

**Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation
Tangaza College
Catholic University of Eastern Africa**

**A PROPOSED PRE-NOVITIATE
FORMATION PROJECT**

For the Province of Mother of the Greatest Love
of the Canossian Daughters of Charity

By

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*This is a project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a diploma in Religious Formation*

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this project is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Diploma in Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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To the members

of my Religious Province. Mother of the Greatest Love

And

my two formators

Pauline and Sr. Goretti Wong

who accompanied me in my initial stage of religious life.

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO

Sr. Mary Boccoardo, my Provincial
for offering me the opportunity to study the course of Spirituality and Religious
Formation at Tangaza College.

Br. Daniel Carlin, my Supervisor
for his advice, insights and patient direction.

My lecturers
for their inspiring teaching and personal witnesses as formators

My fellow Sisters in the community
for their understanding and constant support. and

Br. Russell Peters
for his patient and careful proof-reading.

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INTRODUCTION

Reasons for This Formation Project

In the year 2002, the General Council of the Canossian Sisters established a new Province in Africa – the Province of Mother of the Greatest Love. It is composed of three countries: Egypt, the Sudan and Uganda. The presence of our Sisters in these lands gradually attracted young women to join our Congregation. There is thus a growing need for the ministry of Initial Formation. Being new, the Province has no well established formation program of its own. The Sisters in the formation ministry have been using the formation program of the Province of Eastern Africa. Though there are commonalities among the African cultures, each country is distinct from the others historically and socially. Egypt and Sudan are Arabic countries and have a strong Islamic cultural background. These factors make the new Province very different from the Province of Eastern Africa and the new Province is becoming more and more aware of the need of a sound, localized, and inculturated formation throughout all stages of Religious Life.

The writer of this project was involved in formation work in the Province and found it very challenging. This work is the result of her two years study of Spirituality and Religious Formation. The objective of this work is to present to the Province a more developed and concrete plan of Pre-Novitiate formation. It is based on what is said about formation in the Rule of Life, the Canossian Plan of Formation, the Plan of Formation of the Province of Eastern Africa, and the documents of the Church. In addition, it takes into consideration the historical,

cultural and social background of the candidates. It aims to be a useful tool to help formators and formation communities as they are entrusted with the important ministry of shaping the future of the Province and the Congregation.

Religious formation is a life long process. It begins with the Pre-Novitiate formation and continues with the Novitiate, the juniorate and the on-going formation until one comes to the end of the battle of life. A well established formation plan should cover all the stages of formation, thus showing the graduality and continuity of the whole process. Nonetheless, due to the time factor, this work can only address the first stage, that of the Pre-Novitiate formation. Knowing that theory and ideal need to be confronted and tested by the reality of life, the writer sincerely welcomes suggestions and comments from those who read it or use it. It is the hope of the writer that this work will be an inspiration to others for future contributions to the completion of the whole plan of formation for the new Province.

Contents and Structure

For a long time formation concentrated only on externals, without giving much attention to the interior, the feelings, or the motivation. Today, we talk of holistic approach. In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II explicitly states that formation has to involve the whole person. It will have to express the characteristic of totality.¹ Hence, the approach of this project is strongly holistic. The contents of the program cover various axes of life: human, social, psychological, spiritual, biblical, apostolic, charismatic and professional. Nonetheless, they must not be

1. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

thought of as individual components, but must interact and converge on the ultimate goal: the maturity and freedom of the person.

Another principle of formation is that it has to be experiential. Values and contents, no matter how beautifully they are laid down in the program, have to be lived and experienced by those being formed. The formation community is not an academic institute for intellectual training. It should be a place where one can experience the values being lived, as well as a place where one can exercise them in practice. For this reason, the section on modalities is presented in greater details so that the users of the project will find various methods to implement the contents.

Without clearly defined goals, the elements of the formation program will fall apart. Goals and objectives give the project a direction which it aims to achieve. They also form the basis for evaluation. Therefore the goals and objectives of each stage of formation are clearly spelled out in the project.

This project consists of three parts:

Part I gives an overview of Pre-novitiate formation in the Canossian context.

Part II and Part III deal with Aspirancy and Postulancy respectively. The pedagogy is basically the same. The purpose is to show the continuity and graduality of formation. They consist of these elements: Goals and objectives, policy for admission, areas of formation, modalities, evaluation, and allocation of roles.

The appendixes include some practical resources which might be useful to those who use this project.

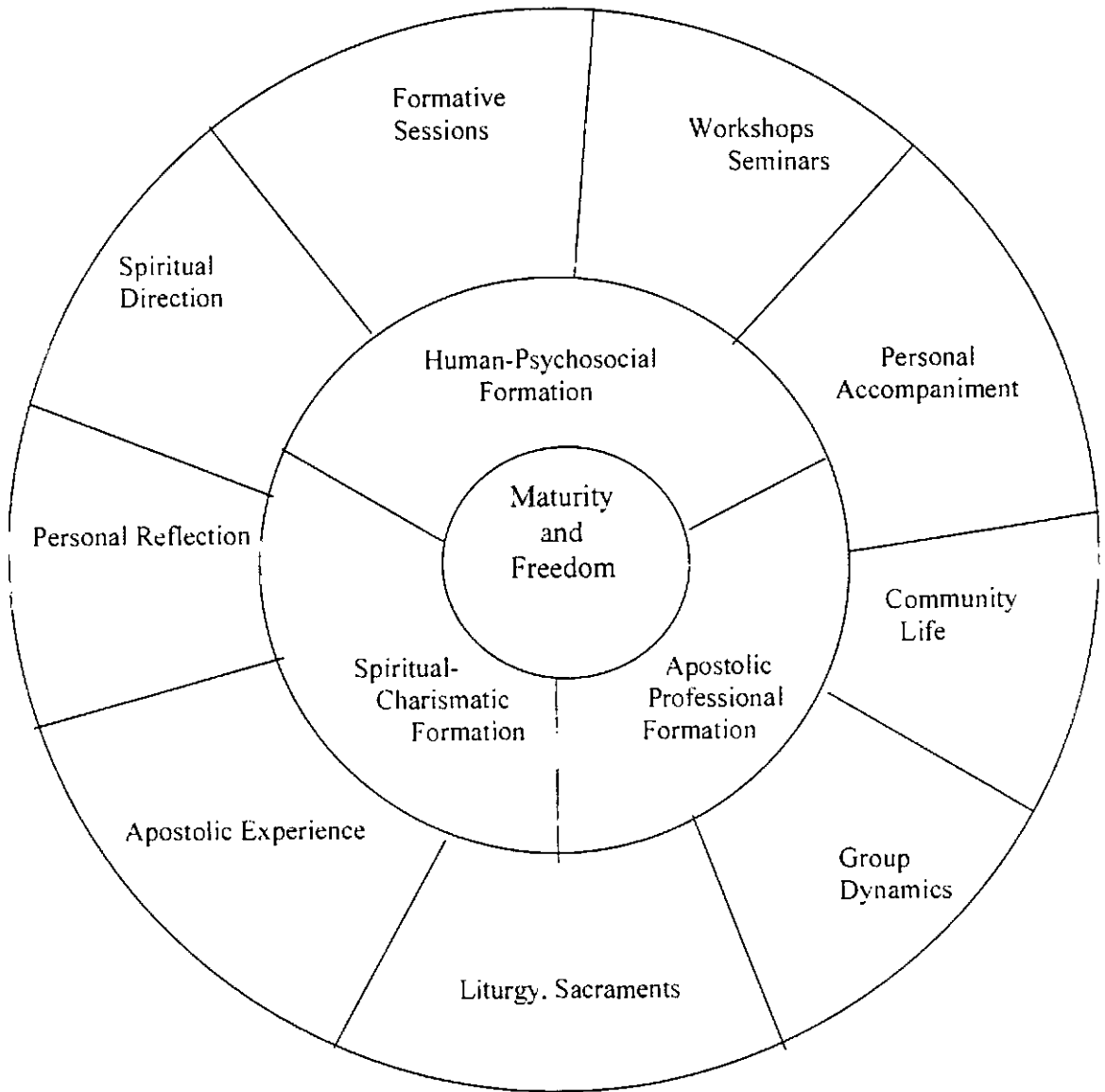
Users

This formation project is addressed to all the members of the Province as each one of us has a role to play in the formation of the new generation.

It is directed in a special way to Sisters responsible for Initial Formation. In the Project, they will find the formative contents and modalities, which they need in order to carry out the important task of formation.

Finally, it is also meant for all the persons in the stage of Initial Formation. By reading through the Project, the candidates will learn about the spirit and expectations of the Institute. They will also have a glimpse of what formation process they are going through. It is, in a sense, an instrument for self-formation and self-evaluation.

A Holistic Model of Pre-Novitiate Formation



The inner circle: The goals of formation

The middle circle: The dimensions of formation

The outer circle: The means of formation

PART I: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PRE-NOVITIATE FORMATION

Each one of us has the obligation to transmit to the future generations the spirit of the Institute in all its purity.² Magdalene of Canossa

1.1 Goals and Objectives

Canossian Pre-novitiate Formation consists of the Aspirancy program and the Postulancy program. Its purpose is to assist a young woman in discerning a Canossian vocation and to prepare her for entrance into the Novitiate. The experience of processing candidates to the Canossian way of life and the Initial Formation show that good intention is not enough to sustain the young person in Religious Life. "Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted, they did not have the required maturity."³ This remark is still valid today. There is therefore a need for a formation program for the candidates before they apply for Novitiate Formation. The general goal of this program is to help the candidates grow intellectually, personally (psychological/emotional maturity) and spiritually. It is our hope that as the candidates grow towards maturity, they will also attain greater inner freedom for vocational discernment.

Intellectually, there is a need to help the candidates acquire the ability to reflect objectively and authentically on self, the family, as well as their faith journey, so as to enable them to make responsible decisions for their choice of life.

Personally, the candidates need further human development, which has started before they come for religious formation. By attending to the entire growth of the candidates, the human formation program would let their personalities emerge so that they can learn to reflect and to relate. Some may need personalized help in order to work through personality blocks that would impede the formation process in the novitiate.

² M. CANOSSA, *The Unabridged Rule*, 376.

³ VATICAN II, *Renovationis Causam*, 4.

Spiritually, the candidates need to learn to pray and establish a reasonably stable personal relationship with God. There is also the need to acquire some solid knowledge of their Catholic Faith and the Scriptures before they can make a mature response to the call to consecrated life.

The Pre-Novitiate Formation Program should help the candidates acquire certain qualities which would be essential for Novitiate Formation.

Firstly, the candidate should possess sufficient self-knowledge and self-acceptance so that she will not lack basic self-confidence when the Novitiate Formation process invites her to reflect genuinely and critically on her motivations in order that the desired reorientation can take place.

Secondly, she should be supported to become more open, free and trustful in accepting the personal accompaniment of the Formators, the human mediation, through whom the Spirit works and guides.

Thirdly, she should be challenged to demonstrate her potential capacity to meet the demands of Canossian formation. This involves her growing in self-esteem, her suitability to live in community, her enthusiasm and capacity to persevere in face of trials and difficulties.

Fourthly, the candidate should also be supported to become relatively sure that God is calling her to Religious Life and to demonstrate a growing desire to live this vocation in the Canossian way.

1.2 Inspirational Sources

This Formation Project draws inspiration from the Word of God, the Magisterium of the Church and the charism of the Institute. The divine wisdom from these sources gives vitality and direction to the Project.

1.2.1 The Word of God

The Word of God is a powerful source of formation. It is “living an effective ...able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart” (Heb.4:12) It invites us to listen constantly to the heart of God so as to discover His presence in our everyday life. It consoles our hearts; it confronts our intellect, it challenges our way of living. By adhering to and obeying the Word of God, we allow ourselves to be formed. The following Biblical passages give inspirational thoughts to the writing of this Plan.

- ☞ *Jn 10:10 "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*

All formation programs are meant to guide those in formation to discover the meaning of their life and live it to the full.

- ☞ *Lk 10:27 " You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself."*

All formative activities should be motivated by charity and help the formatees to perfect the two commandments of love. But before reaching that goal, one has to possess sufficient self-love.

