

2025 Oriens Japanese sub-region

Meeting of Formators



Venue: Our Lady of Nasu Abbey

May 19-23, 2025

Twelve participants from all seven monasteries of the Oriens Japanese sub-region gathered at Nasu Monastery from May 19th to the 23rd.

The Participants

	monastery	Participant	Role
1	Tenshien	M. Johanna	Abbess Novice Mistress
2	Phare	D. Aloysius	Novice Master
3	Oita	D. Vianney	Novice Master
4	Nishinomiya	Sr. Rosa · Maria	Sub-mistress, Mistress of young professed
5	Nishinomiya	Sr. Marta	Receptionist at Nishinomiya
6	Imari	Sr. Marie · Raphaela	Novice Mistress
7	Imari	Sr. Agnes	Junior Mistress
8	Ajimu	Sr. Bernarda	Novice Mistress
9	Ajimu	Sr. Marta	Junior Mistress
1 0	Nasu	Fr. David	Sub-regional Formation Secretary
1 1	Nasu	Sr. Marie · Teresa	Junior Mistress
1 2	Nasu	Sr. Bernarda	Novice Mistress

Schedule

6/19 (Mon) pm Participants Arrive

6/20 (Tues) am After Tierce 1st discussion / 2nd discussion after coffee break

pm After None the 3rd discussion. 4th discussion after coffee break.

6/21 (Wed) am 5th discussion after Tierce / 6th discussion after coffee break

pm Field trip

6/22 (Thurs) pm 7th discussion after Tierce / 8th discussion after coffee break

Lunch break: Tour of Abbey/After None 9th discussion

10th (final) discussion took place after coffee break.

6/23 (Fri) Departure 1 group departs at 9am/ 10:30 departure group visits cookie factory

Topics discussed (dialogue and sharing from the 20th to the 22nd)

- Use of the internet in the novitiate/a means for Vietnamese sisters to communicate with their families in their home country
- Current status of the novitiate at each monastery and formation initiatives
- Difficulty of formation when there is only one person in formation
- What is the content of the novitiate program?
- The challenges in formation for non-Japanese candidates
- Sharing experiences of various Vocation Promotion Projects. Initiatives to introduce our Order to people who are interested in religious life
- When new candidates are admitted after a long period of no candidates, how will the age gap affect their formation?
- Exploring the possibility of holding common learning/fellowship sessions for simply professed in Japan
- Explore the possibility of holding formation courses including online for candidates at the Oriens Region or sub-regional level in Japan.
- Maintaining hope for the future even with a lack of applicants
- Sharing current state of our prayer in light of the Abbot General's circular letter.
- Some reflections concerning the *Ratio*.

Number of those currently undergoing formation as of May 2025

	Monastery	Postulants	Novices	Simply Professed

1	Phare	0	0	1 (Japanese)
2	Tenshien	0	1 (Japanese)	0
3	Nishinomiya	0	0	0
4	Imari	1 (Japanese)	1 (Japanese)	1 (Japanese) 2 (Vietnam)
5	Nasu	2 (Japanese)	1 (Japanese)	2 (Japanese)
6	Oita	0	0	0
7	Ajimu	1 (Vietnam)	0	0
Total		4	3	6

Discussion

The previous Formators Meeting of the Japanese sub-region was held in Tobetsu in 2019. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions on travel etc., the Meeting could not be held. At the full Oriens Formators Meeting held in Rawaseneng in 2023, an Indonesian priest and member of the Society of the Priests the Sacred Heart, Father Julius Sunardi, gave conferences and visual materials on "Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons" and "Protection Programs."

A questionnaire was distributed before this 2025 Japanese sub-regional Formators Meeting, and it was decided that no lecturer would be invited; instead the participants wanted to share their experiences by meeting in discussions.

5/20 (Tues) morning session

Discussion topic 1) use of Zoom, smartphones, the Internet, etc. The following was shared during the exchange of opinions:

— Online class experience

Imari: Liturgy study once every three weeks using Zoom / Irregular sessions with Fr. Kato

Nasu: 2024: Lectures from Sophia University on "Synodality", different lecturer each time.

