



The Nature of Religious Formation

Christine Myers, PhD

Religious formation at every level is based in the conviction that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. John 14:6). “At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth” (John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae* 5). Religious formation must therefore be understood in terms of growth in a living relationship with the Lord that encompasses the whole of who we are and what we do – intellect, will, desires, relationships, work and recreation.

As disciples of Jesus, our formation is life-long and nourished by the encounter with Jesus Himself in the teaching and Sacraments He entrusted to the Church. It is not a path walked in isolation but rather a pilgrimage made within the communion of the Church. We journey together in the transformation of our lives in Christ, from darkness to light, becoming day by day the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16).

Understood this way, religious formation means learning to live one’s whole life in all its dimensions as a total gift of self to Christ in the communion of the Church. Knowing ourselves to be loved to the point of folly by God, we surrender ourselves to Him and give ourselves to serve others.

Religious formation in this context of divine love becomes a life-giving communication of the love and truth of God. It is a work of the Church that gives our lives – whether we are young or old – direction, meaning and a mission. Once we have encountered Christ and our lives have begun to be transformed, we very naturally desire to share with others the truth, goodness and beauty of the Lord and His Church. The Lord Himself begins to send us to others and to instruct us. What greater adventure can there be than following the plan of God for our lives?

Bishop David Konderla’s letter, *God Builds a House*, points us in this direction by holding before our eyes three core virtues that we are to practice everywhere and at all times. First, we are always in need of “encountering Christ” who is alive in the Church and active on our behalf through all seven Sacraments. In particular, our faith-filled conviction of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation are expressed by attending Mass, Adoration and Confession. This faith is supported by devotion to the Mother of God through prayer and Marian consecration. Second, we are “transformed in Christ” by making Him the center of our daily lives and recognizing our duty to follow Him and to make Him known. Third, we are “united in Christ” as a local Church comprised of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and locations. Our bond of charity must stretch beyond our parish or ethnic group to reach all our brothers and sisters. In these three points, we find the overture to our common opus of religious formation – whether at the parish, in the home, with children, youth or adults.