

Echoes from the Plenary Council - 29th November 2019

Once again today we had a very clear introduction to the question of Initial formation given by our secretary of formation Bob Tebri. He stated clearly that what he would share was not a reflection on what formation should be but rather a look back over the last 3 years or more to see just how we are faring with the recommendations made by the last chapter (and how thus to move forward). This is indeed the methodology that has been used throughout this plenary council.

Since the last chapter there have been numerous meetings for those involved in formation at various levels. The programme of all the pre-first phase centres have been harmonised for there was a great discrepancy and some were also mirroring what would later be covered in the first phase. For the most part the follow up of stagiaires by provincials and coordinators has greatly improved which also is the case for the evaluations that are made. Most receiving communities were made up of 3 confreres though unfortunately there are still exceptions where the stagiaire becomes the third member. Certainly on the whole our formation continues to reflect the values of our charism by the M.Afr formation we desire to give (JPIC-ED, Missiology, spirituality, human development issues, integrity of ministry (some candidates elaborate their own code of conduct). In our formation houses there is a growing awareness of candidates to be present in the peripheries for their pastoral ministry, hospitals, prisons, the slums. It would be interesting to hear from provincials if the same interest and ardour is there when they become young confreres.

Formation is a rich and complex process; it is difficult to find a word that conveys the formation reality with all its nuances. The same certainly could be said about leadership and yet it is incumbent on those in leadership to work for solutions. Certainly in the group work today we tried to look at certain issues that continue to arise in our formation process be it with stagiaires or young confreres. Let us not forget that the period of stage is also a period of formation and in some way because of the accompaniment needed it could also be true of the young confreres. We discussed about the stage, about the reticence of certain of our stagiaires or young confreres to accept an appointment to a given province or even a type of ministry. Many felt that there seemed at times to be a lack of readiness and availability. There are situations where after a few months in a particular mission a young confrere is asking to change or a stagiaire may be ill at ease because he did not get the specific place he had desired. Maybe our discussions were begging the question that is so fundamental concerning our identity. Surely the very basis of whom we are, the very basis of our identity is mission and that entails our constant availability, generosity and flexibility; how do we form for such important elements of whom we are?

Yes, in many ways the questions discussed around the accompaniment of stagiaires; their receiving communities, the role of leadership and the role of stage coordinators are issues that have been discussed so many times over the years, directives are there, guidelines are there so how is it that such questions are still arising? Surely it is a question of all leadership teams to take these matters seriously and follow the guidelines that have been in place for so long. Our animation, our visits, our overseeing, our proximity are all the important aspects of how we follow up things.

Francis Barnes