house in order to be able to carry out the ministry of spiritual growth of the candidates to the priesthood more effectively.

Therefore, discussions from the reviewed literature have shown several studies and suggestions supporting the training of spiritual directors for effective spiritual development of candidates to priesthood. For instance, Finney indicates that, the Archdiocese of New Orleans, has established training requirements for those interested in the serving as spiritual directors within the archdiocese. It is important that spiritual directors are properly formed so that they can lead people and serve them with genuine faith and integrity.[19] Therefore, through this study the researcher seeks to remind the leadership of the Catholic Church in Sudan and South Sudan on the urgency of training of spiritual directors for the effective spiritual development of candidates to priesthood in St. Paul's Major Seminary, Juba South Sudan.

## Research Design and Methodology

This research proposes a mixed method model, with a convergent parallel design. The design is chosen because it enables the researcher obtain quantitative and qualitative data which provide a comprehensive examination of the research problem. According to Creswell, the main purpose of using a mixed method research design is to make research findings reliable and valid, and reduce the level of inherent bias by comparing some sets of data.[20]

The targeted population for this study was 146 selected from spiritual coordinator, spiritual directors, formators and candidates from

philosophy and theology in St. Paul's major seminary in Juba, South Sudan. Candidates from both sections were included in this study because, the population in one section was not sufficient to conduct this study to provide reliable information for this discovery. Spiritual coordinator was included, because of his role in the spiritual affairs of the candidates is critical. Spiritual directors were chosen because of their important roles in the spiritual accompaniment of the candidates to the priesthood.

Formators were involved because they have deliberate authority of the spiritual formation of the candidates in the formation house. The researcher selected appropriate participants who participated in the study. The sample size of 110 participants was used in this study and they were stratified into four namely one spiritual coordinator, 13 spiritual directors, 15 formators from philosophy and theology sections and 45 candidates from theology were purposively selected. Meanwhile, 36 candidates from philosophy was selected through simple random sampling. The description of sample and sampling procedures is summarized in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample and sampling procedure**

| Participants | Population Target | Sample Size | Percentage of population in strata | Sampling procedure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spiritual coordinator | 1 | 1 | 100% | Purposive sampling |
| Spiritual directors | 13 | 13 | 100% | Purposive sampling |
| Formators (Phil Theo) | 15 | 15 | 100% | Purposive sampling |
| Candidates in Philosophy | 36 | 36 | 100% | Simple random sampling |
| Candidates in Theology | 81 | 45 | 56% | Purposive sampling |
| **Total** | **146** | **110** | **75%** | |

The researcher used both interview guide and questionnaires as research instruments in this study. Interview guides are used to gather qualitative data from spiritual coordinator and formators. Questionnaires with close- ended and open-ended questions were used to obtain quantitative data from and spiritual directors and candidates.

The research instruments for this study was validated using face and content validity. According to Kumar this type of validity ensures that every question on the research instrument has a rational connection with the objectives of the study, and that it also checks that items and questions incorporate all the aspects of the topic under study.[21] The validity of the research instruments was assured by the evaluation of two supervisors and research experts who validated the content and construct of the research instruments. This ensured that the content of the questions responded to the objectives of the study.

Before proceeding to collect data in the field, the researcher obtained a permission letter from the Rector of St. Paul's Major Seminary in Juba, South Sudan. After the data collection, the researcher separated the material based on the qualitative and quantitative data separately according to the research questions. The quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using tables and bar figures. The qualitative data will be analyzed in a narrative form and discussed.

The researcher made use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches for data analysis. This was presented in tables and figures. Mugenda and Mugenda, affirm that qualitative analysis involves systematically analysing information collected so as to establish patterns, trends and relationships.[22] In this study, qualitative data collected from open-ended questions was transcribed, coded and categorized into themes informed by the research objectives.

The researcher ensured that appropriate ethical considerations were obtained for administering the research instruments. This included, obtaining clearance permit from Tangaza University College Research Committee (TUCREC) and Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, of The Republic of South Sudan (MOHERST) R.S.S.

**Analysis, Presentation and Discussion of the Findings**

The results of the findings from the collected data for this study were analyzed, discussed and presented according to the researcher objectives and its sequences. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the participants

through the administration of questionnaires and interview guide are discussed using a convergent parallel design. The quantitative data is analyzed descriptively and presented using tables and figures. Meanwhile, the qualitative data is coded, categorized and discussed in narrative form.

## Coding of the Participants Interviewed

This section presents a coding matrix of sixteenth participants that were interviewed as indicated in the (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1: Matrix of Participants Interviewed**

| No. | Code of Participants | Years of Experience | Ministry/Apostolate | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Participant A | 4 Years | Spiritual Coordinator | Male |
| 2 | Participant B | 4 Years | Formator | Male |
| 3 | Participant C | 3 Years | Formator | Male |
| 4 | Participant D | 7 Years | Formator | Male |
| 5 | Participant E | 4 Years | Formator | Male |
| 6 | Participant F | 6 Years | Formator | Male |
| 7 | Participant G | 5 Years | Formator | Male |
| 8 | Participant H | 5 Years | Formator | Male |
| 9 | Participant I | 4 Years | Formator | Male |
| 10 | Participant J | 3 Years | Formator | Male |
| 11 | Participant K | 7 Years | Formator | Male |
| 12 | Participant L | 3 Years | Formator | Male |
| 13 | Participant M | 3 Years | Formator | Male |
| 14 | Participant N | 3 Years | Formator | Male |
| 15 | Participant O | 4 Years | Formator | Male |
| 16 | Participant P | 1 Year | Formator | Male |

Table 1.1: displays that, the researcher interviewed sixteen participants, which includes one spiritual coordinator and 15 formators as the sampled numbered targeted for this study

## Facilitation of Spiritual Direction by Spiritual Directors

The result of the findings on how interpersonal skills could be used to facilitate spiritual direction by the spiritual directors indicate that interpersonal skills are indispensable and could use to facilitate effective communication between spiritual directors and candidates during spiritual direction sessions. It is evident from the results of the findings below (Table 2.2) that majority of the participants are of the views that usage of interpersonal skills by spiritual directors during spiritual directions sessions would enhances the spiritual development of the candidates to the priesthood.

**Table 2.2: Interpersonal Skills for Facilitation of Spiritual Direction**

| Participants | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|
| Candidates in Philosophy | 18 (55%) | 14 (42%) | 1(3%) |
| Candidates in Theology | 25 (62.5%) | 14 (35%) | 1(2.5%) |
| Spiritual Directors | 8 (61%) | 5 (39%) | 00(00%) |

Thus, the results of the findings in above (Table 2:2) reveal that spiritual directors could undergo formal training in the field of spirituality and spiritual formation in order to acquire interpersonal skills for effective communication during spiritual direction sessions.

## Interpersonal Skills are Foundational for Effective Spiritual Direction

The results of the findings on whether interpersonal skills are foundational for effective spiritual directions shows that majority of the participants are of the opinions that interpersonal skills are foundational for effective spiritual direction and this is apparent from below (Figure 1.1).
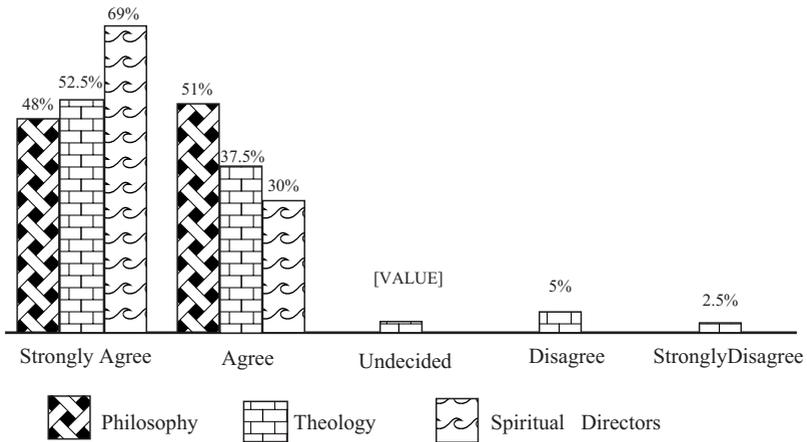
**Figure 1.1: Interpersonal Skills Foundational for Spiritual Direction**

The views of participants are in line with the qualitative responses from the interviewed spiritual coordinator and formators. Participant 2B puts it in the following manner:

It is very important skills; the bishops should ensure that the candidates (*priests*) for spiritual directors should be able to communicate well. I refer to my own experience in the seminary, some of our spiritual directors were unable to communicate. Communication is not only talking, but bodily contacts. For example, spiritual directors need to pay close attention to the candidates by smiling encouragingly, positively conveying messages and making eye contact etc. However, non-verbal communication is subject to customs and traditions to a large extent, therefore care must be taken by the spiritual directors to conduct themselves appropriately, especially when dealing with the opposite sex. For instance, physical contact in some cultures may be deemed appropriate and is also considered to be a sign of affection, but some might consider it to be highly improper. Effective use of verbal

and non-verbal communication should be employed, so that the candidate and the spiritual directors can convey their points across. Words express a message partially only; therefore, the tone, gestures and attitude form an important part of interpersonal skills as well (August 13, 2019).

Rungapadiachy underlines that interpersonal skills are those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people. This has direct implication on the art of spiritual direction because the director is expected to interact effectively with the candidate during spiritual direction session.[23] This implies that the bishops and seminary administrations should ensure that spiritual directors should be people are able to communicate effectively with candidates during spiritual direction sessions verbally and non-verbally.

## Communication with Spiritual Directors with Good Interpersonal Skills

The results of findings on communication with spiritual directors with good interpersonal skills displays that good interpersonal skills have a positive consequences on the candidates in terms of their feelings and comfortabilities during spiritual direction sessions as it is reflected in the below (Table 3:3).

Participant 16P expressed that:

> Spiritual director who has good interpersonal is able to help and guide the candidates spiritually. This can create in the candidates the spirit of trust to share with him whatever they have without reservations and fear. These skills are connected with the character of Christ who is the first spiritual director. The presence of these skills in the person of director as well as his personality can moved directee towards communication with him in the direction (August 22, 2019).

Jackson remarks that good interpersonal skill is, by definition, a two-way street where both speak and are listened to without interruption, can ask relevant questions, express their thoughts and exchange information after they are able to comprehend the message the other party is trying to relay.[24] The outcome of these findings seems to indicate that good interpersonal can help spiritual directors communicate with candidates in a friendly manner.

**Table 3.3: Good Interpersonal Skills**

| Participants | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|
| Candidates in Philosophy | 18 (55%) | 15 (45%) | 00 (00%) |
| Candidates in Theology | 29 (72.5%) | 10 (25%) | 1 (2.5%) |
| Spiritual Directors | 10 (77.5%) | 2 (15%) | 1 (7.5%) |

**Spiritual Discernment requires training**

The results of findings on whether spiritual discernment requires training indicates that discernment as the art of discovering God's will requires training. The views of the participants was held by Hardon, who declares that, since discernment is called an art, like prayer, it is learned by doing and not just by reading about it. It is a skill resulting from study and practice. Ordination and religious vows do not necessarily guarantee competence in spiritual discernment[25]. The ability to discern spirits is both a gift and a training, and the training should ideally elicit the gift that lies unrecognized. In support of this opinion, participant 1A warn that:

> We are not born with these skills, even if they are potentially within us, we need to develop them through formal training in order to be able to help candidates (August 12, 2019).

This suggests that even though discernment is a gift as stated by St. Paul (1 Cor. 12: 4-11), it is also subject to formal training for the acquiring of necessary skills and techniques.