- ☞ *Phl. 2:6-10 "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus...he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death...."*

The ultimate aim of all stages of formation is a gradual conformity with the attitude Jesus Christ. This may not be so evident in Pre-novitiate formation. But the formators should not lose sight of this finality in the process of formation.

- ☞ *Micah 6:8 " This is what Yahweh wants from you. Only this: to do what is right, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God."*

Charity and humility are the two charismatic virtues that every Canossian Sister should embrace. Our formation should help the candidates understand and possess these virtues progressively, even at the very first stage of formation.

- ☞ *Lk 1: 46-49 " My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my saviour....The Mighty One has done great things for me, holy is his name."*

The formation program should help the candidate become more and more aware of God's presence in her life. Thus she can praise and thank God for what she is and what she is to become.

1.2.2 The Church in Africa

The African Synod declared the option for Church as the family of God in the service of society. Based on this idea of the church as family Fr.

Orobator suggests some principles for religious formation in Africa which sheds light to make this Project more contextualized.

For growth: Family is the place for growth. It is where one gets nutrients and education, where one learns to relate and to communicate, where one shares duties and responsibilities, where one grows to fulfill the promise and hope of the family. In a similar way, formation should also promote the integral growth of the person and help the candidate to become a mature person who is able to continue the history of the Institute.⁴

Communion: Family means a communion which accommodates diversity and differences. However, some narrow this down to communion just among tribal and ethnic groups. To confront this tendency, our formation policy should be one that welcomes candidates from various backgrounds and encourages the practice of diversity.⁵

Pro-woman: “The quality of our Church as family also depends on the quality of our women folk, be they married or members of institutes of the consecrated life.” (African Synod No.68). According to the Synod, women are the backbone and stability of the family. They have important rights and duties in building up the family of God. Our formation should help the candidates increase this awareness and to acknowledge their gift and dignity as women.⁶

1.2.3 Charism of the Institute

The Rule of Life

The Rule of Life gives clear guidelines for each stage of formation. It derives from the wisdom of the Foundress who was first and foremost an educator of the heart and formator of the soul.

✞ Art. 62: Formation aims at the fullness of charity....It is a progressive journey...The Holy Spirit plays a leading role in our formation.... Community life enjoys a privileged role in formation at every stage.⁷

⁴ C.F.A.E. OROBATOR, “Spotting the Chick: An Essay on Formation in the Context of Church as Family”, 26.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CANOSSIAN, *Rule of Life. Constitutions*, 62

- ☞ Art. 62: During Pre-novitiate time the candidate is helped to deepen knowledge of self and of the call, to grow in human maturity and in faith so as to be able to make a free and responsible choice.⁸

The Directory

- ☞ Art. 68: Every person always has the primary responsibility to respond to God's call in ever new, attentive and personal ways, collaborating and contributing actively.⁹

1.3 Agents and Mediations of Formation

1.3.1 The Spirit of God

It is God himself who calls a person to a consecrated life and grants her the graces to respond to this call. Among all the graces is the gift of his Spirit who reaches the depth of human heart to illumine, teach and guide her towards full Christian maturity. Thus, the Spirit of God, who is the Truth, is the first agent of formation at all stages.

1.3.2 The Virgin Mary

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Magdalene consecrated the Institute to Mary, Mother of Charity at the foot of the Cross, whom she considered as the Foundress and the Mother. Mary, who loves even in deep sorrows, is the authentic model for our vocation as Daughters of Charity. As we keep close to her with a filial love, she forms us in the same way as she formed her son, Jesus.¹⁰

1.3.3 The Person in Formation

Every individual is directly responsible for her own formation. Vocation is a gift from God. The one who receives it has the responsibility to foster its growth to maturity and let it bear fruits. This demands the attitudes of humility, docility and openness. "This openness is prompted by the desire of having a clear knowledge of

⁸ CANOSSIAN, *Rule of Life. Constitutions*, 62.

⁹ CANOSSIAN, *Rule of Life. Directory*, 68.

¹⁰ CANOSSIAN, *The Plan of Formation*, 16

oneself and by a readiness to let oneself be advised and directed with the intent of correctly discerning the will of God.”¹¹

1.3.4 The Major Superior

The Major Superior is the one who has overall responsibility for formation. It is her duty to identify and carefully form Sisters for the ministry of formation. Though not directly involved in the formation work, she should be well informed of the progress of those in formation.

1.3.5 The Formation Community

The formation community receives from the institute the mandate to accompany young people during a special time of their formative journey. They support them by their presence, by being true witnesses of the Gospel and the charism in daily life. Their collaboration is requested also in the process of discernment and evaluation.

1.3.6 The Formators

The Sisters who are given the mandate for Initial Formation commit themselves to accompany young people in formation along their journey towards maturity. They are responsible for the formative and personalized itineraries, for implementing creatively the formation program. It is also their duty to provide the candidates with the human, educational and spiritual help they need. Above all, they are to communicate God's love and the heritage of the Institute to those entrusted to their care through deep and meaningful relationships. ²

1.4 Persons in Formation

If the formation is to be effective, it must be contextualized and person-oriented. Thus, before plunging themselves into the work of formation, the formators need to ask two questions: “Who are the formatees?” and, “Where do they

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 19.

¹² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 31.

come from?” Accurate information to these two questions make the journey of accompaniment more focused and personalized.

1.4.1 Who Are Our Formatees?

Personal background

- ☞ Nationality: Candidates are from the three countries in the Province (Egypt, Sudan or Uganda)
- ☞ Tribes: Candidates of the same nationality may belong to different tribes who speak different tribal languages and follow different traditions.
- ☞ Age: All accepted candidates are 18 or above.
- ☞ Education: All accepted candidates for Aspirancy have completed secondary education. Some are studying in college or university.
- ☞ Language: Candidates from Egypt and Sudan are Arabic speaking people. Their English standard is relatively low. Candidates from Uganda speak Bantu languages. In general, they have no difficulty in using English for communication.
- ☞ General knowledge: Candidates from the villages do not have much exposure to the global world. Others may have some experience in urban living.
- ☞ Personal qualities: In general, the candidates are physically strong, gifted in dancing and socializing with people. Some of them demonstrate a rather submissive character.

1.4.2 Where Do They Come From?

Family background

- ☞ Most families of the candidates have either a rural or nomadic background. Some are working in the cities.
- ☞ Many candidates live with the extended family; some have been raised by their relatives. They are more used to living in big families where privacy and boundaries are relatively limited.
- ☞ Some families are refugees from the war zone in South Sudan or North Uganda. Some may have had traumatic experience of violence and war.
- ☞ Some family members are Muslims.

Cultural and social background

- ☞ Egypt and Sudan have a strong Arab and Islamic culture.
- ☞ Each tribe has its own culture, traditions, customs and rituals.
- ☞ Modern African societies are challenged with problems of poverty, unemployment, hunger, social unrest, war, corruption, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and HIV/ Aids.
- ☞ Women's status is generally low in society.

Faith background

- ☞ Egypt and Sudan are Islamic countries. Catholics in Sudan have restricted freedom in carrying out church activities. Catholics in Egypt follow the Coptic Rite different from the Latin Rite.
- ☞ Catholic faith is preserved in the traditional Catholic families where faith is transmitted and practiced. Candidates from these families demonstrate a stronger faith. They are often active members of Parish groups.
- ☞ Youth growing in the urban centres are not much interested in religious matters. Their faith is shallow due to a poor catechetical foundation. Some see Religious and missionaries as affluent people who can offer them financial and material assistance.

1.5 Basic Characteristics of Pre-novitiate Formation

1.5.1 Personalization

Not all the candidates begin the formation process with the same human and Christian maturity. Therefore the formation has to attend to the personal needs and respect the rhythm of growth of each individual so that each one advances at her own pace.

1.5.2 Graduality

Growing to maturity is a gradual and dynamic process. Every stage is important and should not be overlooked. This implies that at each stage, there are definite objectives which facilitate the integral development of the person. Before one achieves the designated objectives of a particular stage, it is not advisable to move on to a new stage.

1.5.3 Holistic Approach

Formation has a profound effect on individuals. It should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions. For formation to be complete, it must provide a human, cultural, spiritual and ministerial preparation, using all the available recourses. Above all, special attention should give to the harmonious integration of the various aspects so that no single dimension is neglected.¹³

1.5.4 Communitarian

Community life is a core element of the Canossian charism. Hence, formation has to take place in a community with the aim of developing and discerning one's capacity for relationships.

1.5.5 Missionarity

Canossian vocation is a call to make Jesus known and loved. This call invites us to "look into Jesus Crucified and do likewise"¹⁴. Formation should help to motivate every single heart to embrace this common mission with zeal and generosity.

1.5.6 Evaluative

The formative process should be continually evaluated objectively and in a personalized way, avoiding needless competition and tension. Through regular dialogue and periodical reports, both the formator and the one in formation can verify their progress and adjust the means to the personal needs.

¹³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

¹⁴ This is the foundational charism of the Institute derived from one of the spiritual experiences of St. Magdalene of Canossa.

PART II : ASPIRANCY

"What are you looking for?"

" Rabbi, where are you staying?" "Come and see." Jn 1:37-38

2.1 Goals and Objectives

Goals

The goal of Aspirancy is to provide a conducive environment for vocation discernment for the young woman who expresses her desire to know more about Religious Life in the Canossian family. Vocational accompaniment at this stage is to help the candidate grow in human maturity and deepen her Christian faith, which will enable her to discern God's will with freedom and responsibility.

Objectives

The formation at this stage is to help the candidate:

- a. To grow in the knowledge of her identity as an African woman, a Christian and a person in relation with other people.
- b. To discover her self-worth as a child of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, the savior.
- c. To build up a healthy personality capable of greater self appreciation and self acceptance.
- d. To develop a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer and reflection on the Word of God.
- e. To discover and experience the value of silence and solitude in discerning the action of the Spirit in her life.
- f. To grow in faith through a deeper understanding of the foundational doctrines of the Church.
- g. To know and appreciate the different states of life of a Christian and the various forms of religious vocation within the Church
- h. To have a basic understanding and experience of Canossian Spirituality and ministries.

- i. To have a taste of the joys and demands of communal living, and to acquire certain communication skills necessary for living in a community.
- j. To be more aware of her gradual growth in the understanding of her vocation which will lead her to make a free and responsible response.

2.2 Policies for Selection and Admission of Candidates to Aspirancy¹⁵

- a) The vocation promoter in each community gives vocation animation to secondary school girls from Form III onwards. It is carried out through personal contact or organized activities in schools, parishes or diocesan vocation camps.
- b) “Come and see” experience is offered to those who express the interest to know about Religious Life and manifest a certain sensitivity to it. They are invited to our communities for weekends or for a week. The vocation promoter establishes a personal relationship with them and follows them closely in order to know and understand them better. There is no prescribed length of time to this phase. It varies with each individual.
- c) In the process of selection of candidates to the residential Aspirancy, the Superior and the community are consulted. However the vocation promoter’s judgment is given credit.
- d) The candidate’s family is to be visited before acceptance to the residential Aspirancy. Permission from the family is obtained in writing. It is important for the family to understand that this stage is only for vocation discernment and not admission to Religious Life. Moreover, we need to have a signed document in which the parents clearly state their readiness to accept their daughter back if she is found not suitable to our religious congregation.
- e) The following are the requirements for admission to Aspirancy:
 - ☞ The candidate is a practicing Catholic and shows interest in religious matters.
 - ☞ She is physically fit and has sufficient psychological health.
 - ☞ She demonstrates a good temperament and has a good moral reputation.

¹⁵ Adapted from the Plan of Formation of the Eastern African Province.

- ☞ She has reached the age of 18 and has completed secondary education with satisfactory results. Candidates who fail in English have to re-sit the exam to get the qualifying mark.
- f) The candidate makes application for the Aspirancy program by submitting an application form together with the following documents:
- ☞ A brief account of her vocation history
 - ☞ Photo-copy of her birth certificate, baptism and confirmation certificates
 - ☞ Photo-copy of educational credentials, including result slips and academic certificates
 - ☞ A letter of consent from the parents or guardians
- g.) Admission of a candidate to the Aspirancy takes place only after having obtained all the necessary information. The Provincial Superior is notified of the acceptance of the candidate to the Aspirancy.
- h.) There is a very simple ritual of welcoming to receive and introduce the candidate to the community.

