

Brief Report of the Formators Meeting of the Japanese Monasteries

Monday October 7 – 11 Our Lady of Phare Abbey, Hokkaido

The following is a brief summary of points that surfaced during our sharing on Mother Johanna's conferences:

- Similarities and differences in formation in each monastery. The nuns tend to have a prolonged period of candidacy and postulancy (2 ½ yrs., Tenshien, 1 ½ yrs.) before receiving the habit. Candidates for the monks receive the oblate's habit after 3 months and remain that way for 6 months before receiving the novices' habit.
- Mother Johanna explained the movement of "aggiornamento" from observances to the more fundamental elements of Gospel life and a more thorough understanding of the Rule of St. Benedict. Importance of fidelity was emphasized. "Without love, the rest means nothing."
- Careful consideration must be given to the use of social media and how this has transformed the mentality of the younger generation. Novices do not have access to the Internet or email in any of the Japanese monasteries. There is limited access to the Internet when necessary for the professed members. In the monasteries of nuns letters that are sent out are given to the abbess unsealed.
- The aim of formation is to form a person to become a man or woman of God. The talents of the candidate are quite secondary. The monk can only be understood as a man of God. "You didn't come here to do a job or to seek an office, but to become a monk." What is there to strive for after solemn profession? Is the candidate truly searching for God? There is a difference between staying in the monastery and persevering in the monastery.
- Discussion of Japanese Buddhism and Christianity. Some have integrated positive elements of Buddhism after becoming Christian.
- Fundamental principles. We accept a variety of people into our monasteries in the hope of conversion. The importance of a balance between kindness and strictness and clarity on the part of the formator. How to facilitate a novice's growth in obedience and humility without intimidation? "Strive not to make a person discouraged." Our aim is to assist a person in the search for God and lead the person to Christ.
- Differences noted in candidates who were baptized as infants and those who received baptism as adults. Some candidates have been poorly catechized.
- Progress is being made in order to implement the *Experientia* program as proposed by the Order. Japanese translations require more time.
- Normal health of candidates is expected. Physical exams are required but psychological exams are not required for entrance to the Japanese monasteries. Initial and ongoing discernment of the superior and community will determine special needs.
- Fraternal life. "The School of Love." Candidates need to be formed in authentic love and friendship. Problems with exclusivity or emotional attachments can arise. How to attend to the needs of a candidate who did not receive a normal experience of human love at home? We must lead the person to go further than

human attachments so that he can arrive at the love of God. We are brothers and sisters who assist one another in our pilgrimage to God.

- The abbot or novice master should be capable of friendship. Without love and faith he will not be able to understand his monks.
- Silence can assist fraternal charity, but if there is no communication the community will be weakened. So we need to be together at the Eucharist and the Divine Office. Community dialogues, gospel sharing, patience and mutual respect strengthen community life.
- No matter what the changing circumstances might be trust in the presence of God at all times will assist us in our vow of stability.

Evaluation: We worked together very well in an open and peaceful fraternal atmosphere where we could share our joys and difficulties. It was good to hear from seniors who have many years of experience. Happy to be warmly received in Phare!

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