- Use of smartphones for communication when out of monastery
- Personal use of smartphones for contacting family, especially Vietnamese sisters
- superiors permission and responsible use of smart phones
- Use of Skype varies according to monastery
- These devices are necessary for work, such as accounting or taking orders for confectionery business.
- Some simply professed expressed the joy of being free from Internet in the monastery.
- Japanese dictionaries are outdated when looking up words; some items not included.
- Use of the Internet limited to a common room and time restrictions
- Recognition that the Internet must be used wisely and with discretion

Discussion topic 2: When no candidates or only one applicant

- difficulties for candidates who have no companion.
- Spain has devised periods of common formation
- Even if not as extensive as Spain, would be good to have some exchange between our novitiates.
- Interaction: Experiences outside of one's own community are a source of enrichment and benefit.
- Interaction: Experiencing other communities was a positive experience that broadened my monastic perspective.
- Considerations of the experience of the Isles Region Junior Seminar in England
- The USA continues its Juniors Seminar program
- Vietnamese sisters from Nishinomiya and Ajimu are engaged in exchange programs.

Discussion topic 3: Silence

- I strongly feel that new members need formation in the area of silence.
- Sharing each participant's experiences with silence
- Different national cultures treat silence in various ways.

Topic 4: The difference between "aspirancy" and "postulancy" is unclear.

Topic 5: Projects for the Promotion of Vocations

- Imari welcomed people interested in monastic life or a period of three months
- Four "Vocational Consideration Gatherings" were held in Nasu for 3 days and 2 nights, including during the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2023 and again in 2024.
- "We must do something to introduce this lifestyle to the world!" but we have not yet put it into action.

- There are people who desire this life, but their interest tends to be only a passing curiosity.

5/20 Afternoon Session

Topic 1: Should applicants be required to submit a medical certificate from a psychosomatic physician or psychiatrist when joining? The discussion began with an exchange of opinions and then developed into a sharing of ways to interact with people in the novitiate.

- Knowing yourself and knowing God are two sides of a coin.
- Lectures by a psychology expert from OSB Meinrad Abbey, USA at Glenstall, Ireland-- very informative.
- A Vietnamese expert on mental, intellectual, and physical health said: “Bananas and bones. If you give a banana to a dog, it won't eat it. If you give a bone to a monkey, it won't eat it. Each person has different gifts and each person has their own food that is suitable for them. The same is true for humans.”
- The relationship with people during initial training is not uniform, as if they were drawn from a standard format, rather it differs depending on each person's temperament.

Topic 2: When new members join after a long period of absence, how does the age difference impact the community?

- The age of new recruits is also rising, so the impact is not so great.
- We heard the unique story of a Diocesan priest who was married, raised children, his spouse died and he entered the seminary.
- Is the common life in a monastery difficult for people who have been married?
 - The experience of Nasu
 - The experience of Imari
- In this day and age, there are many people who are emotionally wounded due to experiences of abuse, etc.

5/21 Morning session

Topic 1: Content of conferences given in the novitiate

- Phare: Constitutions, Rule, history of Order, the vows and Spiritual life
- Oita: Conferences on the Rule and the history of the Order given by the superior.
“I was surprised at how little young people today know about the Catechism.”
- Tenshien: Rule, Constitutions. Vows and spiritual life liturgy, monthly Bible sharing. Sharing in the light of life

- Nasu: history of Order, Bible (presently O.T.) Rule, vows and spiritual life, Catechism, liturgy
 - Nishinomiya: Explanation of Rule, lecture on the Psalms, and work instructions (by the Abbess)
- Lectures were given by the late M. Theodora on Psalms, Old Testament, Liturgy, Rule
- Lectures from Fr. Bernard of Saint-Sulpice on The Bible
- Lectures *on Lectio Divina* by Fr. John Sakamoto (Phare), “the relationship between human beings and God”
- Pope Benedict XVI's "Jesus Prayer" and "Finger Prayer"
- Ajimu: Study of Japanese, practice public reading, singing practice, study of vows
- Constitutions by abbess
- Psalms by M. Johanna
- Gospel sharing among newly professed
- Imari: Rule and Constitutions by abbess
- Using the *Exordium* to teach history of Order
- Using the commentary by M. Catharina to teach Cistercian documents
- Singing practice, liturgy (on line, Patristics by a priest from outside)
- Emotional education: Decide on a theme and "share reading", "The Little Prince", "Momo"
- Japanese Tea Ceremony

Topic 2: exchange of opinions about the perception that formators have not received training as formators.

Topic 3: Challenges for non-Japanese candidates

- There was an exchange of opinions concerning the responsibilities in formation due to language and cultural differences.

Afternoon Field Trip

We enjoyed “matcha” green tea and Japanese sweets served in the style of a Japanese tea ceremony while admiring the Japanese garden in Nanko Park near Nasu Town, and then strolled through the garden.

Afterward, we visited the restored three-story castle tower of Komine Castle in nearby Shirakawa City, and returned to the monastery as evening approached.



