

**PICCOLA OPERA
DELLA DIVINA PROVVIDENZA**

(Don Orione)

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DIRETTORE GENERALE

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Object: *Forum on Formation*

**Dear Confrères
Sons of Divine Providence,**

“Peace and blessings to you all in the Lord!”

With joy and hope, we present to the Congregation the proposal for the realization of the **"Forum on Formation"**, an initiative of the on-going Formation Secretariat.

The development of this initiative is the result of a reflection initiated within the General Council, which was then deepened by some confrères engaged in the formation sector, selected according to linguistic areas, and coordinated by the Vicar General, Father Maurizio Macchi, and the General Councilor, Father Fausto Franceschi. Provincial Vicars were also invited to intervene in the concluding phase of the elaboration and to evaluate the proposal.

With this letter, we want to officially launch the initiative and provide a contribution to make it understandable in its content and methodology, so that it can be lived with enthusiasm and fidelity to provoke us to that "vital conversion" mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996): *"Formation is a vital process through which a person converts to the Word of God in the depths of his being and, at the same time, learns the art of seeking the signs of God in the realities of the world."* (n. 68).

At the beginning, there is a dream...

It is the dream of the General Chapter Fathers: *"We dream of a formation (initial and ongoing) that helps everyone relive the fundamental experiences of our religious and Orionine being. Like the disciples were attracted by the personality of Christ and left everything to follow Him, and as our first fathers were attracted to Luigi Orione and decided to go with him, giving themselves completely, we dream that there are formative paths that help all Orionines to fall in love with Christ and Don Orione and find the strength to involve themselves totally."* (15th General Chapter, Action Line n. 2: Human and Spiritual Fragility, n. 13).

What did the Chapter propose, to realize the dream?

There were four proposals that involved different actors: the provincial councils in preparing formators (n. 15), each religious in paying attention to his personal formation (n. 16), and all the confrères in taking care of *"those who experience moments of discomfort and suffering"* (n. 17). Additionally, the Chapter asked the General Council to promote *"in every possible way an organic, widespread, and continuous interest in religious and charismatic formation, from the beginning of the vocational journey. To carry out a comprehensive formative action that prevents and addresses human and spiritual fragility, some main pedagogical modules (knowledge, competence, and experience) on the fundamental traits of the charism at the personal, community, and provincial levels will be formulated and used to renew initial and ongoing formation."* (15th General Chapter, n. 14)

A prioritized and strategic theme

To celebrate the first anniversary of the 15th General Chapter, in the month of June, the General Council met via video conference with the Provincial Superiors and Delegates. For the occasion, a questionnaire was prepared. Its last question asked the Provincials to choose a proposal from the Chapter on which the General Council should focus in a prioritized and strategic manner during the year 2024. Almost all Provincials indicated the theme of Formation as a priority, expressed in this way: "Promote a comprehensive formative action that prevents and addresses human and spiritual fragility."

In each six-year period, a convention is normally organized on Formation.

True! We did it six years ago as well, where about fifty members of the Orionine Family gathered (approximately 25 brothers, 16 Sisters, and other lay members) at Casa Tra Noi in November 2018. However, these and similar conferences primarily focused on initial formation. They undoubtedly sparked great interest but reached a necessarily limited number of brothers. Additionally, the question arose regarding the formative impact these conferences could have on communities that were not primarily formative and on religious in general. Maybe the methodology was more suited to producing guidelines or documents for initial formation or, in any case, to guide formators in their duty of accompaniment and guidance.

Now a "Forum on Formation": is it just a name change?

The change is substantial. Instead of a punctual, predominantly speculative event, reserved for a small group, we seek a new experience in line with the Chapter's request: to promote an organic, widespread, and continuous interest in formation at different levels (personal, communal, and provincial). Furthermore, the reflective process starts from the grassroots, involving individual religious not as listeners but as protagonists, within the community and then the province.

Such a methodology will lead us to consider reflection on permanent or continuous formation, which does not necessarily exclude initial formation but integrates it into a broader and more experiential path.

We are well aware that continuous formation needs to be invented today. Unfortunately, there is a perceived spreading of a certain fragility of identity and motivation, even in long-standing religious, accompanied by a subtle shift towards rather individualistic or even secular lifestyles. It is, therefore, necessary to rediscover on-going formation as a process of renewal and daily growth that primarily occurs through experiences in community life. Formators are not primarily scholars or experts in religious life but the brother who lives next to me: together, he and I, in the daily life of our community, we form ourselves in our consecrated identity and help each other grow in generous dedication to the Lord and to brothers.

It will be a matter, finally, of questioning whether the personal and communal formative journey needs renewal and whether the proposals coming from the Congregation are sufficient or suitable and meet our real needs, so that permanent formation can truly support spiritual, communal, apostolic, and relational life.