**Table 4.4: Discernment Requires Training**

| Participants | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Candidates in Philosophy | 8 (24%) | 18(55%) | 1(3%) | 4 (12%) | 2 (6%) |
| Candidates in Theology | 20 (50%) | 16(40%) | 4(10%) | 00 (00%) | 00 (00%) |
| Spiritual Directors | 7 (53.5%) | 4(31.5%) | 1(7.5%) | 1(7.5%) | 00 (00%) |

## Trained Spiritual Directors Help Candidates Discern their Vocations

The results of findings on how trained spiritual directors could help candidates discern their vocations discloses that in comparisons to untrained, trained spiritual directors are capable of helping the candidates to discern their vocations spiritually as it is demonstrated in the below (Figure2.2). Maestro underscores that training is necessary for a person who wants to purse any vocation. Unfortunately, today many priests are appointed to be spiritual directors in the formation house without formal training.[26] Participant 150 revealed that:

> Naturally there are those who are gifted, but fundamentally speaking trained directors are much effective when it comes to the assisting and guiding the candidates discern their calls to priestly life. They have skills and techniques, there is an urgent need for on how to discern. Our spiritual life style is in constant change both outside and in the formation house as well, but natural or divine gift should not be taken for granted" (August 18, 2019).

The findings suggests although spiritual discernment is a divine gift there is a pressing need for training of spiritual directors in order to help the candidates discern their vocation to the priesthood.
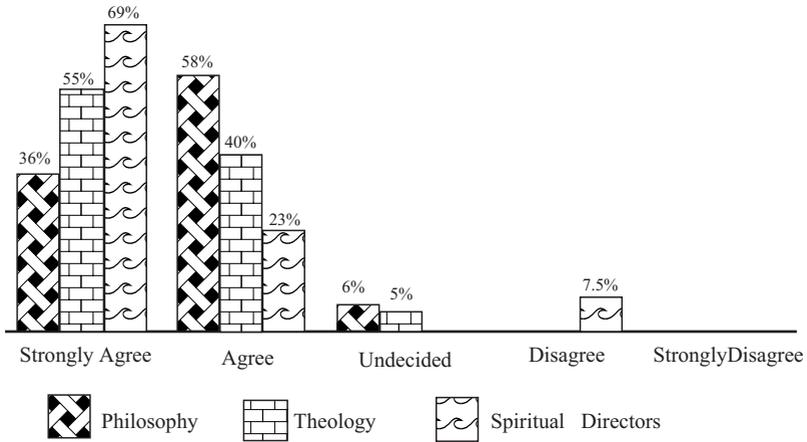
**Figure 2.2: Help Candidates Discern their Vocations**

## Trained Spiritual directors Examine Spiritual Life of Candidates

The results of the findings on how trained spiritual directors examine the spiritual life of candidates to the priesthood reveal that trained spiritual directors are capable and able to examine the nature of spiritual life of candidates better than untrained as indicated in the below (Figure 3:3). This was supported by Walsh, who confirmed that training of spiritual directors involves the pursuit of the truth amidst ideologies and personal prejudices that rationalize sinful conduct. Beyond a knowledge of religious beliefs and doctrine, it requires a sufficient critical grasp of theological and spiritual life issues.[27] This indicates that the seminary authorities should train the priests who are selected to be spiritual directors prior to the assignments in the seminary in order to acquire necessary skills and knowledge for examining the spiritual life of candidates to the priesthood in the formation house.
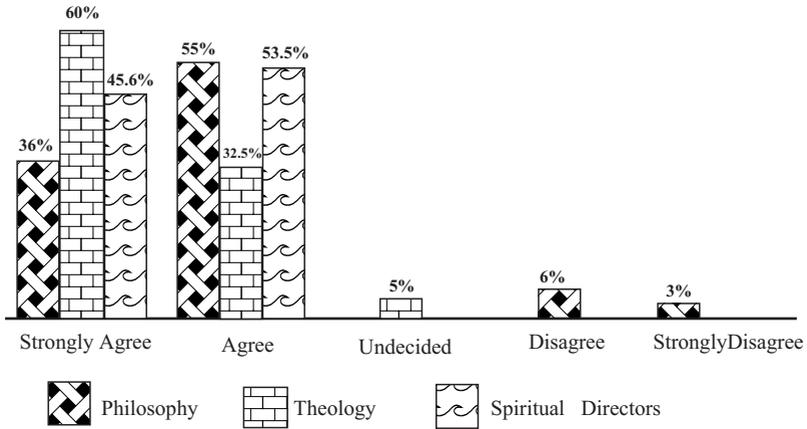
**Figure 3.3: Examination of Spiritual Life of Candidates**

## Spiritual directors in formation houses should be well-experienced and trained

Participants were requested to air out their opinions on whether spiritual director in formation houses should be priests who are well-experienced and trained. The result of the findings in the below (Table 5.5) shows that the presence of well-experienced and trained spiritual directors in the formation is absolutely important. Its presence and participation in community spiritual activities set good examples for the candidates to imitate. Well- experienced and trained spiritual directors are mirrors in formation house and spiritual formation of the candidates. Their commitments and love for the spiritual activities such as prayers word of God will probably help the candidates grow spiritually.

**Table 5.5: Well -Experienced and Trained Spiritual Directors**

| Participants | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Candidates in Philosophy | 23 (70%) | 8 (24%) | 1 (3%) | 1 (3%) |
| Candidates in Theology | 32 (80%) | 8 (20%) | 00 (00%) | 00 (00%) |
| Spiritual Directors | 12 (92.3%) | 1(7.5%) | 00 (00%) | 00 (00%) |

The Congregation for Catholic Education Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Formators once again underlines that those who are chosen for the service of formation in seminaries are distinguished for a certain experience of life, human maturity, balanced spirit, ability to listen and dialogue, positive opinion, but at the same time, critical of modern culture, secure in their own vocation, with knowledge.[28] Still on the presence of well-experienced and trained spiritual directors participant 2B stressed that:

> Being a well experienced and trained spiritual director is at the heart of the matter. He explained that, a potential priest may get the training in all sincerity but cannot be a very good spiritual director. Being helpful spiritual director is a talent that needs to be developed through ministerial experience of one's own growth in and through spiritual direction. Experienced and trained director is capable of demonstrating what spiritual direction is all about. First to the seminary communities that he knows or have certain level of knowledge. Secondly through the way he organizes his own prayer life in the seminary, thirdly his readiness to help candidates on their spiritual life, building up of good relationship with them and entire formation communities (August 12, 2019).

This implies that appointments of well-experienced and trained spiritual directors in the formation house is important and has positive impacts on the spiritual development of the candidates to the priesthood.

## Experienced and Trained Spiritual Directors Foster the Spiritual Growth

The results of the findings on whether well-experienced and trained spiritual directors can foster the spiritual growth of candidates to the

priesthood showed that well-experienced and trained spiritual directors can likely foster the spiritual growth of the candidates to priesthood. The results in the below (Figure 4.4) affirm that a good number of the participants are in support of the views that, well-experienced and trained spiritual directors can foster the spiritual growth of candidates.
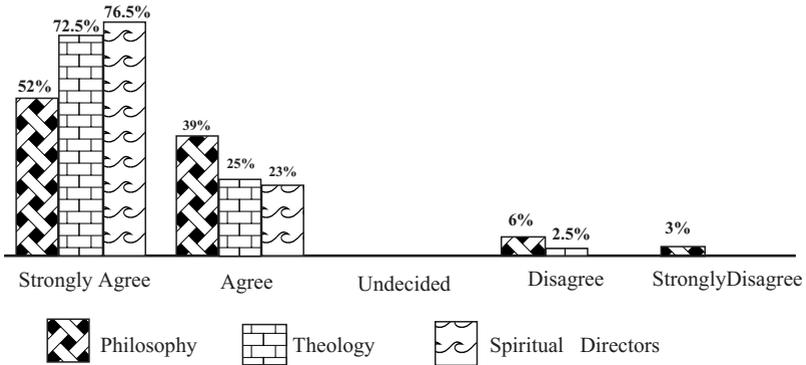


**Figure 4.4: Fostering of Spiritual Growth of Candidates**

Sandra explains that, it should be evident that the organizing principle is experience. The theoretical knowledge helps to illuminate one's and other's experiences. Skills are the ability to relate to creatively one's experience to someone else's.[29] This were backed by participant 14N who said that:

> It is extremely important that spiritual directors and formators in the seminary should be the best experienced and trained people, because the young people we are preparing are the future of the Church. This should be seen in terms of his methodology which he has learned from through spiritual direction and his experience involving others qualities which we have mentioned about the directors previously. Like listening, patience, communication, confidentiality,

friendship and appreciation. If these elements are presence in the life of director he can be of greatest help to the candidates in the formation (August 19, 2019).

## Possible Strategies for Promoting Training of Spiritual Directors

The findings on the investigation of various possible strategies for promoting training of spiritual directors for the effective spiritual development were explored and results indicated that majority of the participants were in support of the possible intervention strategies of: motivations and provisions of basic needs for directors, trainings should be holistic in nature, selection of more interested priests for training by bishops' conference, additional courses like, psychology African spirituality and anthropology and ongoing formation for updating directors' skills & experiences already in the field.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that spiritual development of the candidates to the priesthood in the formation house depends on the spiritual specialization or training of spiritual directors. Formations houses that lack qualified spiritual directors face challenges of achieving effective and quality spiritual formation for its candidates to the priesthood. Appointments of untrained spiritual directors and the type of spiritual accompaniments received by candidates from them may affect the spiritual development of the candidates.

Results from questionnaires, interview guide and literature review revealed that appointment of ordained Catholic priests to be spiritual directors without formal training or preparation had a negative influence on the spiritual development of the candidates to the priesthood. The affectivity of spiritual growth of candidates often depends on the prior preparations of spiritual directors by those

responsible for the formation house in this modern time.  The study reveals that majority of the participants adequately understand the ideals of training of spiritual directors as contained in the Church's teachings.

This could be attributed to the fact that there is an urgent need for trained spiritual directors in the formation house. This is because formal training in the field of spirituality provides directors with skills, techniques, abilities and knowledge on spiritual direction. However, the study also reveals that formal training without experience does not necessarily qualified person to be good spiritual director in the formation. However, it is evident from the findings that effective spiritual development of candidates to the priesthood in St. Paul's Major Seminary Juba, South house does not depend solidly on the training of spiritual directors.

There are other factors that contribute to the spiritual growth, such as the personality of the spiritual director, level of education and own spiritual and moral life plays greater role in his spiritual career in the formation house. Thus, the findings reveal that besides formal training of spiritual director ones' personal experience of spiritual life or testimony is absolutely essential and it has direct effect on the spiritual development of candidates to the priesthood in the formation house.

**Recommendations**

This study recommends the followings first, the Bishops and those in charge of appointing spiritual directors in St. Paul's Major Seminary should ensure that the appointees are trained before their appointments in order to help and guide the candidates for priesthood grow spiritually. Second, the authorities responsible for the appointment of spiritual directors need to consider their ministerial experience in spiritual direction and academic qualifications.

Third, the leaders of Catholic Church in Sudan and South Sudan should ensure that all the priests selected to be trained as spiritual directors are good listeners. Fourth, spiritual directors in the formation house should not forget to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence which will enhance the spiritual accompaniment of the candidates to priesthood. Fifth, spiritual directors in the formation house should be an exemplar spiritual person for the candidates to follow and imitate, people who are committed to help the candidates discover the importance of spiritual direction and its needs in their life.