At the Suirakuen teahouse in Nanko Park



Komine Castle in background



In front of the castle tower of Komine Castle





5/22 Morning session

Topic 1: Desire for a Seminar for Formators

Sr. Bernarda of Nasu introduced the Monastic Formators Program (MFP) which she participated in in 2019. It is a three-month seminar with multiple instructors. Some would like to receive training as a formator, but it doesn't have to be a long-term program like the MFP.

- The possibility of involving not only current formators but also those with the capacity to take on this role in the future.
- The problem of interpretation arises if we invite lecturers from overseas.
- Some things we would like to ask of the Japanese superiors:
 - ① Some interaction among the simply professed of other monasteries.
 - ② Lectures from some experienced Japanese monks or nuns
- Some lectures can be rather academic. I would like some practical advice on spiritual accompaniment.
- Once every three years is a bit too long a gap, so it would be nice to have this opportunity once a year.
- In addition to the Formators Seminar we would like to hold a seminar for training formators.
- If people other than formators were to participate, wouldn't it be difficult to select them?

- As a formator, I would like to invite the people I want to train in the future to be able to participate.
- Wouldn't it be better to meet once every three years rather than every year?
- Sometimes you invite a lecturer, but the audience will “listen only.”
- Sharing events like this time allows us to exchange frank opinions even on sensitive matters.
- I would like to propose holding a Formators Meeting and also a separate "Formators Training course." Where and how to hold the "trainer's course" will be up to the superiors.
- What I had in mind was to hold something like a “mini version of MFP” in Japan.
- The only way to train someone is by learning through experience.
- I was suddenly asked to take on the mission of formator and it was like the microphone suddenly being passed around to me at a karaoke performance. I was suddenly asked to do so without any preparation.
- The one who is requesting this service cannot just say, “now you are the future formator.”
- Whom should we invite to such a course? Several names from the Japanese sub-region were mentioned.
- Could the lectures be online via Zoom?
- Once a week or once a month?
- Several names of monks or nuns from outside the sub-region were proposed.
- Someone from our Order who can be a spiritual companion and who can talk about their experiences.
- What should we call this "gathering"? For example, a “Monastic Seminar?
- Some people are saying that I don't know how to provide formation, so perhaps it would be better to include the word "formation."
- We strongly encourage training for formators, but is it possible for people who are not currently formators to participate?
- While expressing our current requests, is it possible for us to ask our superiors what they would like us formators to learn, or to ask them for direction?
- You can't generalize everything because each monastery has a different approach to formation.
- I think the importance of formation lies in building a bond of trust between the formator and the candidate. Training skills and techniques are important, but more than that, as young people develop strong bonds with the people in formation, their trust in the community should also deepen.

- I wanted my formator to be someone with a lot of experience.
- I would like to hear some specific teachings from experienced people on how to lead.
- It is not easy to objectively look at experienced people from within a community, that is why we tend to invite lecturers from outside.

Afternoon Session

Topic 1: "Even if there are no applicants, we remain hopeful for the future."

- We have become accustomed to the situation where there are no candidates, and no one feels a sense of crisis. They are just sitting back and doing what they can with the current membership. The people who are not causing problems still remain, and things are stable now, but if things continue like this, we will naturally disappear.
- We experienced the same situation at our monastery, but then a man who had been active as a priest joined, and it was a great source of inspiration.
- Ajamu is active and enviable.
- I feel that things can't go on like this and that something has to be done.
- Using Tenshien's "Monastery Guide" pamphlet as a reference, Nasu also produced a pamphlet last year, the 70th anniversary of its foundation. It has been well received. We hope that it will lead to the possibility of vocations.
- In the Oita Diocese, Bishop Moriyama led a "Vocational Meeting." Results will not come immediately, but we hope for the long term results.
- In Vietnam too, interesting initiatives are being carried out to nurture the seeds of vocation for children.
- Rather than doing nothing, we believe it's better to just try to do something, so we have produced a pamphlet and we hold "meetings to think about vocations."
- It appears that no monks or nuns go to Catholic schools to speak about our Order.

5/22 (Thurs)Afternoon Session

Topic 1: Jan. 26, 2025 Circular Letter of Abbot General.

- The Abbot General's letter was read and shared by everyone.
- Without prayer, we will just keep working and our hearts will wither.
- At one time, there was no common time for prayer in the chapel. When I first joined, I didn't know what to do during my private silent prayer in the chapel. Ten years ago, I instructed them to make prayer time mandatory. When I became a superior, I introduced a silent prayer after Vigils, even if it was just

under 30 minutes. When Vespers and Compline were scheduled together for a time, I felt that there was a lack of individual prayer. Since becoming a superior, I have been impressed by the efforts of the community of one of our foundations to properly hold this silent prayer.

