

**CHRIST'S SHEPHERD  
AMONG THE DISCIPLES:**

**RE-EXPLORING FORMATION MINISTRY'S  
SCRIPTURAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND  
THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING  
IN  
THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT**

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The dwindling number of Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) college-level seminarians in the Philippines proceeding to their novitiate prompted this researcher’s study of both the situation of these seminarians and contextualizing scriptural, philosophical, and theological principles for a ministerial response.

***The Pastoral Situation and Method of the Study***

The aforementioned formands begin with a good number in their first-year in the college-level seminary ranging from fifteen to forty-five freshmen formands in the recent five academic years since 2010. About a quarter of this number continue unto their senior college seminary year and a postulancy year after their college graduation; but those entering the novitiate after postulancy from each of these classes ranged from 0 for two consecutive academic years to 1 to 2 novices for the more recent three years.

The contemporary Filipino young persons’ characteristics strongly influence the OMI college-level seminarians themselves, based on what these formands usually narrate of their seminary formative experience for decision-making whether to proceed further into the next stages of the OMI seminary formation. What are the qualities of the present generation of Filipino young persons to whom the said formands belong that the formation program can recognize and respond to appropriately, also taking into account the formands’ expressed needs in formation? What meaning does a formand place on his

stay in this formation? What scriptural, philosophical, theological understanding and principles of the Oblate charism can serve as foundational bases for supporting them in their needs? These are essential questions to which this study brings responses, insights, and recommendations.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy provided this researcher with a reflective space through distanciation process of situational narrative that reappropriated the scriptural text of the Shepherd from John 10:1-21 into the situation for inspiration of pastoral response. Ricoeur explains the *hermeneutical distanciation* that allows the pastoral situation to be expressed through a narrative text. Ricoeur elucidates that when an episode became expressed through a narrative (biblical) text, this sets free the text "to enter into relation with all the other texts that come to take the place of the circumstantial reality referred to by living speech" in other times and places and circumstances.<sup>1</sup> An interplay of Filipino philosophical principles and scriptural hermeneutics of the Shepherd with theologizing and reflections on OMI congregational charism contextualized this study in the pastoral situation, as aided by this researcher's Doctorate of Ministry degree studies and dissertation at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, USA until his successful paper-presentation in 2015.

The flow of this study was guided by the qualitative research method of Richard Osmer's practical theologizing through the tasks of descriptive empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. It flexibly moves back and forth to tasks that have already been explored while interrelating them, since "it is helpful to think of practical

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Vol 2 of Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 109.

theological interpretation as more like a *spiral* than a circle.”<sup>2</sup> The phenomenological method of inquiry was utilized for interviews and surveys with the formands mainly and former formands, as well as with the Oblate formators and with relevant respondents.

The descriptive empirical task involved priestly listening and attending which relate to other persons with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness.<sup>3</sup> This researcher employed informal, semiformal, and formal attending. Informal attending included observations on ordinary activities to bring out spontaneous experiences of the respondents. Semiformal attending used specific methods and activities providing structure and regularity to attending which were plenary and group sessions on relevant formative themes with the formands, and follow-up surveys or interviews with them and with the formators as well. Formal attending investigated on particular episodes, circumstances, and contexts through empirical research and data on the seminary’s enrolment statistics, Filipino socio-cultural environment, and comparative experiences of other seminary programs’ formators in other congregations and the diocese.

### ***Oblate Formation and Filipino Youth Trends***

Oblate formation respects the dialogue between God in His love and the formand to freely respond in love to the call of Christ. While the formand discerns Christ’s call, he develops acceptance of himself.<sup>4</sup> Review of previous resources necessarily includes an understanding of the Oblate formation process specifically on the Oblate college-level

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 33-39.

<sup>4</sup>Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *General Norms for Oblate Formation* (Rome: General House, 2011), no. 27.

seminary program which is part of the pre-novitiate stage. The formands are to be prepared for the aspirancy (referring to the next level of postulancy) and the novitiate in a number of important categories: community life, academics, spiritual growth, discernment, physical, affective and social life, and pastoral development.<sup>5</sup> These aspects of seminary formation provide a process for the formands to go through the transition from their previous life with their families and mostly coming as new high school graduates. Formators can assist formands to be more attentive to their personal experiences in order to respond to their call in discernment.<sup>6</sup> A unified personality is formed through the elements including human, intellectual, pastoral-missionary and spiritual in view of achieving an integral person.<sup>7</sup> Transitioning from the wider Filipino socio-cultural milieu involves a dimension of serious personal involvement.

Oblate formation is an ongoing process.<sup>8</sup> At the first stage of Oblate formation, the pre-novitiate, essential qualities for formands are signs of an Oblate vocation, maturity, knowledge of the faith and Christian teaching, practice of the faith in one's life, intention to follow Christ, continuity of seeking God's will, and some attraction to the Oblate life.<sup>9</sup> As the first stage of formation, the emphasis is on the human and Christian preparation of the pre-novices.<sup>10</sup> Challenges faced by the young formands can be

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<sup>5</sup>Formation Committee, "Initial Formation Directory for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Philippine Province," (OMI Philippine Provincial Office, Cotabato City, Philippines), 2003, 3.

<sup>6</sup>Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *General Norms for Oblate Formation*, no. 29.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., no. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., no. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., no. 106.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., nos. 158-159.

daunting considering their original socio-cultural environment and entering Church and social expectations attached to those discerning vocation to ordained and/or religious life.

Previous research studies on current trends among the Filipino young persons' characteristics and concerns provide a background of such socio-cultural environment.

Fr. Catalino Arevalo, SJ, a noted Filipino theologian, in one article he wrote described the Filipino youth of today as needing support in their faith:

The well-known shortage of priests and even religious; the lack of religious and catechetical formation (it has been estimated that less than 10% of Filipino children receive adequate catechetical instruction) especially in the urban areas, but increasingly in rural areas as well; the massive population movements toward the cities, where traditional family structures break down, and with them the handing-on of traditional christian belief and values; the moral impossibility for traditional parishes to reach the majority of children and teen-agers in the massive slums which are rising around big cities—all these factors contribute to the erosion of faith among the youth in the Philippines.<sup>11</sup>

In a 2009 congress on Filipino youth sponsored by a leading catholic school, Xavier School in Metro Manila, the keynote speaker Emily Abrera, chairperson emeritus of McCann Worldgroup, characterized the Filipino youth as living their lives more virtually through text messaging and the internet than interacting with physical persons. “The lifestyles of our youth have increasingly become sedentary.”<sup>12</sup> The cellphone is indispensably used. On the positive side, Abrera observed that the youth devoted time for study. This, however, was directed to earning much and quickly. She noted: “Jobs and careers that promise a quick return on their educational investments—financially and

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<sup>1</sup>C.G.Arevalo, SJ, “The Relevance of Pedro Calungsod, How Relevant Is Pedro Calungsod to the Filipino Youth Today?,” under “Blessed Pedro Calungsod,” Catholic Media Network, [1]. [http://www.catholicmedianetwork.org/cmn/Filipino\\_Youth.html](http://www.catholicmedianetwork.org/cmn/Filipino_Youth.html) (accessed Jan. 21, 2013).

<sup>12</sup>Emily Abrera, “Understanding Today’s Filipino Youth and Family,” Xavier School, posted by Gary Garcia, July 24, 2009, [1]. <http://www.xs.edu.ph/?p=6511> (accessed Jan. 21, 2013).

physically—provide a more tangible realization of an improved lot in life. Call center and OFW (overseas Filipino worker) jobs seem to be the new ‘aspirational’ professions.”<sup>13</sup>

Abrera noted more contemporary challenges. Most Filipino youth do not live with both parents due to the need for one parent to work and live elsewhere. Some have divorced or separated parents. There is generally no sense of a need for silence. “This young generation has a high tolerance for noise, having also spent a great deal of time in malls where one must shout to be heard.” There is a relative loss of a sense of the sacred.

Hector Teodoro Miranda, coordinator for Career Education at the De La Salle University Office of Counseling and Career Services in Manila in 2010, wrote an article on the Filipino youth for the Annual Conference of the Anthropological Association of the Philippines. He asserted that expectations from parents and family are one source of pressure among the Filipino youth, along with competition faced at pursuing a career.<sup>14</sup> He referred to Donald Super’s study of the reasons for career anxiety which are a lack of self-understanding, occupational information, and resources, and social expectations, social adjustment, adjustment to authority, adjustment to co-workers, family and home demands, and community adjustment.<sup>15</sup> Factors that influence the goals and aspirations of the Filipino youth are (in rank order): “monetary remunerations, desire to help family members, self-actualization needs, influence of significant others and lastly, awareness of the needs of the community.”

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Hector Teodoro Miranda, “Career Anxiety: The Filipino Youth in Crisis,” 4, *27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Anthropological Association of the Philippines*, University of the Philippines Visayas, Iloilo City, Oct. 20-22 (2005), [3], <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17812386/Career-Anxiety-The-Filipino-Youth-in-Crisis-by-Hector-Teodoro-Miranda-DLSU> (accessed Jan. 15, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 5.

Fr. Martin Macasaet, SDB, in his presentation at the Asia Oceania Formation Conference described the Filipino youth of today as tending to be individualistic.<sup>16</sup> Fr. John Sakai, SJ, described the stage of youth in his contribution at the same conference.<sup>17</sup> He views emerging adulthood among the youth as characterized by change and an exploration of possible life directions. The youth need a community that provides them a means to become aware of their vocation in life and for deeper prayer life. Discernment of vocation makes one aware if the priesthood or religious life is one's true vocation.