2.3 Areas of Formation

2.3.1 Human-Psychosocial Dimension

Before one becomes a religious, one must firstly be a mature human person. In view of this, the formation program of Aspirancy is geared to help the candidates possess a minimum of human maturity. Each aspirant is assisted in her human development to let her personality emerge in order for her to learn, to reflect and to relate.

a Self Knowledge

Self knowledge is the starting point for growth towards human maturity. It is also the essential foundation of an authentic life of the spirit. Most of our life problems and trials come from the fact that we do not understand ourselves. Thus, to help the aspirants attain greater self knowledge is one of the primary aims of the formation program.

The aspirant will be helped to understand herself as:

- ☞ A human person: composed of body (physical being), mind (intellectual being), and soul (spiritual being). These three aspects of a person interrelate and interact with one another.
- ☞ A distinct person: A human person is distinguished from all other creatures because she possesses an eternal soul and a high level of reasoning power. We are expected to develop human values and live according to these values.
- ☞ A sexual being: When God created human beings, he created them distinctly “male and female”. By this definition, girls are different from boys as they are naturally living their femininity. Sexuality is not what we do but who we are as a total person.
- ☞ Being in relationship: Human beings are social beings, hence, throughout life we shall grow within interpersonal relationships, in our family and community. As a person, it is natural and healthy to desire and develop relationships and friendships with other people.
- ☞ An image of God: Each human person is created in the image of God. This shows how special we are and the dignity God has bestowed upon us. Women and men are all equal in the sight of God. Girls are not inferior to boys. Boys and girls need to appreciate and esteem each other as images of the same God.
- ☞ A unique person: Each person is unique in every way: appearance, body structure, talents, strengths, weaknesses, abilities and ways of thinking and doing things. Each one occupies a special place in the universe. Each one contributes something unique which no other person can offer. There is no need to belittle or to boast about oneself among others.
- ☞ An African: Each human person is born into a specific culture. As the person grows up, he/she is formed and taught to feel, think and act in ways acceptable in that culture. There is no bad or good culture. All we need to do is to know and appreciate our own culture and to understand the positive and negative impacts of the culture on our personality development.

(The above content is adapted from *About Girls*)¹⁶

¹⁶ J. KIURA, *About Girls*, 8-10.

☞ b. *Self-image*

Self image is one's concept of the self as a person. It implies a personal evaluation of oneself. Poor self-image is a stumbling block for growth and a big obstacle to inter-personal relationship. In the initial formation, the aspirant will be helped to look at her self-image and be guided to re-imagining her distorted self concept.

Topics will include:

- ☞ The Johari Window
- ☞ The Ideal Self ... "I should be...."
- ☞ The Perceived Self... "I am...."
- ☞ Tracing the origin of one's self-image
- ☞ How self-image affects communication and relationship with others
- ☞ Working with poor self-image
- ☞ Changing attitudes (ideas, beliefs and self-talk) about oneself

c. *Self Acceptance*

A healthy personality is one who has matured through self acceptance. When there is no appreciation for oneself, it would be impossible to appreciate anyone else, and hence difficult to develop intimate relationship with others. Thus, the formation program will help the aspirant acknowledge and develop her gifts, but also to accept and be patient with her limitations.

Formation contents will include:

- ☞ Looking at my giftedness: physical, mental, personal qualities, talents and skills, spiritual gifts, feelings as gifts
- ☞ Obstacles that block people from acknowledging and developing their gifts
- ☞ Celebrating and sharing one another's gifts
- ☞ Working with my brokenness
 - Naming things that I do not like about myself
 - The origin of self-hate
 - Transactional analysis
 - Healing of negative experiences
 - Turning weakness to strength

d. Befriending My Emotions

Emotions are part and parcel of human existence. Unacknowledged and unrecognized emotions, if not dealt with properly, can lead to crisis in one's life. On the other hand, emotions are gifts from God. By acknowledging and understanding our emotions, we can enrich our lives and develop genuine relationships with God and others. The aspirant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand the function of emotions in human life.
- ☞ Accept the neutrality of emotions. There are no good or bad emotions.
- ☞ Become aware of her changing emotions for example anger, worry, boredom, excitement, delight.
- ☞ Manage emotions appropriately by acquiring the basic emotional skills
- ☞ Recognize and be sensitive to the emotions of others.

e. Sexuality

Sexuality is an important element of the human personality, an integral part of one's overall consciousness. It is both a central aspect of one's self understanding and a crucial factor in one's relationship with others. During initial formation, the aspirant will be helped to foster a proper understanding and awareness of her psycho-sexual maturity.

Contents of formation:

- ☞ Becoming a mature girl:
 - Physical changes at puberty
 - Adolescent changes: physical, emotional, relational
 - The menstrual cycle
 - Managing sexual energies
- ☞ Traditional initiation rites
 - Sharing of personal experience
 - Exploring the values and limitations
 - The issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- ☞ Roles of women in traditional African communities and modern society
- ☞ Friendship
 - Friendship as a basic need

- Types of friends: ordinary friends, close friends of the same sex, friends of opposite sex
- Intimacy and boundaries in friendship
- Acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in any friendship
- Saying NO to inappropriate relationship
- Friendships in the community

f. Building Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the sense of self-respect, confidence, identity and purpose found in an individual.¹⁷ Self-esteem is essential for growth as a Religious. A key ingredient in a mature, life-giving spirituality is a basic esteem for oneself. When love for oneself is not present, it becomes difficult to pursue or maintain a healthy relationship with others and with God. Without these relationships, it is impossible to live fully a Religious vocation.

Building self-esteem in the candidates is a gradual, step-by step process. The formation program will take on an integral approach. The young person will be helped in five main aspects.¹⁸

1. The establishment of a sense of security

- Understanding one's limits and the limits of others
- Knowing what to expect
- Willingness to try new experiences
- Capacity to risk the possibility of failure
- Feeling comfortable, accepted, trusted and safe

2. The establishment of a sense of self-concept or identity

- Having a basic knowledge of the physical self
- Awareness of one's emotions, feelings, needs and desires, and how they affect one's thinking and actions
- Having a general understanding of one's personality type
- Understanding and appreciation of one's culture and family
- Owning a realistic knowledge of one's strengths and shortcomings

¹⁷Cf. R.W. REASONER, *Building Self-Esteem*, 1.

¹⁸ Ibid. 3.

- Having healthy self-care: personal hygiene, health, nutrition, leisure
- Possessing a positive feeling about one's self-image

3. The establishment of a sense of belonging

- Ability to share, participate and collaborate
- To be a responsible member of the group
- Show appreciation and respect toward the unique strengths, values, and desires of others
- Openness to relationships
- Good manners, kindness, politeness, generosity, hospitality

4. The establishment of a sense of purpose

- Ability to internalize values and goals for oneself
- Perseverance to work toward the attainment of goals
- Ability to reflect and evaluate daily events
- Show interest and readiness to learn, to work – self-motivation

5. The establishment of a sense of competency

- Discovery and appreciation of one's gifts
- Have self-confidence, reliable, honest,
- Ability to make responsible decision in freedom and to admit mistakes
- Creative thinking
- Openness to feedback and direction

g. Defense Mechanisms

The human person tends to use different ways to keep unacceptable thoughts and anxious feelings out of the consciousness. This system of covering up is what is called defense mechanism. Often times, defenses are employed when one's self-esteem is attacked. All the defenses give a distorted image of oneself. To grow into authenticity, one needs to be aware of the defenses and to go through the process of unmasking oneself from these defenses. The aspirant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand the meaning of defense mechanisms in relation to protection of self-esteem
- ☞ Explore the more common types of defenses: repression, regression, denial, projection
- ☞ Become aware of when and why defenses are used
- ☞ Use defenses in an appropriate way

h. Family Dynamics

Family has a crucial role in forming a person. An understanding of the family background and how it affects the growth of the individual is an indispensable step for the deepening of self-understanding. Genogram is one important instrument that helps both the formator and the aspirant in assessing and understanding the growth journey of the aspirant in the family context. The aspirant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand what a genogram is and the function of it
- ☞ Create her own genogram
- ☞ Read and analyze the genogram
- ☞ Assess how family members are related to each other and affect each other as well as the entire family
- ☞ Evaluate the family's strengths and weaknesses in relation to her personality development.

i. Value Education

We need to have good character to be fully human. Good character consists of knowing the good (habit of the mind), desiring the good (habit of the heart), and doing the good (habit of action).¹⁹ All three are necessary for leading a moral life. All three make up moral maturity, which is a discerning element for religious vocation.

At the same time, we are aware that many of our candidates are coming from societies that suffer severe social and moral problems. We see it necessary to strengthen the cultural values in the young women as part of the formation. The

¹⁹ Cf. H.A. HUFFMAN, *Developing A Character Education Program*, 37.

following core values suggested by Huffman for school curriculum²⁰ are also appropriate to be integrated in the whole formation program.

1. *Respect for human dignity*

- ☞ Respect for self: treat oneself and one's own life as having inherent value
- ☞ Respect for others: treat all other human beings as having dignity and rights equal to one's own
- ☞ Respect for the natural environment, public and private property

2. *Responsibility*

- ☞ Orienting towards others, and actively responding to their needs
- ☞ Being dependable
- ☞ Keeping one's commitments
- ☞ Recognizing interdependence among people
- ☞ Carrying out duties to the best of one's ability
- ☞ Thinking through the moral consequences of decisions

3. *Honesty*

- ☞ Avoiding deception and dishonesty
- ☞ Admit one's mistakes

4. *Tolerance*

- ☞ A fair and objective attitude toward those whose ideas, race, and needs are different from our own
- ☞ Avoiding physical and verbal aggression
- ☞ Striving for the fair resolution of conflicts

5. *Self-discipline*

- ☞ Pursuing healthy pleasures in moderation
- ☞ Working toward distant goals
- ☞ Delay gratification, develop talents
- ☞ Developing self-esteem through relationships with others
- ☞ Practicing honesty and trustfulness

6. *Helpfulness*

- ☞ Taking pleasure in doing kindness to others

²⁰ Cf. H. A. Huffman, *Developing A Character Education Program*.

- ☞ Being involved in community life

7. *Compassion*

- ☞ Not only knowing one's responsibility, but also sharing the feelings of others, especially the sick, the elderly, the poor
- ☞ Seeking to be informed and showing concern about important moral issues in society and the world.

8. *Cooperation*

- ☞ Able to work in harmony with people of different views

9. *Moral courage*

- ☞ Capacity to resist peer pressure to do things that are contrary to her core values
- ☞ Holding those core values as a standard measuring one's own behavior
(see also Appendix 5: A list of African Proverbs on Cultural Values)

2.3.2 Christian- Ecclesia- Biblical Dimension

Today there is often a catechetical vacuum in the lives of young people. Our aspirants need to answer some basic questions about Christian life in the Catholic Church before they can even begin to ask questions about the specifics of Religious Life. Thus it is necessary to include a basic catechesis in the Pre-novitiate program.

Aims:

- ☞ To help candidates develop a deeper relationship with God and the Church
- ☞ To increase their knowledge of the core content of the Catholic faith
- ☞ To enrich and expand their understanding of the Scriptures and the sacred traditions and their application to daily life
- ☞ To live more faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ through a life of prayer and loving service
- ☞ To foster growth in Catholic faith in three dimensions: knowing and believing (mind), trusting (heart), doing (will)

The following faith themes, based on the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, are to be covered during Aspirancy.²¹

²¹ Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision*, 31-32.

a. The Profession of Faith

- ✦ Catholic beliefs: the Creed and the core beliefs of the Church
- ✦ Holy Trinity: Introduction to God's self revelation as three in one and some implications for living Christian faith and spiritual life.
- ✦ Salvation history: Introduction to the Bible as an understanding of God's saving action for human kind
- ✦ Jesus Christ: exploring the meaning of the Incarnation, the life, the teaching of Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection, and the call to discipleship.
- ✦ The Church: understanding the origins of the Church, her development and mission in the world

b. The Sacrament of Faith

- ✦ Sacraments: understanding the role of the sacraments in the Christian life and experiencing the Church's celebration of the sacraments.
- ✦ Church year: understanding the meaning of the liturgical seasons of the Church and the scriptural teaching presented through the Lectionary.

c. The Life of Faith

- ✦ Life in the Spirit: understanding the role of the Spirit in Christian life as sanctifier
- ✦ The dignity of the human person: recognizing the divine image present in every human person.
- ✦ Christian morality: understanding and applying the teaching of the ten commandments to contemporary life situations as we encounter the many complexities in our world
- ✦ Personal growth: discerning the Spirit at work in their lives and cooperate with God's grace for growth
- ✦ Relationships: developing and maintaining relationships based on Catholic values
- ✦ Sexuality: understanding the Church's teaching on sexual morality, (abortion, contraception, pre-marital sex, marriage, etc) understanding the Church's positive view of sexuality as a gift from God, and understanding the importance of valuing chastity and sexual restraint.