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## Endnotes

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# Inter-generational Dialogue: Towards Building Synergy in Consecrated Life in Nigeria

*A Paper Presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Joint Conference of The Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men)* and *Nigeria Conference of Women Religious, Held At Ikeja, Lagos (Nigeria), on this same Theme, From 8TH - 14TH January 2023*

## Fr. Wenceslaus Madu, CMF

## Preamble

*I was invited to lead a discussion on the above topic; and I must start by expressing my appreciation to the two secretaries of our respective conferences for this singular honour. To be invited to address any audience is always a privilege; what more to be invited to address a community of women and men who have dedicated their entire life totally to the cause of living the evangelical virtues together and in the service of the Church and their brothers and sisters. I am very grateful for the invitation and feel highly honoured. However, my prevailing circumstances could not allow me sufficient time to develop a technical paper on this all important a topic. All I will go ahead to do here is to provide some framework for our discussion on how we could exploit the diversity among the generations in our membership to enhance our effective witnesses as those who have chosen the consecrated life in today's Nigeria.*

## Introduction

We are living in a very challenging and interesting period. The 21st century man and woman insist that she/he is living in an altogether

historical situation, living an original human experience. The novelty of experience is such that it is claimed that the perennial wisdom and morality of the past no longer apply. As distinct from past mentalities, contemporary ideology stresses the mass aspect of things. It is an era of mass communication, mass travel, mass education, mass entertainment and even mass murder. The conventional wisdom exalts personal profit over the common good, money over virtue, and power over service to others. The defeat of reason, the mass culture and the frenzy of self-fulfilment create a further characteristic of the contemporary world. In such a world, the task of living a life of evangelical counsels of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience, a life that is fully God-centred, is, indeed no walk in the park. The consecrated life and indeed, Christianity lived to the fullest involves struggle.

This struggle is even more compounded by the nature of our calling. We witness at the same time both an intense desire for an improved quality of communal life and at the same time a sense of fear or resistance surrounding it. Those embracing the consecrated life today are very much influenced by the post-modern radical individualism, selfie culture, excessive use of social media, etc. But at the same time, we find in them also a hunger for meaningful community. So, we are caught up in this ambivalence and it is also reflected in the quality of life we live as members of the consecrated life in the present time. Many begin to question the relationship between community life and mission, their relevance and importance. A lot of energy is spent in questions of power and authority in the community and members find the exercise frustrating as the quality of their participation in the apostolic work suffers.[1]

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[1] Antony Bhyju, "Religious Community – A Place for Becoming Real Brothers and Sisters (Formation for Fraternal Life in Community)", in *Sayansa, Journal of Consecrated Life*, vol. XII, no. 2. July – December 2017, 187-204 (187).

All these make our gathering very relevant and our topic very timely. Following a brief discussion on the identity and relevance of the consecrated life, I will touch on intergenerational dialogue and allied concepts, and end with concrete suggestions on how these could be deployed in promoting synergy in the consecrated life.

## Understanding Consecrated Life and Living

Consecrated life is a form of life within the Church wherein members profess vows of chastity, poverty and obedience within a congregation approved by the Church. According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, it is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God.[2] In professing these vows and living within community, the members individually and as a whole witness to a life of communion with Christ, the Church, and one another.

## Fraternal Life as the Essence of the Consecrated Life

An integral part of the consecrated life is shared community life. In the words Saint Pope John Paul II: "The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common. Even more so, the current renewal in the Church and in religious life is characterised by a search for communion and community".[3] These flows from the realisation that in seeking God, no one is self-sufficient. Rather, we are called, in the light of faith, to move beyond self-centredness, drawn by

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[2] Can 573, par 1.

[3] John Paul II, Address to Plenary Session of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Nov. 20, 1992, No. 3 in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), Dec. 2, 1992.

God's Holy Face and by the "sacred ground of the other",[4] to an ever more profound experience of communion.[5] So understood, fraternal communion is a reflection of God's own way of being and bestowing himself; it testifies to the fact that "God is love"(*1Jn* 4:8, 16). Members of the consecrated life profess to believe in, and live by, the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The community of brothers and sisters thus becomes a graced reflection of the God who is a Trinity of Love.

Over and above the bond of our Baptism which joins them to their Christian brothers and sisters in a sacramental way, we, as members of the consecrated life, are bonded together into a special cultic fraternity or sorority thanks to our commitments to live the vows together in a community. There is here a convergence of "yeses" to God which unites us into one single community of life. Consecrated together -- united in the same "yes", united in the Holy Spirit – we discover every day that our following of Christ "obedient, poor and chaste", is lived in fraternity, as was the case with the disciples who followed Jesus in his ministry. We are united in the mission to oppose prophetically the idolatry of power, of possession and of pleasure. We are living witnesses to the fact that God's love calls us to go beyond blood relationships, ethnicity, and nationality, to be brothers and sisters to all.

Because our communities are made of ordinary human beings who are often limited, fragile and broken, it is natural that some difficulties arise while living together in communities. We have not chosen our companions. They were given to us. We experience how difficult it is to create harmony among us always. The story is told of a group of monks who were asked, from a human perspective, what was the most

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[4] Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 169: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1091.

[5] Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution Vultum Dei Quarere, On Women's Contemplative Life*, no. 1.

gratifying aspect of their lives. They answered almost to the man: the common life with our brothers. They were then asked to name the most difficult aspect of monastic life; and the answer, not surprisingly, was the same: the common life with our brothers. If there is a cross in living alone, there is clearly a cross to be carried in living among others.

As a brotherhood and sisterhood "where the daily and patient passage from 'me' to 'us' takes place",[6] fraternal life in a community offers a golden opportunity to consecrated persons to learn how to be faithful to the Lord and to one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love and honour all their brothers and sisters until death physically separates them.[7] Such faithfulness always implies being open to one another and calls for sharing "the joys and sorrows, the concerns and successes of other members". It becomes, in the beautiful words the Document *Fraternal Life in Community* "*Schola Amoris,* a School of Love, for young people and for adults — a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God's mercy and of fraternal solidarity".[8]

## The Relevance of the Consecrated Life in the Society

Irrespective of the context of the diverse cultures and societies of our planet, wounded as we are, by divisive forces of passion and conflicting interests, there exists at the same time a yearning for unity. In such a context, consecrated living in a community clearly demonstrates that life in common is both possible and fulfilling (cf. *Ps* 133:1), despite differences of age, education and even culture. Living

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[6] Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), *Fraternal Life in Community* (Vatican, 1994), 39.

[7] CICLSAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third MilleniulI1. 30.*

[8] CICLSAL, Fraternal life, 25.

together in their various communities, consecrated persons show the way as it brings together people of different ages, languages and cultures who meet as brothers and sisters and remain united despite the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. When we do not succeed in bearing the cross of living among others, our communities become mere houses of indifference or even battle fields, where what we do, they become real symbols of a better world to come.[9] They become signs that bear "witness to a higher reality and points to higher aspirations".[10] They become a prophetic "sign" in this our time when consumerism feeds the logic of individualism and the "culture of fragmentation,"[11] and the throw-away logic extends to every sphere of existence: to the unborn, to the elderly, to those least able to contribute to the economy.[12]

## Consecrated Life Exists for Mission

Consecrated life does not exist for itself. It is the means to reach the end, i.e., mission. In other words, without communities in mission or shaped by mission, our institutes and our various institutes lose their very reason of being and they become conflictual fields and areas of protection of all kinds of individualism. A religious community must strive to become a "visible and concrete manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal."[13] Pope Saint John Paul II so much insisted on the profound mutual interconnection between communion and mission that for him

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[9] Jose Cristo Garcia Paredes, "Communion and Love-Shaped Communities: Biblical Inspiration", in *Sanyasa,* 127-142 (128).

[10] CICLSAL, Fraternal Life, 56

[11] Pope Francis, "Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life," 2017.

[12] Michael Czerny, "Religious Life from Vatican II to Fratelli Tutti" in *Review for Religious*: New Series, Volume 1, Issue 1, Summer 2021, pp. 87-106 (102)

[13] CISLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, Rome 1994

the two must "interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion".[14] In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, he speaks of "communion for mission" and "mission for communion" and insists that communion and mission should go hand in hand.[15]

For this reason, the major thrust of a religious community cannot be creation of structures, rules and regulations or insistence on laws. Neither can it be simply a community- centeredness, nor a levelling collectively without dynamism or inspiration where the emphasis is on "being in community" and neglect evangelical responsiveness to the world around. Religious communities cannot also be "task-oriented companies" or action-oriented corporate presence, like multi-national corporations where work and efficiency in execution are the prime values. Wherever work is important, activism can dominate, and individuals could be sacrificed to the fulfilment of the work. Members can slip into careerism and professionalism, driven by cravings for status, power, glory and reputation.[16]

The challenge facing us today is how our institutes, communities and persons may be transformed into missional congregations, communities and persons; and how to move from religious institutes shaping missions to being mission-shaped religious institutes.[17] The changing cultural atmosphere we are living, constitutes for us a call from God. They present a moment of opportunity, a challenge to confidence in the gospel, and a call to imaginative mission. It must accommodate the cultural and spiritual diversity of its members,

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[14] John Paul, *Christifideles Laici*, 32.

[15] John Paul, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, n. 24).

[16] Xavier E. Manavath, "Founders' Missionary Vision: The Essence of a Religious Community, in *Sanyasa* 155-167 (160).

[17] CISLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community,* n. 54

knowing that community life itself is a mission. The vision of seeing the community as the first act of mission is an important missiological orientation for every consecrated person. Thus, to be a community is not just a substantive or noun, but it is a verb- an action, a collective responsibility that creates an eschatological witnessing which flourishes in our diversity because of the basic openness to dialogue and seek the truth together. Today more than before, consecrated life is challenged with an opportunity and a very special task: that of creating, inspiring, enlivening and sustaining everywhere *authentic fraternal communities* that radiate friendship, encouragement, support and reconciliation. It must put all its efforts to strengthen community life, to which new generations are very sensitive. And this is where intergenerational dialogue is called for.

## Intergenerality: The Meaning

*Intergenerationally* – literally relating to, involving or affecting generations – is the interaction between members of different generations that centres on the concept or idea of fairness or justice in relationships between children, youth, adults and seniors, particularly in terms of treatment and interactions. According to social identity theory, people generally seek to classify themselves and others based on perceived similarities and differences. Therefore, individuals may seek to classify themselves as belonging to a particular generation because they perceive oneness with traits popularly associated with other members of the group and classify others into separate "out-groups" based on dissimilar characteristic. Among the most common generational classifications today include the 'Traditionalists (1926 – 1945)', 'Baby Boomers (1946 – 1965)', 'Gen-Xers (1966 – 1980)', 'Millennials (1981 – 2000)', and 'Gen-Zers (2001 – 2015)'As individuals create in- and out-groups from generational identities, interactions between members can be impacted and conflict can

occur.[18] This bias between generations occurs because of the human need to belong to a social group to provide a sense of social identity, pride, and self-esteem, but may also create stereotypes about those in different social groups, which may be generations.[19] In the African sense, we have age groups and classification into different groups especially with the paradigm of age and sometimes gender. What kind of relationship (both inter and intra) exists between these groups? What is the basis of the interaction? Is it subordinate, passive and receptive or an active, mutual recognition of capacity and importance? These are important questions to ponder upon.

## Intergenerational Solidarity

This refers to the degree of closeness and support between different generations. It is based on the recognition that different generations have unique competencies and knowledge that can be the subject of conversation in partnership -building; and the recognition that different generations are key stakeholders in the development of the society (social impact and integration) and it is only through working together productively and respectfully that the system can leverage on their contributions.

Intergenerational synergy or solidarity is a model that enables the interaction of different generations for the mutual benefit of the different generations.[20] At the heart of it is a sense of mission and

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[18] Urick, Michael J.; Hollensbe, Elaine C.; Masterson, Suzanne S.; Lyons, Sean T. (2017-04-01). "Understanding and managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Startegies". *Work, Aging and Retirement, 3*(2): 166-185. ISSN: 2054-4642 doi:10.1093/workar/waw009.

