

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FINANCES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY:
FROM THE FORMATION OF CANDIDATES TO THE LIVING WITNESS OF
PROFESSED MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTE.**

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims at portraying the fact that the finance and economic growth of any religious institute is the responsibility of all the members of the institute including the candidates in the institute's formation house. The formation house is the ideal place to inculcate the idea in the candidates and future members of the institute. *Institute* here refers to any Consecrated Religious Institute in the Catholic Church such as Religious Congregations, Religious Orders, and Societies of Apostolic Life. *Members* of the institute imply those who have made their Profession of Vows, Make the Commitment or Taken the Oath of membership. The *Candidates* are those still at their initial formation – that is those who are yet to Profess the Vows, Make the Commitment, or Take the Oath.

The Finance and economy of a consecrated religious institute are officially and primarily entrusted to the Superior and the Bursar of the institute. However, the Superior and bursar alone may not be able to bring about any meaningful financial and economic growth if the other members of the institute do not contribute their quota towards encouraging the growth.

The financial and economic demand of a religious institute increases as the members of such institute increase in number. This makes it difficult if not impossible for just the Superior, the councillors and the bursar alone to meet up with the demands of the institute without the support of other members.

FORMATION OF CANDIDATES TO ENHANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH

For other members of the institute to truly and generously contribute to the financial and economic growth of the institute they have to first of all see it as their individual and communal responsibility. And this idea has to be ingrained in the formation programme. That is to say that at the formation of a candidate one should be made to understand that it is part of his/her responsibility to provide some things for the institute or community and to manage the already provided things well. If this is not done, then it will be very difficult to convince such person to be economically responsible or fruitful to the institute after profession, especially after final profession.

For example, if in a formation house all the needs of the candidates are provided; such as good meals, toiletries, cosmetics, transportation money when going home

and when coming back to the formation house, books, entertainment equipments, frequent parties, and so on, and if the formators are using expensive things for themselves and for their community, then the candidates will find it difficult to understand when any one says the institute is in need. Such formation makes the candidates to believe that, to be a religious is to live in affluence. Such candidates begin to see their biological families and biological relations and friends as those who are truly in need rather than the religious community or institute they belong to.

On the other extreme, when the candidates in the formation house are made to pay fees, it is also counterproductive. For instance, when candidates are asked to pay formation fees, that will make some of them to go begging for money from people and family members. The candidates will wait till after profession to begin to pay back such money over a hundred fold to the family member, friends, and relations. At this point the candidate is like a politician who begged and borrowed money for campaign and after winning the political post, he/she has to pay back the money with huge interest, even if it means using public fund to do that and also save some for himself/herself.

CANDIDATES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

If providing all the candidates needs in formation house and on the other hand tasking the candidates heavily to pay for their formation may most likely not help the candidates or the professed members to join in building up the institute's finance and economy, what then should be done? There should be a middle course, for virtue is said to lie in the middle. There is great need for the candidates under formation to make both material and spiritual contributions in the institute while still in formation. But these contributions should be strictly voluntary. The formators have to encourage it.

MATERIAL CONTRIBUTION BY CANDIDATES

The material contributions from the candidates may include things like hand towels and liquid soap for wash hand basin, moping stick, liturgical materials like sacred linens, food items and so on. Some of the candidates are from a family of farmers. They can almost painlessly give from their family farm produce to the institute. The candidates can make farm in the compound and also engage in skillful work like painting of the compound when needed. These can cut down the expenditure of the formation house on labour cost. But, they need to be encouraged to do that. The institute may not depend on such generosity from the candidates, but it is necessary. It helps the candidate to see the institute as their home and see themselves as stake holders in it. Thus the candidate can willingly bring things from their family or buy some little things for the community when coming back from a journey. It could even be a little quantity of groundnut. Or bread for the community. When one contributes generously to ones institute, one feels truly like a member of it. However the formators have to be careful of those candidates who will try to use material donations to buy their way through formation. So those who contribute such

material gifts to the institute or community should be appreciated but not 'worshipped' or seen as sacred cows.

Experience has shown that those who generously and sincerely contribute material things in the community do not complain much for any lack in the community. Such persons also are more disposed to sacrificial life and manage whatever is available. They also avoid waste. But those who do not contribute materially to the institute are often complainants and wasteful of the institute's resources while they are very economical with their so called personal properties. You can sometimes hear them saying "this thing is not a community property. It is my personal thing, so nobody should touch or destroy it for me." In other words one can touch or destroy the community or institute's properties but not the person's personal property.

SPIRITUAL CONTRIBUTION BY CANDIDATES

Spiritual contribution is also very important. This includes praying for the central administration of the institute, praying for the formators and individual members of the institute especially those in a more challenging apostolate. Such prayers can be done during the community prayers when possible, and during one's private prayers. Thus, the candidates have to be formed to be generous in their prayers. They have to often pray for the needs and well being of the institute. When one is generous to be praying sincerely and devotedly for the good of the institute and her members, such person will likely be very prudent in using materials or finance of the institute.

The candidates need to see the formation house and the institute as their home and family in which they also have the obligation to help sustain. The formation has to be such that those devoted to their apostolate are held in high esteem. This will help the candidates to begin to appreciate hard work and look forward to a fulfilled apostolate after profession, rather than looking forward to acquiring lots of personal properties because he/she sees those who acquired such things been hailed by others.

PROFESSED MEMBERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

With such formation in simplicity, generosity, and seeking fulfilment in the apostolate one embraces the professed life with more focus on the goal of the institute which is also his/her personal goal. This focus on the spirituality and apostolate of the institute helps a professed member to be less focused on personal material possession. Such a member becomes less expensive to maintain. Thus, members need to avoid unnecessary distraction of personal material acquisitions and religious politicking to be able to concentrate on vocation. When one focuses more on the primary apostolate assigned to him/her, then one becomes less demanding of the material things from the congregation and one will now put in even personal possessions into the apostolate. Also the professed member who is

well formed to be simple, generous to the institute, and spiritually sound will not hesitate to make his/her returns to the institute rather than thinking he/she is doing the Superior and bursar a favour. Likewise, the Superiors, Councilors, Bursars, Project coordinators, and so on, have to be less expensive as well.

Therefore, it is important for every member of the congregation to remember that the institute is not a personal property of a member or some members of the institute. Rather, everybody, including the Superior General, Councilors and Bursar General are all MEMBERS of the institute. They also applied to be admitted into the religious institute just as every other person. So, no member of the institute should waste the institute's property or money thinking he/she is punishing the Superior or Bursar. Also, the Superior and the Bursar should not waste the institute's resources. And no one should withhold any information that can help to boost the economy or the finance of the institute with the thought that he/she does not want the Superior and council or the bursar to succeed, or thinking "They will not listen to me because they are in charge". Every member need to just air his/her opinion and suggestions with love, humility and prudence. Then leave the rest to the Holy Spirit and to those whom the Spirit has chosen to temporally pilot the affairs of the institute.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when a proper formation is given and well received candidates will naturally contribute to the economic growth of the institute. The members need to put into practice the formation given to them and live a simple life while focusing on the spirituality and apostolate of the institute. This will minimize unnecessary expenses by the institute and the financial returns from the members will increase, thereby, improving the finance and economy of the institute. I believe every consecrated religious institute is given the opportunity to get all the economic and financial resources they need to carry out their apostolate. It is only left for the members to be sincere in making their remittances and use their God given wisdom to find out the numerous opportunities surrounding them, without losing focus of their apostolate and spirituality. Thus it is the responsibility of every Professed Members and the candidates in formation to contribute to the Finances, and economic growth of the Religious Community or institute.