- ☞ Social justice and service: understanding the importance of respecting the rights and responsibilities of the human person, appreciating our call to be stewards of creation, and discovering and living Jesus' call to a life of loving service
- ☞ Lifestyles and vocations: discerning how to live the Christian vocation in the world, in marriage, single life, ministerial priesthood, permanent diaconate and consecrated life.
- ☞ Mary, Mother of all Christians: understanding the roles of Mary in the Church and in Christian life, and develop a loving devotion to her

d. Prayer in the Life of Faith

- ☞ Christian prayer: understanding and experiencing the many forms of prayer in the Church, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the Eucharist
- ☞ Methods of prayer: introduction to awareness exercises and meditation.
- ☞ Understanding the importance of silence and personal prayer in spiritual life.
- ☞ Enriching one another's faith experiences through sharing of the Word of God.

2.3.3 Charismatic- Apostolic Dimension

One of the aims of Aspirancy is to help the candidate have greater familiarity with our Institute. The following aspects regarding our charism and ministries will be included in the program.

- ☞ Introduction to the lives of the Foundress, St. Magdalene of Canossa, and St. Bakhita.
- ☞ Stories of early missionary Sisters, especially those who worked in Africa.
- ☞ Introduction to the devotions of the Institute: the Chaplets, Way of the Cross, devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows
- ☞ Introduction to the charismatic virtues: humility, charity, silence, mortification
- ☞ Introduction to the ministries through involvement in the various apostolic works, like teaching catechism, visiting the sick and Christian families, helping in the school or dispensary.

2.3.4 Professional Dimension

Ours is an apostolic Institute. Sisters are called to a life of service through various ministries. Professional training in the formation program serves three purposes.

- ☞ To discover one's professional aptitude
- ☞ To build up one's self-esteem
- ☞ To discern one's compatibility with the charism of the Institute

Professional training includes:

- ☞ Basic principles of teaching catechism and teaching in general
- ☞ Knowledge of basic nursing
- ☞ Basic course in sewing and tailoring

The offering of this training will depend on the human resources and personnel available in the Province.

Practical skills will include:

- ☞ Leadership skill: time-management, public speaking skills, group leadership skills,
- ☞ Basic secretarial skills: report writing, minutes taking, computer literacy,
- ☞ Language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing with fluent English
- ☞ Other life skills: cooking, gardening, house-managing, budgeting, etc.
- ☞ Talent building: arts, music, drama, story telling, etc.

2.4 Modalities

Aspirancy is an initial stage of vocation discernment. The ultimate aim is to help the young candidate make a mature decision about her state of life. Considering that the candidates are coming from villages or areas far from the community, residential Aspirancy is offered to them so as to facilitate personal and group-based vocation accompaniment. The duration of Aspirancy is normally one year. If deemed necessary, it can be extended, but not longer than two years.

To help the aspirants acquire the necessary human and spiritual maturity, we offer them an integral formation program which aims at forming the mind, the heart and the behaviours of the person. The program will take on a holistic approach with special emphasis on the human and psychosocial dimension.

2.4.1 Personal Accompaniment

“The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly with a certain frequency.”²²

a. Formation direction

Aim²³

- To provide an opportunity to review, discuss, examine and direct the individual on a one-to-one basis
- To help the aspirant grow in the capacity of self-disclosure which is an important element for human maturity
- To sustain a regular format of communication

Role of the formator in personal accompaniment:

- Caregiver
 - To create a warm, human, appropriate personal relationship with the aspirants that makes it easier for them to talk about themselves and be receptive in guidance
 - To avoid favoritism: sarcasm: embarrassing candidates; or any behaviour which undermines a candidate's dignity and self-esteem
- Mentor
 - To discover, affirm and develop each candidate's special talents and strengths
 - To give advice and corrective feedback: when necessary even confront and challenge the aspirant for a change in attitude or behaviour
- Model
 - To act as a role model who mirrors all the virtues, especially charity and humility, aspired to by every Canossian sister.

²² JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 66.

²³ CF. B. MORIARTY, Lecture notes on Planning a Formation Program.

Format²⁴

- The formator will meet each aspirant privately and regularly at least once a month
- The duration of the regular interview is normally within one hour
- Content of the interview may include personal history, family, self-development, health, personal and intellectual growth, social dynamics such as friendship, community living, prayer life, further clarification of lessons, corrective feedback, etc.
- Confidentiality is the hallmark of this relationship and session but with the understanding that the formator by office is responsible for evaluation and is dealing with an external forum.

b. Spiritual direction

The Spiritual Director has a role to play for the success of the work of formation. Their role is to discern the authenticity of the call to the Religious Life in the initial phase of formation, and to assist the Religious towards a successful personal dialogue with God while they are discerning the ways in which God seems to wish them to advance.²⁵

It is the responsibility of the Aspirant Mistress to sort out experienced and well trained Spiritual Directors to guide the aspirants. She will encourage them to make use of the ecclesial mediation for their spiritual growth. To be effective, spiritual direction would take place at least once a month.

2.4.2 Community Living

“Community life enjoys a privileged role in formation at every stage. Formation depends to a great extent on the quality of the community. This quality is the result of its general climate and the style of life of its members, in conformity with the particular character and spirit of the institute.”²⁶

²⁴ Cf. B. MORIARTY, Lecture notes on Planning a Formation Program.

²⁵ Cf. Congregation For Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 30.

²⁶ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 26

Religious vocation is a call to live in communion. This is to be realized first and foremost in the religious community. Hence community life has been and is still today one of the most stimulating and decisive factors of formation.

Aim:

The “living together” experience will offer the aspirants the opportunity to:

- Experience life in common and to have an exposure to the Canossian style of life
- To see and be aware of the communitarian dimension of religious vocation
- To discern their suitability to live a common life characterized by multi-cultural diversity

Format

The aspirants will live in a quarter separated from that of the Sisters so that they do not have the idea that they are already admitted to Religious Life. For the same reason, the aspirants will not wear a habit of any kind. A Sister from the community appointed by the Provincial will journey with the aspirants in their human and spiritual growth.

The aspirants will have their own time-table of prayer, work, studies, meals and recreation, independent of the community. However they are encouraged to attend daily Eucharist with the community. On feast days and special occasions, the community may invite the aspirants to join their celebration and community activities. These will be moments for the aspirants to get acquainted with our religious family and at the same time, to let themselves be known to the community.

In the aspirant community, the aspirants will perform the normal domestic tasks such as general cleaning work, preparing meals, etc. Each aspirant will have the opportunity to prepare her tribal dishes. This will help to prepare the aspirants for easier adaptation to an international community.

During leisure time, the aspirants will do some handcrafts such as sewing, mending, embroidery, etc. Recreational activities like traditional singing, dancing, cultural games, sports are also encouraged. On feast days, the aspirants will be invited to prepare performances of entertainment. All these attempt to

develop the talents of each individual and help them to appreciate the richness of each culture.

English is the common language. Candidates of the same tribe are discouraged from using their tribal language to avoid misunderstanding and division.

2.4.3 Growth Group

Formation at this level is very much a group experience and it is in the group session context that most of the formation will take place.²⁷ The value of regular or weekly group meetings, with the opportunity of discussing any issue of concern to individual or the group, cannot be underestimated. Once trust and an atmosphere of mutual respect has been fostered, the aspirants will start to feel safe and free to be themselves.

Aims

- To provide a forum where aspirants' thoughts are valued and where they can gain self-esteem that comes from learning to express themselves in a group
- To create a trusting community as a support structure to nurture and hold in place the values and strengths that the aspirants are developing
- To develop the attitudes and skills needed in communication, such as listening and respect

Format:

- Will be held at regularly scheduled times (once a week or twice a month) and in response to special needs.
- Will last from one to two hours, depending on the complexity of the topic
- Will be facilitated by the formator or an aspirant.
- Will emphasize interactive sharing and discussion.

Suggested topics:

1. Faith sharing: sharing of one's vocation story
2. Appreciation time: taking one aspirant a time, the formator invites the group to say something they like or admire about that person

²⁷ cf. M. O'REILLY, *The Formation of A Religious in Africa Today*, 33.

3. Rule-setting: What rules do we need for our bedroom? For doing laundry?
4. Problem-solving:
 - a. Individual problem: Who is having a problem that we might be able to help solve?
 - b. Group problem: Dispute over house duties; argument over punctuality
 - c. Complaints and recommendations: Anyone can make a complaint about a problem, but she has to offer a recommendation for correcting it.
5. Planning a project: How would you like to celebrate the Feast of our Foundress?
6. Concept clarification: What is a lie? Is it ever right to tell one?
7. Sharing on learning: What did you learn from this book/ the life of this saint/ this project, etc.

2.4.4 Liturgy and Sacraments

Liturgy and sacraments are food that nourishes our spiritual life. Through the participation in the liturgy and sacraments, we encounter God and receive the graces to live a sound Christian life. Thus, liturgy and sacraments occupy an essential part in the formation program.

a. Daily prayer

- ☞ Aspirants will be guided gradually to integrate their lives to prayer. They will pray among themselves morning and evening. Twice a week they will pray with the Sisters.
- ☞ Format of prayer will follow the Liturgy of the Hours by singing hymns and psalms and listening to the Word of God. They are encouraged to be creative.
- ☞ The Sister-in-charge and other Sisters will pray with the aspirants in turns.
- ☞ On Solemnities and special liturgical seasons, the aspirants will join the prayer of the community.
- ☞ The aspirants are encouraged to make personal prayer during the day.

b. *Celebration and devotions*

- ☞ Particular attention will be given to the season of Advent and Lent. Aspirants will be guided to celebrate Christmas and Easter with intensive preparation.
- ☞ The Feast of the Institute, the Feast of the Foundress and the Feast of St. Bakhita will be celebrated with the community in a family spirit. The aspirants will be instructed to take active part.
- ☞ Special devotions are encouraged:
 - Daily prayer to the Foundress, St. Bakhita, and Our Lady of Sorrows
 - Personal daily rosary, once a week saying the Rosary together for special intentions
 - Way of the Cross on Fridays
 - Prayer to St. Michael at the end of recreation

c. *Meditation on the Word of God*

- ☞ The aspirants will do half an hour of meditation daily
- ☞ Once a week they will be guided to meditate on the Word of God using different methods: silent, fantasy, symbolic, etc.
- ☞ The aspirants will be guided to do prayer review.
- ☞ Once a week there will be the sharing on the Word of God or faith sharing.

d. *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

- ☞ Aspirants are requested to attend daily Mass. They are encouraged to take active part: reading the Word of God, choosing hymns, playing the music, and offering intercessory prayers
- ☞ They will be instructed on how to prepare the altar and the liturgy

e. *Sacrament of Reconciliation*

- ☞ Aware that through the sacrament of reconciliation, we receive the grace of conversion of heart, the formator will see that the aspirants go for confession regularly.

2.4.5 Formative Sessions

Formative sessions are times for systematic learning and studying on the topics specified for Aspirancy formation. The Aspirant Mistress will be responsible for conducting the classes. She can involve other Sisters if the personnel allow her to do so. Each session should be long enough for explanation, discussion and clarification. When there are external courses or seminars on relevant topics, the aspirants are encouraged to make use of the opportunities.

