

POST-MEETING REFLECTION

This meeting of formation personnel provided the opportunity for us to reflect upon the hopes and joys of our Society's formation programme as well as face the many challenges posed by the future.

The meeting was undoubtedly positive and hopeful, marked by decided spirit of co-operation, openness and mutuality. More than just an exercise in exchanging information, it proved to be a forum for sharing aspirations and disappointments. It was a reality check and an appreciation of what is being done.

The statements and recommendations are the fruit of our deliberations and reflect the issues in the spotlight of current concern.

In any honest evaluation of formation, the central question has to be whether the programme is **meeting the needs of our Society** with regard to preparing students for mission as ordained ministers of the Church.

I could not improve upon the exhaustive description of the aims and objectives of the formation programme as found in the introduction to the Guidebook for Formation. However, in listening to the present needs of our Society and the areas of concern of our formation personnel, I have identified five current characteristics urgently required by Mill Hill Missionaries and therefore of prime concern to us all.

1. A **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** can never be overemphasised. Since all Mission is about witnessing to and proclaiming Jesus Christ, formation reminds the students where their focus of love and service is to be found.
2. The **ability to deal with change** is a crucial requirement for missionaries. The ability to assess change and adapt to it without loss of values will demand flexibility, openness and inner conviction from all of us. Formation provides several opportunities for students to wrestle with change in order to develop their own approach to it.
3. In a world which stresses personal happiness and individual rights, **perseverance** or "stick-ability" is a key concern for us all. Helping the students and each other to integrate suffering, embrace sacrifice and balance personal needs with the needs of others will lead to fulfilment in potentially life-giving situation.
4. **Freedom** is a core value of the Gospel and especially relevant to missionaries. The freedom that comes from knowing and accepting ourselves and respecting difference in others leads us to healthy attitudes of open-mindedness and tolerance, bearing the fruits of understanding and compassion. The increasing level of freedom and self-responsibility given to students as the programme progresses equips them well for the future.

5. An overt **love of life** and an appreciation of all its gifts will do more than anything else to open up the hearts of others to hearing the Gospel. A truly happy missionary, in spite of all, invites others to explore the meaning of the Good in the News. The formation programme works best when students are challenged to enter into it with joyful acceptance. If not it will be reduced to a sterile process of 'jumping through hoops'.

It is a sobering thought that students look to us members and associates for an example of missionaries who value their relationship with Jesus Christ, who are adaptable and flexible, and who persevere in freedom with an obvious love of life.

I am sure they are not expecting us to be saints but they are rightly looking for encouraging signs of missionaries who are trying to be and do their very best. This places a grave responsibility upon each one of, one we may not shirk.

Thus, in responding to the opening question on whether the formation programme is meeting the needs of our Society, it is with pride and admiration that I can say a wholehearted "yes".

This "yes" is made possible because of the quality, dedication and creativity of our formation personnel and the students who choose to join us, as well as the often solid support of our members and associates. Long may this partnership prosper.

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