In the same meeting Archbishop (now Cardinal) Orlando Quevedo, OMI, of the Archdiocese of Cotabato described the situation of the young Filipinos.<sup>18</sup> The young people live in the world where the challenges of materialism have to be faced by professing to living not of this world. The Oblate charism offers values of communion of mind and heart so that dialogue with the world can happen. Part of the challenge of formation is the background of poverty of formands with some lack in faith background. Some formands come from families with problems. The evangelical counsels of the Oblates, which are the vows, can be the direction that challenges the technological trends.

These sources imply that both self-awareness and social awareness can help the Filipino young including the formands to become more integrated persons.

### *Understanding the Young Formands*

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<sup>16</sup>Fr. Martin Macasaet, SDB, Lecture, biennial conference of the Asia-Oceania Formators' Conference, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 13 to 19, 2013.

<sup>17</sup>Fr. John Sakai, SJ, lecture, same conference.

<sup>18</sup>Bishop Orlando Quevedo, OMI, lecture, same conference.



Understanding the young Oblate college-level formands in the Philippines who face socio-cultural challenges can help make the formation ministry relevant to them. The formands themselves becoming aware of their contemporary situation as young persons was seen as an engaging starting point.<sup>19</sup> The formands' faith formation that they have received prior to entering the seminary can serve as a gauge for the level of discussion and sharing on life with them.

They were asked what words or imagery describe the Filipino young people of today and what these meant. A complementary question was what they viewed as positive and negative characteristics of the Filipino young persons of today, inclusive of themselves. Their responses would provide understanding of challenges they also face.

All of the fifty-five formands in academic year 2012-2013 responded to the questionnaires. There were a higher number of formands writing negative descriptions of the Filipino young than positive ones. Even their positive responses were mixed with negative elements. On the positive side, the first main line of positive description dwelt on the Filipino young as technological. The eight formands wrote such a positive response but had a taint of the negative. They described the Filipino young as fast learners in "computers, cellphones, and sex." Dependence on technology veers towards the fashionable. They find technology not traditions as developing their talents faster. Their time to attend the Mass competes with time for technology like facebook, twitter, and google. They enjoy themselves despite worries and concerns because of technology. Along with this, they are also metrosexual which means being conscious with their looks.

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<sup>19</sup>Oblate College-level formands in all year-levels in academic year 2012-2013, survey by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 31, 2013.

Six formands wrote the second main line of descriptive words such as: enthusiastic, joyful, relaxed, and hospitable while they get influenced by foreign youth or figures, further explained as “I am not looking on the bad side of reality today because it will make things difficult.” The six formands moreover wrote that they are thirsty for the Word of God but they “find Sunday worship as not fulfilling because it is boring or the approach is not fit to their time.” The third main line describes them as “modernized,” written by three formands. They are adapting to the fast changes in the society; and they even have the capability to change the culture they are in nowadays. This was, however, mixed with understanding such characteristic as doing what they wish.

On the negative side, thirteen formands wrote the first main line of responses: being stubborn or being different for the sake only of being different. Along this line, they become independent-minded because of technology, especially social media, but with negative implications. They interpret being more liberated as imitating the other young in other countries uncritically. They described the youth as in their varying predilection for “food,” depicting their instability with making choices in daily life “because different personalities have different tastes.” Ten formands wrote the second main line of being modern explained as being adventurous and curious that get into troubles. They are not content as they try to acquire also what gadgets their friends have. Nine formands wrote the third main line that they are “materialistic and selfish or self-centered,” “consumerist,” and “highly secular/hedonistic.” Three formands wrote the fourth main line describing the young as “worldly.” “Filipino values are dying/diminishing.” “Many young get easily addicted to worldly things like gadgets which are part of the trends and can also include sex.” They are “socializers,” as “young

Filipinos nowadays are prone to social occasions or parties that give the idea that they are not ready for knowledge yet.” Three other formands wrote the fifth main line pertaining to bad attitudes. They are “positively active and friendly, however, ill-mannered and insensitive,” “disrespectful,” and “conceited, insistent, and trendy” that get them into negative experiences.

This researcher complemented the foregoing data-gathering with his designed questionnaire to corroborate with the formands earlier researches on the Filipino youth and an interview with their rector.<sup>20</sup>

This researcher asked the formands to rate the ten sentences depicting positive characteristics of Filipino young persons today and ten sentences depicting their negative characteristics according to their observation of the young, inclusive of themselves. They used a Likert-scale of 1 to 5 with the following levels: rating 1 is not real; rating 2 is somewhat real; rating 3 is moderately real; rating 4 is very real; and rating 5 is extremely/most real, verbally explained to mean also as degree of truthfulness or being experienced by themselves.<sup>21</sup> The salient points of the perceived trends are qualitatively presented and analyzed in the following averaged results.

Most prominent characteristics of the Filipino young today are their being creative in approaching the society and are fast-learners in utilizing information technology for good purposes, rated as very real by the formands. The young look for persons to imitate as their models; and they tend to relate to God in finding His will for

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<sup>20</sup>Oblate College-level formands in all year-levels in academic year 2012-2013, survey by this researcher, Cotabato City, January 31, 2013; Fr. Ross Kapunan, OMI, rector of the Oblate college-level seminary, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 23, 2013.

<sup>21</sup>Donna Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Pub., Inc., 2010), 249.

their way of life. This last point however can be contrasted with the lowest rated statement that the young base their decisions in life on Church teachings and authority. The young as open and sincere about themselves, giving importance to community and family, prioritizing studies, and engaging in sincere and open relationships with other people having rated only moderately or below indicated attention needed on these areas.

On the negative trends, it was noted that these statements had higher average ratings than the previous positive ones. A most prominently negative characteristic depicts the Filipino young as influenced by popular celebrities or athletes by imitating them without evaluating their moral values. The negative statement on the use of information technology rated higher than its previous positive counterpart, depicting Filipino young as using this in ways that tend to neglect studying or work, even to the point of attachment. A third highest priority is given to material success and independence for a career. Still rating as very real are characteristics of enjoying the shifting moment, pleasing other people's expectations especially peers, being free in many choices, wanting to be different while staying away from traditions or authorities, and making decisions based on their personal opinions. Closely related to this last statement and still close to very real was their dependence on their parents or family while meeting expectations of the latter. This corroborates one salient point in the research that the Filipino young can be influenced by parents or family when it comes to deciding for their career. If parents are not faith-inclined though, materially oriented career tends to be their emerging opinion given also a similar social environment.

Related with the characteristics earlier given by the respondents in their own words, the foregoing results show lesser positive perception of the Filipino young. This

researcher still sees the point of evoking their positive characteristics like their being creative, fast-learners, friendly, and with some traces of considering the traditional and listening to their parents or family. Being relaxed can be guided to reflection.

Salient negative characteristics from the two survey tools presented freedom as a concern of the young that requires guidance. Information technology could get them attached to less worthwhile uses of this other than their studies, the spiritual, and formation. The modern world tends to be immediately equated with the material and consumerism. Values are diminished by concern for the self. Even the sense of relating with other persons is depicted as tending towards fashion, competition, and adventurous fun. In spite of this highly negative perception though, this researcher still senses the formands' longing to belong to a community in their commonality of concerns including electronic socializing, praying and reflecting on their way of life as moderately real, along with being open and sincere in relating with other people, and a desire to achieve, both also as moderately real, which could be directed to vocation discernment.

As to the faith formation background of the formands prior to their entering the Oblate college-level formation, most of the formands had their family as the immediate source of values, learning to pray, attending Mass, talking about God, and catechesis. Through elementary school, only about half and less than half of their total attended catechesis and/or religious education. Less than half had parish involvement. A little more than half had the Mass as their source of faith formation. Through high school, most but not all had catechesis and/or religious education counting about eight formands who have not had it at all. A large number had parish involvement or religious organization membership, though not all. A large number attended Mass as source of

faith formation in such high school stage, though not all. Less than half went to regular confession. A large number had recollections or retreats though.

There was a need for balancing these responses from the formands with the formators' perceptions of the formands in the Oblate college-level formation program and compared with other selected congregations proximate in mission interests in the locality in Mindanao, as well as the archdiocesan formators of Cotabato City. These provided a reflective comparison of common trends and essential factors.

### *Perceptions of Oblate College-level Formators*

The Oblate college-level rector explained the factors for the formands not proceeding to the next levels of formation which were mainly unclarity of their vocation and direction in life. He expressed a significant need for more conferences such as sessions on formative concerns like clarification of their vocation and direction in life and more awareness of the Oblate charism. He expressed that by himself he could not provide all topics or themes that might be needed for formation. This researcher hence could help in the formation program by providing support for such sessions.<sup>22</sup>

Further explanations of the rector included not having enough religious background when formands enter the seminary. Many wait for their formators to declare for them their vocation or direction in life instead of as formands themselves expressing their motivation and intention in being in the seminary. Some formands eventually express that vocation to the priesthood is a desire of their mother.

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<sup>22</sup>Fr. Ross Kapunan, OMI, rector of the Oblate college-level seminary, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 23, 2013.

A formator of the Oblate college-level formation program described the formands on the positive side as having a hunger for God and religious experience. They are willing to learn. They have creativity. They show excitement in activities. On the negative side, though, they show a lack of initiative, indifference, lack of a correct sense of priority, and insensitivity. They show very little clarity of meaning and purpose of their stay in formation. They are ambivalent concerning their call. Only very few of them manifest enthusiasm for Oblate life. They lack maturity and are not ready to make a commitment. They still want to experience many things pertaining to affective life and integrate their human growth with their spiritual life. They need more regular time for spiritual direction. He also expressed the need for informative sessions to make the formands aware of the meaning and purpose of their formation, integrating the human and spiritual aspects of their lives, and the Oblate charism introduced to them.<sup>23</sup>

A former formator of the OMI college-level formation program from 1999 to 2001 observed that the emergence of information technology influenced a change in the mentality of the youth as more consumeristic. The character of the young eventually diminished in sense of the Oblate vocation as most formands opted for experiencing life outside the seminary and very few returned to formation. Many of the formands were more concerned with graduating with the college degree than with pursuing religious life. With consumerism in the society there is less time for the reflective aspect. Their decisions in life tended to be temporary and not viewing a life-time commitment. They were competitive with their skills but were more concerned with external appearances.