Suggested methods for formative sessions:

- ☞ Lecturing, questioning
- ☞ Group work and presentation
- ☞ Role play, story telling, poems, songs, proverbs, games
- ☞ Discussing newspaper clippings, magazine articles
- ☞ Viewing and discussion of video programs, films, documentaries
- ☞ Reading together and sharing, book reports, reflection papers

2.4.6 Inter-Congregational Seminars and Workshops

The ministry of formation is challenging and demanding. The Sisters involved in this work need the support and collaboration of all those who work for the same cause. Many religious congregations have put together their resources to offer formative seminars or workshops to candidates for Religious Life. Whenever there is such an opportunity, the Aspirant Mistress will make use of it. Courses on human development, catechism and Scripture are suitable to be done at inter-Congregational level. If the Aspirant Mistress cannot attend the meetings with the aspirants, there should be follow-up sessions to make sure they understand and internalize what they have learnt.

2.4.7 Apostolic Experience

Aspirancy is an experiential period in searching for God's will. Many young people have the desire to do good work for God. These desires need to be nourished and tested by concrete actions. Therefore, apostolic involvement is a necessary element in the formation program.

The Aspirant Mistress needs to see that there will be sufficient and suitable apostolic work for the aspirants so that they will have an experience of the Canossian style of ministry. She may need to collaborate with the Parish priest and the Sisters-in-charge of the various ministries. She will also carry out apostolic reflection with the aspirants periodically.

Suggested work for the aspirant

- ☞ Teaching Sunday school or catechism
- ☞ Participating in Small Christian Community meeting
- ☞ Visiting families and the sick
- ☞ Tutoring the low-achievers in the school
- ☞ Teaching in the nursery or primary school
- ☞ Helping out in the dispensary
- ☞ Organizing Sunday liturgy in the out-station/ sub-parish

Time for apostolic work

- ☞ Daily: 3 – 4 hours a day depending of the nature of the work
- ☞ Weekends and Sundays : 2-3 hours in pastoral work
- ☞ Seasonal: special project for the poor during Lent or Advent
- ☞ Yearly: active participation in vocation camp for youth

Format for apostolic reflection

At this stage of Aspirancy, we are not going to formally evaluate the candidate's apostolic potentialities. However, the aspirant will be guided to reflect on the apostolic experience and write short reflection papers periodically.

2.4.8 Personal Reflection

A life without reflection is not worth living. Personal reflection helps a person to get in touch with herself and thus leads her to the growth of self-knowledge. The aspirant will be guided to develop the capacity to reflect objectively and sincerely as a means for self formation.

Tools for personal reflection to be introduced:

- a. Silence:
 - Practicing quieting-exercises like listening to the sound of nature, the surroundings, breathing exercise

- Maintain a quiet atmosphere in the premises and keeping silence in the chapel, the bedroom and the studying room
- b. Writing a diary or journal
 - Encourage the aspirants to write down their daily experiences and how they feel about them.
 - Reflect over the experiences during the monthly recollection day
- c. Reflection paper
 - Write short papers on a given topic. It helps the aspirant to organize her thoughts and integrate what she learns.
- d. Consciousness Examen
 - Guide the aspirant to practice consciousness examen daily. It would be of a short duration of 5 -10 minutes.
 - Help the aspirants to become aware of the presence of God in the course of daily events and to look at and pay attention to their inner movements
 - The purpose of this exercise is to help her gradually develop a spirit of discernment
- e. Guided reflection day
 - Once a month, the aspirants will be guided to spend a day of reflection either on the premises or in another suitable place.
 - The purpose is to take a review of the growth journey during the month.
 - A variety of activities will be used: personal reflection on given questions, small group faith sharing, shared prayer, writing reflection papers, guided meditation on the Word of God.

2.4.9 Home Visit

Candidates are encouraged to have regular contact with the family. Every three months the aspirants will take a week's holiday for home visit. At the end of the aspirant year, the aspirants will go home for a month before joining the Postulancy. These are times for integration and discernment.

2.5 Evaluation

Evaluation will be done throughout the formation process. Through daily observation and personal interviews, the Aspirant Mistress will assess the growth of the candidate. Towards the end of the year, a more formal evaluation will be conducted. The aspirant will be guided to write a self-evaluation paper concerning areas of personal development, community life, spiritual life and apostolic life. Opinions from the community will be consulted. Then the Aspirant Mistress will submit a written report to the Provincial.

2.6 Criteria for Admission to Postulancy

Candidates who are admitted to Postulancy should show:

- a) Physical and psychological fitness needed for religious life.
- b) Sufficient affective maturity that facilitates healthy interpersonal relationships
- c) Willingness and openness to guidance and formation
- d) Acceptance of personal responsibility for personal and spiritual development
- e) Flexibility and adaptability to changes and multi-cultural living
- f) Interest and availability for apostolate
- g) sufficient mastery of English

2.7 Allocation of Roles in the Welcoming Community

Formation of vocation is a major concern of the entire Institute. Each and every Sister, whether directly or indirectly involved, has a role to play in the formation process. However, members of the Welcoming Community are given the important task of accompanying the young persons in the search of their vocation.

Various roles must be well distributed and understood by the community in order to carry out the formation program effectively. This implies clearly allocating responsibilities.

2.7.1 The Aspirant Mistress

The Aspirant Mistress is officially appointed by the Provincial to be responsible for the formation of the aspirants as a whole. Her vital task is that of personal accompaniment. She is the one who establishes the activities and the daily

horarium. She should not be given other leadership roles in the community, such as Superior. Part-time apostolate other than the work of formation is acceptable if the group of aspirants is small, not more than eight.

2.7.2 The Local Superior

The Local Superior collaborates with the Aspirant Mistress in the formation by establishing and maintaining a welcoming and fraternal atmosphere in the community. She is responsible for the provision of temporal goods to the aspirant community.

2.7.3 The Professed Sisters

“The most powerful formative influence is the testimony of fraternity among the members of the community.”²⁸ Thus the Major Superior ought to pay attention to the choice of members of the Welcoming Community, so as to guarantee homogeneity as far as possible. Sisters in the community are encouraged to participate in the work of formation by generously sharing their talents, knowledge, and apostolic experience with the aspirants during formative sessions, recreation or day to day interaction.

²⁸ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 49.

PART III: POSTULANCY

*Postulancy is a settled disposition of heart which makes the candidate a postulant, someone who begs and asks.*²⁹ Onwujuru

3.1 Goals and Objectives

Goals

Postulancy formation is to prepare the candidate for entrance to the Novitiate. It is a time for the candidate to deepen her relationship with the Lord and to strengthen her human and Christian growth which had begun in the previous stage. By gradually sharing in the life of our religious family, the young woman is accompanied to evaluate genuinely the compatibility of her gifts with the charism of the Institute, thus her suitability for Novitiate Formation.

Objectives

The formation at this stage is to help the candidate:

- a) Deepen the awareness and acceptance of self, her gifts and limits, recognizing and appreciating God's presence in the events of her life.
- b) Experience a more stable life of prayer through the practice of silence, listening and meditating on the Word of God, the sacraments, and the liturgical prayer.
- c) Grow in discerning what enhances or hinders her journey of faith, which enables her to build an authentic relationship with God, herself and others. She is initiated into the integration of cultural and evangelical values and into the multi-cultural nature of our family.
- d) Experience a gradual initiation into Canossian community life style and a joyful self-giving in the community and in the apostolate.
- e) Attain a deeper knowledge of the person of St. Magdalene, her vocational journey, and her virtues.

²⁹ C. ONWUJURU, *Religious Life in Nigerian Culture*, 74.

- f) Obtain an overview of the development of the Institute since its establishment.
- g) Clarify and evaluate her motivation for the choice of Canossian religious life in the light of the Word of God and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This enables her to make a free decision to ask to be admitted to the novitiate.

3.2 Policies for Admission to Postulancy

- a) During the Aspirancy each aspirant will undergo a general medical check up in a reliable hospital or dispensary. The medical report will be kept in the aspirant's personal file. Candidates for Postulancy should show sufficient physical health.
- b) The Aspirant Mistress will prepare a written recommendation for each proposed candidate and will comment upon both her strengths and areas needing improvement. She may consult the opinions of the members of the community.
- c) The aspirant who wishes to continue with the Postulancy program will be guided to do a few days recollection to reflect and pray over for her readiness and suitability. Then, she will make a formal application to the Major Superior, who with her councillors is responsible for the admission to postulancy.
- d) The Postulancy program will take place at the approved Formation House in the Province. The Aspirant Mistress will have to visit the candidate's family before she joins the Postulancy. Permission from the family will be obtained in writing.
- e) Upon arrival at the postulant community, the candidate will undergo a period of orientation and a five-days retreat prior to the commencement of the Postulancy program.
- f) A ceremony of official acceptance will mark the beginning of this stage of formation. The candidate will be given a medal of the Sorrowful Mother as an insignia for this stage of formation. During the ceremony,

the Provincial Superior will introduce the Postulant Mistress to the candidates.

3.3 Areas of Formation

To achieve the objectives proper to this formative stage, the candidate will continue her formation in all the dimensions of her personal growth.

3.3.1 Human, Psycho-social Dimension

a. Stages of Human Development

Based on the study of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of human growth, the postulants will be guided to understand the progressive growth and development of the entire life cycle of the human person. The postulants will be helped to look into their stages of growth and to compare Erikson's theory with the African view of human life. They are also encouraged to examine and work through areas of crisis in their development in the light of God's redeeming grace. External help will be offered if necessary. Topics will include:

☛ Erikson's eight stages of human growth³⁰

- a. Stage 1 Infancy: Trust Vs Mistrust
- b. Stage 2 Early childhood: Autonomy Vs Shame and Doubts
- c. Stage 3 Play age: Initiative Vs Guilt
- d. Stage 4 School age: Industry Vs Inferiority
- e. Stage 5 Adolescence : Identity Vs Confusion
- f. Stage 6 Young adulthood: Intimacy Vs Isolation
- g. Stage 7 Adulthood: Generativity Vs Stagnation
- h. Stage 8 Maturity: Integrity Vs Despair

☛ African stages of development³¹

- a. The unborn
- b. Pregnancy, birth and naming
- c. Infancy and childhood
- d. Initiation
- e. Marriage

³⁰ Cf. E. ERIKSON, *Childhood and Society*, 247- 274.

³¹ Cf. E. GICHINGA, Lecture notes on Human Development.

- f. Enthronement/Adulthood
- g. Elderhood
- h. Death and the living dead (ancestors)

☞ Personal salvation history

Reflecting on personal stages of growth in the light of faith in order to “uncover the unique and unrepeatable meaning of one’s life, so as to attain a historical knowledge of self”.³²

b. *The Learning of Motivations*³³

To act we need a motive. Motivation is what is capable of moving one to action. An understanding of human motivation would help the young person become more conscious of her behaviour and thus enable her to make responsible choices and decisions. The postulant will be helped to have a more authentic knowledge of herself as she is guided to answer these questions:

- a. What forces make her act? What makes her shrink from action?
- b. What gives her energy? What deprives her of it?
- c. What makes her desire for something and not others? What makes her courageous and what makes her fearful and passive?

Topics will include:

- ☞ An understanding of the different elements involved in the human motivational system: instincts, needs, desires, values, attitudes
- ☞ Exploring the dynamics of these elements which affect one’s behaviour and decision making.
- ☞ Becoming aware of the dissonance and inconsistency in human motivation
- ☞ Dealing with inner conflicts

c. *Defense Mechanisms*

Formation is to help the young person reach real freedom of heart. This begins by becoming aware of internal conditionings, both conscious and unconscious. To achieve this, the postulants have to go through a process of “destructuring”, that is to identify presumptions of self, pretence of self sufficiency.

³² A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 68.