[19] "Social Identity Theory; Simply Psychology" Retrieved 2020-11-06 from *www.simplypsychology.org*

[20] Towards Harnessing Intergenerational Opportunities for Inclusive Growth and Devt in Nigeria, *Being the text of the 10th Convocation Lecture delivered by Olanrewaju A. Fagbohun SAN, Professor of Environmental Law & 8th Vice Chancellor of the Lagos State University, at the Osun State University, Osogbo on Tuesday September 21, 2021 published in This Day*, Monday, 5th December, 2022; https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/10/04/towards-harnessing-intergenerational-opportunities-for-inclusive-growth-and-devt-in-nigeria/accessed December 5, 2022

purpose: to move away from the current paradigm which provides limited opportunities for interaction between generations to a setting which provides limitless opportunities for interaction, and which in turn results in better physical and mental health for the older generation, ability to learn and grow for the younger generation, and higher levels of satisfaction for all generations. The participation of the older generations will, among others, help to deepen understanding of best practices and the historical challenges of the sector, particularly in the face of climate change. The younger generations on their part, will bring to bear innovative technologies that will improve efficiency and give competitive advantage for the benefit of all. When there is a synergy of these attributes between the old and the young in the consecrated life, living together in communities would become a better place. The most successful communities are those in which the individual *gifts* of the members are identified, affirmed, and utilized. Such communities experience among other things the growth of the individuals, the improvement of community life, and the effectiveness of the ministry.[21]

## Intergenerational Conflict

An intergenerational conflict is either a conflict situation between teenagers and adults or a more abstract conflict between two generations, which often involves all-inclusive prejudices against another generation. This is a term describing one generation that, contrary to the will of another, will not help the other generation and makes it difficult for the other generation to act.[22] Intergenerational

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[21]Bhyju, "Religious Community, 199

[22] Klimczuk, Andrzej, *Intergenerationality, Intergenerational Justice, Intergenerational Policies*, [in:] S. Thompson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2015, pp. 419-423; Lüscher, Kurt, Hoff, Andreas, Klimczuk, Andrzej, Lamura, Giovanni, Renzi, Marta, Oliveira, Paulo d.S., Sánchez, Mariano, Viry, Gil, Widmer, Eric, Neményi, Ágnes, Veress, Enik , Bjursell, Cecilia, Boström, Ann-Kristin, Rapolien , Gražina, Mikulionien , Sarmit , O lak, Sema, Canatan, Ay e, Vujovi , Ana, Svetelšek, Ajda, Gavranovi , Nedim, Ivashchenko, Olga, Shipovskaya, Valentina, Lin, Qing, Wang, Xiying, Generations, intergenerational relationships, generational policy. A multilingual compendium - Edition 2017, Universität Konstanz, Konstanz 2017

conflict also describes cultural, social, or economic discrepancies between generations, which may be caused by shifts in values or conflicts of interest between younger and older generations. It is associated with the term "generation gap".

Conflict of any type is an extremely difficult issue for most people living in the community. It can lead to communities to become stuck and to the development of tensions among community members. Conflict, however, is necessary for without it, the community will not grow. Conflict is productive only when it is resolved. The development of the community also depends on how they deal with *conflicts*. Communities develop only when the people involved have the willingness and capacity to deal with conflict. Until the members develop a greater comfort and confidence in dealing with conflict, communities are condemned to stagnation. The task of formators and superiors is to encourage the members to address the conflict.[23]

## Intergenerational Policy

For intergenerational solidarity to be achieved, there must be deliberate policies and law, educational activities that can dispel misconceptions between generations and more intergenerational contact activities. An intergenerational policy is a public policy that incorporates an intergenerational approach to addressing an issue or has an impact across the generations. These policies can be targeted to increase age integration by facilitating interaction between people of different age groups by supporting physical proximity, developing common interests, or by other mechanisms. The purpose of integration is to eliminate social barriers and difficulties associated with age, including discrimination on the grounds of age. These policies contain specific

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[23]Bhyju, "Religious Community", 193

programs and actions aimed at supporting simultaneous participation of children, youth, and older adults.[24]

## Drivers of Intergenerational Collaboration

The followings could be identified as the main reason why it is necessary for us as Religious Institutes to promote intergenerational synergy among us through targeted policies:

- To meet the challenge of rising longevity, loneliness, and social exclusion which has resulted in older adults having to depend on the support of younger generations for longer period.
- To meet the growing digital divide challenge in the way it is separating generations.
- Enhance increase of understanding of others in ways that help to remove/reduce negative stereotypes.
- Support the development of new skills and competencies.
- The recognition that different generations have unique competencies and knowledge that can be the subject of conversation in partnership -building; and
- The recognition that different generations are key stakeholders in the development of the society (social impact and integration) and it is only through working together productively and respectfully that the system can leverage on their contributions.

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[24] Generations United. (2010) "Guiding Principles Archived 2008-08-20 at the Wayback Machine"

## Concrete Ways of Promoting Intergenerational Synergy

Most of the proposals here are adopted from Pope Francis, among the greatest advocates of the need for intergeneration synergy in the Church today. Especially in his *Fratelli Tutti,* Francis recommends to everyone, but especially to consecrated persons the followings as tools for promoting synergy across the generations:

### 1. *The Use of Dialogue*

Dialogue is a means of seeking the truth together and knowing it in its effective objectivity, overcoming every kind of "appropriation" that limits it to a single point of view.[25] Since from its nature, the consecrated community is the result of the Trinity - the perennial example of a perfect dialogue of love - the fraternity also is essentially embedded, formed, and led to grow in a loving dialogue. "Dialogue in charity" is invaluable in the endeavour of weaving the bonds of communion. A Gospel fraternity cannot live without dialogue.[26] By their calling, consecrated people are essentially ordered to be experts of communion and dialogue.[27] From their lives they know that when they let their differences co-exist and converge in harmony, communion becomes possible.

It is therefore necessary to have ongoing formation on the issue of intergenerational dialogue to strengthen the charism of brotherhood and sisterhood in consecrated life. A sensible and well-planned ongoing formation does make dialogue among the different generations easier and aiding in overcoming some of the unavoidable problems and crises arising with advancing age. To put it short,

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[25] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 206.

[26] John Paul 11 encapsulates this concept by affirming that "The consecrated life, by the very fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue," *Vita Consecrata,* 74.

[27] Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata, 10.*

dialogue is one of the principal means for ongoing formation. It is one of the essential requirements for an effective formation process which tends to encourage and enable the building up of a fraternity. Dialogue facilitates members to freely share their joys and sorrows with one another; thus developing a deep and committed affective life among themselves. Since the fundamental technique of formation in Consecrated life is brotherhood and sisterhood, a productive and caring dialogue between the younger and older members does not only inspire fraternal living with one another but also makes them available for mission.

## 2. *Promotion of Mutual Respect and Kindness*

*Kindness* is as an attitude of respect, respecting "other people's right to be themselves and to be different"[28] and "concern not to offend by word or deed".[29] Reciprocity of respect based on the common dignity of everyone should be the focus in the allocation of areas of e apostolate or mission or spirituality of the community rather than on who is what and who is old or young.

## 3. *Sincere and Honest Interaction among Members.*

This involves learning neither to impose one's own opinions nor to undervalue those of others.[30] For this to be achieved, all members must see themselves as builders of community and not simply recipients of its eventual benefits. A community exists inasmuch as it comes about and is built up by the contribution of all, each according to his or her gifts, through the development of a strong spirituality of communion whereby all experience a sense of belonging.[31] Only in this way can life in community provide its members with the mutual assistance needed

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[28] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 218.

[29] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* 223.

[30] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 224

[31] Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43: *AAS* 93 (2001), 296-297.

to live their vocation to the full.[32] Here the following words Pope Francis addressed to a group of nuns in contemplative life should be borne in mind:

> You who have embraced the monastic life must never forget that today's men and women expect you to bear witness to an authentic fraternal communion that, in a society marked by divisions and inequality, clearly demonstrates that life in common is both possible and fulfilling (cf. *Ps* 133:1), despite differences of age, education and even culture. Your communities ought to be credible signs that these differences, far from being an obstacle to fraternal life, actually enrich it. Remember that unity and communion are not the same as uniformity, and are nourished by dialogue, sharing, mutual assistance and profound compassion, especially towards the most frail and needy.[33]

## 4. Conscious Attempts at Promoting more Intergenerational Communication

Communication is an essential aspect of life as brothers and sisters in community, a practical horizon in which to exercise the evangelical style of relating to others. Understood as "a mutual exchange of information and understanding by any effective means,"[35] communication has been recognized as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community. Communication entails clear message from the sender and to the receiver. The deeply felt need to enhance fraternal life in community is accompanied by a corresponding need for communication which is both fuller and more intense. Whereas good communication builds communion and brings peace, harmony, progress and unity among the people;[36] poor communication brings misunderstanding, frustrations

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[32] Cf. Second Vatican ecumenical council, Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 602.

[33] Francis, *Vultum Dei Quarere,* 26.

[34] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 53, 199.

[35] Anthony, D'Souza, *Leadership* (Nairobi: Pauline 1994), 119.

[36] G. Kaitholil, *"Communion in Community" A Renewal Programme for Religious* (Bandra, Mumbai: Pauline Publication, 2003)*,* 44.

and disunity in the lives of the people and it could prevent effective development.[37]

Today, thank God, communication within institutes has developed considerably. There are a growing number of regular meetings of members at different levels, central, regional, and provincial; superiors often send letters and suggestions, and their visits to communities are more frequent. The publication of newsletters and internal periodicals is more widespread. Regular meetings at the community level, often on a weekly basis, have also proved very useful; they let members share problems concerning the community, the institute, the Church, and in relation to the Church's major documents. They provide opportunities to listen to others, share one's own thoughts, review and evaluate past experiences, and think and plan together. Such meetings are particularly necessary for the growth and development of fraternal life, especially in larger communities. Time must be set aside for this purpose and kept free from all other engagements. We only need to deploy this good development to the promotion of intergeneration synergy.

## 5. *Institutionalising Intergeneration Synergy in Constitutions*

There should an intentionality about building the intergenerational synergy within consecrated life. This must clearly be spelt out by the leadership, and if possible, it should be enshrined in the constitution and should be reflected in the composition of the Council. This calls for more flexibility regarding the structures of our community. We should evolve structures of the communities (time schedule, rules and norms of community living, leadership models and styles of governance) that

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[37] Juliet Chikaodinaka Ogbodo, Healthy Community Living: An Examination of Factors that Enhance Communal Living in Consecrated Life Among the Carmelite Missionaries, Nairobi Kenya: An Integration Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of Requirement for Certificate in Spirituality at Tangaza University College Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2019, 14.

[38] Manavath, "Founders' Missionary Vision", 164

are life enhancing, dialogical and participative.[38] We should make our provincial or General Chapters to become habitual celebration permeated by a loving, responsible, obedient and caring dialogue and a fraternal and warm environment where everybody listens humbly and attentively to each other; with the full participation of every member of the fraternity across the generational divide.

A concrete measure would be enshrining in our constitutions the requirement that both chapter delegates and members of the Council should be selected or elected from different age groups. Only in this way could we ensure that all generations are represented at the table where policy decisions are made. And only by so doing can we succeed in having Councillors who exercise authority to build up a fraternity weaved with deep and intimate fraternal relationships of the brothers and sisters among themselves; Councillors who can create participative models of authority, whereby all the brothers and sisters have a say, before deciding on thorny issues that have serious consequences on the future of a local fraternity, a Province, or on the Order itself.

## 6. *Experience of Ongoing Formation*

Ongoing formation is an intrinsic aspect of the religious vocation, that is all-embracing process of renewal, targeting all aspects of the human person in relationship with the Institute to which he or she belongs. Ongoing formation is a path that is Open. It lasts all lifelong and has no closing date. As missionaries *dedicated to God and consecrated by Him*, our life is an ongoing process of formation with an attitude of *constant listening, and open to the surprises of the Word and the Spirit*.