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<sup>23</sup>Fr. Eduardo Santoyo, OMI, formator at the Oblate college-level seminary, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, February 16, 2013.

He suggested that the formands today could be assisted to go back to the purpose of life and see its essentials as not only gained materially.<sup>24</sup>

### *Perceptions of Formators in Other Seminaries*

The present Marist Brothers' director of novices with experience of being a rector at the college-level formation program from 2003 to 2009 explained the factors for their candidates not proceeding to the higher levels of formation after their second-year college (as built-in aspirancy and then postulancy), before their two-year novitiate. Many were motivated only for studies, eventually pursuing a career. Some did not have good academic performance. He characterized their formands as restless and looking for technology like the use of the internet. They are visual in utilizing images from the internet for learning but find reading to be a challenge. They look for the joy of the moment, companionship, and friendship. They are connected with others through the computer and cellphones. They are, however, concerned with their family which could pull them back. Some are able to go through conversion experiences as of God's grace, which they consider needed for them to act on their decision concerning their call.<sup>25</sup>

The Capuchin formator of postulancy at the first-year college level explained a main factor in the dwindling number of their college-level formands proceeding to the next stages of formation. Difficulty in adjusting to the community life in the seminary is a big consideration. Many formands remained in their lax social life they had before entering the seminary. They could not give up their previous way of life with their own

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<sup>24</sup>Fr. Gene Gilos, OMI, former Oblate college-level formator, interview by this researcher, Tamontaka, Maguindanao, Philippines, February 19, 2013.

<sup>25</sup>Bro. Lindley Sionosa, FMS, the director of novices and former rector of the college-level aspirancy from 2003 to 2009, interview by this researcher, Tamontaka, Maguindanao Province, Philippines, February 13, 2013.



individual activities and spontaneous time for their own purposes. Many were willing to become religious in the beginning but had community life difficulties.<sup>26</sup>

The Franciscan formator explained that the usual factors for their college-level formands not proceeding to the next levels of formation were violations of their seminary rules and regulations, academic failure, and family problems. He expressed that youth trends that affect their seminarians include being isolated from the community because of attachment to the use of technology like the cellphones and the internet.<sup>27</sup>

The rector of the college-level seminary in the Archdiocese of Cotabato explained that lack of maturity is a factor in the dwindling number of formands proceeding to the theology level from those who graduated from their college-level seminary.<sup>28</sup> Prayer, sanctity, and wholeness have to be integrated with human formation. The seminarians usually have similar characteristics as most young Filipinos today. They are fond of using modern technology like computers and cellphones. They follow current fashion and fads. They lack, however, focus and stability in many aspects of life. A sense of sacrifice and charity is diminishing. Dedicating one's entire life for the sake of other people does not seem to be their priority. On the positive side, they still have respect for prayers and the sacraments. They are obedient and diligent in work and study.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Bro. Michael Angelo Flores, OFM Cap., a formator of postulants, Bro. Noe Roxas, OFM Cap., a post-novice, and Bro. Jasper Espanola, OFM Cap., a post-novice, interview by this researcher, Kidapawan City, Cotabato Province, Philippines, February 27, 2013.

<sup>27</sup>Fr. Irineo Tactac III, OFM, Formation Director of Post-Novitiate, interview by this researcher, Kidapawan City, Philippines, February 26, 2013.

<sup>28</sup>While diocesan and consecrated life formation programs have somewhat differing objectives, the diocesan formators' insights are useful for further understanding the pastoral situation of college-level seminary formands.

<sup>29</sup>Fr. Ben Torreto, rector of the college-level seminary of the Archdiocese of Cotabato, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, February 8, 2013.

A formator at the same seminary observed that other choices like engagement with women for the vocation to marriage and a big salary are additional reasons why the seminarians do not proceed to theology. Their interest in computer games and social networking on the internet and the use of cellphones take their focus. Many of them do not qualify for admission to theology.<sup>30</sup>

This researcher gains insights from the foregoing information that the contemporary young Filipinos face these challenges which could influence the formands unless they become aware of the real meaning of life and the direction of their freedom to persevere in God's presence for pursuing the way of life that Christ opens for them.

### ***Questionnaire Responses from Lay Catechist Graduating Students and A Sister***

This researcher asked lay catechist graduating students in a sisters'-run catechetical training institution<sup>31</sup> on the university campus to write their responses to questionnaires to gather their experiences and observations on the faith formation being given to the young people prior to entering college. This helped this researcher understand ordinary experiences in the faith formation situation prior to entering also the Oblate college-level seminary. Eighteen lay catechists from the Cotabato archdiocese and neighboring dioceses in Mindanao responded through surveys and group sessions. Their

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<sup>30</sup>Fr. Gerard Fornan, a formator at the college-level seminary of the Archdiocese of Cotabato, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, February 19, 2013.

<sup>31</sup>Notre Dame Catechetical Formation Center (NDCFC) graduating lay catechists in academic year 2012-2013, survey and open forum by this researcher, Kidapawan City, Philippines, February 25, 2013. NDCFC is run by the Oblates of Notre Dame sisters' congregation and is located in the OMI-run Notre Dame University compound in Cotabato City, Philippines. All eighteen (18) catechists inclusive of fourteen females and four males who catechize in the Archdiocese of Cotabato City and neighboring dioceses where most of the Oblate college-level formands originate participated.

locations of catechetical ministry were also from where most of the current Oblate college-level formands come.

This researcher presents the highlights of their responses relevant to this study. They expressed that in most dioceses and parishes in Mindanao there are more uncatechized young people than the catechetical ministry can catechize. They elaborated on the reasons. Eight lay catechists said that young persons in remote areas far away from the main parish church do not have catechists and are visited by priests only once a year for the *fiesta* Mass. Six lay catechists responded that there are many young people who are not active in the Church. Two lay catechists suggested that the parents at home should be the first catechists for their children, but on the other hand, only one lay catechist wrote that there is catechetical instruction for the adults in their parish.

Moreover, twelve lay catechists wrote that there is no instruction on vocation discernment. Six lay catechists answered that this topic is not thoroughly discussed as only the priesthood and religious life are connected with vocation. They also remarked that there is no attention given to young persons also to discern a vocation to married life. The preparation for marriage instructions are given only to those who have already set a date for marriage.

As gathered from these lay catechists, the situation of faith formation among young lay people had little attention on discipleship and response to a particular vocation.

A religious Sister who is part of the staff supervising recollections and retreats from the Notre Dame University college-level students including the OMI formands, and nearby high school students, expressed in an interview by this researcher her observations of the manifested behavior and concerns in casual conversations with the young Filipinos

within the area.<sup>32</sup> She noted that the young persons from public high schools tend to be hungry for the word of God because of their lack of religion class. She, however, described the young persons from the city as more distracted with the internet and computer games than the rural youth. The young Filipinos from the rural areas are moreover focused on life itself than on entertainment as she observed them to be more focused on prayer than those from the city. Even those from catholic schools lack the formation of the faith from their parents. She observed that the young focus on interpersonal relations during recollections but could not as much on prayer. She sees that the young getting attracted to vices like excessive drinking of alcohol can be re-directed to focusing on their studies. Internet access distracting the young into watching movies or playing computer games can be re-directed to attending to their studies.

She observed the need of the seminarians to be helped in becoming more aware of their vocation in life and growing up into maturity. They also need to look into growing deeper in their spiritual outlook in life.

From the data explained by the lay catechists and a sister, this researcher was able to proceed to an interpretation of an evident need for youth ministry to be intensified which can begin with and enhanced in the Oblate parishes and ministries. The family life ministry can also be enhanced so that there can be ongoing faith formation for parents. Unless the parents receive continuing faith formation, what guarantee can the Church have that faith is nourished among the young and vocation given attention?

### ***Formands' Concerns for Their Formation***

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<sup>32</sup>Sister Rita Marie Cuevas, Oblate of Notre Dame, Sister-in-charge of recollections and retreats at OMI-run Divine Mercy Retreat House, for Cotabato City and neighboring areas, interview by this researcher, Tamontaka, Maguindanao, Philippines, February 14, 2013.

This researcher asked the formands to write their responses to questions in order to gain better insight on their formative concerns. The formands themselves identified what they perceived as helpful aspects, activities, or element in their seminary program, their existing formative needs, and their recommendations/suggestions in regard to those needs. This researcher also asked them about their initial and current reasons for being in the formation program.

All of the fifty-five formands in academic year 2012-2013 responded to the questionnaires.<sup>33</sup> The yielded results showed the spiritual aspect as most helpful for the formands which they suggested to be sustained. Intellectual aspect was second most helpful with their explanation as integration of their knowledge with their life of faith. Their pastoral life was helpful to them in serving the people, specifically mentioning their teaching of catechism. Community life in the seminary helps them relate with other seminarians fostering unity and help for one another. Only a comparative few find the aspect of spiritual direction and guidance for vocation as helpful to them. Eventhough only one formand wrote the response of consultation with formators, it was deemed by this researcher as important in clarifying their vocation.

As to the question on formative needs, most formands expressed belongingness to the formation community. They needed community unity that fosters fraternal love and being valued as a person. One formand explained that even the weakest member can become a great disciple when there is sensitivity to the other person. Pastoral visits to the poor were also expressed needed.

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<sup>33</sup>Oblate college-level formands, written survey conducted by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 31, 2013.