³³ Cf. A. CENCINI – A. MANENTI, *Psychology and Formation*, 302-324.

masks, defenses and inner wounds. "True freedom begins with the discovery of one's servitude, and that a mature adult is also a wounded one"³⁴

During the formation process, the postulant will be helped to:

- ☞ Broaden her understanding of the functions and dynamics of defense mechanisms and the types of defenses
- ☞ Deepen her awareness of the use of defenses
- ☞ Use defenses in a mature way
- ☞ Break down the destructive defenses through therapeutic exercises if found necessary

d. Self-awareness

Self awareness is the key to self knowledge. By bringing the unconsciousness to the consciousness, one becomes more and more transparent to herself, thus leading to an authentic life in the Spirit and opening oneself to intimate relationships with others. The postulant will be helped to grow in self awareness in various ways:

- ☞ A basic understanding of the four levels of self awareness³⁵:
 - The sensuous-superficial level: eg. The minor irritation (thirst) and pleasure (good meal)
 - The physical-vital level: pain (stomach ulcer) and pleasure (good health)
 - The psychological-psyche level: deep sorrows (misunderstanding) and joy (fulfillment in work)
 - The spiritual level: consolation (felt presence of God) and desolation (lack of faith)
- ☞ Practice of awareness exercises (*Sadhana* of Anthony de Mello)
- ☞ Writing a diary, journal
- ☞ Working with dreams
- ☞ Understanding the transactional analysis
- ☞ The study and application of Myers-Briggs

³⁴ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 29.

³⁵ Cf. L. LEIFI, Lecture notes on Self- awareness.

e. Sexuality

Sexuality is part and parcel of human existence. A proper understanding and appreciation of one's sexuality is basic to a happy life of celibacy. During initial formation, the postulant will be helped to develop a positive self-concept about her own sexuality.

Formative contents:

☛ Sex

- Understanding the accurate meaning of sex
- Exploring the cultural beliefs and taboos about sex in African context
- Exploring and articulation of personal sex values
- Related issues: pre-marital sex, pregnancy, abortion, HIV/Aids

☛ Intimacy

- Understanding intimacy as a need in human growth
- Exploring the cultural beliefs and taboos about intimacy
- Understanding different types of intimacy
- Exploring the paths to intimacy

☛ Boundaries

- Understanding the meaning of and the need for boundaries as related to friendship and intimacy
- Keeping healthy boundaries in any inter-personal relationship

f. Obstacles for Growth and Changes

Many people in one way or another have experienced trauma. “ PTSD-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder seems to exist to some degree in anyone who has suffered an especially difficult or abusive childhood. The emotions of anger, fear and anxiety often are the results of a series of traumatic incidents experienced in childhood, such as physical and sexual abuse, incest, parental alcoholism or divorce.”³⁶ These negative experiences if they remain unresolved can be stumbling blocks to formation. During Prenovitiate formation, it is suitable to offer healing therapy to those who have experienced traumas in their lives. Professional help is also advisable if necessary.

³⁶ E. BOURNE, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, 383.

Healing of traumas

Objectives:

- ☞ To help the young person become aware of her life experiences and has the courage to re-read her life history
- ☞ To help the person understand the gamut trauma imparts on human life
- ☞ To enable the person to identify, welcome and integrate what helps or obstructs her human growth and faith journey

Formative contents:

- ☞ Definition of traumas and post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD)
- ☞ Causes of traumas
- ☞ Symptoms of PTSD
- ☞ Effects of traumas in a person
- ☞ Psychological defenses associated with trauma: dissociation, repression and denial
- ☞ Treatment of trauma

Anger:

The postulant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand the definition of anger and to name it
- ☞ Know and identify the causes of anger: frustration, threat to self-esteem, injustice and physical harm
- ☞ Identify the unhealthy responses to anger
- ☞ Manage anger: awareness, acceptance, analyze the cause and take appropriate response
- ☞ Appreciate the value of forgiveness and reconciliation

Fear

The postulant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand and identify the five basic fears: Fear of loss of control, fear of death, injury or pain, fear of rejection, ridicule or shame, fear of abandonment, isolation, being alone, fear of something strange and unknown¹⁷
- ☞ Explore the origins of fear

¹⁷ Cf. E. BOURNE, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, 384.

- ☞ Re-experience any painful feelings and work through those feelings
- ☞ Establish and reinforce new positive beliefs.

Anxiety

The postulant will be helped to:

- ☞ Understand the nature and cause of anxiety
- ☞ Identify the physical, behavioral and psychological reaction caused by anxiety
- ☞ Deal with anxiety by using various strategies: stress management, regular exercises, relaxation, good nutritional habits, changing attitude about perfectionism, resolving interpersonal conflicts.³⁸

g. Inter-personal Communication Skills

To prepare the postulant for multi-cultural living in the community, it is necessary to equip her with certain communication skills so that she is capable of developing good relationships with the members of the community.

Among the skills that she needs to learn are the following:

Taking responsibility for communication, withholding judgment, showing respect, empathizing, tolerating ambiguity, being patient and persistent, recognizing one's own cultural biases, being flexible, emphasizing common ground rather than differences, sending clear messages, taking risks, increasing one's cultural sensitivity, respecting each one's boundary.

These are skills which will help the postulant communicate with anybody, whether someone from her own culture or another.

3.3.2 Christian- Biblical Dimension

A basic knowledge of the Catholic faith is a pre-requisite for entering the Novitiate which is a time and place for deepening one's understanding of one's call. Without the foundation of a sound knowledge in faith and the Scripture, the choice of Religious Life could be superficial. During Postulancy, the candidate will be helped to grow in her faith through biblical and theological studies.

³⁸ CFE. BOURNE. *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, 13-14

a. The Profession of Faith

- ☞ The mystery of the Trinity: the postulant will be helped to understand and experience in her daily life the triune God.
 - The Fatherhood of God, the source of all goodness who constantly gives her life
 - The friendship of Jesus Christ, the model for all Canossians who accepts and forgives her even up to death on the Cross.
 - The guidance of the Holy Spirit, who makes her personal history meaningful.
- ☞ The Church: the postulant will be helped to deepen a sense of belonging and love of the Universal Church and the local church.
 - The nature of the Church as missionary
 - The models of the Church in particular the Church as family (the African model)
 - The challenges that the Church is facing today
- ☞ Mary, Mother of the Church: the postulant will be helped to develop a special devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows, the patron of the Institute, as recommended by the Foundress.

b. Biblical Study

- ☞ Introduction to the Old Testament: the postulant will be helped to acquire the knowledge and tools to read the Old Testament and to understand its meaning and challenges for us today. Specific themes: Creation story, Exodus events, Patriarchs, Roles and messages of the prophets, Covenant in the Old Testament.
- ☞ Introduction to the Psalms: the postulant will be helped to acquire the knowledge and tools to read and appreciate the psalms as a preparation for praying the Liturgy of the Hours.
 - Introduction to the historical background of the Book of Psalms
 - Types of psalms
 - Selected reading of the psalms from the Breviary

✦ Introduction to the Gospel of St. Mark: the postulant will be helped to acquire the knowledge and tools to read the Gospel and will be guided to know the person of Jesus through meditating on the Gospel.

- The world of Jesus (first century Palestine)
- The author of the Gospel
- The time and place of writing
- The literary characters and theological aims of the gospel
- The content and specific themes
- The portrait of Jesus in Mark

c. The Sacrament of Faith

- ✦ Sacrament of Initiation: understanding the rites, the symbols, the values of the Sacrament of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation.
- ✦ Eucharist: understanding the crucial role of the Eucharist in Christian life and developing a devotion to the Eucharist
- ✦ Liturgical life: experiencing and participating in the liturgical celebration of the Church and the Congregation.

d. The Life of Faith

- ✦ Christian morality and living a virtuous life: incorporating Catholic moral principles and virtues into one's life and moral decision making
- ✦ Conscience, grace and sin: understanding and uncovering the human desire for God and to act accordance with God's grace; recognizing the impact of sin, personal and social; learning to make decisions in accordance with one's rightly formed conscience.
- ✦ Justice and peace: understanding and applying in daily life the pastoral cycle of See, Judge and Act; developing a stand for justice, peace and non-violence even in everyday circumstance.
- ✦ Ecumenism: learning the basic beliefs of other religions and forming an attitude of openness, respect and appreciation towards other religions
- ✦ Christian vocations: understanding the various forms of consecrated life within the Church – contemplative, apostolic, lay consecration, ad gentes.

- ☞ Virtues: understanding and practicing the theological and cardinal virtues of faith, hope, charity, forgiveness, obedience, humility, self-sacrifice, generosity, etc.
- ☞ Life of the saints: reading the lives of the saints and learning from them their good example.

e. Prayer in the Life of Faith

- ☞ Forms of prayer: understanding and appreciation of the richness of different forms of prayer – Thanksgiving, Worship and praise; Intercessory; Petition; Praying with Scripture, etc.
- ☞ Methods of prayer: learning and experiencing different ways of praying, such as: Vocal prayer, meditation, adoration, shared prayer, Lectio Divina
- ☞ Difficulties in prayer: dealing with distraction and dryness in prayer
- ☞ Personal prayer: recognizing the need and importance of personal prayer and developing a consistent personal prayer life
- ☞ Community prayer: recognizing the value and beauty of communal prayer and taking an active part in community prayer.
- ☞ Silence: developing a felt need for moments of silence and recollection in one's life

3.3.3 Charismatic-Apostolic Dimension

Postulancy is a time for the candidate to discern the compatibility of her gifts with the Canossian charism. She will be guided to understand the spirit of the Institute as she learns about the life of the Foundress and gradually getting involved in community life and the ministries. Thereby, in the process of discernment, she begins to discover her charismatic identity in relation to the Canossian charism.

a. Charismatic Formation

- ☞ Life of the Foundress: understanding and meditating on her journey in the search for God's will, especially during the early years under the guidance of Don Libera.

Assigned text: *Letters of Spiritual Direction*³⁹

☞ Introduction to the Canossian spirituality

- Love of Jesus Crucified: develop an authentic and personal relationship with Jesus, practicing his virtues of humility, obedience, self-giving, forgiveness in everyday life.
- Devotion to Mary, Mother of love at the foot of the Cross: building up a filial devotion to Mary and imitation her virtues of faith, trust, obedience, fortitude and generosity.
- Canossian core values: understanding and acknowledging the Canossian core values of universal love, union of hearts, gratuitous service, fraternal charity, authentic dialogue, respect for human dignity, integral promotion of human life, preference for the poor and the less privileged.

☞ Community life: understanding the aims and principles of community life in Canossian Family; active participation in all community acts.

Assigned text: the Treatise on the Virtue of Fraternal Charity (*Unabridged Rule* 243 – 259)

○ Aims:

- to fulfill the two commandments of love- love of God and neighbour:
- to empower and support the Sisters in their ministries
- to be a sign of love to the world

○ Principles:

- Jesus Christ is the foundation of fraternal charity
- Let every decision and action be guided by the motive of charity
- Seeking unity of hearts rather than uniformity
- Love sincerely one another without preference to nationality, temperament and appearance
- Accepting the limitation of others and bearing one another's burden
- Never judge or give bad interpretations to another's action
- Giving special attention to the sick and elderly Sisters



³⁹ These are letters written to St. Magdalen by Luigi Libera, her Spiritual Director between the years 1792-1799.

☞ Asceticism

It is not enough for the postulants to acquire knowledge and high ideals. What fascinates the mind has to be lived out in daily reality. It is essential for the Postulant Mistress to propose to the postulants a clear ascetic program, as a constitutive and peculiar part of the charism. “Only by acting does the young person experience the gift and the flavour of incarnating the charism in her person in a very original way.”⁴⁰

b. Apostolic Formation

☞ Cognitive input

- Goal of all ministries: to make Jesus known and loved by all people
 - Style of service: simplicity, generosity, humility, patience, flexibility,
 - Approach to service: person-oriented, gradual, systematic, preventive and formative
 - Choice of beneficiaries: people from all sectors of society – the poor, the marginalized, the rich, the children, youth, women, the sick
 - Branches of ministries: education, evangelization, assistance to the sick, formation of laity and spiritual exercises
 - Qualities of Sisters in ministry:
 - Good health
 - Emotional maturity
 - Sound inter-personal relationships
 - Capable of collaboration
 - Solid theological and spiritual maturity
 - A passion for God and his Kingdom
 - Faithful to the charism of the Institute

3.4 Formative Environment and Modalities

Postulancy is a time for personal growth and discernment for a Canossian vocation. The specific formative environment is in a formative, fraternal, ministerial community where the postulant is welcomed as a member. In our Institute, the duration of the Postulancy will be one full year. To signify her identity as a

⁴⁰ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 117.

postulant, the candidate will put on a simple, modest uniform on Sundays, public occasions and at official functions.