It is all embracing involving the whole person and all dimensions of his/her personality in an integral process of growth: human, spiritual,

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[38]Manavath, "Founders' Missionary Vision", 164

intellectual, pastoral and charismatic levels, for the renewal of communities, missions, and the apostolic structures. The experience of ongoing formation varies but it seems to me that this aspect does not receive the adequate attention of Superiors as it should. For the clerical Institutes the emphasis is on initial formation beyond which missionaries arrive at a "status". For non-clerical Institutes, scholasticate is seen as "punishment", due to the pressures and urgency to get qualified professionals to man the apostolate of the Institute. What is your experience of ongoing formation in your Institute? However, for sustainability of our missionary enterprise, there is need to open a creative dialogue with members to see how to support them to continue to grow holistically in their vocation itineraries and be converted to the ideals of the Institute.

## 7. Understanding Recent Changes in the Canon Law

During the recent years, of Pope Francis, several changes have been made in the Code of Canon Laws as it pertains to Consecrated life. and illegitimate absence from community. For example, can. 694 § 1, on illegitimate absence from community Under the new law, promulgated by the pope in an apostolic letter issued "motu proprio," superiors can declare a member dismissed *ipso facto* if they have been illicitly absent from the community for more than a year and cannot be located. "Community life is an essential element of religious life," He cited canon 665 of the Code of Canon Law, which provides that "religious must live in their own religious house observing common life and cannot be absent without permission of their superior." And citing can. 665 § 2, which, based on the biblical injunction directed superiors to seek out those who are "lost", emphasizing the pastoral profile of superiors. The modification of can. 694 § 1, must be studied carefully in dialogue to avoid misapplications.

## 8. Experience of Synodality in the Religious Life

Religious life is a form of Synodality. Men and women religious have a particular and important role to play in promoting Synodal conversion in the Particular Churches where they exist, drawing from their experiences as captured in their Constitutions and norms of religious life. In fact, religious life has a very concrete experience of this "walking together" and lived as a spiritual process, whether through its long experience of community life and discernment in common or through its deliberative and decision-making bodies, such as chapters and councils. Men and women religious have a duty to share these values with the entire Church and thus contribute to creating the new images of the Church suited for the Church in the third millennium. Religious life, as we know, is always present among the poorest. The synod's Preparatory Document and the Vademecum invite us to pay special attention to the poorest, the smallest and to those who are on the periphery. Synodality must encourage the participation of all and especially give voice to the voiceless. In this sense, "what place does the voice of minorities, the marginalized, the excluded occupy in our communities?"

Synodality is about collaboration, would it be possible to see that projects are being developed that associate one religious body with another, and with lay people, in reaching out in a creative and prophetic way in the work of evangelization.

## 9. Combatting Cliquism with the Promotion of a Culture of Friendship

Clannishness and the formation of cliques along generational lines is one of the major causes of conflicts, and this is especially true in consecrated life. It is the canker worm that destabilizes the unity of community living. It is very challenging for community growth and makes people to move and do things in groups, with their friends,

instead of doing things collectively. These forming of cliques destroy inclusive relationship that strengthens community bond of peace. Making individuals cling, help and relates only to their friends living others out of space.

Genuine friendship, built on love, destabilizes cliques of any form in our community. Whereas cliques diversify the well-being of community living and destroys unity, peace progress and harmony among individual in a giving community and our society at large, genuine friendship and love creates a strong bond holding individuals together. Friendship reduces the tension and ensures that inter-generational conflicts are avoided.

## 10. Provisions for the Care of the Elderly

The fact that we are talking about dialogue across generations already imply that tensions exist among the old and the young members of the consecrated life. If this tension must be diffused, then there must be conscious policies devoted to the care of the elderly, the most vulnerable dimension in the divide. Let us be clear: The presence of the elderly in the religious communities is a very positive thing. Elderly members of our communities provide a witness, wisdom and prayer which are constant encouragements to the young in their spiritual and apostolic journey. It is therefore not surprising that "The Church document *fraternal Life in Community*[39] dedicates eight paragraphs for the care of the elderly religious.

The salient aspects of the document are:

- Religious communities should accept in their midst the elderly religious and esteem deeply their presence and the services which they can offer.

- Religious communities should provide them care and attention

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[39]CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 68, 69.

fraternally and, in a way, consistent with consecrated life those means of spiritual and material assistance which the elderly need.

- Consecrated persons also should prepare themselves long in advance for becoming old and for extending their "active" years by learning to discover their new way of building community and collaborating in the common mission and responding positively to the challenges of their age.

- Superiors must arrange courses and meetings for the elderly religious to assist personal preparation and to prolong and enhance their presence in their normal workplaces.

- When in time these elderly members lose their autonomy or require special care, even when their health is cared for by lay persons, the institute should support and care them in such a way that they continue to feel a part of the life of the institute, sharers in its mission.[40]

It is also important that the elderly equip themselves and that they feel energetic and young at heart always. There should be concrete plan to care the aged members. Provisions must be made for them to move in freely in the wheelchair inside the house and the campus. It is good to keep the aged religious active as much as possible. It is not a bad idea to provide a computer to them to write their memoirs, experiences, reflections, homilies, and biblical commentaries. It is profoundly encouraging to discuss the congregational matters with them. Occasionally, ways are to be found to share the meals with them even if they are bed-ridden.

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[40]S. Anselmus, "Compassionate Care for the Aged and Sick Members of Community" in SanyaSa, *Journal of Consecrated Life* Vol. XII, No. 2 (2017), 233-244 (236).

Even the elderly religious have the desire and longing to visit the communities, friends and family members. It is therefore important to give them the opportunity and space to do whatever is possible for them. They need to be encouraged to do what they can, and they must be generously appreciated for the works done. The elderly after their so-called retirement should try to do what they want to do, do research in new topics and keep themselves busy always by reading, writing and listening besides resting and relaxing. They can see and experience God and life from a higher perspective and share and write those precious experiences for the future generations.[41]

Regarding caring for and appreciating the elderly members of our different orders, we can learn from our present Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis. On the occasion of the gathering of the grandparents and the elderly at St. Peter's square on 28th September 2014 in which Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was also present, Pope Francis, looking at his predecessor in Office said: "I specially thank Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for his presence. I have said many times that I am so happy that he lives here at the Vatican because it is like having the wise grandfather at home". Yes, every elderly religious in religious communities, in congregations is like having a wise grandfather or grandmother at home. The presence of the elderly members in religious communities and in religious congregation should make everyone happy.

**Conclusion**

When all is said and done, members of the consecrated life, in their common life, should seek a fruitful exchange between young and old, "never discarding whole generations."[42] Commenting on the Lucan

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[41] Anselmus, "Compassionate Care for the Aged", 238

[42] Pope Francis, "World Day of Consecrated Life Homily (WDCL)," 2018.

passage of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22–39), Francis affirms that "an institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And constant encounter."[43]Religious communities favouring such fruitful encounter and communication do much to console their elders, enrich their younger members, and give convincing, prophetic witness of communion to a world increasingly afflicted by intergenerational apartheid. This should be our dream as Institutes of Consecrated Life; and realising this dream should be our major challenge and our primary task as Major Superiors of our respective Institutes.

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[43] Pope Francis, "WDCL Homily," 2018.

# Building a Morally Sensitive Society:
# The Role of Catholic Schools

*A paper presented at a seminar organized by the Archdiocesan Education Committee of the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan for Management and Staff of Catholic Schools on Friday 27th January 2023 at the Church of Ascension Catholic Church Hall, Bodija, Ibadan*

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## Abstract

*The Catholic Church considers morality to be synonymous with life. Evil and death came into the world that was created good when Adam and Eve in disobedience ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and their eyes were opened to the realization of good and evil. Morality, especially within the context of Moral Theology in the Catholic Church, is hinged on some basic concepts including freedom, truth, natural law, and conscience. Generally, moral sensitivity or moral awareness is the ability to recognize moral issues when they arise especially in day-to-day living. Largely, the Catholic Church views the holistic formation of people as indispensable for achieving*

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*their potential to live responsibly in their society. Catholic schools were known for being disciplined in all ramifications – punctuality, meeting deadlines, cleanliness, examination integrity, diligence, commitment of staff, responsibility and accountability, mutual respect, decency, orderliness, care of students, high academic achievement, and excellence in all ramifications. The moral atmosphere of Catholic schools will definitely affect the moral atmosphere outside the four walls of the schools. Since education is an essential way of directly and indirectly impacting the society, the holistic formation Catholic Schools are expected to provide their beneficiaries at all levels will incredibly and invariably impact the larger society.*

## Preamble: A Brief Look at the Catholic Church's Teaching on morality

Morality in the Catholic Church is synonymous with life. This assertion is underpinned by the declaration from the Author of Life Himself, CHRIST the LORD in John's Gospel Chapter 10, verse 10b, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly". In recognition of the veracity of the LORD's declaration, Pope St. Leo the Great cautions against giving in to evil, "Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ". Leo's admonition reminds us of who we are as children of GOD and at what incredibly huge a cost we were adopted as such. It will therefore be inimical to our nature as GOD's children if we do not intentionally follow in the footsteps of CHRIST and His moral principles.

Evil came into the world that was created good when out of disobedience, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of

Eden and their eyes were opened to the realization of good and evil. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil…" (Genesis 3:22a). When we talk about morality especially within the context of Moral Theology in the Catholic Church, there are certain fundamental concepts we must bear in mind. These include freedom, truth, natural law, and conscience https://beginningcatholic.com/catholic-morality. The concept of freedom is essentially the fact that we are unequivocally responsible for the choices we make because GOD has given everyone free will to make choices either to act or to abstain from acting.

Next. Truth as a moral principle is objective regardless of the circumstances because it stems from GOD Who is Truth itself, and GOD is eternal for HE is changeless. Also, in considering the concept of natural law as exemplified in the lives of the Gentiles who were not under the Divine Law of GOD guiding the Jews, St. Paul in his letter to the Romans chapter 2 verse 14 and 15 say, "The Gentiles do not have the Law; but whenever they do by instinct what the Law commands, they are their own law, even though they do not have the Law. Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them." St. Paul's assertion simply demonstrates our natural human disposition.

Further, essentially, the formation of a good conscience underpins ethical choices and decision-making. St. Paul says of himself and the importance of the conscience in moral issues, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 9:1). The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes conscience as, "a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no.1796). The formation of a good conscience is a

life-long process. As children of GOD and as Catholics, we are blessed with many mechanisms available in the Church to facilitate the development of a moral conscience, such as active engagement with the Word of GOD, intentional reception of the Sacraments, sincere relationship with GOD especially through dedicated prayer times, the Church's teachings etc. https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/morality. Lastly, the Catholic Church projects the Divine Law as moral laws which are eternal (unchanging), universal (binding on all human beings) and objective (beats laws such as relativism, secularism, etc.) (Dignitatis Humanae, 3). That is, sin is sin regardless of the time it is committed, where it is committed, the status, age, cast or creed of the persons who committed it.

## Moral Sensitivity

Generally, moral sensitivity or moral awareness is the ability to recognize moral issues when they arise especially in day-to-day activities. Therefore, both formal and informal character formation is of utmost importance for building a moral society (Scheopner, 2005). When Individuals are morally sensitive, they demonstrate that their capacity to resolve ethical concerns is significant. They are mindful of crucial repercussions in decision making which involves other persons. Narvaez and Rest (1995) considered four components of acting morally. One of these components is moral sensitivity which they perceive as involving "the receptivity of the sensory perceptual system to social situations and the interpretation of the situation in terms of what actions are possible, who and what would be affected by each of the possible actions, and how involved parties might react to possible actions." Their perception of moral sensitivity is fundamentally action based. However, there are divergent opinions as to what is more important in considering the concept of morality,

Kekes (1984) asserts that "The kind of person one is, is a more fundamental, and thus a more important consideration than how one acts." He argues with Kant (1953)'s assertion of 70 decades that the key question of morality is hinged on action. Kekes stand is that morality should be essentially concerned about who a person ought to be than their actions because ultimately a good person's action will reflection their true self as they make choices and live in the society. In another development, Castillo (2018) argued for the value of embedding moral and ethical education within the classroom, via the curriculum and instructional practices such that they will complement students' attempt at fighting inequalities within their respective communities. In this regard, teachers are expected to be actively involved in both guiding and exemplifying the moral values they teach. This angle gives credence to the relevance of school in building a morally sensitive society. However, are the teachers equipped for this all-important mission? *"Nemo dat quod non habet"* "No one can give what he does not have".