There were needs expressed regarding seminary facilities. One notable item was computer internet access in the seminary. Their current internet access for research was in the university library and could be limited by the number of students utilizing the same computer units. Their time for university internet use was constrained also by their seminary schedule.

Most formands suggested spiritual enhancement which they expressed as being closer to God and becoming aware of His presence. A more personal communication with God was suggested by them. Orientations/sessions/conferences on the call and self-awareness were second most recommended. Third most suggested were exposure activities including strengthening their vocation as they experience reality. These included relating the theme of Oblate charism with their pastoral involvements and having more university human interactions with lay students. An eighth important suggestion but was notable was for more understanding from formators of the formands' situation. There were two seemingly opposite suggestions of free will in studying and more discipline with the seminary schedule observance. Another couple of seemingly opposite suggestions pertained to discipline as seminarians for challenge in formation and more time for rest, free days, and recreation. These were interpreted by this researcher as a need for a balance of outlook on their formation process.

Supported also by Lonergan's intentional notions that there is unity and relatedness of the conscious process which is intelligent, reasonable, and responsible,<sup>34</sup> an area of the survey questions dwelt on the formands' intentional reason for entering

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<sup>34</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 13.

formation, their sense of meaning and importance in their being part of the formation program, and their purpose for continuing to stay in the formation program.

To know one's real vocation in life is a basic intention of most formands. Second most frequent initial reason included developing one's whole person, to be formed as a good Christian, knowing oneself more, and conversion to change oneself. Third most frequent reason comprises to be closer to God while wanting God wholly and to become like Christ.

There was a seeming point of contradiction though of the fourth categorized response of formands: "I want to be a seminarian." Variations to this answer were just to experience seminary life, not knowing what one's course of life really is, and even only out of curiosity. Directly opposite this response were two categories of a seeming clarity of responding to vocation from God for the consecrated and/or ordained life as one's ambition in life and offering one's life to Jesus. These were interpreted by this researcher as needing guidance and support for discernment by the spiritual directors and formators.

Further seemingly contradictory responses were being inspired by one's parents that tended also to one's parents wanting him to be in formation, expressed similarly by five formands as: "my parents want me to be here; I need to please them as their child," and an initial practical reason for one's studies.

It was noteworthy that one formand expressed a desire to become a religious Brother. This was pursued in later recommendations in this project and paper.

The meaning and importance of the formands' being in formation gathered a most frequent response of formands' forming themselves to build a personal character, though in their explanations they were referring still to developing their personality. The

formands' second most frequent response was being called by God. The third most frequent response comprised knowing oneself and being with other people in and through the seminary community. A few of the formands responded preparation to become a priest. A few responses presented a need for support in clarifying the meaning of their being in formation such as: "I did not expect it but it is God's plan;" and "I don't know and I am still discerning its meaning."

Knowing the purpose in continuing to stay in formation could shed light on the direction of individual formands for their eventual life beyond. The most frequent response was clarifying their vocation and answering God's call. Second most frequent response was for their growth as individuals. Other responses were knowing themselves more and still searching for their purpose in life.

There were thus a mixture of various responses to clearly become ordained, to generally become a disciple, to simply prepare for the next level of formation, to change one's old ways, and a few having no concrete purpose.

The formands suggested for their sessions the topics or themes mostly on God's presence in one's life, Christ's call, Oblate charism inclusive of St. Eugene's life, human growth, interpersonal relationships inclusive of formation community, and discernment of vocation. Though spiritual direction was a response by only two formands, it was seen as a basic essential by this researcher to be incorporated in the theme of discernment.

### ***Scriptural Hermeneutical Reflection***

The initial stages of gathering experiences and interpreting with varied significant persons mainly the formands and formators a perspective of the given situation, this researcher proceeded with conducting sessions with the formands to reflect on a



normative scriptural resource of the Good Shepherd passage (Jn 10:1-21). While Ricoeur's hermeneutical distantiation opens the scriptural text for reappropriation of its meaning as cited earlier, the scriptural scholar Evelyn Thibeaux's paradigm of literary characterization<sup>35</sup> provided a hermeneutical understanding of the images primarily of the shepherd and sheep. Thibeaux notes narratological categories of traits as character indicators through direct definition of naming the actual trait. This researcher applied this to the adjective in the "good shepherd." The line "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me" (v. 14) thus presents both directly and indirectly the good quality of the bonding between Jesus the shepherd, who calls, and the sheep who respond to His call. Thibeaux referred to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's understanding that indirect presentation does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it by action, symbolic dimension, speech, social aspect of character or analogous landscape.<sup>36</sup>

The formands have joined a formative community that seeks to personally respond to Jesus' call, as the sheep to the shepherd, while being transformed themselves into shepherds as Christ to other persons in the Church community and society. The formands would be able to integrate their growth centered in Christ Shepherd in the aspects of their seminary formation into apostolic community through their studies, human-spiritual maturity, and Oblate pastoral immersion among people.

Thibeaux pointed out, that a biblical text might present "another point of view . . . on what it means to be human in relation to God."<sup>37</sup> The sheep are related with Jesus, the

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<sup>35</sup>Evelyn R. Thibeaux, "Reading Readers Reading Characters," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 215-227.

<sup>36</sup>Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 59, 61, 62, 64, 67, 69.

<sup>37</sup>Thibeaux, 217.

Good Shepherd, in a bond of intimacy similar to that between Jesus and the Father. So the more abundant life (v. 10) that Jesus speaks of is not only this earthly life, but also and especially involves life in the divine reality of Jesus, mutually knowing and known by the Father.

As transforming into shepherds, the formands would understand themselves as called to protect the other persons from harm that modern-day thieves, robbers, strangers, and hired hands like the Pharisees could cause them out of their self-centered interests. The formands as becoming shepherds<sup>38</sup> would see themselves as called to defend other persons from the wolf that catches and scatters them, like the modern-day hindrances to communion in Christ such as lack of faith or indifference to the sufferings of the poor or false security in material benefits caused by human attachments to fleeting things. The formands could clarify their call to share in shepherding, even with self-sacrifices as Christ offered His life. Like the shepherd also, the formands would respond to the call to lead other sheep not already “in the fold,” so that there will be one flock in the one shepherding of Christ (see v. 16). Following Christ in His ways characterizes a Good Shepherd who cares for the other sheep as well as He does with the already flocked sheep (see vv. 13 & 16). Formation ministry involves formators and other support formators in shepherding among the formands centered in Christ Shepherd in caring and sacrifices.

John Goldingay complements the method of Thibeaux; in this project, their two methods are conjoined into one method of interpretation. He develops the method of

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<sup>38</sup>In the *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate* (Rome, 2000), 84, quote from 1853, would-be ordained priests are formed in the congregation, “striving to walk in the footsteps of the divine Shepherd,” feeding “with watchful and constant care the sheep that have been led back to him.”

“How Stories Preach,” or *preaching by stories*. This method allows stories to be “a key means by which scripture communicates and therefore a key source for the preacher.”<sup>39</sup>

Goldingay realizes the method by “retelling part of the story fairly straight, then reflecting on that part (perhaps talking about a modern experience that might be equivalent), then retelling more of the story, then reflecting again, then telling more of the story once again. . . .”<sup>40</sup> He points out that “fictional story such as a parable needs to be preached in such a way that it works once more as a story.”<sup>41</sup>

Preaching brings “a message from God intended to change the faith and life of the hearers.”<sup>42</sup> One example Goldingay cited was a story that presents what can happen when the listener follows Jesus, for discipleship. Retelling the story is “not only out of a concern that people come to the right act of faith in regard to the events of the past, but also so that they may see the story’s implications for ongoing life in the present.”<sup>43</sup>

This researcher thus engaged with the formands utilizing the conversational way of Goldingay in narrating the scripture text of the Good Shepherd in order to evoke in them the response of personal involvement to the call.

The first session focused on the foregoing scriptural reflection relating Christ Shepherd’s call with communion of vocations to various ways of life of discipleship and eventual shepherding other persons. Group sharing of three formands per group followed

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<sup>39</sup>John Goldingay, “How Stories Preach,” in *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Toronto, Canada: Clements Publishing, 1995), 71.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. 72.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 75.

on their personal experiences of their current intimacy with Christ and in view of their vocation.<sup>44</sup>

The open forum highlights after their group sharing in this first session manifested that all of the formands in academic year 2012-2013 became aware of living their lives in the presence of Christ the Shepherd, guiding them towards the truth about themselves as they journey through life. They expressed that they were encouraged to deepen their reflection of experiencing His presence so that they can listen more clearly to His voice toward a personal vocation for each one of them. They became more aware of their living in communion with persons in various vocations while the community and the Trinitarian community live with and support them. These positive manifestations of gains indicated for this researcher that succeeding sessions with group sharing and open forums could continue to be conducted.

### ***Formands' Examples of the Good Shepherd in the Filipino Society***

For the Filipino people, Christ as Good Shepherd is already a popularly accepted image. A questionnaire was conducted by this researcher among fifty-four out of fifty-five total formands in academic year 2012-2013 (as one formand got sick) with the question: "Give an example of a profession, work, a person, or a type of a person that best represents Christ the Good Shepherd in the Filipino society."<sup>45</sup> Their responses helped in making the formands look for their own real representation of Christ the Good Shepherd that helped illustrate for them an example of a shepherd in the Filipino context.

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<sup>44</sup>Oblate College-level formands in all year-levels in academic year 2012-2013, session and Likert-scale survey by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 31, 2013.

<sup>45</sup>Oblate college-level formands in academic year 2012-2013, survey by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, Feb. 7, 2013.

This researcher mentioned some of these examples in the spontaneous explanations that he made in the carrying out of succeeding discipleship growth sessions.

