

ST. BEDE ABBEY CONTINUING EDUCATION POLICY

Introduction

A) The meaning of continuing formation: The process of continuing formation is here understood as all initiatives undertaken to promote the on-going conversion and other kinds of growth and development to which a St. Bede monk commits himself by his profession of perpetual vows and, if he has been called, by his acceptance of Holy Orders.

B) The scope of continuing formation: As the profession of perpetual vows involves a man's commitment of his whole being the service of the Lord and his kingdom, so continuing formation concerns the whole person: spiritual growth, psychological maturing, intellectual development, and the acquisition of skills appropriate to a person's evolving responsibilities.

C) The need for continuing formation: This need is rooted in the developmental nature of the human person and the evolving character of human societies and cultures. Contemporary Christian thought is especially sensitive to the various stages and levels of natural and supernatural development from youth to old age, and to the need to provide direction and support for healthy development at each stage and level. So, too, rapidly evolving changes in contemporary conditions of living and in social mores and values, together with new advances in scripture studies, the theological sciences and pastoral practice, require the church's religious and priests to cultivate personal and professional development adequate to meet the changing conditions of the times.

D) Official promotion of continuing formation: The *Rule of Benedict* (=RB) echoes the consistent teaching of Scripture that the Christian life is not a fixed and stationary condition but a process marked by growth and movement to a goal.¹ The explicit teaching of the Second Vatican Council on continuing formation of religious and priests² is repeated in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (=CIC)³ and in the *The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* (=C)⁴, as well as in other official church documents.

Policy 1: Each monk has the personal responsibility of continuing his own spiritual, doctrinal, and practical formation throughout his entire life (C 55; cf. *Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life* 18; CIC 661).

Implementation

1. This responsibility is exercised first of all by the cultivation of a deepening relationship with the crucified and risen Lord, expressed through humble service of the brothers, daily fidelity in the community's worship, work and discipline, and the faithful practice of *lectio*.

¹ Cf. e.g., key texts in *RB*: "...the road that leads to salvation is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run the path of God's commandments..." (*RB* Prologue 48-49). "Are you hastening to your heavenly home? Then with Christ's help keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teachings and virtues we mentioned above, and under God's protection you will reach them" (*RB* 73, 8-9).

² "Throughout their lives religious should labor earnestly to perfect their spiritual, doctrinal and professional development. As far as possible, superiors should provide them with the opportunity, the resources, and the time to do so" (*Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life* 18). "Since in our times human culture and the sacred sciences are making new advances, priests are urged to develop their knowledge of divine and human affairs aptly and uninterruptedly...The priests may more easily pursue their studies and learn methods of evangelization and of the apostolate to better effect, every care should be taken to provide them with opportune aids" (*Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry* 19).

³ "Throughout their entire life religious are to continue carefully their own spiritual, doctrinal and practical formation, and superiors are to provide them with the resources and time to do this" (CIC 661). "...religious clerics are bound by the prescriptions of Canon 279, #2..." (CIC 672). "In accord with the prescriptions of particular law, priests are to attend pastoral lectures which are to be held after priestly ordination; at times determined by the same particular law they are also to attend lectures and theological meetings or conferences which afford them opportunities to acquire fuller knowledge of the sacred sciences and of pastoral methods" (CIC 279, #2).

⁴ "Each monk has the personal responsibility of continuing his own spiritual, doctrinal, and practical formation throughout his entire life. The abbot is to take care that the resources and time are available for this pursuit" (C 55).

2. Each monk should, as his needs dictate, seek direction and support for his personal growth from others: from his abbot; from a spiritual director or companion; from a support group of prayer and dialog.
3. Each monk should budget his time in such a way that he can regularly draw upon the abundant resources of the abbey collection of books and periodicals, or on similar sources, to nourish his spiritual, doctrinal and professional growth.
4. Each monk should, as circumstances allow, take advantage of lectures and workshops that will foster his personal and professional growth, especially those offered in the locality or in the diocese.
5. With regard to longer, formal programs for professional or personal development, each monk should bring to the attention of his abbot in ample time the needs he feels and, if possible, information about programs that can meet these needs.

Policy 2: Priests and permanent deacons of the community are obliged, according to the norms of Canon Law, to continue the pursuit of sacred studies after their ordination (CIC 672 and 279 #2).

Implementation

1. In addition to the initiatives listed under Policy 1, and in accord with the type of priestly ministry they exercise, priests of the community should:
 - a) include in their regular reading one or more theological or pastoral journals that can help them keep abreast of developments in the sacred sciences and pastoral practice;
 - b) be aware of and consult, as needed, books and other printed material, videotapes and audiotapes that can help them in their ministry;
 - c) as circumstances allow, attend lectures and workshops concerned directly with continuing priestly formation, especially those offered in the locality and diocese;
 - d) given the central importance of preaching in their ministry, engage in periodic assessment of their preaching with the help of appropriate literature, invited critiques or an occasional workshop, and by such means seeks to improve their preaching skills.
2. Permanent deacons of the community should use similar means to continue their formation in accord with the type of ministry they exercise.

Policy 3: The abbot shall fulfill his own particular responsibilities for the continuing formation of the community, taking care that resources and time are available for each monk to fulfill his responsibility to engage in continuing formation (C 55; Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life 18).

Implementation

1. The abbot shall foster the formative influences of the community's life, assign offices and work and responsibilities in such wise that confreres have time for individual formation activities, and assist confreres, as may be needed or helpful, in their personal growth.
2. The abbot shall give regular spiritual conferences to the community (cf. C 56), shall provide for an annual retreat at the monastery, and ensure that all confreres make an annual retreat.
3. The abbot shall arrange that community members professionally trained in sacred sciences and pastoral practice, as well as those who have participated in spiritual, theological or pastoral programs, share the fruits of their studies or formative experiences with the community.

4. The abbot shall see that competent persons from outside the community are engaged to present appropriate programs to the community; these programs shall consist of at least two one-day workshops or a series of conferences each year.
5. The abbot shall see that information about the broad range of means for continuing formation is made available to the community.
6. The abbot shall, as far as possible, see that appropriate preparation and continuing support is given when a confrere must make a major change in his life, e.g., at the time of retirement or at the assignment of a new and major office.
7. The abbot shall annually review with each confrere needs in the area of continuing formation.
8. Shortly after the annual installation of the senior council, the abbot shall consult the council about continuing formation policies and their implementation.

Policy 4: The abbot may appoint a director of continuing formation or several confreres to assist him in his responsibilities for the continuing formation of community members.

Implementation

Among the ways a continuing formation director or others may assist the abbot are:

1. the seeking of information and help from the formation directors of other abbeys, from the Religious Life and Ministry Committee and the Formation Committee of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, from the coordinator of Ministry to Priests in the Peoria Diocese, and from the National Organization of Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy;
2. the gathering and disseminating to the community of information about current continuing formation program;
3. proposals for the acquisition of appropriate new library materials and bringing to the attention of the community library holdings that are especially helpful for continuing formation;
4. the making of the practical arrangements for community workshops or similar programs held at the monastery.

Policy 5: The importance of the continuing formation of community members requires commensurate efforts to provide adequate funding for such formation (cf. C 55; *Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life* 18; *CIC* 661).

Implementation

1. When an annual abbey budget is established, it shall include as adequate funding as possible for continuing formation.
2. Efforts shall be made to establish an endowment fund for the continuing formation of community members.