As regards the quality of teachers as custodians of morals, it is heartening that Finland provides an incredible support for teachers as they are seen as custodians of ethics within the learning community. In Finland's educational system which ranks as one of the best in the world, teachers are highly respected and are considered as "ethical professionals who can be trusted and who share similar basic values about their work" Tirri (2019). Tirri details these values as dignity, truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, and freedom. Finnish teachers are expected to continue to uphold and advance these values while ensuring the values underpin their relationship with their learners.

Heightened moral sensitivity has been proven to positively impact various areas of life as discovered by: Xie, Liu and Teng (2023) who asserted that the higher moral sensitivity to bullying a student has, the

more likely they are to help the victim or inhibit bullying rather than ignore it; Yu, Zhou and Nussberger (2022) who discovered that persons who are morally sensitive felt less grateful and more uneasy when offered immoral help and also that there was less likelihood for persons to accept the help of immoral persons and strengthen their relationship with them even when they accepted it; and Katsarov et all (2017) who reviewed 20 distinct game mechanisms to assist designers of video games in the choice and application of game tools as they had the capacity to foster moral sensitivity.

Scheopner (2005) revealed that there are two ways of facilitating students' growth in moral sensitivity–formal and informal. Formal moral education is intentionally designed to help children develop and comprehend in practical terms, ethical and moral principles. On the other hand, informal moral education occurs at any given time when the teacher utilizes teachable moments to assist learners grow in their learning, for instance, as they make ethical decisions. Both formal and informal moral instruction are important in the holistic formation of the learner.

## The Catholic School as a Formal Moral Organism

For all intents and purposes, the Catholic Church views the holistic formation of persons as crucial in their potential to live responsibly and morally upright in the society. The Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education defines a school as "a place of integral formation by means of a systematic and critical assimilation of culture" (The Catholic School, 26). The key phrase here is "integral formation". The Code of Canon Law (CCL) (Can. 795) expresses expectation of Catholic education, as, having the capacity to provide "complete formation" - "Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the

common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life" (CCL, Can. 795). In addition, the Catholic Policy on Education reiterates that "anyone who has received formation in Catholic Education should feel, judge, and act always and consistently in accordance with right reason, enlightened by the example and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ." Furthermore, The Second Vatican Council's Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education) holds that "a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which he as man is a member and in whose obligations as an adult he will share". How then can Catholic Schools play active roles in the building of a morally sensitive society?

## The Role of Catholic Schools in Building a Morally Sensitive Society

The document, *Congregation for Catholic Education: The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* [(CCE), 2000, Parr. 1] acknowledges the fact that there are crisis of values which have impacted human behaviors in diverse ways. Now, education has become more complex both in scope and content making "education and schooling become particularly difficult today" (CCE, Parr 2). Therefore, more than ever before, Catholic schools must lean on centuries of sound educational heritage and boldly embrace renewal to be emboldened and confidently offer salvation to people (CCE, Parr 3). Catholic education is founded on Gospel values and so must courageously offer the world the values it needs to be morally upright knowing that "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the

mystery of man truly becomes clear" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1997, para. 359).

Before delving into practical examples of the Roles of the Catholic Schools in building a morally sensitive society, it is pertinent to hear Pope Francis view on Catholic education. In offering hope to the members of the *Gravissimum Educationis* Foundation and by extension to all educators, Pope Francis said, "Catholic education gives soul to our globalized world and radiates the promise of Christian salvation." Also, in taking cognizance of global challenges confronting the human family, the Pope claimed, "Catholic education recognizes that humankind's moral responsibility today does not just extend through space, but also through time, and that present choices have repercussions for future generations." *https://www.vaticannews. va/en/pope/news/2018- 06/pope-francis-gravissimum-educationis- foundation.html*

It is assumed that every Catholic school, indeed every educational establishment has its vision, mission, and core values. The vision is the goal the school hopes to achieve, the mission is how the goal will be achieved, while the core values are the ethical principles that drive every activity geared towards achieving the goal. The role of teachers in building a morally sensitive society cannot be over-emphasized. The document, *Divini Illius Magistri* (1954) buttresses the indispensability of teachers in this all-important mission, "But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs", which invariably are underpinned by moral values. I agree with Castillo (2018) that moral values/core values/ethical principles must be woven into the curriculum and instructional practices of schools to facilitate holistic formation of the learner. Smith (2006) revealed that he taught English in a Catholic school in Thailand for more than six years where moral

values were embedded into all their lessons. More interestingly, "ten percent of each student's grade was based on how well they practiced moral values inside and outside of the classroom." *https://www.edutopia.org/how-approach-moral-issues-classroom*

From his personal experience of working in a school where the students were offered such an enabling environment which empowered them to be morally sensitive, Smith (2006) offered seven practical suggestions that Catholic schools could employ in helping to train their learning communities to build up a morally sensitive society. I will share four of them. First, schools ought to, "acknowledge that young people encounter difficult moral questions every day, and they want guidance". For instance, students could be encouraged to critically appraise actions and inactions of leaders and the consequences on the society. They could examine parallels in their own lives and proffer solutions. Second, schools must "recognize that no subject is morally neutral". Different topics in different subjects will always surface moral issues. In recent times we have seen the inclusion of immoral items in school curriculum and textbooks. Thank GOD for various groups who spoke up and coerced the government into withdrawing such anti-educational and morally destructive materials. Smith suggests encouraging students to reflect on and discuss general themes such as, "compassion, indifference, resistance, propaganda" etc. Third, trust must be built in the classroom. Smith suggests starting by establishing basic rules such that elicit respect and the teacher must model them. Further, practice of listening to students, challenging ideas not persons, mutually developing a language for moral questioning; acknowledge the difference between being safe and been comfortable – students must feel safe. However, Smith believes discomfort will help them learn and grow. And four, have faith in your students. Generally, young people want to belong. They need to be encouraged to grow, make a difference, show themselves not just others that they are capable of high achievement.

Globally, school curriculum is divided into four types, the Scholar Academic Curriculum – which is the commonest (basically formulated to prepare students to write standardized tests or examinations such as is generally operated in Nigeria; Social Efficiency Curriculum – which is driven by hands-on experiences such as we have in technical and technological education – sewing, catering, mechanical apprenticeship, hairdressing, Computer training all requiring a lot of practice where learners' assessment is reported as either pass or fail, no in-between assessment; Learner-Centred Curriculum which is customized according to learner's abilities, interest, learning style, and teacher's capacity to offer an appropriate and enabling environment for the learner while constantly providing a detailed and well written assessment of the learner's growth without subjecting them to any form of standardized testing, the assessment is more of formative (that is on-going guidance where the chef tastes the food while cooking rather than summative which comes up at the end like guests tasting the food in which case, possible and helpful amelioration has been delayed; and the Social Reconstruction Curriculum in which students are trained to make their world a better place by acquiring skills to solve real life challenges, which more often than not have ethical concerns. A fundamental assumption of the Social Reconstruction Curriculum, therefore, is that educators must have a balanced sense of judgment underpinned by ethical principles, which will facilitate their efforts at stimulating their students' moral sensitivity as they encounter both easy and difficult ethical issues every day. Whichever curriculum theory we adopt in our schools, it is expected that as Catholic schools, moral values are intentionally woven into every sound, letter, word, phrase, sentence, and activities we engage in or refrain from, in all our classrooms and schoolwide interactions.

Permit me to allude to the four focal points on which schools run by my Congregation are built. They are Faith formation, morality, academic

excellence and altruism – charity (e.g. Bridge of Care). These for us will ensure our students receive holistic formation. We hope that this type of education will sharpen their moral sensibilities such that by the time they graduate from our schools and step into the world, they are well-equipped to make right choices and positively impact their society.

Catholic schools *were* known for being disciplined in all ramifications – punctuality, meeting deadlines, cleanliness, examination integrity, diligence, commitment of staff, responsibility and accountability, mutual respect, decency, orderliness, care of students, high academic achievement, excellence in all ramifications. Catholic schools *had* a high degree of moral intensity, that is, the consequences of moral choices, moral sensitivity and moral judgement were always heightened resulting in school wide practices devoid of immoral behaviour. When schools are aware that going against their core values will violate some moral principles, they will be proactive in how they interact with all stake holders – students, parents, staff, local community, etc. The Church documents and some of the research works that have been referenced in the early part of this paper undoubtedly demonstrate that Catholic schools have moral roles to play in facilitating the development of a morally sensitive society through the daily engagement of all stakeholders who are members of the society. All these interactions have a way of overtly or covertly sending signals of light or darkness to the society. Let us look at a few areas where morality could be a school wide concern by asking, "In my school, what is the quality of our…"

1. School policies – (Is it comprehensive, clear and accessible enough for all stakeholders?)
2. School climate – (What do organisation, team work, inclusion, owning decisions, staff/selfdevelopment, relationships among

all stake holders, commitment, conflict resolution, exam practices, communication skills, safety strategies, staff expertise look like?)

3. School curriculum especially – (Do we operate the five curricular concurrently and are we all aware of them and actively engaged with them?)

4. School examination policy – (How seriously and proactively are issues of examination misdemeanor handled?)

5. School administration and administrators – (Do we have qualified and experienced administrators; what does the day-to-day running of the school look like?)

6. School succession plan – (How do we view the need for this at all levels?)

7. School mentoring program – (How important is the issue of mentoring?)

The moral atmosphere of our school will definitely affect the moral atmosphere outside the four walls of our schools. Remember, "*Nemo dat quod non habet*" "No one can give what he does not have". If we ourselves are confused and are not getting it right, how do we hope to be involved in activating the conscience of the society with which we interact on a daily basis? In Europe and America, Catholic Schools are still the most highly sort after because of the enviable moral track record of Catholic Education. How can we ensure this is upheld and fostered in our schools here in the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan? Our schools in lesser or greater degrees are a reflection of our society and vice versa.

**The Catholic Diocese of "Kenz" Cairns Queensland, Australia boasts of providing Catholic Education that is:**

- Faith and values-based learning environment.
- A provider of holistic education – academic, spiritual, social, emotional and physical development.
- Welcoming, inclusive and family-oriented environment of high standards of behaviour and respect for self and others.
- A safe and caring environment offering a sense of belonging and community.
- Nurturing and develops individuals and their abilities.
- A provider of quality learning and teaching known for strong academic reputation.
- A giver of broad curriculum and co-curricular options, providing academic, vocational and employment pathways.
- Providing well-resourced and equipped classrooms with full ICT integration.
- A developer of life-long skills and a love of learning, strongly linked with parents and community.
- Committed to social justice, preparing learners for a life of worth, not simply a life of work.

  *https://www.cns.catholic.edu.au/about/the-catholic-school-difference/*

If the Diocese of "Kenz" Cairns truly engages in all the above-mentioned practices, we can imagine what the society in which they interact will look like because a significant percentage of their graduates, parents, and all those with whom they share life will become more morally sensitive. I strongly believe that the success of Catholic Schools in building a morally sensitive society will largely depend on

their capacity to know, understand and accurately interpret moral issues in the society. Our schools will mirror our society and vice versa. We have the power to create morally sensitive learning communities. If it is working elsewhere, it can work here also.

In conclusion, it is no gainsaying that since education is an essential way of directly and indirectly impacting the society, the holistic formation Catholic Schools are expected to provide their beneficiaries at all levels will incredibly and invariably impact the society in which they live. Therefore, if we realize that our school communities are not living up to the moral expectation of Catholic Education, we may need to intentionally and urgently investigate and amend areas of moral lapses in order to continue to be relevant instruments of justice and morality, and to ensure that as Pope Francis stated, the type of Catholic education we offer "gives soul to our globalized world and radiates the promise of Christian salvation".