The most prominent responses from higher to lower frequency were: a teacher, followed by a priest, a nurse/doctor/hospital person, father/mother/parents, religious/religious leaders/missionary. A few formands each wrote former President Corazon Aquino, a driver, guidance counselor, “a poor farmer,” good policeman or soldier. Others had only one formand each answering: judge, Red Cross workers, non-governmental organizations, maid/helper, potter, tour guide, and a person who is faithful not just in words but in deeds.

Through the formands’ responses, the formands reflected for themselves how Christ the Good Shepherd could be contextualized in the ordinary Filipino social life.

### ***Filipino Philosophical Expressions of Communion in Christ the Shepherd***

The foregoing reflection on the principle of communion in Christ the Shepherd for His disciples’ shepherding of persons can be expressed in Filipino philosophical understanding. Jaime Guevarra translates the Filipino notion of *pakikipagkapwa* into English terms as shared identity, equality, and being with others. It identifies oneself with the other person as not different from one’s self.<sup>46</sup> Empathy toward common goodness brings about this notion of *pakikipagkapwa*. This notion moreover describes the Filipino person as mindful of other persons regarded as one’s self in the notion of *kapwa*, meaning a fellow human person, as discussed by Natividad Dominique Manauat.<sup>47</sup> She adds

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<sup>46</sup>Jaime Guevarra, “*Pakikipagkapwa* (Sharing/Merging Oneself with Others),” [original translation] in *Filipino Cultural Traits*, ed. Rolando Gripaldo (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 10.

<sup>47</sup>Natividad Dominique Manauat, “Contextualizing the Filipino Values of *Pagkalinga* (Taking Someone under One’s Care), *Pag-aaruga* (Taking Care of), *Pakialam* (Meddling/Caring), and the Feminist Ethics of

*pagkalinga* as benevolence bringing about compassionate caring. This value fits into the general Filipino value system of *pakikipagkapwatao* as shown by care for family members and others by way of Filipino hospitality. An ethics of care encompasses relational values, emotional sensitivity, and avoiding hurting others.<sup>48</sup>

These Filipino philosophical notions are akin to the character of Christ the Shepherd that all Christians emulate as disciples and shepherds themselves. In an ecclesial and social sense the family transcends itself to be inclusive of all persons to belong to one family or communion in Christ the Shepherd.

The Filipino expression of the good shepherd's characteristic as *mapagkalinga* as an adjectival form of *pagkalinga* as benevolence has to extend beyond the physical life for persons' salvation *ginhawa*, treating one's fellow human person as one's self. A good shepherd supports fellow persons' human and spiritual growth in life journey with Christ.

Another possible blending of philosophical and theological faith expression in the Filipino culture has to do with salvation. Jose De Mesa, a Filipino theologian, posits the word *ginhawa*, which refers to clear breathing or serenity, as bearing the theological reality of salvation. This contrasts with *hirap*, which means suffering, as the human condition out of which *ginhawa* is pursued.<sup>49</sup> This researcher finds these expressions as philosophically resonating with Filipino suffering *hirap* in this life in the world but

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Care," [translations original] in *Filipino Cultural Traits*, ed. Rolando Gripaldo (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 130.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>49</sup>Jose De Mesa, "Making Salvation Concrete and Jesus Real: Trends in Asian Christology," *Exchange* 30, no.1 (2001), 12, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfvoer?sid=3aaa94f4-c21f-4e97-a572-0c3bece16f49%40sessionmg> (accessed Jan. 18, 2012).

overcome by the deeper meaning of life given by the salvation *ginhawa* in Jesus that is highlighted in the sacraments of initiation. Belonging to the faith community henceforth brings salvation *ginhawa* from suffering *hirap* alone in the difficulties of life in the world. These expressions can blend with normative theological principles of salvation and communion.

The Filipino perspective of a community leader can contribute to the understanding of the role of an ordained priest. The earliest Filipino social institution of community as the *barangay* is discussed by Felipe Landa Jocano, a Filipino anthropologist.<sup>50</sup> This was the term for the boats crafted by Filipino ingenuity to transport from fifteen up to a hundred families migrating from one developed political community to a new settlement for naturally greener pastures. This became the same name of a political system similar to the Greek *polis*. When a *barangay* had settled in a new place it had a well-developed political leadership called *pangulo* (head or leader) with a council of elders as advisers to the chieftain. This sense of community was present among early Filipinos in the 14<sup>th</sup> century before the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century. The *pangulo* handled the *barangay* as a guide *gabay* and less as a ruler *pinuno*.

This researcher reflects from the foregoing source that the image of a priest can be expressed more as a guide than as a ruler in the Filipino culture. Relating this reflection with the earlier discussion of the good shepherd as *mapagkalinga*, benevolent in compassionate caring, the ordained priest can thus be described as benevolent in his

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<sup>50</sup>Felipe Landa Jocano, *Filipino Prehistory: Rediscovering Precolonial Heritage* (Quezon City, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 2001), 153-160.

being a guide to others as he supports others in their growth and responding to their call to a way of life.

One more cultural expression is inter-*barangay* relations to forge peace and cooperation instituted through *sandugo* or one blood, or blood compact, which was a ritual of drinking drops of blood shed from both *barangay* leaders mixed with native wine.<sup>51</sup> They committed to such unity.

Similarly, the ordained minister supervises the caring for people by engaging the entire community members as disciples and shepherds in their varied vocations in forging communion unto the wider human race, as reflective of missionary endeavours with other religions, cultures, or localities.

A complementary Filipino philosophical-theological perspective of lay vocation in communion with others could be taken from De Mesa's researches that correlate dignity *dangal* with the Filipino expression of the Paschal Mystery, uniting His passion and death with His resurrection.<sup>52</sup> The suffering Christ is depicted as defeated or put to *hiya* or shame. The resurrection aspect however can emphasize *pagbabangong-dangal*, translated as raising up of one's honor or dignity. Upon Jesus' resurrection, His vision was proven right and His shame was taken away. The disciples who were afraid turned fearless after the resurrection. *Pagbabangong-dangal* is not only physical but involves the daily struggles of the totality of human life.

This researcher's reflection on this Filipino perspective relates a person's seeming defeat in the world as paradoxically a raising up of one's dignity as one lives according to

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>52</sup>Bevans, Stephen, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 101.



the resurrection of Christ. A faithful life growing in Christ's self-giving on the cross overcomes even death amidst the ways of the world that turn away from Christ's. While in seminary formation if the candidates could come to understand their dignity in becoming transformed in Christ, this would help them in understanding and living their relation with the world.

Vocation to consecrated life in community could be understood in the way that Dante Luis Leoncini explains the Filipino trait of *pakikisama* as a norm to achieve the earlier mentioned broader value of *pakikipagkapwa-tao*.<sup>53</sup> *Tao* is a specific Filipino term meaning a person. *Pakikisama* more deeply interiorizes and actualizes treating the other persons as members of the same family, as when applied to consecrated community, it witnesses to a life shared in common and fosters mutual love in communion with varied vocations, extended to society. It implies good companionship or accompaniment. It can suggest being protected when trouble comes one's way. He elaborates that *pakikisama* is a value that carries out concern for every other person, which is applied in this project to members of the new family of the consecrated community and with the wider human community.

### ***Oblate Charism and Broader Formative Perspective***

Further interpreted formative needs were highlighted in this study from surveys and interviews with various relevant persons. Philosophy graduating students of

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<sup>53</sup>Dante Luis Leoncini, "A Conceptual Analysis of *Pakikisama* (Getting Along Well with People)," [translation original] in *Filipino Cultural Traits*, edited by Rolando Gripaldo (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2005), 160.

academic year 2012-2013 inclusive of lay students,<sup>54</sup> some philosophy professors of the formands,<sup>55</sup> some administrators,<sup>56</sup> and an originally lay alumnus of the philosophy program<sup>57</sup> revealed that more involvement by the formands in university activities would offer better opportunities for them to integrate their human growth with their more spiritual and seminary-community-oriented formation program. More advantageous for their growth would be available in a freer university engagement such as in student leadership roles, affective life with more lay students in varied degree programs, socializing in usual students' activities like being allowed by the seminary formators to join sports varsity teams, various newsletter editorial boards, socio-cultural functions, campus ministry, and student organizations.

Surveys and interviews with former Oblate college-level formands who proceeded as lay persons,<sup>58</sup> those who proceeded to higher levels of Oblate formation

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<sup>54</sup>Notre Dame University AB Philosophy Graduating Students in academic year 2012-2013 inclusive of eight lay, nine diocesan seminarians, and eleven Oblate formands, written survey and round table discussion by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, January 23, 2013.

<sup>55</sup>Professor Michael Bibaoco and Professor Wrendolf Juntilla, Notre Dame University philosophy professors who teach courses among the formands, interviews by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, March 14, 2013.

<sup>56</sup>Professor Edwin Matura, Notre Dame University Philosophy Department Chairperson, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, March 13, 2013; Professor Antonio Lim, Jr., Notre Dame University Dean of the Office of the Student Affairs and Services in academic year 2012-2013, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, March 16, 2013.

<sup>57</sup>Attorney Servillano Santiago Lorenzo III, an originally lay student and graduate of AB Philosophy from Notre Dame University where the Oblate formands study, interview by this researcher, Cotabato City, Philippines, March 7, 2013.