3.4.1 Community Experience

Community life enjoys a privileged role in formation at every stage. Formation depends to a great extent on the quality of this community. This quality is the result of its general climate and the style of life of its members, in conformity with the particular character and spirit of the institute.⁴¹ Henceforth, the community has an important role in the formation of the postulants. The fraternal relationship among the sisters, their fidelity to the charism and their apostolic commitment all speak to the postulant what it means to be a Canossian Sister.

Received as a member of the community, the postulant is gradually introduced to the common life of the Sisters. Different community experiences will lead her to a deeper understanding of her own personality and thus enable her to attain greater maturity.

To foster a spirit of union, the postulant will be invited to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours and the daily Eucharist together with the Sisters. For the arrangement of meals and recreation, there can be certain flexibility. The principle is to secure a healthy boundary between the professed Sisters and the postulants, but at the same time fostering a meaningful and respectful relationship.

Community project

The community project is a formative tool for community building. It fosters the bond among the group. It provides an opportunity for the members to communicate and dialogue. It invites the attitudes of respect, acceptance, appreciation and letting go. It is the responsibility of the Postulant Mistress to initiate the project once she sees that a certain union is established among the candidates.

Main items to be discussed:

- ✧ The vision and mission of the postulant community
- ✧ Ways and means to achieve the vision
- ✧ Ways to strengthen spiritual life

⁴¹ Cf. Congregation For Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 26.

- ☞ Rules and responsibilities for happy community living
- ☞ Style of relationship in the community
- ☞ Ways of recreation, celebration, community outing

Community reconciliation

- ☞ To foster the spirit of mutual acceptance and forgiveness, the postulants will be introduced to the practice of community reconciliation.
- ☞ It will be done once a week, in a prayerful atmosphere.
- ☞ The postulants are also encouraged to ask pardon or clarify misunderstandings when such thing happens.

3.4.2 Personal Accompaniment

“Study her well....try to discover the character, temperament and inclinations; understand and judge whether it be more efficacious and opportune for her spiritual good to guide her with gentleness together with firmness or if there might be greater profit in treating her with absolute gentleness.”⁴²

a. Formation direction

The Postulant Mistress is prepared with the necessary skills to accompany the postulants in their human and spiritual growth and in discernment of their vocation. With the support of the community and free from other engaging commitments, she makes herself available for the accompaniment of each individual.

The roles of the Postulant Mistress⁴³:

- ☞ She follows the postulant on her journey, without providing ready-made solutions and answers to her doubts or questions, but helps her look into her own heart and to discern the guidance of the Spirit in events and be responsible for her own decisions.
- ☞ She forms the postulant to be attentive to life so as to understand and evaluate her way of interpreting it and responding to it in the light of the Word of God.

⁴² M. CANOSSA, *The Unabridged Rule*, 313.

⁴³ Cf. CANOSSIAN, *The Plan of Formation*, 37.

- ☞ She helps her to learn about the dynamics of the human person, to avail herself of a sound spiritual direction and a systematic study of Sacred Scripture, Catechesis, Liturgy, Canossian charism, etc.

Format:

- ☞ The Postulant Mistress will schedule a personal interview for each postulant at least twice a month.
- ☞ The duration of each meeting will normally be 45 minutes to one hour.
- ☞ Contents of the interview will include: self-growth, health, intellectual development, relationship with co-postulants and professed Sisters, problems in apostolic work, community living, family issues, prayer life.

b. *Spiritual direction*

Spiritual direction, different from formation direction, deals mainly with one's relationship with God. Good spiritual direction will help the postulant attain greater inner freedom which is a pre-requisite for discerning God's will for her. The Postulant Mistress will as far as possible look for experienced Spiritual Directors to guide the postulants and will encourage them to make the best use of their help. Spiritual direction usually takes place once a month.

3.4.3 Growth Group

Group interaction provides favourable opportunities for personal and community growth. "Who a person is in a group is who she is and observing how a person relates to others, especially her fellow postulants, is more informative than any written recommendation from the parish priest."⁴⁴

The growth group will take different formats:

a) With the Formator

Twice a month, facilitated either by the Postulant Mistress or a postulant. The content can be about issues concerning to individual or the postulant community.

⁴⁴ M.O'REILLY, *The Formation of A Religious in Africa Today*, 33.

b) With co-postulants

Once a month, facilitated by one of the postulants. The Postulant Mistress will discuss the theme with the leader but need not attend the meeting.

c) With the Sisters in the community

Twice a year, facilitated by the Postulant Mistress. It would be a time for sharing and questioning about the challenges of religious life, community life and apostolic life.

3.4.4 Formative Sessions

Each postulant will be helped through systematic input and study to gain knowledge and acquire the ability of logical thinking and critical reflection on self, society as well as one's relationship with God. Subjects to be taught are specified under the Areas of Formation in the formation program. The Postulant Mistress and the Formation Team are responsible for the teaching. The Postulant Mistress will schedule enough time for formative learning so that all the essential contents will be covered within the postulant year. Oral and written tests can be used as a means to help the candidates consolidate the knowledge and internalize the concepts. But they are not to study for credits. Participation in inter-Congregational courses or seminars for the formation of postulants is encouraged.

During the time of Postulancy, professional skills like computer literacy, tailoring, teaching catechism, etc., are advisable for the postulants in view of a more complete human formation and preparation for ministries. However, the time for this training should not become an obstacle to other aspects of formation. English is a requirement for Novitiate Formation. Those who are weak in English will be helped to attain the required standard.

3.4.5 Internalization Process

Change of attitude happens only when one internalizes the values and makes them one's own. What remains superficial will not have an effect on one's growth in the long term. To help the postulant internalize the knowledge and values she acquires, the Postulant Mistress will offer her all possible help.

- a) Silence and solitude
 - ☞ Practicing awareness or quieting exercises regularly
 - ☞ Developing the habit of silence by working in solitude during daytime and conversing in a gentle voice.
- b) Personal reflection
 - ☞ Each day after the formative session, there will be 35 to 45 minutes for personal reflection on some guided questions
 - ☞ Each one will write down her points of reflection and share with the postulant mistress during personal interview
- c). Journal writing
 - ☞ Keeping a personal journal or diary and review the experiences at intervals in order to read the movements of the Spirit.
- d). Reflection paper
 - ☞ Writing papers on given topics and present the thoughts and reflections in a clear organized way
- e). Consciousness Examen
 - ☞ Practicing consciousness examen twice a day: at mid-day and at night.
 - ☞ Based on the traditional Ignatian method, other ways are also recommended.
- f.). Faith sharing
 - ☞ In an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance, the postulants will share their faith, prayer experience, their relationship with God, and their salvation history and vocation story.
 - ☞ The postulants will be guided to learn and observe the principles of sharing: listening, respect, non-judgment, empathy.
- g). Monthly recollection day
 - ☞ Once a month the postulant will spend a day in prayer and reflection to review the journey of growth.
 - ☞ The Postulant Mistress or a priest will be the spiritual guide.

3.4.6 Liturgy and Sacraments

Religious Life is a life of unceasing praise, worship and service. Gradually, the postulant will be helped to experience the mystical dimension of consecrated life through participation in the liturgy and sacraments.

a. *Common prayer*

- ☞ The postulant will join the common prayer and daily Eucharist of the community to experience the spiritual union with the Sisters, the Institute and the Universal Church.
- ☞ Once a month there will be devotional Mass for the postulant community.

b. *Celebrations and devotions*

- ☞ The postulant will actively participate in all the liturgical celebrations of the Church and the Institute with the community in order to foster a sense of belonging.
- ☞ Christmas, Easter and the Feasts of the Institute will be celebrated with special devotion.
- ☞ The Postulant Mistress will help the postulants understand and appreciate the traditional devotions of the Institute.

c. *Meditation on the Word of God*

- ☞ The postulant will do half an hour of meditation in the morning and in the evening.
- ☞ Once a week there will be guided meditation using a variety of methods.
- ☞ The postulant will be introduced to do prayer review.

d. *Spiritual reading*

- ☞ The postulant will be introduced to the method of doing spiritual reading.
- ☞ The Postulant Mistress will provide sufficient and appropriate material for spiritual reading.

e. *Sacrament of Reconciliation*

- ☞ The Postulant Mistress will see that the postulant celebrates the sacrament regularly.
- ☞ During Lent and Advent, it will be favorable to have community penitential service as a preparation for the feasts.

f. Personal prayer

- ☞ The importance of personal prayer will be emphasized.
- ☞ Each postulant are encouraged to specify a time for personal prayer in her own personal time-table.

3.4.7 Apostolic Experience

During the time of Postulancy, the postulant will be enabled to experience the mission of the Congregation through the various ministries of charity which she carries out together with the Sisters so as to discover the Canossian style of service which is : simple, practical, humble, and generous. As far as possible, each postulant will be given the opportunity to be involved in different ministries so that she has a wider picture of the apostolate. This will also help her to discern her aptitude for future ministry. It is the responsibility of the Postulant Mistress to draw up a plan for apostolic exposure. Attention will be given to the variety of work, the time involved and the methods of evaluation.

Suggested apostolate for the postulants:

Education:

- Those who are qualified will be given some teaching duties in the school
- Giving private tuition to the poor students

Assistance to the sick

- Visiting the sick in the families or in the hospital
- Helping out in the dispensary

Evangelization

- Teaching catechism in the parish
- Participation in the Small Christian Community
- Participation in youth groups, women's groups

Format for apostolic evaluation

Informal:

- Through dialogue with the postulant during personal interview
- Through dialogue with the Sister-in-charge of the ministry during formation team meeting

Formal:

- Half yearly, the postulant will write a personal evaluation reflecting on the major learning issues, key experiences, her strengths and weaknesses as a minister, her relationships with her colleagues and beneficiaries, and growth issues that surfaced during the apostolic experience.
- At the end of the year the Sister-in-charge and the parish priest will write a report to the Postulant Mistress as regard to the performance of the postulant, her attitude towards work, her capacity for collaboration and reflection, her strengths and weaknesses, and her relationships with people. The points will be discussed with the postulant in order to affirm, to encourage, to improve, to challenge for growth.

3.5. Evaluation

The evaluation of the postulant is a continuous process. By the end of the Postulancy, we would like to see that the postulant has attained the required Christian maturity and we are also interested in evaluating the person's growth towards the Canossian spirit in a number of key areas: personal, inter-personal, spiritual, and apostolic. The postulant may not embrace all the qualities we aspire, but we need to see that in the process of formation, there are signs of changes in attitudes and behaviour which indicate that the postulant is ready and open for Novitiate Formation.

Format of evaluation

Informal:

- a) The first evaluation is above all made by the postulant herself. For the entire period of Postulancy, the postulant will evaluate herself as to the validity of the choice she has made, that is, if she is decided on continuing the formation to Religious Life following the Canossian charism. This has to be examined and discerned in daily life little by little as she deepens in the knowledge of herself as well as that of Religious Life and the Institute.
- b) On the part of the Institute, the Postulant Mistress will be responsible for evaluating the authenticity of the vocation of the postulant. Through personal accompaniment, daily observation, regular dialogue, she will assess the progress

of growth of the postulant and will make a relative discernment of her suitability for entrance to the Novitiate.

Formal

- a) Self evaluation: twice a year (mid-year and end- of- year) the postulant will be asked to submit a self-evaluation commenting upon the areas outlined in the Guideline for Self-Evaluation (Appendix 1).
- b) Formation Team's / Formation community's comments: three months before the end of Postulancy, the formation staff will gather to speak about how they see the postulants are progressing. The information gathered at this meeting will be presented in a written paper and will be brought to the postulants.
- c) Peer evaluation: each postulant will submit a signed evaluation of her peers based on some guided questions. (Appendix 2) All comments should be positive and constructive. This will be done three months before the end of Postulancy.
- d) Formator's written report: At the end of the postulant year, the Postulant Mistress will give a written report of each postulant as specified in the Ordinances of the Institute for the Secretariat F-5. (Appendix 3) The assessment will be based on the evaluation materials gathered during the year. The report will be shared with the postulant individually and comments can be noted. It will then be sent to the Provincial.