Thank you and GOD bless us all.

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# Benefits and Challenges of a Smart Phone to Candidates in the Holistic Formation of the Catholic Religious in Langata Sub-County Nairobi – County

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## Abstract

*The Catholic Church accepts and appreciates the use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news. In fact, all social communication applications could be effectively used for evangelization. This research focused on examining the benefits and challenges of using a smart phone in the holistic formation of the religious in Langata Sub-County, Nairobi County in Kenya. the specific objectives included; investigating the benefits and drawbacks of using IMO and Instagram, investigating the advantages and disadvantages of using Twitter and Facebook, investigating the advantages and disadvantages of using WhatsApp and Viber, and proposing alternative methods for*

*effectively utilizing the benefits of smart phones for the holistic formation of the Religious in Langata Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. The study was based on the "Uses and gratifications theory" (UGT) and media system dependence theory. It used quantitative and qualitative methodologies, using a convergent parallel mixed method research design to enhance its findings. The target population consisted of 50 Novices, 10 Mother Superiors, and 95 Professed Sisters from various Congregations. Purposive sampling was used to sample 10 major superiors and 95 Professed Sisters, while simple random sampling was used to sample 40 novices. Data collected via questionnaires and interviewing protocols. Both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods were used to analyse the data. According to the research on the benefits of smartphone use for holistic formation, WhatsApp was used to communicate with new people in novel ways, Facebook was used to share information about formation and forging professional connections. Findings on challenges of using smartphones showed that, WhatsApp is a significant source of interruption during prayers, and religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook bullying. The study concluded that, the use of a smartphone could influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user. The study's recommendations include; formees should be trained on the proper use of smartphones, communities should also conduct workshops and invite communication experts to enlighten the novices on how to detect dangers such as scams and exploiters online, superiors should form small groups amongst formees to enhance sister's keeper" spirit, and strict rules should be established in the community to control the use of smartphones during critical times, like time for community prayers and other activities.*

**Keywords:** Postulancy, Celibacy, Effective Communication, Formators, Holistic Formation, Initial formation, Major Superiors, Novices, Smartphones and Social Media.

## Introduction

Human beings are social-beings, they have to socialize with their fellow human beings in different ways. A person is not an island. He/she has to share his/her ideas, opinions, opportunities, fears and thoughts with his fellow human beings in order to be enriched in different aspects of his/her life.[1] The Catholic Church accepts and appreciates the use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news. Therefore, all social communication applications could be effectively used for evangelization.[2] For instance, WhatsApp is known as the most used application by every generation. It is used worldwide and could be useful as tool for formative development of candidates in formation.[3] Smart phones, generally are not given to candidates at the stage of initial formation; however, they are given immediately after the First Profession. After some years of not using a phone, young Religious Sisters suddenly have access to it.—Smart phones have a lot of advantages for candidates who are in their initial formation stage, such as group discussion, communicating with their friends, relatives, superiors, posting creative pictures of their congregation to attract vocations, posting reflections and uploading songs.

However, WhatsApp has also some disadvantages such as the following: It allows communication only with those friends who have accounts on it, those who have Smartphones, and those who have internet access. It is used in the majority of English-speaking African nations. However, Africa engages in internet activities lesser than most other worldwide regions.[4] On the other hand, there are also some

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[1] Nick Morgan, "*We Humans Are Social Beings - And Why That Matters For Speakers and Leader*s," last updated Sep 1, 2015, accessed April 15, 2021

[2] His Holiness Pope Paul VI, Decree On The Media Of Social Communications "***Inter Mirifica,"*** accessed December 4, 1963, 13/04/2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html.

[3] Mansoor Iqubac, "*WhatsApp Revenue and Usage Statistics (2020)," last* updated March 9, 2021, accessed April 13, 2021, https://www.businessofapps.com/data/whatsapp-statistics.

[4] Madeline, "*WhatsApp in Africa: Statistics & Business Potential,"* last updated January 15, 2019, accessed April 13, 2021, https://www.messengerpeople.com/whatsapp-in-africa/.

disadvantages of using WhatsApp in the context of religious life. Overuse of the gadgets affect their life style negatively: such as health, ministry, and relationships, so it is very important to have discipline in using it. Facebook is a social networking platform with features where users could create profiles, send messages, and communicate with friends, and any person with an account. If Religious Sisters use this means of social networking properly, it could serve as a means of evangelization. For example, sharing reflections on daily scripture readings, discussions, academic work, posting news, etc. However, this same social networking could be abused. For instance, some Religious Sisters spend all their precious time chatting with someone thousands of miles away, while they spend less quality time with their sisters in the community. Some of them go late for spiritual exercises just because they are glued to their handsets.

## Problem Statement

A Smart phone is an important tool in witnessing to Christ in our time; it is inevitable to use it. According to Justine John, "social communication helps the Church to engage people, in the dialogue of faith".[5] The Church supports the use of social communication in transmitting the truth that Christ reveals to humanity. However, she is keen and attentive in recommending the proper use of these gadgets; since information which comes from the media is not necessarily true or authentic. Nevertheless, the Church accepts them in her proclaiming of the Good News.[6] It has been emphasized that a smart phone is not used during novitiate but most of the congregations do not explain

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[5] Dyikuk, Justine John. "The Pros and Cons of Social Communication in the Mission of the Church in Nigeria." (2019).page 8.

[6] Rev. Fr. George Nwachukwu, *The Church's Position on the Use of Social Media*," last updated October 11, 2019 accessed 13April 13, 2021, "https://recowacerao.org/the-church-and-social-media-application-of-social-media-in-the-churchs-mission-of-evangelization.

clearly to the candidates the reasons for not giving them smart phones in the initial formation. It is helpful for the candidates to integrate the proper use of smartphones in initial stages of their formation. When this is not done, it creates a gap in the holistic formation of the candidates. There are many studies on the benefits and challenges of the use of a smart phone,[7] however, the research did not find any study whose focus was specifically in the area of religious formation. Thus, the importance of this study was to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of smart phones among religious Sisters in Lang'ata Sub-County. The study thus, targeted major superiors, formators, professed sisters and formees' of female Catholic religious to explore how they might benefit from the use of smart phones for the formative growth of their candidates.

## General Objective

The objective of this study was to find out benefits and challenges of using a smart phone for the holistic formation of the religious in Lang'ata, Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya.

## Theoretical Review

## Uses and Gratifications' Theory

The current study is based on the uses and gratifications' theory, which was devised in the 1940s by Blumler and Katz. The scholars were concerned with the interpretation of the media and its influence on human formation.[8] The theory has its roots in the communications'

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[7] "Dr Philippa Collin, University of Western Sydney Dr Ingrid Richardson, Murdoch University Dr Amanda Third, University of Western Sydney Ms Kitty Rahilly, Inspire Foundation" The Benefits of Social Networking Services April 2011.

literature. The uses and gratifications' theory–argue that most individuals prefer the media that satisfies their wants and provides the greatest amount of pleasure. In order to examine the advantages and difficulties of using a smart phone in religious formation, it might be helpful to consider the uses and gratifications' theory, which has particular significance to smartphones. The theory outlined 10 different uses, including communication, information gathering, leisure, amusement, relaxation, expressing of opinion, surveillance of others, and information sharing. The proponents of the uses and gratifications' theory conducted research on how the general public engages with media platforms. This approach contends that users leverage media to satisfy certain needs or desires.[9] Many candidates for holistic formation use the Internet for pleasure, informational purposes, socializing, finding like-minded people, and self-expression. Every one of these applications serves a certain role, and the requirements determine how media–is exploited. By analyzing the influences on media preferences of various populations, this theory is helpful in determining the motivations behind media use amongst religious novice sisters and how it could be of help in religious formation.

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[8] Anita Whiting and David Williams, "Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach," last updated August 30, 2013, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041/full/html?casa_token=rCUxJJzrh4wAAAAA:7nOyNZpbxjrdDu2LKy0vTfsY0pqc_7tyiIovMFdpKKLc5hkLqoh-S8LWS7PblRe83hfJLHEtPLYBs4vxxgduq9dN8ciOfinXHrcdiVY7PNw6ffSPBqZh#b9.

[9] Lariscy R.W., Tinkham S.F. and Sweetser K.D., "Kids these days: examining differences in political uses and gratifications, internet political participation, political information efficacy, and cynicism on the basis of age," American Behavioral Scientist, 55, 6 (2011), 749 – 764.

## Media System dependency Theory

Ball-Rokeach and DeFluer introduced the Media Dependency Theory in 1976.[10] This theory was developed to understand how people and media relate. The main reason behind the development of the theory was lack of clarity on the impact of media on people. The extent to which a person relies on the media to provide information is a key point in understanding the influence of the media on a persons' beliefs, emotions or behaviors. The theory asserts that if a person becomes so reliant on mass media, the media becomes a key source of information to that person. Hence people relate well with the media which is beneficial to them and gives them an opportunity to understand what is happening around them. The more an individual relies on the media, the more significant media will be in their life and have a great impact on them.[11] Social media platforms are a key tool for engaging societal activities since they are broadly used to disseminate information.[12] Since media dependency theory aims at understanding the asymmetric dependencies amongst individuals and media systems, it was applicable for research on finding out benefits and challenges of using a smart phone for the holistic formation of the religious in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County in Kenya.

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[10] Ball-Rokeach, S J.. "An Application of Media System Dependency Theory." International Journal of Public Opinion Research 2 (1976)

[11] Grant, A. "Television shopping: A media system dependency perspective." Communication Research 18 (2014):

[12] Ognyanova, K and S Ball-Rokeach. "Political Efficacy on the Internet: A Media System Dependency Approach." in Laura Robinson (2015): 27.

## Literature Review

Yılmazsoy[13] sought to investigate the implications of adopting WhatsApp as a social networking tool in the Turkish educational processes. Results revealed that, in comparison other students, those who are hooked to instant messaging lack discipline, are unable to manage the amount of time they spend texting, and ignore their responsibilities. Additionally, the students understanding level, learning skills and productivity and academic achievement had also been affected. Students who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp also feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting. Zanamwe[14] examined WhatsApp's usage in higher education. The findings showed that students utilized social networking sites for educational achievements, particularly for group projects. It was also determined that social networking tools strengthened learners' social abilities, increased their technology expertise, and assisted learners in communicating in novel ways with unknown peers. Bouhnik[15] examined implications of the use of WhatsApp in school. According to research, leveraging WhatsApp for learning has several advantages, including improved student communication, fostering of interaction and facilitation of cooperation among students, cheap cost, speed, accessibility to learning resources, and learning that continues outside of the class hours. Kamau et.al[16] sought to determine how using WhatsApp affected Kenyan

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[13] Yılmazsoy,, B and M Kahraman. "Negative Aspects of Using Social Networks in Education: A Brief Review on WhatsApp Example." Journal of Educational Technology & Online Learning 3 (2020): 69-90.

[14] Zanamwe, N, T Rupere and O Kufandirimbwa. "Use of Social Networking Technologies in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A learners' perspective." International Journal of Computer and Information Technology 2 (2013):

[15] Bouhnik, D and M Deshen. "WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students." Journal of Information Technology Education: Research (2014):

[16] Kamau, J, N Mwaura and M Njau. "Effect of Utilization of Whatsapp Social Media Platform on Spiritual Growth of Church Members a Case of New Life Church Kenya." (2019):

churchgoers' spiritual development. Research findings showed that using social media makes Religious people more mature, with lives marked by more love for one another, regular prayer and devotion, a rise in selflessness, and a better sense of community. According to the findings, church leaders and members who use social media will become more mature Religious women who could do their assigned duties efficiently. Njoroge[17] looked into how social media usage among young people affected how they changed their behavior within some of the universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Findings showed that Students used internet on their mobile devices, particularly on WhatsApp. 68.8 percent of the students, talked on the phone or used a computer to text or chat with virtual peers.

