

## Formator in the General Delegation of Francophone Africa

*Father David GIAPUNDA, SMM, Congolese, after completing his specialization in Spiritual Theology, training branch at the Pontifical University of Gregorian (PUG) in Rome, returned to his Entity of origin. We interviewed him about his studies and his current mission as a formator.*

### **What was this formation of formators that you studied in Rome?**

The two-year degree program in Spiritual Theology with specialization in formation of formators for the priesthood and consecrated life consisted of the integration between intellectual-academic formation and human-spiritual-pastoral formation. The formation was aimed at helping future formators to acquire more precise educational competence in carrying out their task of discerning and accompanying future priests and/or religious. The program offers in its interdisciplinarity 21 courses, 4 seminars and research work. The disciplines are mainly based on the dialogue between theology, spirituality, vocational psychology-anthropology and canon law. The courses are more practical than theoretical because they address the discernment and accompaniment of hypothetical situations developed by teachers. This is why at the beginning of the year, the students are divided into groups of 8 to 10 and the number of students registered in the first license does not exceed 50 students. In addition, there are about ten practical exercises including visits to seminaries in Rome, exchange meetings with the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Congregation for the Evangelization of People, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, etc. The specificity of the formation at the Gregorian consists, above all, in the proposal made to the future formator of an individual framework of work on himself under the direction of a guide for a period of 6 months or more (what is called "conferences"); of discernment and vocational growth and group therapy or group dynamics of between 7 to 10 candidates led by two psychologists together with our guide. The concern here, as Benito Goya would say, *"a mountaineer guide, before he can guide others to the top of the mountain, he must have already traveled many paths"*, that is to say, he must have carried out a profound work on self-knowledge.



### **What aspects of Formation did you particularly work on and what do you still need to work on?**

As part of my research, I worked on vocational discernment and spiritual direction in "initial formation". In concrete, I looked on how to help the person in formation in self-knowledge and in the integration of all the dimensions of the personality; how to create a climate of mutual trust; how to make the most of periodic dialogue and community time; how to link motivation and requirement, respect for freedom and requirement of the institution; how to read the possible influence of personal and family background (presence of illness, conflicts, resistance to the Spirit, etc.) in the spiritual life of the person in formation to respond to the call to holiness.

The aspects on which I have to work are among others: in general, to see if the frequentation of the Spiritual Direction is a natural motivation or an obligation; picking up the fears that the practice of Spiritual Direction would arouse; and thus from the various elements of discovery, seek to improve

access to this essential helping relationship for the human and spiritual growth of the person in following Christ. In particular, how to form young people in the footsteps of Montfort to appropriate the means that the Church offers to nourish the relationship with Christ and make discernment a style of life "*à la Montfort*".

**On which points, according to you, must insist the ongoing formation of the formators?**

Today, with the new paradigm of formation maturation which consists in thinking of formation as an endless path of transformation, the permanent formation of the formator must insist, I dare to believe, on "*docibilitas*", - learning to grow personally in the spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral life. It is necessary, to paraphrase Vita Consecrata 65, to offer opportunities for growth to the formator in adherence to the charism and mission of the Institute. There is also a need to let oneself be transformed by the Lord by assimilating his feelings throughout life, as the Montfortian Ratio Formationis, volume II says, by appropriating the classic means offered to us by the Church (Cf. Montfortian Ratio Formationis, volume II, "Means of formation"). The formator must have a supervisor who can also be his spiritual director to allow him to come into contact with his interiority. Exchange meetings among formators are also a training framework.

**What suggestions to the Congregation and to your Entity can you make to give greater impetus to the Formation of Formators?**

Without any pretension, I suggest and call with all my wishes the major superiors to offer a specific preparation to those who are called to live the mission of formator. Today, experts agree that "*It would certainly be unfair to throw all the responsibility for crises and defections on the conscience of the formators...crises, without prejudice to the mystery of personal responsibilities, depend very much on human maturity and supernatural nature of formators ... and the relevance of their methods and training content*". It is useless to oppose grace and nature, content and method which in themselves are inseparable. To consider mainly the spiritual or theological side to the detriment of the practical method (especially psychology) which informs on how the person functions carries many risks. The method in formation allows "*that the action of grace at the center of every vocation is as adequate as possible to the service to be rendered*". The attention in the formation having to bear on the "subject called", the contribution of the specific formation helps to highlight lights and shadows, strengths and weaknesses, maturity and immaturity of the candidate in the exercise of his own freedom, more or less limited to respond to God's call. Formation means being able to discern one's personal situation, but also knowing how to discern what is wrong with others and helping them get rid of it or accept their situation. The advantage of a specific formation is that of making formation a savored experience before becoming the exercise of a ministry, as insisted by A. Cencini. The need for formators in the GDAF is more pressing. You would have to spend to have formators.

**In your first year as a Formator in your Entity, what are the joys and sorrows of this new mission?**

My joys: I am discovering more and more that the life of a young person is like "a burning bush which you have to approach by taking off your shoes and keeping an unassuming distance in front of *this holy ground*". The ministry of the accompaniment of young people is also a path of growth for those who exercise it honestly. Training others is like a contemporary experience of training oneself. I have resolved to share my little knowledge with the team of formators. I am delighted that colleagues have admitted that since my arrival they look at young candidates differently.

My difficulties: we demand a lot from young people but we don't always put them in the right conditions. We live in a community of about twenty people but without any vehicle! Running a school in a house of formation has a cost that goes beyond the money we need for self-financing.