An "organic, widespread, continuous" journey, in stages:

- **Local stage in 2024:** Each religious will receive the texts of four Orionine Lectio, one every two or three months, for personal reflection, followed each time by a community sharing meeting that must have an immediate impact on community life. There we will question if the Community is a reality of permanent formation, and what to do to make it more authentically Orionine. At the end of each meeting, the Community will send its reflection to the Province, through an online form.
- **Provincial stage in 2025:** An event will be planned to identify and share lines and paths for the Province, possibly in conjunction with the Provincial Verification Assembly scheduled for the mid-six-year period.
- **Congregational stage in 2026:** There will finally be a Congregational event (whose modalities are yet to be scheduled) that will collect the fruits of the local and provincial stages.

The journey will span two and a half to three years (2024-2026).

How is the Orionine Lectio structured and what themes will we address?

The texts prepared in the form of "Orionine Lectio" cover the following themes:

1. **My spiritual life** (prayer, meditation, spiritual direction, love for Scripture, preparation of liturgies, Christ at the center, lectio divina).
2. **My more personal moral life** (dependency, attachment to television, internet, hobbies, time wastage, unhealthy or morbid friendships, exclusivist friendships, alcohol dependence, pornography, gambling).
3. **My way of living the role, ministry, responsibilities** (external attitudes of authoritarianism, self-referentiality, independence, perfectionism, intransigence, inability to show compassion).
4. **My service, primarily as a relationship** (capacity for empathy, listening, putting others and their needs at the center, renouncing personal gratification to make space for the happiness of others, renouncing imposing my ideas to welcome others).

It emphasizes the personal aspect: it is the "I" of the religious questioning his own way of being and living his Orionine vocation, an analysis of his situation, lights, and shadows. It was chosen to prioritize the involvement of the person (a very concrete self-questioning), rather than a reflection solely of a communal nature, to avoid the risk that something generic remains that does not foster personal decisions. However, it should be noted that the third and fourth Lectio both focus on community relations and apostolate: the third emphasizing negative aspects, the dangers we risk falling into; the fourth emphasizing virtues underlying relationships, the Gospel style.

The four texts of Orionine Lectio will be sent, already translated, to the provincial vicars, not all at once, but one every two months approximately. This will allow more time for preparation and the use of feedback from the previous one to improve the subsequent ones, in addition to keeping interest alive. Provincial vicars will be responsible for distributing personally the texts to each religious, for personal reflection, which must precede the community meeting. The role of community directors will be particularly important, as they have the precious task of animating, motivating, and involving the brothers in this journey.

Attention!

The text of the 4 Lectio should not be considered as duplication of permanent formation modules. They should not replace them either. They have a different dynamic, aimed at provoking a clear contribution from the community to the Province.

Throughout the year, other initiatives will be promoted to enrich personal and communal reflection. For example, the opening of an online platform or forum is being considered to facilitate exchange among the religious, communication, and sharing, and to make formative materials available in text, video, or audio formats.

In conclusion, the goal of this journey is self-examination, provoking sharing, and possibly discovering new forms and tools to implement on-going formation. This is ultimately the scope of the Forum: continuous formation, which must materialize in personal and communal work and not be limited to occasional extraordinary events dropped from above.

Finally, we want to thank the brothers who have committed to organizing this Forum and who will continue to accompany its implementation, including any adjustments or continuity until the congregational stage. They are: Fr. Gustavo Omar Cadenini (Province Nuestra Señora de la Guardia - Spanish Area); Fr. Josimar Felipe da Silva (Province Nossa Senhora de Fátima - Portuguese Area); Don Oreste Ferrari (Delegation Mother of the Church - English Area); Don Hyacinthe Vieira (Province Notre Dame d'Afrique - French Area); and Don Sylwester Sowizdrzał (Province Madonna di Czestochowa - Polish Area).

We entrust this journey of formation to the Mother of Divine Providence to help us regain the higher tones of spiritual, apostolic, and charismatic life. In this effort, Saint Luigi Orione encourages us: "*Come, my children, let us work on ourselves, shaping our lives according to the life of Jesus Christ: let us take heart and with strength - looking to the Lord and asking for help from the Lord - let us move forward in acquiring Christian and religious virtues and in the love and service of God and the Church. We must learn Jesus Christ, as St. Paul said, and walk, walk, walk briskly on the path of the Lord. Come, my children, prepare yourselves to be Apostles... But it is absolutely necessary that we all be Apostles of faith, of love for God and neighbor, of love for the Holy Madonna, of love for the Pope and the Church. (...) Resist temptations and discouragement: they are not from God: remain perseverant and faithful to your vocation, to your Congregation.*" (Letters, II, pp. 237-239, from Buenos Aires, August 2, 1935).

In God, your brothers

Don Maurizio Macchi
Vicario Generale

Don Fausto Franceschi
Consigliere Generale

P. Tarcisio G. Vieira
Direttore Generale