<sup>58</sup>Apollo Valensoy, Galilee Lagaña, Redentor Dupá, Niñorowin Dejecacion, Kevin Napoles, former Oblate college-level formands who proceeded as lay persons, Cotabato City, Philippines, February 21, 2013, February 21, 2013, February 23, 2013, March 6, 2013, and March 8, 2013 respectively. Niñorowin Dejecacion was interviewed in Midsayap, Cotabato, Philippines.

who were formands at the time of this study,<sup>59</sup> and those who became Oblate priests<sup>60</sup> and Brothers<sup>61</sup> from varied decades provided deeper insights and recommendations that could broaden a perspective of the said formation program. Some issues in the personal life of the formands can only be issues of ongoing growth at integrating the basic human-spiritual dimension. Many suggested more frequency of consultative dialogue with formators pertaining to their ongoing stage of personal growth to once or twice a month as this was only done once a semester to many of them during their period in the seminary. More assistance and personal support from formators were also suggested. More open and regular feedback about their status in their seminary stay from the formators was deemed wanting so as to provide the formands ample time for personal reflection and adjustment to their increasing self-awareness. Many of those who proceeded as lay persons or those they knew carried bitterness on their part until their elderly years in life, given also social stigma of “not having made it as a priest/Brother.” It is thus essential to address with a broader perspective the formation process, as they become lay disciples and shepherds in the Church and for society later on in their careers.

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<sup>59</sup>Ryan Isog, Ryan Dave Jungco, Apolonio Wacan, Jr., Rusel Ricabar, and Peter Sotomil, former Oblate college-level formands who proceeded to higher levels of formation as postulant, postulant, theology-priestly scholastic, Brotherly scholastic, and theology-priestly scholastic, Tamontaka, Maguindanao, Tamontaka, Maguindanao, online Facebook messaging, Cotabato City, and Kidapawan City, Philippines, February 12, 2013, February 12, 2013, March 13, 2013, March 26, 2013, and October 20, 2013 respectively.

<sup>60</sup>Fr. Mark Pagente, OMI, Fr. Ignacio Rellin, OMI, Fr. Amador Castillo, OMI, Fr. Wilfredo Cabrera, OMI, and Fr. Howard Tatel, OMI, former Oblate college-level formands who proceeded as full-fledged Oblate priests, interviews by this researcher, Midsayap, Cotabato, Cotabato City, Cotabato City, Kidapawan City, and Kidapawan City, March 7, 2013, September 24, 2013, September 26, 2013, October 21, 2013, and October 21, 2013 respectively.

<sup>61</sup>Bro. Emilio Ungsod, OMI and Bro. Jose Aduana, OMI, a former Oblate postulant for Brotherly program and a former Oblate college-level formand who both proceeded to becoming full-fledged Oblate Brothers, interviews by this researcher, Cotabato City and Kidapawan City, March 30, 2013 and October 25, 2013 respectively.

More Oblates from neighboring ministries and some lay personnel can contribute their experiences and specializations on the various aspects of formation as non-residential and non-evaluative support formators. A specific track for Oblate permanent Brotherhood was suggested to begin at that level of formation as some already feel such call. Fields of specialization could be made available to all formands along with the philosophy program to address the experienced need for competencies. Balanced with the equal need for growth in personal maturity, varied formats of the college-level formation program were suggested to be explored such as non-residential aspirancy, residence in an Oblate apostolic community as a college-level student aspirant, or residence in a lay church community while studying as an aspirant with regular formative sessions in the seminary on particular schedule.

Many of the Oblate priest and Brother respondents expressed a need for relating with people outside of the seminary, as they experienced focus on studies but had no or very little interaction with other persons who were not formands. They lacked affective life, particularly that emotions were not discussed. There was a need for every formand to know oneself. Freedom was needed for making a lifetime commitment which they could not clearly articulate yet then. Some articulated that they did not have apostolate in their time which they later on saw was needed for interacting with people. Most of the Oblate respondents including the formands in the next stages of the formation program recommended more regularity of spiritual direction to guide them in their discernment of vocation.

Common to the varied respondents was a sense of being supported by the sustained community bond with their fellow formands even in their later years in life as

lay or religious and/or priests. Spiritual intimacy with Christ that touches the core of one's humanity also sustained their following His call to discipleship and ministering to others in their own ways of life. St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Oblate founder's charism of evangelizing the most abandoned people characterized their ways of life.

A balanced approach in the formation process is inferred necessary to emphasize on the discernment of vocation particularly recognizing those with inclination to the ordained and/or consecrated life as its significant purpose while communion with varied vocations to discipleship and shepherding is a basic grounding. Spiritual nourishment has to go with human growth in self-awareness and direction of one's life in listening to and following God's call and will.

Further surveys and interviews with other congregations' formators opened up variations of perspective of college-level formation which could be considered.<sup>62</sup> The Marist Brothers have regular students' dormitory initial year for their aspirants prior to a year of seminary residential formation. Their novitiate period cuts between the college years of studies before earning a college degree. The Franciscan Capuchins also cut the college years of studies with their novitiate period and have a prolonged mixed apostolate and studies while living with a Capuchin religious community prior to earning a college degree. The Franciscans (OFM) had a similar straight four year-college seminary track as

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<sup>62</sup>Bro. Lindley Sionosa, FMS, the director of novices and former rector of the college-level aspirancy from 2003 to 2009, interview by this researcher, Tamontaka, Maguindanao Province, Philippines, February 13, 2013; Bro. Michael Angelo Flores, OFM Cap., a formator of postulants, Bro. Noe Roxas, OFM Cap., a post-novice, and Bro. Jasper Espanola, OFM Cap., a post-novice, interview by this researcher, Kidapawan City, Cotabato Province, Philippines, February 27, 2013; Fr. Irineo Tactac III, OFM, Formation Director of Post-Novitiate, interview by this researcher, Kidapawan City, Philippines, February 26, 2013.

do the Oblates but they emphasize on the formation of integral persons with more regularity of seminary processes and sessions than on the academic competency training.

In a further interplay between Osmer's normative reflection and the pragmatic stages in practical theologizing, this researcher related his Oblate congregational research on St. Eugene de Mazenod's apostolic community's missionary charism with the foregoing findings that could broaden a perspective of formation for this given challenge.

Eugene and his initial missionary companions saw that the people were growing in ignorance of the faith, as a result of the Revolution in 1789 and its continued effects. Napoleon prevented whatever would threaten his power over the country and the minds of the people and thus ravaged the Church as his perceived powerful adversary.<sup>63</sup> Eugene and his missionary companions were deeply moved by the almost total loss of faith in the countryside of Provence. They thus were convinced that through parish missions this would be remedied. At the same time, they would be useful to the diocese.<sup>64</sup>

Eugene renewed parish preaching by reaching out to the abandoned countryside and other marginalized communities and speaking in the people's own dialect.<sup>65</sup> Ever since Eugene began as a diocesan priest, he addressed the shortage of priests, due to the Revolution exterminating them, or a number of them fleeing the country, marrying, or leaving the ministry. There were no new vocations to augment the ageing clergy.

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<sup>63</sup>Francis Santucci, *Eugene de Mazenod: Cooperator of Christ the Saviour, Communicates his Spirit* (Rome: Association for Oblate Studies and Research, 2004), 26-27.

<sup>64</sup>Joseph La Belle, OMI, "Apostolic Life in the 1812-1826 Thought and Founding Charism of Eugene De Mazenod, O.M.I." (STD dissertation, Pontificia Facolta Teologica Teresianum, Roma, 2006), 92.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

Eugene reformed the seminary formation of priests by restoring the fervor of the faith and intensifying spiritual devotion among seminarians when he served as rector of the seminary. He continued what he began as a seminarian by participating in the pious association “that aimed at the promotion of the spiritual progress of its members and, through them, of the whole seminary community.”<sup>66</sup>

Eugene had a sense of urgency to remedy the most pressing ills of the abandoned people becoming callous and indifferent. Religion was practically extinct.<sup>67</sup> Eugene responded to the conviction of the Pope that only missions could bring back the faith that the people abandoned. Preaching missions would continue the spread of the Word of God among the people. The missionaries were to travel through the rural areas of Provence preaching in Provençal, which was the language most easily understood by the people, to become closer with them who were humble and less-educated. The aim of their ministry was to work for conversion, which meant bringing those who went astray from the faith back to God’s salvation.<sup>68</sup> They provided “spiritual assistance for the poor people scattered over the country districts, and for the inhabitants of the small rural villages deprived of spiritual help.”<sup>69</sup>

The conduct of their preaching had the content of preaching who Jesus is, what He meant, to prevent mortal sins, to practice virtues, to lead the people to act with rationality, to become Christians, and to help them to become saints.

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<sup>66</sup>Santucci, 29.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 80 & 157.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 109.

Eugene was involved in ministry to the youth. In his early years as a priest, along with his meeting with priests to converse with them on the priestly state, he gathered the youth of Aix together for instructions on Sunday evenings.

These instructions were in a conversational vein, which God Himself ensures seasoning.<sup>70</sup> Engaging in youth ministry was his chief ministry until 1816. He formed and directed the congregation of Christian youth. It continued to take a large part of his time until he moved to Marseilles in 1823. The youth congregation had the purpose of forming a corps of very pious young people. They were to address the state of godlessness in the society and to achieve their own sanctification as well. Their means to actualize these were a lifestyle as examples to others, giving of advice and guidance to others, and a life of prayer.

The contemporary Filipino youth along with the Oblate college-level formands share similar circumstances of rekindling their communion with Christ and with one another towards becoming more cooperative with His call to a specific way of discipleship and becoming as Christ Shepherd to others.

### ***Formative Life-Experience Setting Re-explored***

From the combined surveys and interviews from the various respondents, the daily life of formands was re-explored looking into the seminary schedule which the formation program had in the five academic years included in this study until academic year 2014-2015. In almost all of their scheduled activities they are always with their

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 38 & 47.



fellow formands. This was among the significant observations made by various relevant persons from the surveys and interviews.