Baruah[18] investigated social media's efficacy as a medium for communication and its potential benefits in India. Findings indicated that social media has facilitated communication in a variety of ways and has the potential to radically alter the social lives of individuals, both personally and collectively. Altenhofen[19] investigated the methods employed by some American Catholic priests on Facebook to build and preserve their clerical power. The research found out that priests utilized Facebook to connect with one another and exchange information concerning their church groups. They used Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family, share life events, obtain news updates, and find humorous material. Facebook helped them to

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[17] Njoroge, R. "Impacts of Social Media Among The Youth on Behavior Change: A Case Study of University Students in Selected Universities In Nairobi, Kenya." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013).

[18] Baruah, T. "Effectiveness of Social Media as a Tool of Communication and its Potential For Technology Enabled Connections: A Micro-Level Study." International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 2 (2012):

[19] Altenhofen, J. 'Sharing The Catholic Faith: How Priests Establish/Maintain Religious Authority on Facebook," (PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2016).

establish and maintain religious authority. Makinde[20] analyzed the impact of social media on Christian youth's faith and their lifestyle. The findings showed that many Christian youth were negatively and positively influenced by twitter and facebook usage. While some of them used social media for faith networking, others used it to advance immoral practices and were swayed away by social media even during church services. Odek[21] looked at how University of Nairobi students' use of mobile phones affected their ability to communicate interpersonally (face to face). Results showed that students largely depended on their smartphones for academic purposes, for building relationships, resolving disagreements, and entertainment, to the point where it significantly reduced their use of the typical Face-to-Face method of communication and led to a cellphone over-reliance.

## Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted convergent parallel mixed method research design, where descriptive and phenomenology research designs were used.[22] The target population for the study was 50 Novices, 10 Mother Superiors and 95 Professed Sisters from various Congregations living in Lang'ata sub-County in Nairobi County, Kenya. The sample size was 10 major superiors, 95 professed sisters, and 40 novices. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data.

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[20] Makinde , O. "Impact of Social Media on Christian Youth's Faith And Their Lifestyle." (Masters' Thesis ,Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos, 2017).

[21] Odek, A. "The Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Interpersonal (Face To Face) Communication Amongst The Students of The University of Nairobi Main Campus." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2015).

[22] John W. Creswell J.W. and David J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed., (California, Sage Publications, 2018), 63.

**Table 1: Benefits and Challenges of Using WhatsApp for Holistic Formation**

| Statements | SD | | D | | UD | | A | | SA | | M |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | |
| **Benefits** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WhatsApp helps religious women interact with new people and improves their interpersonal skills | 8 | 6.4 | 10 | 8.0 | 14 | 11.2 | 35 | 28.0 | 58 | 46.4 | 4.00 |
| WhatsApp enhances continuation of learning beyond class hours | 6 | 4.8 | 4 | 3.2 | 7 | 5.6 | 25 | 20.0 | 83 | 66.4 | 4.40 |
| **Challenges** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Religious women addicted to instant messaging are unable to control the time they spend in messaging and neglect their assignments | 8 | 6.4 | 10 | 8.0 | 8 | 6.4 | 36 | 28.8 | 63 | 50.4 | 4.09 |
| Overuse of WhatsApp has a negative effect on the life style of religious women | 10 | 8.0 | 4 | 3.2 | 19 | 15.2 | 34 | 27.2 | 58 | 46.4 | 4.01 |
| Religious women who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting | 8 | 6.4 | 12 | 9.6 | 6 | 4.8 | 40 | 32.0 | 59 | 47.2 | 4.04 |

*Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, UN=Undecided, A=Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, M=Mean.*

Findings show that respondents strongly agreed that WhatsApp enhances continuation of learning beyond class hours (M=4.40). WhatsApp helps religious women to interact with new people and improves their interpersonal skills (M=4.00). Findings concur with Bouhnik[23] that benefits of using WhatsApp include easier communication with colleagues/family, creating dialogue and encouraging sharing, low cost, immediacy, and continuation of learning beyond class hours. Kamau et.al[24] also demonstrated that using social media makes religious people more mature, with lifestyles marked by more love for one another, regular prayer and devotion, a growth in generosity, and a better sense of togetherness. Findings on

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[23] Bouhnik, D and M Deshen. "WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students." Journal of Information Technology Education: Research (2014):

[24] Kamau, J, N Mwaura and M Njau. "Effect of Utilization of Whatsapp Social Media Platform on Spiritual Growth of Church Members a Case of New Life Church Kenya." (2019):

the challenges reveal that religious women addicted to instant messaging are unable to control the time they spend in messaging and they neglect their assignments (M=4.09), religious women who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting (M=4.04), and overuse of WhatsApp has a negative effect on the life style of religious women (M=4.01). Findings also concur with Yeboah[25] that due to the time commitment required by WhatsApp, users have procrastination-related issues, loss of attention, and difficulties juggling WhatsApp usage with other responsibilities.

**Table 2: Benefits and Challenges of Using Facebook for Holistic Formation**

| Statements | SD | | D | | UD | | A | | SA | | M |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | |
| **Benefits** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Facebook platform enables religious women to communicate information about their development and cultivate professional contacts. | 8 | 6.4 | 5 | 4.0 | 11 | 8.8 | 37 | 29.6 | 64 | 51.2 | 4.15 |
| Religious women use Facebook to remain in contact with family and friends and obtain liveupdates. | 3 | 2.4 | 11 | 8.8 | 16 | 12.8 | 60 | 48.0 | 35 | 28.0 | 3.90 |
| Facebook help Religious women to establish and maintain religious authority. | 10 | 8.0 | 12 | 9.6 | 17 | 13.6 | 34 | 27.2 | 52 | 14.6 | 3.85 |
| **Challenges** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Some Religious women often check their Facebook accounts before doing anything else, which affects their formation. | 8 | 6.4 | 6 | 4.8 | 14 | 11.2 | 58 | 46.4 | 39 | 31.2 | 3.91 |
| Religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook bullying and negative comments of posts/tweets. | 4 | 3.2 | 7 | 5.6 | 13 | 10.4 | 36 | 28.8 | 65 | 52.0 | 4.21 |
| Some Religious women use Facebook more for social interactions than for religious purposes. | 8 | 6.4 | 4 | 3.2 | 11 | 8.8 | 87 | 69.6 | 15 | 12.0 | 3.78 |
| Religious women are swayed away by Facebook, even during Mass and prayers. | 12 | 9.6 | 16 | 12.8 | 5 | 4.0 | 73 | 58.4 | 19 | 15.2 | 3.57 |

*Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, UN=Undecided, A=Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, M=Mean.*

[25] Yeboah, J and G Dominic. "The Impact of Whatsapp Messenger Usage on Students Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana." Journal of Education and Practice 5 (2014):

The results demonstrate that the respondents agreed that religious women use Facebook to discuss their development and forge connections in a professional capacity (M=4.15), they use Facebook to stay connected with friends and relatives and getting news updates (M=3.90), and Facebook helps religious women to establish and maintain religious authority (M=3.85). Findings concur with Altenhofen[26] that Facebook is used by religious individuals to exchange information about their church and establish professional connections. It also makes it easier for religious people to remain in touch with their loved ones, share life events, and obtain news and updates. Regarding challenges of using Facebook, findings revealed that religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook and Twitter bullying and negative comments of posts/tweets (M=4.21), some Religious women often check their Facebook and Twitter accounts before doing anything else which affects their formation(M=3.91), some Religious women use Facebook and Twitter more for social interactions than for religious purposes (M=3.78) and Religious women are swayed away by Facebook and Twitter, even during Mass and prayers (M=3.57). Findings concur with Makinde[27] that while some Christians use social media for faith networking, others use it to advance immoral practices and are swayed away by social media, even during church services. Odek[28] revealed that some smartphones usage has drastically reduced use of the traditional Face-to-Face mode and that has resulted in a mobile phone dependency.

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[26] Altenhofen, J. 'Sharing The Catholic Faith: How Priests Establish/Maintain Religious Authority on Facebook," (PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2016).

[27] Makinde , O. "Impact of Social Media on Christian Youth's Faith And Their Lifestyle." (Masters' Thesis ,Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos, 2017).

[28] Odek, A. "The Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Interpersonal (Face To Face) Communication Amongst The Students of The University of Nairobi Main Campus." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2015).

**Table 3: Ways of Making Effective Use of the Benefits of a Smart Phone for Holistic Formation**

| Measures | Frequency | Percentge |
|---|---|---|
| Choose the right information from reliabl people and avoid getting addicted to a smartphne. | 72 | 57.6 |
| View or post things which are helpful to religious formation. | 85 | 68.0 |
| Encourage responsible use of a smart pho and correct irresponsible or misuof it. | 68 | 54.4 |
| Allow formees to have phones and teach them how to use them rather than collecti them from them. | 90 | 72.0 |
| Emphasize recreation time with communi membersand not be on phones. | 45 | 36.0 |
| Settimelines for using smartphones. | 68 | 54.4 |

*n=125*

Findings also show that respondents suggested possible ways of making effective use of the benefits of smart phones for the holistic formation of the Religious which included;  allowing formees to have phones and teach them how to use them, encourage formees to view  or post things which are helpful to religious formation, guiding formees on how to choose the right information from reliable people and avoid getting addicted to a smartphone, encouraging  responsible use of a smart phone and correcting irresponsible or misuse of it and emphasizing recreation time with other community members and not to be on phones, which have been proven to be a source of self-isolation. Findings equally concur with Marshall[29]  that the media has made the religious to turn away from spiritual matters, and has prompted them to compulsively think and do things that plainly injure their spirit.

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[29]Marshall T. Poe, A History of Communications: Media and society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet. New York: University Press, 2011), 275.

## Conclusions

Use of smartphones could influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user. When used appropriately, a smartphone could nurture spiritual growth while when used inappropriately it could hinder spiritual growth. WhatsApp has been identified as a useful App since it enhances sharing of religious content and communication with superiors, colleagues and families. However, it could also be used to spread secular content and too much use of the App could lead to addiction, hence distracting religious activities like prayers, vigil and being effective in the ministry where one is assigned to share the Word of God. Religious women heavily rely on Facebook to get current updates from all walks of life, not just for religious information. Getting updates on current affairs might not affect religious formation. However, as the religious scroll their phones, they might view/read secular information which is a source of disruption. It is always not easy to erase memories, and sometimes what people read/see sticks in their minds, and religious women are not an exception. The smartphone Apps, especially social media Apps, do not have an option of filtering information, so when one logs in, she gets to see all that is posted by friends/followers. However, some posts promote religious formation since they focus on the gospel and devotion.

## Recommendations

Formees should be trained on the proper use of smartphones. This would equip them with great knowledge of how to use smartphones for spiritual growth and would also know that improper use of smartphones might lead them astray. The community should also conduct workshops and    invite a communication expert to enlighten novices on how to detect dangers such as scams and exploiters online.

This would help them to filter their social media accounts so as not to allow all sorts of information to pop up on their screens. Superiors should form small groups amongst formees to enhance "sisters' keeper" spirit. This would ensure that everyone is looking after the other, and it would make it easier to identify those who spend most of their time on their phones and perhaps even what they do with their phones. Strict rules should be established in the community to control the use of smartphones during critical times, like community prayers and other activities. The rules could include no use of smart phones in prayer rooms and to achieve this, they could invest in security measures to identify those breaking the rules. To have a common room for computers whereby formees could have access to internet for research purposes, and also chat with their family members and friends on an established date. Communities that allow members to use the Wi-Fi should introduce security measures which would ensure that the members would not be able to access immoral sites since it is easier to control the use of public internet than personal mobile data. To introduce training in computer application in the initial formation, to be designed as part of the formation programme.

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