

# Perseverance in Religious Life and Ministry: Starting from Initial Formation

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# Perseverance and Commitment

- Cultural Shifts
  - Lifelong commitments no longer valued as possible or essential to personal integrity.
- Lifelong Commitment is an invitation to growth and transformation in sometimes painful ways.
  - Developmental stages and the crises that signal their advent.
  - New societal, cultural, and ecclesial realities.
  - Discovery of truth about oneself and possibility of integration.

# Perseverance for Its Own Sake

- May be neither healthy nor holy
  - Stagnation, bitterness, depression, anger;
  - acting in or acting out;
  - Entitlement, crankiness, joyless living;
  - Unproductive or counter-productive ministry
  - Burnout.
- Healthy and holy perseverance
  - Humble self-discovery;
  - Faith, hope, and love in response to disillusionment;
  - Passionate commitment.

# For Reflection and Conversation

- What is the story of your perseverance in religious life?
  - Times of testing and crisis
  - Experiences of transformation, change, and deepening of your commitment.
- What common themes emerge from the stories that are shared?

# Passionate Commitment

- A pervasive and long-lasting state of being energized and invigorated by work rather than drained and exhausted by it;
- thriving and loving one's work in spite of the personal and environmental obstacles one might face in it;
- balance and harmony with other aspects of one's life;
- energizing and invigorating those with whom one works.

# Characteristics of Passionately Committed Individuals

- Boundaries
- Balance
- Openness
  - Especially to feedback and criticism
- Adaptiveness
- Transcendence
- Humility

# Building the Foundation for Healthy Perseverance

- Learn to read and know oneself.
- Learn to read and know others.
- Learn appropriate ways to be read and known by others.
- Learn to recognize and read loneliness, sexuality, and power.
- Learn to recognize and read experiences of disillusionment.

# Learning to read and know oneself

- Pay attention to motivations, satisfactions, desires, and what brings you joy
  - For what are you longing and looking for?
  - Joy when you get it; anger when you don't.
- Discover, acknowledge, and befriend your shadow self.
  - Not weaknesses but the shadow side of virtue
    - The brighter the light; the darker the



# Confronting Personal Shadow

- Looking at self without denial or illusion
  - The self I don't want to know about
- Safety
  - How am I dangerous?
- Power
  - How am I manipulative, domineering, controlling, seductive?
- Goodness
  - How am I like those I consider bad?

# For Personal Reflection

- If your shadow were a person, what would he be like?
  - Physical Appearance
  - Attitude
  - Behavior
- Engage in an imaginary conversation with this person as you imagine him.
  - How does that go?
  - What do you feel toward him?
  - What do sense he feels toward you?

# For Personal Reflection

- When are you most aware of the presence of your shadow?
- When do you think others are most aware of the presence of your shadow?
- What role has your shadow played in your vocational journey?

# Learn to read and know others

- Not everyone will love you.
- People who say they love you may not actually love you.
- Obedience to authority is important but leaders and bosses are all flawed and sometimes very dangerously flawed.
- We are not as important to other people as we might like to think or as they tell us we are.

# Relational Styles

**DOMINANT**  
*Managerial/Autocratic*

**DISMISSIVE**

+self/-others

**Hostile-dominant**

**Friendly-dominant**

**SECURE**

+self/+others

**HOSTILE**

*Aggressive/Sadistic*

**Hostile-submissive**

**FRIENDLY**

*Cooperative/Conventional*

**Friendly-submissive**

**AMBIVALENT**

-self/-others

**SUBMISSIVE**

*Self-effacing/Masochistic*

**ANXIOUS**

-self/+others

# For Discussion in Groups

- What do you find as the most prevalent relation style among the candidates and students with whom you work?
- What practical ways are there to invite candidates to grow toward security throughout initial formation?
- Is there anything systemic that prevents or impedes this growth?

# The Reality of External Formative Forces

- They are real, powerful, and motivated toward influencing individuals to conform to their wishes.
- They are in competition with each other and the self is the battleground of this competition.
- They are unlikely to change and self does not have the power to influence a formative force.
- There are real consequences to acting contrary to a formative force.

# EXTERNAL FORMATIVE FORCES





# Engaging the Formative Forces

- Each one matters to some extent
  - How do I resolve the competition for my mind, heart, and soul?
- The self matters
  - What is it like to be me in response to these demands?
- The tension arising from competing demands and desires seeks resolution.
- Premature resolution of the tension thwarts growth toward integration.
  - Dismissal of the Self as irrelevant or meaningless.
  - Dismissal of Formative Force as irrelevant or

# Learning to be known and read by others

- Skills for intimacy
  - Appropriate self disclosure and boundaries.
  - Making one's work and other actions available for critical feedback.
- Seeking accurate and honest feedback
  - What is it like for others to be with me?
  - Transference and projection.
  - Responding to criticism constructively
    - How might it be true?
    - What shall I do with this information about how others experience me?

# Learn to Recognize Loneliness, Sexuality, and Power

- Loneliness is not an unfortunate side effect of religious life; it is the point.
  - Formation for loneliness.
  - Community as shared loneliness.
- There is more to sexuality than sex.
  - Pervasive nature of sexual energy.
  - Non-punishing observation of attraction and healthy response.
- Accept the reality of one's own power over others.
- Learn the difference between power and powerlessness.

# Prepare for Disillusionment

- Experiences of betrayal, abandonment, exploitation, and rejection by
  - Church
  - Order
  - Leadership and Authority
  - Community
  - God
  - Self
- Responding with faith, hope, and love.

# Steps to Health and Holiness

- Name reality without denial or illusion
  - Tell the truth about what is happening to you
- Engage in honest self-awareness
  - What is it like to be you?
  - Feelings and needs
- Listen for call and vocation
  - What kind of a person I am called to be?
  - What kind of person do I choose to be?
  - Attend to conflict between these two.
- Choose in freedom among behavioral options

# For Reflection and Discussion

- What opportunities are there to engage candidates and students in this kind of reflection?
- What will they find most difficult?
- How can we best help them?