



E-BULLETIN #20

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

ITEM 44

THEOLOGICAL FORMATION FOR LAITY [III]

OUR PRINCIPLES AND PRAXIS [cont'd]

6. UAC As A Tool For Lay Empowerment

UAC is an auxiliary body at the service of the Church and therefore it does not seek anything for itself. In our UAC groups in Nagpur we focus on all our members actively participating in their parish and building up that parish. People who temporarily withdraw from their parishes are trained and supported to work together to overcome their apprehensions and be pioneers in building up the body of Christ in those parishes. The parish situation has not changed much; but much change has happened to these people and they serve the community with joy.

There is a big issue facing us as religious. If in Provinces we are to be successful in promoting UAC we need to develop a common conviction about what we want to do, and SAC Fathers and Sisters must be able to share leadership, witnessing to an emerging model of Church and ministry. There is no future to a clergy/religious dominated model of Church and mission in first world parish communities.

The SAC General Assembly document "**In the Union to Evangelize**" [n. 12] speaks of "*charismatically rich ecclesiology and charismatically poor ecclesiology*". Charismatically poor ecclesiology will see little growth in lay empowerment. Pallottine formation must give members of Pallottine core communities a charismatically rich ecclesiology which then becomes a source of lay empowerment. We must meticulously reflect on this issue and find ways to broaden the ecclesiology we live and share locally. If our ecclesiology is broad and rich then, wherever we live and work, many people who work with us and are associated with us will be animated and empowered to become more active and come to know the richness of our Pallottine charism. I recall this statement made by a lady after attending the first lesson in our UAC Training Manual: "*I have known the Pallottine Fathers for a long time; but I never knew that St Vincent Pallotti was so much in favour of lay involvement. I am encouraged to learn about him more*". Many other persons in the group agreed with her.

7. Advanced Theological Training

According to the methodology we follow, we do not offer adults a theological formation right at the beginning. We start with practical pastoral training which enables laity to actively and meaningfully engage in local pastoral situations, like how to make a good pastoral visit or how to conduct a meeting. We offer a deeper theological formation to those interested to learn more. Many lay persons opt to attend this

programme. Even when we offer theological insights it is oriented to guide and motivate them in active ministry. Whether or not these lay people actually develop good pastoral service skills will depend on accompanying pastoral guides and mentors – often not available! Many pastoral leaders do not have the skills to accompany interested lay people. Theoretical training in centres is not enough; they have to be locally guided in pastoral fields to respond to local needs. Here again one of the priorities UAC could focus on is to provide formation for laity and accompany them so that they are actually supported to engage in select ministry fields. PAC's efforts in lay theological formation are always directed to actual empowerment of laity.

Another important aspect of our formation is that formation is integrative – it integrates theory and praxis, faith and life, knowledge and experience, spirituality and daily life issues, secular and sacred. We have to recognize that every faith issue is connected to real life and real life issues are also deeply inter-connected with faith. Sunday Eucharist is not over with Sunday attendance at Mass; it is linked with and affects how we live our lives on weekdays. Formation must enable people to develop this integrated approach to life and issues; or else it will be ineffective.

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ITEM 43

REVIVE, RE-ENKINDLE AND UNITE; A CALL TO NEW EVANGELIZATION IN AMERICA

Every age, across the varied vicissitudes of history, witnesses the unique gift of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mission of Christ for the salvation of humanity. This is evident in the deep thirst of the human soul for God, amidst the rapidly changing cultural landscape that confuses modern attitudes towards religious values. The Church in America could also be seen as facing a similar situation since, contrary to current secular trends, thousands of adults throughout the United States received the sacrament of Baptism at the Easter Vigil Mass in 2012. This crucial circumstance places the core responsibility upon the Church to discover new ways of evangelization and dynamic means of providing pastoral care to the people of God.

Our apostolic mission thus requires us to respond to the obstacles to faith caused by the present scenario of the powerful political and cultural currents seeking to alter the sanctity of the definition of marriage and family, the impact of a radically secularized culture frantically eroding traditional Christian values and numerous other hot-button issues, including the scar caused by recent allegations on the clergy. This decline calls for a transformation, demanding an apostolate that authentically witnesses the holiness of the Church. Therefore, a revival of faith in its essence would demand a spirit of constancy and creativity towards faithfulness to counter the urgent challenges of the Gospel in our time.

It is also the core of our apostolic vocation to commit ourselves towards the authentic development of every human person with their inviolable dignity. There is a growing need for pastoral care towards the millions maimed in body and spirit, the under-privileged, the vulnerable and the victims of abuse at various levels. It is possible to seek the collaboration of the faithful to be the sign of the Divine Presence to vulnerable humanity seeking acceptance and understanding. The zeal of lay collaborators willing to minister to the needy is commendable. Above all, it is necessary to build up a civilization of love and subsequently to create a unique ecclesial environment fostering fraternal charity.

Another important concern of the Church is fostering the spirit of unity among the faithful. A nation applauded as the 'melting pot of cultures' is not spared from the distress of its inherent bias of racism and other disparities and their impact becomes manifest in the Church as well. Pope Benedict XVI, in his speech with the US bishops in their recent *Ad limina* visit, called for greater unity to counter the "forces of disaggregation within the Church which increasingly represents a grave obstacle to her mission in the United States." Obviously the Church continues to make every effort to defend and foster the spirit of unity in the context of various labels, factions, and other signs of disparity.

In the above context a vital renewal in the Church is both a gift from God as well as a task of the Church. While cherishing the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is also our responsibility to bear a credible and attractive witness to the redemptive and transformative power of the Gospel. The authentic witnessing of the Gospel must in turn create an environment of love and fraternal charity. In order to achieve this objective it is essential to unite everyone in Christ and unify every effort towards the fuller realization of the mission of the Church. In short, our apostolate is to join hands with the Church that earnestly seeks to strengthen the vitality of Christian life amidst present day challenges.

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