- It is important to strive to persevere in the habit of prayer. Also, without silence there is no prayer.
- Thirty minutes of silence after Vigils is important.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed in the church, but without the cucula and without organ accompaniment.
- At our monastery Tierce and None are prayed at work while still in work clothes.
- We do Lectio together. However, it is impossible for everyone to do so at exactly the same time due to work commitments.
- There are differences between the men's and women's Constitutions regarding the practice of lectio (Statutes 21a and 21b).
- For the sake of prayer we stopped using the mixer to make pastries after Vigils. We've been working on our schedule to make this happen.
- The confectionery department is extremely short-staffed, with only four people. During busy periods, prayer and reading are essentially replaced by offering "sacrifices."
- The Abbot General's circular letter made us realize our current situation. In the letter, there were phrases such as "constant prayer" and "calmness of mind," but many sisters keenly felt that they were far from this calmness. When we talked to them, we acknowledged the current situation and realized that our current situation was similar to the description in the Abbot General's letter about a visitor to a monastery who left disappointed. If there is no prayer, there is no reason for our existence, so what do we do? One community says that we must be faithful to the importance of meditation
- In times past there were lay brothers/sisters who were models of prayer.
- We are currently reading "The Way of the Pilgrim" before Compline, and it teaches me a lot about what unceasing prayer is. It is something that cannot be practiced in a group setting, so it requires individual effort.
- When simply professed sisters were asked what they thought about prayer, they said that since taking vows they became busier than during their novitiate. However, they are trying to practice the short ejaculatory prayers such as "The Jesus Prayer" that Father David taught them. A participant from Imari feels it is necessary to try to adjust her schedule by giving top priority to the "things that I absolutely cannot compromise on." It is important to have a serious

attitude toward personal prayer.

- It is important for a superior to set aside time for communal prayer, but even if not, that shouldn't hinder my growth in prayer. Being always filled with thoughts of God depends a lot on the individual's attitude. It would be a shame if Lectio became more of a "study" than a true encounter with God.

Topic 2: Revision of the Ratio

- Times have changed and so revisions are necessary.
- “I learned from email communication that the Abbot General suggests that spiritual support for young professed sisters lasts for two years. Does Nasu actually provide it for five years?”
- Regarding the five-year support, Mo. Angela had requested that the previous novice director and Mo. Agnes meet. This was a time when several people were leaving after taking their vows. However, it seems that this naturally faded away. There were not many people, even in Nasu, who continued to seek spiritual guidance after taking their vows. It is unfortunate that the enthusiasm did not continue immediately after the request from the previous abbess.
- Concerning Oblates: Members of communities that have oblates commented and exchanged opinions about the lives, formation, and promises of oblates.

The discussion concluded before vespers on Thursday the 22nd.



During the meeting Thursday, May 22



May 22nd Coffee Break



(Photo) Every evening, formators from monasteries across the country shared about their communities with the Nasu community.

On the 22nd, 23rd and 24th, from 7:00pm to 7:30pm in the Nasu chapter room, participants from two monasteries at a time spoke to the community about the current state of their monasteries. There was also a Q&A session, which provided a time for interaction between the participants and the Nasu community.

Also, during the lunch break on Wednesday the 21st, the three Vietnamese participants and the Vietnamese sisters from Nasu got together. Although it was their first meeting, it was a wonderful opportunity to share their joy. On the final day of departure, the four sisters, Sr. Rosa Maria and Sr. Marta from

Nishinomiya, and Sr. Marta and Sr. Bernarda from Ajimu, had a tour of the Galette cookie factory. Although they had limited time, they were able to observe the entire production process and enjoy freshly baked galettes as a snack.



At this Meeting of Formators, there were some new faces and a very frank exchange of opinions took place. The weather in May was refreshing, and the noisy chirping of birds could be heard from the treetops of the monastery, which is surrounded by a forest. Perhaps inspired by the formators discussion, the birds were chirping enthusiastically.

In the discussion, we felt a strong desire to receive "formation as a formator." The difficulties in our role were strongly evident in the discussion. Formation is not something that can be achieved overnight. Formators, while struggling against their fears, walk together with new people who want to walk the path of the monastic life. They must show considerate understanding of the candidates' conflicts and anxieties; they must encourage them, and support and move them forward. While giving thanks to the Lord to what might called the "the sprouts of a vocation" seen in the members of the novitiate, they are slowly but surely growing; With St. Paul they trust that "it is God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:7). Formators as ministers are humble collaborators in God's work. "Here I am, Lord" is the answer we formators give every day.

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