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## Exploring Human Formation

### Describing Human Formation

From FCS's perspective, human formation embraces processes designed to unclog, transform, and cultivate the human heart. Human formation requires cultivating a conscious presence to life and the world accompanied by a pausing rhythm to reflect back on everyday experiences. Human formation is about Reflective Living.

Human formation includes processes to assist in cultivating wide-eyed-open awareness concerning who we are today with all our gifts and limitations. Human formation involves understanding and appreciating who have been the significant people, events and things that have shaped and formed us into the people we are today. Our distant past and our recent past impact "how" we go about in helpful and in unhelpful ways interacting with ourselves, others, the things and tasks of the day, and with our God. Finally, human formation also promotes alternative ways of being human, e.g., being conscious and reflective, and living through the formative dispositions of e.g., awe, appreciation, gentleness, humility and kindness.

Some of our past life experiences with people, events, and things (decades ago when we were children or just yesterday) resulted in cluttering up and clogging up the heart. A cluttered, clogging up, and closing up heart, constricts and inhibits us from living and experiencing daily life through the true, authentic, precious, wonderful human beings that we are. As a consecrated person or as a person in initial formation, a cluttered heart diminishes. It does not inhibit necessarily the mission, work and ministry, but rather it diminishes the ongoing empowering experience of joy, fullness, and peace that results from embracing consecrated life. A constricting heart prevents us from experiencing the awesomeness of our true authentic selves, i.e., made in God's image and likeness.

We all have been harmed and hurt, sometimes purposefully and often unintentionally by family, friends, community, and just the daily stuff that the world and life churns up around us on most days. In this regard, part of human formation is about increasing self-awareness, i.e., self-knowledge concerning how distant and recent past experiences impacted and likely continues to impact us today in helpful and in unhelpful ways. Through ongoing growth in self-awareness, we develop the capacity to see more clearly and appreciate more wholeheartedly, that no matter what has happened to us in the distant or recent past, we are created in the image of our God, full of love and wonder, preciousness and delight. This is our true authentic self. This type of comprehensive self-knowledge and self-awareness brings about true human maturity that

the Church seeks for its consecrated persons. It establishes trust and confidence within self and a healthy dose of positive self-esteem and self-worth. It is part of human formation's healing touch.

### **Human Formation Processes**

From a practical perspective, FCS views human formation as consisting and including—systematic, detailed, thorough, and in-depth processes. These processes focus on and hone the transformation and cultivation of the human heart. FCS's human formation processes respond to the Church's desire for comprehensive formation that leads to fullness of maturity. Based on *Vita Consecrata*, initial and ongoing formation remains in the service of—how to go about, how to convert within the depths of one's being, how to transform within one's heart-of-hearts—the living out of the Institute's spirit, its charism, in a manner that unfolds in "put[ting] on the mind of Christ the Lord." Spiritual/Christian/Charism, communal, educational/professional, and apostolic formation stand upon and build upon the foundational human formation of the human heart.

Human Formation is both an art and a craft. As an art, human formation remains in the service of helpfully interacting with self, others and the things of daily life in a gracious and graced-filled manner. It unfolds as a consciousness, a mindfulness that permits hearing the whispering of the Spirit. This connection with the Spirit unfolds into an intimacy with God that informs our thinking, feelings, heart and thus our behavior.

As a craft, human formation brings together a step-by-step series of disciplined processes for initial and lifelong formation. As a learnt and acquired appreciation for living out daily life in a way that unclogs and cultivates the human heart, human formation processes convert and transform the human heart. Human formation underpins and enhances intimacy with God through nurturing the way we take up the various people, events and things of daily life. Prayer and spiritual formation as one aspect of nurturing an intimate connection with God is complemented and supported through the underpinnings of human formation.

More specifically and practically, human formation focuses on the "how", on the manner and on the way that people assume and live out being human, either reflectively or in an unaware manner. Human formation is about living life through dispositions that unclog and open up the pathways leading into the human heart, e.g., awe, appreciation, gentleness, humility, kindness. Dispositions inform, motivate and propel our bodies, thinking, emotions and thus our behaviors.

For people of faith, especially for clergy and religious, for those choosing the consecrated life, "how" they live out being human is always more important than "what" they accomplish. The "what" and the "doing" of life always needs to be informed by and subservient to the cultivation of the human heart, since the human heart is the conduit for the human spirit and the Divine Spirit. In this manner people are informed through God and human spirit. Otherwise behavior is informed through ego-strivings, e.g., what I want, what I insist upon, what I must have.

When the "how" and its dispositions of taking up the day are disconnected from an open and receptive human heart, or the human heart is clogging-up in some manner, then "being" and "doing" is informed through ego-striving, e.g., harshness, arrogance, pride, aggressiveness, judgment, being rushed, overextended, impatient, and being over-focused on achieving, accomplishing, performing, succeeding. Human formation is about the cultivation of the human heart and its importance as the conduit and connective conveyance between God and humanity.

All people do stuff—work, produce, achieve, and strive. But if a person's doing, working, producing, achieving is not informed through an open, receptive, hospitable human heart, not informed through an intimate connection with God, then the working, the producing, the achieving will be oriented via ego-striving rather than the spirit. Ego-strivings often produces helpful and practical assistance to many people. However, what is the cost? What are the consequences over the long-term for the individual consecrated person?

In this regard, "for what does it profit a person, to gain the whole world, and forfeit life?" (Mark 8:36) In this sense, human formation differs from spiritual formation. Spiritual formation comes through the doorway of the human. Without the body, the mind, the emotions, and an open receptive hospitable human heart, there can be no authentic spiritual formation, or for that matter communal, professional and apostolic formation. Human formation is the gateway leading through the other doorways of formation. In this way, human formation is like the primary colors of red, green and blue from which all other colors are composed.

When the daily tasks of taking up life are informed through God, the Divine Spirit, the human spirit, and thus an informed human heart—then life unfolds with perspective, joy, fullness, ease and peace. Alternatively, when life's involvements are informed and taken up through ego-strivings, then the day, the work, and the necessary involvement with people and the world fills-up with arrogance and pride rather than simplicity and humility. The day continues to fill-up with stressfulness and unfilled appetites rather than with graciousness and celebration; with emptiness and loneliness rather than collaboration and ordinary-intimacy; with angst and fear rather than freedom and peace of mind.

**In summary**, human formation is about being aware concerning how one consciously takes up daily life and how to go about intentionally cultivating openheartedness. Human Formation is all about the transformation and cultivation of the human heart. In this manner the human heart is open and free to be in the service of the Spirit for others, and in the service of intimacy with God, others and self. FCS takes up human formation through our Reflective Living processes.