

PERMANENT FORMATION OF JESUITS

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Conducts training programmes for managers and leaders

Permanent Formation (PF) is a lifelong and ongoing process and not simply an extension of our initial formation. It forms an integral part of our personal and professional development. Its goal is to enhance our continuous relevance of who we are and of what we do. As Jesuits today, PF touches our very identity and mission.

Like any other training, PF has become a necessity and no longer a luxury. Personally, I prefer to use the term 'development' instead of training. Perhaps the notion of training gives the impression of a conditioning process, almost like military drill, which results in moulding a person into a fixed pattern. The concept of development, however, connotes more explicitly the idea of growth, of a holistic approach, and a more dynamic view of learning processes.

In order to be effective, our PF needs to be considered in a holistic way both personally and apostolically – personally for our spiritual and human growth, and apostolically for our ministerial effectiveness.

Fr Arrupe considered permanent formation, together with apostolic discernment, constitute the twin pillars of the Society's spiritual and apostolic renewal. Continuing formation involves a change, a conversion. And like conversion, it is continuous, unlike a process which takes place once in a lifetime. We can renew ourselves by updating

our knowledge, developing our skills, and transforming our deep attitudes.

PF should challenge us to respond to contemporary realities. This is the Spirit working in us and through us. We do our part by being attentive to the call of the Spirit and by investing our efforts towards accomplishing our mission. This is our Ignatian charism expressed in the 'magis'.

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For some Jesuits, a convenient excuse not to engage oneself in PF is that they have no time for it. That's like saying "I have no time to put fuel in my car because I risk missing my flight!" Abraham Lincoln once said: "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening my axe." It is worth spending time and energy to recharge our batteries by using appropriate tools.

Many Jesuits still associate PF with going on sabbaticals, attending courses, participating in discussions, reading books and articles, enjoying periods of relaxation, engaging in research, or undergoing intellectual renewal in general. While these also have a place in PF, they should not overlook the deeper meaning and spirit of such formation, especially for Jesuits who are used to a specific "way of proceeding".

For PF to be holistic, it should touch the various dimensions of a person's growth and development, namely, physical, cognitive, affective, social, moral and spiritual.

Designing a training programme

The importance of designing and implementing ongoing formation programmes is becoming more evident today than ever in the past. Both individuals and organizations are painfully aware of the negative impact produced by the lack of training programmes or by their mediocre quality. On the contrary, when we are well trained, when we undergo a constant process of formation, then such programmes prove beneficial not only for our personal growth but also for the development of the organization or institution. The rapid changes occurring in our world today cannot allow us to remain complacent with what we learned a decade ago.

Every formation programme must be planned with a specific objective in mind, designed into a coherent pattern, and adapted to the

needs and requirements of the recipients. In designing a training programme for Jesuits, therefore, one has to be aware of the trainees' mission as Jesuits, of establishing clear criteria, and of an assessment of their training needs. The criteria for the choice of a particular formation programme have to be the nature and purpose of the programme as well as the type of trainees participating. One has to take into consideration the participants' expectations realistically, besides organizing the logistics involved.

Having presented the rationale underlying the basis for the PF of Jesuits, let me now propose what components could be integrated in a concrete formation programme. This involves listing possible topics for including in the programme, making explicit its methodology, clarifying its developmental sequence and identifying those responsible for the programme. In other words, establish the various parameters like the why, what, how, who, and for whom are offered such programmes. In order to simplify the process, let me present them under three classic types of learning:

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Types of Learning

a) *Knowledge ("savoir")*: This refers to the content, subject matter, concepts, theory. This is usually acquired through inputs, power point presentations, discussion, reading, etc.

b) *Skills ("savoir-faire")*: learning techniques, developing skills, experimenting. This is usually accomplished through the use of practical exercises, role-play, simulations, and case-studies.

c) *Attitudes ("savoir-etre")*: This corresponds to one's way of being, his values, personality, and leadership styles. This includes structured experiences, self-awareness, feedback from others, and so on.

In the case of Jesuits, here are some examples for designing an ongoing formation along these three types of learning:

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a) *Knowledge*: Ignatian spirituality, a study of the Constitutions, Biblical theology, liturgy, Christian Ethics, philosophy, social studies, plus updating one's own particular expertise.

b) *Skills*: sessions on pastoral counselling, religious leadership, communication skills, management skills, media, team building, on giving the spiritual exercises, spiritual accompaniment.

c) *Attitudes*: experience of the Spiritual Exercises, the discernment process, prayer, supervision of one's ministry, self awareness, growth/support group, and a period of insertion among the poor.

For Whom?

In general, these formation programmes are applicable to all Jesuits who have finished their initial formation and normally after tertianship. Certain training courses or workshops may be targeted to specific types of participants, like provincials, local superiors, directors of works, novice masters, spiritual directors, treasurers, third age Jesuits, and so on. Other programmes may be directed to Jesuits involved in same ministries, like those in the social apostolate, spirituality, learned ministries, pastoral, educational, etc. Such courses should be tailor-made according to the participants' respective area of interest.

Who should organize these programmes? They can be organized at various levels – local, provincial, regional, international. So, for those in common ministries, the corresponding secretariats at the Roman Curia may provide ideas and resources for such programmes. For the former, the Provincials, Regional Assistancy moderators, Conference moderators and other entities may organize and coordinate various types of formation programmes.

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PF offers an excellent opportunity for collaboration – among various apostolic sectors, inter- and intra- provincial co-operation, and within vertical levels of governance.

Ultimately, it is the individual Jesuit who should be responsible for his personal PF. The local superior's role is to promote ongoing formation in his community and in each member. The major superior can use the

manifestation of conscience as an occasion to bring up the issue of one's PF.

Finally, in order not to be tied down to the usual routine type of activities for PF, creativity has to be encouraged at all levels. In fact, we all need to view "creative fidelity" as an exigency of PF. The final chapter of "The Formation of Jesuits" from the letters of Fr Kolvenbach, published by the General Curia of the Society of Jesus, Rome (2003), deals with "Continuing Formation as Creative Fidelity".

By offering solid programmes of permanent formation for Ours, we would enhance personal and corporate spiritual renewal.