Even while the seminary community life is emphasized along with seminary time for prayer, observed and experienced by various respondents related to the formation process studied, notable areas of concern were the lack of freedom for growth in personal responsibility in life management and for enhanced human relationships also with other persons like the young aside from their fellow formands, a need for more integration of the formation aspects,<sup>71</sup> and a more regular reflection upon their apostolate, particularly regarding a focus upon the Oblate charism. This last element is not strongly required from the OMI's *General Norms* as it states only "some attraction, however vague, to 'what Oblates are and do.'" <sup>72</sup> This is even wanting of stronger articulation in the OMI Philippine formation directory as it speaks of a fourth-year college level Oblate formand expected only "manifested enthusiasm to know more about the congregation, its life and mission."<sup>73</sup> Given these insights, communion of vocations tends to be the direction emerging.

### ***Theology of Communion of Vocations in Christ the Shepherd***

Filipino philosophical, cultural, and theological notions grounding the formation program continue to be re-rooted in the Church's theological norms.

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<sup>71</sup>Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *General Norms for Oblate Formation*, no.30. This is also not articulated strongly in the "Initial Formation Directory for the OMI in the Philippine Province."

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 106.

<sup>73</sup> Formation Committee, "Initial Formation Directory for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Philippine Province," 13.

The *Constitution on the Church* speaks of Christ as the Shepherd and the entire church as sheepfold, with human shepherds taking care of the sheep (*LG*, 6).<sup>74</sup> The sacraments of initiation communally celebrate communion of a person with Christ as His disciple being formed in His likeness (*LG*, 7).

John Markey propounds on Vatican Council II's essential elements of communion theology. "Communion almost always refers to a *community* that is filled with and empowered by the *Spirit* of God and lives through the sharing of gifts and charisms inspired by the Spirit in such a way that it acts as both a *sign and instrument* of God's saving plan for the universal community."<sup>75</sup> The Church embodies the relationship between the Spirit, a local community, and the local community related to other local communities, and then their sacramental relationship with the world.

The lay faithful have a role in the building up of communion in the Church. As one mystical body of Christ, the Church has an organic communion, much like that of a living and functioning body. "In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities."<sup>76</sup> As baptized the lay are anointed as the "Body of Christ." "In a certain way, then, it thus happens that with head and body the whole Christ is formed" (*CL*, 14). In sharing in the Eucharist the lay unite with Christ's self-offering on the cross and they offer themselves and their daily activities which become united in His sacrifice.

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<sup>74</sup>Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* [*LG*], *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 6, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II, Volume 1*. All other Vatican II documents are taken from Flannery's edition.

<sup>75</sup>John Markey, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (New York: New City Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>76</sup>John Paul II, *Christifideles laici* [*CL*], *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 1989), no. 20.

This is termed the common priesthood of the faithful. By the testimony of the lives of the laity, they participate in Christ's prophetic mission. The lay faithful share in His kingly mission by their spiritual combat against sin and in serving justice and charity particularly for the least in society. They share in Christ's power "ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace." They share in this three-fold mission of Christ deriving "*from Church communion*" and requiring to be lived and realized *in communion* and *for the increase of communion itself*" (CL, 14, original emphasis).

The conjugal bond is the Christian communion of self-giving that represents Christ's mystery of His covenant with the Church. "As a memorial, the sacrament [of matrimony] gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children."<sup>77</sup> The married couple bears witness to the fidelity of Christ to the Church by their marital fidelity. The ordained minister helps them on this together with all the faithful in the Church (see FC, 20). Conjugal communion builds up the broader communion of the family.

The family serves as a sign of communion in evangelization. John Paul II understood that it is in the family that the culture of life is developed.<sup>78</sup> The person learns the distinction between good and evil, life and death, love and non-love in the family.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* [FC], *Regarding the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, no. 13.

<sup>78</sup>Carl Anderson, "The Family: Sign of Communion in the New Evangelization," in *Called to Holiness and Communion: Vatican II on the Church* (Chicago: University of Scranton Press, 2009), 268.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 266.

Evangelization has to take place as well in the family, as it does in the Church and in the society.

Not only the married lay vocations but those who remain single share in the Church's communion for evangelization of society, together with the ordained and the consecrated. In the activity of evangelization, Pope Paul VI wrote, inner transformation of the person living according to the Gospel happens at the beginning. Then the whole society is transformed.<sup>80</sup> "It may indeed be said that the only true form of evangelization is that by which the individual communicates to another those truths of which he [or she] is personally convinced by faith (*EN*, 46)." Evangelization responds to modern-day secularism and humanism, by bringing back God as source and foundation of pleasure and activities in the world. The consumerist attitude of capitalism requires evangelization (see *EN*, 55). This evangelization in the modern world is the role of everyone in the Church (see *EN*, 59).

John Paul II asserts in his apostolic exhortation *Consecrated Life* that, according to a charism from the Holy Spirit, such a way of consecrated life contributes to the transformation of the world.<sup>81</sup> As a way of life, the gift of consecrated life converges with other gifts in the ecclesial communion building up the Body of Christ for the Church's participation in Christ's mission in the world (*VC*, 4). While evangelical detachment from one's original family by joining a vowed religious community as one's new primary family is a call for consecrated persons, this way of life connects in communion with other persons in evangelization.

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<sup>80</sup>Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* [*EN*], *Evangelization in the Modern World* [1974], 18.

<sup>81</sup>John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* [*VC*], *Apostolic Exhortation, Consecrated Life*. (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1996), no. 1.

The vow of poverty proclaims that only God is the person's treasure. Christ though was rich lived poverty (2 Cor 8:9) as an expression of total self-gift. Obedience proclaims full sustenance of life in doing the Father's will (see Jn 4:34). The mutual trust and responsibility called for by the vow of obedience in consecrated life reflect the loving harmony in the Three Divine Persons. The vow of chastity manifests dedication to God with an undivided heart reflecting the infinite love of the Trinity (VC, 21). While apostolic engagements in the world are urgent, the eschatological nature of the consecrated life remains a challenge to be lived. The expectation of the final coming of the Lord is intensely lived by consecrated persons with desire, anticipation, commitment, and witness to the utmost treasure of the final Reign of God. The vow of virginity has been understood by tradition as "*an anticipation of the world to come*, already at work for the transformation of man" (VC, 26).

Chastity in consecrated life for the sake of the Kingdom of God shows esteem for the vocation to marriage as Christ's way of making spouses witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church as Bride in bringing forth and raising children in the love of Christ her spouse. Consecrated persons serve as a reminder to all the baptized to live the fundamental values of the Gospel, even while there is mutuality in this reminder (VC, 33).

Consecrated life, though, is not just a collection of individual Christians. The Congregation for Religious Life's *Fraternal Life in Community* asserts that the communion in the Church is made visible in the fraternal dimension of consecrated community life as a sign and stimulus for all the baptized to grow in fraternal

communion.<sup>82</sup> Consecration and mission are two facets of one reality.<sup>83</sup> Consecrated life is a way of being, according to a mission charism, like teaching, preaching, or administering. The distinctive consecrated character is one's public profession of Church's mission.<sup>84</sup> Religious persons live up to who and what they professed.

Pope John Paul II exhorts that formation of priests recognize the image of Jesus as Good Shepherd applying especially to the identity and role of the ordained priest. Through the sacrament of ordination, inclusive of anointing of holy orders and laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit configures the priest to Christ as head and shepherd of the community (*PDV*, 15).<sup>85</sup> Christ Himself as the priest in His whole being as Son of God and especially in His salvific passion, death and resurrection fulfills offering His life for His sheep. He gathers them together as one flock (*PDV*, 13). Jesus entrusted prolonging His mission for humanity to the apostles whom He called and gathered in unity with Him, with one another, and with the Father, to be sent into the world (*PDV*, 14). The apostles in turn carried out the mission by calling other men as bishops, priests, and deacons, embodying Christ the Shepherd in their caring for the flock. The ordained person proclaims His word, continues His paschal meal, and gives his life in Christ's service for

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<sup>82</sup>Congregation for Religious Life, *Fraternal Life in Community* (Vatican City: Congregation for Religious Life, 1994), no. 2.

<sup>83</sup>James Downey, ed., *Religious Life: What the Church Teaches* (Chicago: Institute on Religious Life, Inc., 1985), 40.

<sup>84</sup>David Fleming and Elizabeth McDonough, eds., *The Church and Consecrated Life* (St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious, 1996), 313.

<sup>85</sup>John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis [PDV], I Will Give You Shepherds* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1996), no. 15.

the salvation of His people who strive to grow in the likeness of Christ in their lives (PDV, 15).

“He is a servant of the Church as communion because – in union with the bishop and closely related to the presbyterate – he builds up the unity of the Church community in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and services” (PDV, 16). In communitarian form, the ordained recognizes, upholds, and helps the laity in their specific role of the common priesthood in the Church’s mission (PDV, 17). The ordained tend to face increasing pastoral activities. The lay disciples and shepherds, however, have been asking for the ordained to commit to forming them to suitably fulfil their shared ecclesial mission. “The more the laity’s own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out” (PDV, 3). The ordained labors to make the Church “community a herald and witness of the Gospel” (PDV, 16). The ministry of the ordained is thus complementary with the ministries of the laity in a communion of their vocations for discipleship and shepherding the flock while reaching out to other people.

As life and love are emphasized in the relationship of the Good Shepherd and the sheep (Jn 10:1-30), it must be emphasized that shepherding is not only governing, and that even in that regard it is a specific style of governing. It gives importance to the “loving, life-giving, caring, nourishing, leading, protecting aspects of the image, to mention but the main ones. This image is also closely related to the service aspect of those who are given authority in the Christian community.”<sup>86</sup> Cachia asserts that the New Testament continues the heritage of the Old Testament image of the shepherd to refer to

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<sup>86</sup>Nicholas Cachia, *The Image of the Good Shepherd as a Source for the Spirituality of the Ministerial Priesthood* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997), 23.