3.6 Criteria for Entrance to the Novitiate

Candidates who can be admitted to the Novitiate should show:

- a) Sufficient human, psychological and affective maturity necessary for living a celibate life
- b) A progressive growth in self-knowledge and self-acceptance that acknowledge personal gifts and imperfections.
- c) Ability to live and work peacefully in a multi-cultural community and to resolve personal and communal conflicts constructively
- d) Acceptance of personal responsibility for personal development and formation as a response to a personal call from God.
- e) Openness to and readiness for guidance and accompaniment

- f) Fidelity to personal and communal prayer, sacraments, community obligations
- g) Active involvement in various aspects of the postulant program and showing generosity in doing her apostolate
- h) Greater inner freedom that facilitates her decision to live for Christ through a life of charity and service proper to our Institute

At the end of the Postulancy, the postulant will be expected to have acquired an understanding of her vocation with a certain clarity and thus be able to make a free and responsible choice for her life.

3.7 Allocation of Roles in the Formation Community

The community is indispensable to the process of formation in religious life. The fact that postulancy formation takes place in a ministerial community highlights the formative nature of the community.

3.7.1 The Superior

The local Superior is responsible for fostering a spiritual atmosphere within the community inspired by liturgy and firm values. “Well-ordered community life with its set times for prayer, reflection and socializing is conducive to spiritual growth”⁴⁵ Animated by the light of the Gospel and the wisdom of the charism, the Superior collaborates closely with the Postulant Mistress, giving her positive support and advice, but without intervening in her authority.

3.7.2 The Postulant Mistress

Appointed by the Provincial, the Postulant Mistress is responsible for the formation as a whole. She is the one who personally accompanies the candidates. With the support of the Superior and the Formation Team, she implements the formation program and the course of activities. Since accompaniment demands much attention, energy and time, it is recommended that the Postulant Mistress should not be engaged in other ministry when the number of candidates exceeds four. Moreover, the Postulant Mistress also pays attention to maintain a balance between work and relaxation so as not to become exhausted. To avoid confusion and

⁴⁵ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 47.

escapism, it is important that the candidates are fully aware of who is the formator placed at their side by the Institute.⁴⁶

3.7.3 The Formation Team

Members of the Formation Team are appointed by the Provincial. They share the responsibility of formation by visiting the candidate's family, teaching some of the subjects, attending group interview and team meetings. It is also their duty to give their objective opinion about the postulants during the regular formation team meetings.

⁴⁶ Ibid 48.

CONCLUSION

The truth will make you free. Jn.8:22

The general objective of the Pre-Novitiate is to help the individual discern carefully and then choose freely the consecrated life as her personal response to God's call. Therefore, formation should pay attention to the maturing of real freedom in the young person.⁴⁷ As Jesus says that the truth makes one free, real freedom is born from a true knowledge of oneself. Our formation then should help the person discover the truth of herself. To allow this to happen, the formation program must be directed towards the whole person, her past and present, her personality, behaviour and intention, and covers all dimensions of life: human, cultural, spiritual, and pastoral.⁴⁸ Personal accompaniment, spiritual direction, community living, prayer, liturgy and sacraments, systematic study of the Bible, catechism, and the heritage of the Institute, apostolic involvement, and group dynamics are part and parcel of the whole program. Through these means of formation and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, it is hoped that the one in formation will be free to become who she is meant to be in the Plan of God.

⁴⁷ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 57.

⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

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APPENDIX 1

A GUIDE FOR SELF –EVALUATION

An honest personal evaluation will give you valid information for discernment. Therefore, we would like you to sincerely evaluate yourself in the following areas and base your evaluation **not upon who you want to be but who you are here and now**. The questions are there to guide your thoughts. You need not answer each concern asked.

A. Psycho-emotional

a. Family

- i. How are my relationships with my father/ mother/ brothers/sisters/ relatives?
- ii. Do I communicate with them regularly?
- iii. Do I feel comfortable to talk about my family with others? Why? Why not?

b. Relationship with self, with peers, with authority

- i. How do I value myself? Do I have high or low self-esteem?
- ii. Am I confident? Insecure?
- iii. Can I communicate effectively with others?
- iv. Am I able to give effective feedback? Receive feedback?
- v. How do I handle conflicts? Withdraw/ confront/ dialogue?
- vi. Am I comfortable with my peers? My formator?
- vii. What is my attitude toward my formator? Submissive? Open with trust? Rebellious? Aggressive? Passive? Angry? Afraid? Hidden?
- viii. How do I see the personal encounters with the formator? Positive? Frightening? Helpful? Requirement to be fulfilled?
- ix. Do I dominate others? Or am I dominated by others?

c. Sexuality and relationship with the opposite sex

- i. Am I able to maintain healthy relationships with men?
- ii. Am I afraid to relate with them? Am I overly concerned about my relationships with men?
- iii. Do I feel comfortable to talk about these relationships with my peers? Formator? Do I keep them to myself?
- iv. Am I comfortable to be a woman?
- v. How do I handle sexual emotions?

d. Capacity to reflect

- i. Am I able to reflect on my experiences?
- ii. Am I able to express/communicate my experiences to others?
- iii. Am I able to internalize ideas, concepts?
- iv. Am I open to other's view, arguments, and reasoning?
- v. Am I able to integrate experiences?

B. Community Life

a. Interpersonal

- i. Am I friendly to other postulants?

- ii. Do I engage in conversation with most postulants? All? A few? Do I tend to distance myself from others?
 - iii. Am I accepted by others? Disliked?
 - iv. Am I generous to others?
 - v. Do I take initiative to help/ to reach out to others?
 - vi. Do I take my house responsibility seriously? Am I negligent? Careless?
 - vii. Do I participate actively in community activities? Am I always present? Absent? Late? Enjoy the company? Reluctant to go?
 - viii. Do I find it difficult to say NO to others?
 - ix. Do I feel free to be myself in the community? Do I feel pressured by others to do what they think is right?
 - b. Material things
 - i. Am I content with what is provided?
 - ii. Am I careful and considerate when using the things of the community?
 - iii. Do I value the things and properties of the community?
- C. Apostolate
 - a. Am I truly interested in my apostolate or do I see it as a requirement?
 - b. Am I able to handle the responsibility given to me?
 - c. Do I learn from the experiences? Gather insights?
- D. Prayer life and spiritual life
 - a. Prayer life
 - i. Do I value every day's morning and evening prayer? Mass?
 - ii. Do I take time to pray personally other than the community prayer?
 - iii. Do I take interest to learn more about prayer?
 - iv. Do I take seriously my daily consciousness examen and the monthly reflection day?
 - b. Religious motivation
 - i. Do I have a desire to persevere in searching for my vocation? Have I taken the necessary steps to make that desire into a reality, into a possible commitment?
 - ii. Why am I determined to join the Canossians?
 - c. Spiritual direction
 - i. Do I go regularly to my Spiritual Director ?
 - ii. Am I able to open myself to the Spiritual Director?
 - iii. Do I find the Spiritual Direction beneficial for my spiritual growth?
- E. Knowledge of the congregation
 - a. Do I have sufficient knowledge of the Congregation for vocation discernment?
 - b. Do I take interest in the life of the Congregation?
 - c. Am I attracted to the Canossian spirituality and the Canossian way of life?
 - d. Do I feel a growth in a sense of belonging to the Institute?
- F. Overall assessment of self
 - a. After a year of postulant formation, have I grown in the process? Grown much? Grown little? Not at all?
 - b. What do I consider as the areas of growth in my life during this year?
 - c. What do I consider as the possible areas of improvement for the future?
 - d. What would I consider as the best way to help me in my growth in the future?

(source: The Sacred Heart Province of the Philippines)

APPENDIX 2

Peer Evaluation

Name of the postulant: _____

1. Describe some of the gifts and talents of this person and use examples.
2. In what ways or in what aspects does this person need to improve?
3. How do you see this person in times of frustration or difficulty or inconvenience?
Describe about her ability to cope.
4. How would you describe this person's relational skills?

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3

A GUIDE LINE FOR DESCRIBING THE PERSONAL TRAITS OF THE CANDIDATE (F-5)

FAMILY SITUATION - relationship with the family

PHYSICAL TRAIT - health

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAIT

- responsible knowledge of self, of one's abilities and limitations
- emotional balance
- ability to relate serenely
- capacity to make decisions and courage in accepting the consequences
- ability to see reality and accept it
- openness to guidance
- sense of creativity

INTERLLECTUAL TRAIT

- general knowledge
- openness to learning
- special skills
- knowledge of language (which)
- ability to express herself by writing or orally
- openness to objective truth
- common sense and practicality
- sound judgment on self and others

PROFESSIONAL TRAIT

- skills regarding special areas
- interests and qualities for professional tasks

MORAL TRAIT

- uprightness and respectful frankness
- concern for and openness to others
- capacity for confidentiality
- coherence in life

SPIRITUAL TRAIT

- personal love for Jesus
- spirit of faith in looking at reality
- love for prayer
- gratuitous self-giving
- understanding the value of the cross in one's life
- living out poverty
- responsible obedience
- affective maturity

COMMUNITARIAN TRAIT

- openness to welcome others
- availability to give and receive forgiveness
- capacity for sharing

-openness to collaboration

APOSTOLIC TRAIT

- promptness in giving up one's preferences to accept a common project
- ability to take any opportunity to announce the Lord and his Gospel
- preference for those most in need
- earnestness in preparing for apostolate
- creativity

CHARISMATIC TRAIT

- special love for Jesus Crucified and Our Lady of Sorrows
- loving knowledge of St. Magdalene and her spirit
- sense of belonging to the Institute

APPENDIX 4

ECCLESIAL AND CONGREGATIONAL DOCUMENTS

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APPENDIX 5

A LIST OF AFRICAN PROVERBS ON AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES⁴⁹

Beauty

An ugly girl can bear children just as well as a pretty one. (Sudan)
Good manners constitute beauty. (Igbo)
The human being is more beautiful than gold. (Akan)
The mango shines but has a stone inside it. (Tanzania)

Community

A man must depend for his well-being on his fellow man. (Akan)
If all the people were to carry the heavens, no one individual would become humpbacked. (Akan)
One finger cannot lift up a thing. (Akan)
When a person descends from heaven, he descends into a human society. (Akan)

Humanity

All human beings are the children of God; no one is a child of the earth. (Akan)
Humanity has no boundary. (Akan)
It is a human being that counts; I call upon gold, it answers not; I call upon cloth, it answers not; it is a human being that counts. (Akan)

Individuality

It is by individual effort that we can struggle for our heads. (Akan)
The fingers of the hand are not equal in length. (Akan)

Knowledge

All things depend on experience. (Akan)
Experience is the mother of knowledge. (Swahili)
Knowledge is like a garden; if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested. (Akan)
The freedom that comes from ignorance enslaves the one who entertains it. (Ewe)

⁴⁹ K. GYEKYE, *African Cultural Values*, 187-194.

Personal Responsibility

A person becomes what he/ she wants to become. (Swahili)
He who gets blisters from the hoe handle will not die of hunger. (Swahili)
Life is as you yourself make it. (Akan)
Living is intention. (Swahili)
One is not born with a bad head, but one takes it on earth. (Akan)
Only he who goes to the forest comes back with firewood. (Swahili)
The lizard does not eat pepper for the frog to sweat. (Akan)

Virtue

A man's knowledge cannot be read in his face, nor can a woman's virtue. (Swahili)
An unpleasant truth is better than a pleasant falsehood. (Swahili)
Avarice is the root of all evil. (Swahili)
Gentle character is that which enables the rope of life to stay unbroken in one's hands. (Yoruba)
Good character is a person's guard. (Yoruba)
Humility is the crown of virtue. (Egypt)
Ingratitude is the worst of sins. (Egypt)
The decline and fall of a nation begins in its homes. (Akan)
To lose one's temper is to astray. (Swahili)
To own a few things is better than to be a thief. (Akan)
To possess a virtue is better than gold. (Akan)
When virtue finds a town, the town thrives and abides. (Akan)

Work

Do you want to harvest corn without cultivating corn? (Sudan)
There is no other thing you get out of laziness than poverty. (Akan)
The person who goes to draw water does not drink mud. (Akan)
The person who comes round to lick the soup will never be filled. (Akan)