His ministers. It is “applied both to Jesus Christ and to those who will minister to the people in his name.”<sup>87</sup> This is for the well-being of the sheep. It would be significant that the formands would become aware of the direction of the ordained way of life as for the sake of the people. Cachia cites some Church Fathers in this regard.<sup>88</sup> He refers to Gregory Nazianzen who asserted that God shepherds through the pastors.<sup>89</sup> Cachia also refers to Augustine as expressing that in the ministry of Peter is the unity of all represented.<sup>90</sup> He notes John Chrysostom asserting that the ordained priest pleases God with his good action of caring for His sheep.<sup>91</sup>

Communion in the Church has the complementarity of the priesthood of all the baptized and the ordained priesthood. “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” (*LG*, 10). Various vocations thus share in the likeness of Christ the Shepherd for one another and other people.

### ***Filipino Perspective of Vocation Discernment***

Filipino cultural concepts of dignity and worth interrelate in bringing about essential principles that assist a formand to pursue a way of life.

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 245, Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 11, 7.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 247, Augustine, *Sermon* 147, 2: *Sermons* III/4, 448.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 249.



Jocano provides a Filipino term for value as *pamantayan*, in English translation as “standard.” It encompasses *halaga*, translated as “merit, significance, worth, or the price we give to objects, ideas, sentiments, and actions.”<sup>92</sup> *Pamantayan* further refers to traditionally established principles and rules that govern people’s behavior. Living out ideals will make one a person of *karangalan*, which means dignity, taken from the root word *dangal*.<sup>93</sup>

A Filipino formand can find fulfilment of one’s dignity *dangal* when he opens himself to the worth or value *halaga* of God’s will to be pursued in one’s way of life. In freedom that cooperates in God’s will, the essential principle of the standard, *pamantayan*, calls for an attentive listening and responding to one’s vocation that comes from Christ. The formands’ hearts could become more open when the vocational themes presented find integration with their own experiences.

Discerning one’s vocation goes through human-spiritual integration in one’s growth. Continuing discipleship growth sessions as pragmatic pastoral action conducted with the formands deepened their understanding and involvement<sup>94</sup> regarding their own age range from sixteen to twenty-two years old with only one formand aged twenty-six who was a college student-transferee. Most were fresh high school graduates. He developed this theme from various resources he gathered from his studies at the Oblate School of Theology in the U.S., mainly that of Peter Feldmeier. “What we actually see is

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<sup>92</sup>Felipe Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition* (Quezon City, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 2002), 19.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>94</sup>Series of Discipleship Growth Sessions on various themes with Likert-scale rating of Level of Understanding and Sense of Involvement gained through pre-test and post-test questionnaires after Group Sharing and Open Forum conducted from January 31, 2013 until 2015 for this study.

that a person's sense of self constantly readjusts to the changing circumstances of life, both interiorly and exteriorly."<sup>95</sup>

In the adolescent period, from twelve to eighteen years of age, the person is focused on being loved by God for one's self-identity.<sup>96</sup> Formation of one's personality is a process of reflective personal engagement. Expectations from peers challenge and expand one's perspectives of meeting one's broadening roles in the family and the society. The school system exposes formands to a logical relationship in the world.

Adolescents developing an identity begin to make commitments in life, as foundations towards later adult life.<sup>97</sup> Emotional fluctuations, seeking freedom, and sensitivity to peer evaluations need to be viewed generously by formators as efforts to establish personal autonomy at the same time as finding group or community belonging, without regarding these as strange.<sup>98</sup> Parents and authority figures still are important to assist and guide adolescents.

Personal experience of the faith where there is emotional investment with the community can inspire authentic religiosity in the adolescent's imagination. Feldmeier suggests, "adults need to hang out with youth and engage in meaningful discussions about values, religion, relationships, and so on."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian: Spiritual Growth through the Life Cycle* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 135.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 125.

In the early young adulthood period, from eighteen years old to twenty-two years old, a relatively set identity begins to be tested. Fidelity involves faithfulness to one's identity and preparation for sustaining commitments, while preparing for adult roles. Some sociologists suggest adolescence can extend up to twenty-two years old for some persons.<sup>100</sup> At the end of early young adulthood a person becomes compelled to make permanent choices of a career or marriage and engages in these through much of her/his later adulthood periods.<sup>101</sup> Leaving home involves reconstructing new relationships with the family and with others.

There is a critical expansion of consciousness in college education. Self-awareness and being self-critical is a good transition from simple conformity.<sup>102</sup> Going beyond mere expectations of others one cultivates self-definition, while clarifying one's abilities and interests. Those who had an exercise of freedom for their self-definition are the ones who find satisfactory and integrated self in adulthood later. "Identity is not static, but shaped and reshaped by those interpretations and patterns of meaning . . . that a person's sense of self constantly readjusts to the changing circumstances of life, both interiorly and exteriorly."<sup>103</sup>

The continuing young adulthood period extends from the age of twenty-two years old until forty years old. Interdependence develops as still valuing being in a community but one's identity is not fused into such relationships. *Chronos*, the ordinary passage of

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 135.

time, can blend with *kairos*, one's sacred time of grace.<sup>104</sup> Inner freedom for God's personal design for the person comes to central focus. Young adults are both stable and open to new possibilities.<sup>105</sup> The young adult is an independent person with firm values and beliefs entering into the arena of public participation in the community. For young adults vocation means that what God wants of me is myself, while being true to oneself.<sup>106</sup>

Being consciously aware of typical issues of transition towards growth can clarify for formands and their formators the change that continues to happen as the formands move through subsequent stages of personal development during and immediately after their college years.

Marie Theresa Coombs and Kelly Nemeck helped in an understanding of vocation by describing it as "a particular way of perceiving God's purpose for us. It designates the divine will as it relates to who the Lord desires us to be, how we are to become that unique person and what we are sent forth to do for God and others."<sup>107</sup> God transforms the person into that person He wills him/her to become, for accomplishing a mission.

God responds to the human person's use of freedom. Such freedom is exercised in relation to good. "We exercise our freedom to the extent that we act in view of the greatest good possible under the circumstances."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>107</sup>Marie Theresa Coombs and Kelly Nemeck, *Called by God: A Theology of Vocation and Lifelong Commitment* (Eugene, ORE: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 20.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 16.

There is a particular vocation within the universal call to holiness for every person. “A vocational lifestyle involves a fundamental way of becoming our true selves and of relating to others.”<sup>109</sup> The three vocational lifestyles of marriage, celibacy and singlehood are basic to our ways of living and acting. They are equally committed ways of living.

Marko Ivan Rupnik expounds on the discernment process which can be applied to one’s vocation.<sup>110</sup> By opening to the foundational loving encounter with God, discernment begins to take place in a person’s dialogue of one’s life with God. It begins listening to God’s gift particular for the person confronting societal realities.<sup>111</sup> Then follows a stage of remaining with Christ while gaining a knowledge of one’s true self, as God sees him/her. Fulfilment of God’s will is strengthened as God shows the person how to live as a redeemed person within a culture and the world.<sup>112</sup>

At the end of discernment with a choice, the person presents one’s choice to the Lord at prayer. A spiritual guide may be necessary so as to help the person purify one’s imagination of the carrying out of one’s choice. At prayer that truth is in communion in love with God and the person allows such decision to become fruitful in one’s life.<sup>113</sup>

### ***Conclusion and Recommendations***

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>110</sup>Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Discernment: Acquiring the Heart of God* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 200.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, 165-169.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 208-209.

The scriptural, philosophical, and theological reflections that emerged from this study were developed into discipleship growth sessions incorporated in the essential themes such as Discipleship in Communion of Vocations, St. Eugene and the Oblate Charism, Growth in Human and Spiritual Integration, and Discernment of Vocation that this researcher realized were necessary to support the formands in their integral growth as persons, disciples, and gradually becoming Shepherds themselves centered in Christ in their communion with the various vocations to discipleship.

What arises as a contemporary meaning of ministry, including that of the ordained in the example of St. Eugene, is to bring others closer to Christ, while not merely regarding ministry as “done” by oneself. The Filipino philosophical understanding can be expanded by this researcher’s novel personal reflection that the space between (*pagitan*) interiority (*loob*) of fellow persons (*kapwa*) is Christ the mediator (*namamagitan*), since He is at their center. In Filipino language, relationship between persons (*namamagitan sa kapwa*) and mediator find the same root. The Filipino word for fellow persons is contracted from two words *kapuwang tao*. Literally in English these mean fellow person/s. The central syllables *puwang* means an open space and the prefix *ka* means shared. The shared open space then is tantamount to the interiority of the person’s inner space for God/Christ mediating or communing with fellow persons. This implies that any ministry cannot find fulfilment unless God/Christ is in between two persons, evangelizer and evangelized, and for the sake of fulness of life eternal in God/Christ, for both of them, and not for loyalty merely to the evangelizer. Fulness of life involves universal communion of ways of life directed to other persons (*kapwa*).

Recommended for further studies are on the area of exploring youth ministry's creative initiatives that could address the need for the young to understand their being disciples and nurturing them to become shepherds themselves, with assistance of spiritual direction for their discernment of their vocation. Family life ministry could also be explored that would connect it with the parents' appropriate role in nourishing the seed of consecrated and/or religious vocation while also basically supporting communion of vocations with married and single lay discipleship and ministries. How can the Oblate charism be shared by the formands who proceed as lay faithful to others in society?

Christ the Shepherd continues to call every person in the society and in the world to become closer to Him and with one another in a communion of disciples, and in a respectful dialogue with other religions and cultures for common outreach to the most abandoned persons. As Christ continues to be among His disciples in this contemporary world, every person who heeds His call to discipleship can also become Christ's shepherd among the disciples.

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