

examined in one of the two plenary sessions of the general council; they should therefore be received in the months of May and November respectively.

2. Examination and evaluation of the results of the consultation

2.1 The sorting and scrutiny of the confreres' replies belongs to the provincial. He will maintain a due reserve concerning both the replies of individuals and the overall results, which cannot therefore be published.

2.2 The provincial will examine and analyse the indications given by the confreres, so as to be able to complete with accuracy the appropriate forms which the secretary general will send to all provincial offices. The provincial will then send to the Rector Major a copy of each form.

2.3 The provincial, in the light of the results of the consultation and after careful reflection and discernment, will make mature proposals. He may naturally seek advice from responsible persons, but the nature of the matter is such that it cannot be examined and voted on in the provincial council.

2.4 Before the end of the term of office of a provincial councillor or councillors, the provincial will send his proposals to the Rector Major on the appropriate forms, keeping in mind what is said in 1.4 above.

This process will come into force on 15 April 1985.

3.2 ADMISSION TO THE DIACONATE AND PRIESTHOOD AND THE EXERCISE OF THE DIACONATE

1. Reason for this communication

Towards the end of the GC22 the general council received a request signed by more than 50 capitulars who asked for a clear, unambiguous interpretation of the norms of the CIC which regulate the duration of the curriculum of priestly formation, admission to the diaconate and priesthood, and the exercise of the diaconate, with special reference to salesian formation.

2. Process followed

In its first session, immediately after the GC22, the general council collected and studied some conclusions which were supported by the

weighty opinions of consultants and those with much experience in pastoral practice. These were passed on by the Regionals in the meetings they had with the provincials.

This gave rise in turn to further questions, suggestions and interpretations. The same experts as before, with some further additions to their number, studied the question again in the light of these further requests and incentives, and there was a patient re-examination of all the opinions expressed, in a common desire to reach an agreed conclusion which would both respect the norms of canon law and at the same time promote an efficacious formation through the exercise of the diaconate.

3. Perspective

Formational concern, which gives sense and value to the times and manner of exercising the diaconate, carried most weight in the decisions of the general council. These times and practices had not in the past been well programmed, followed up and subsequently evaluated. On the other hand the problem of deacons who abandon their vocation remains a serious and painful reality for us. This communication and the accompanying small document which will soon be sent to provincials, provincial formation commissions and formation communities concerned, is meant to be read, understood and put into practice by confreres who are aware that they share a common responsibility in the same spirit and with the same intentions and desires. The document is entitled: "Guidelines for the practice of the diaconate in preparation for the priestly ministry".

4. Dispositions

4.1 Duration of the curriculum for priestly formation

The formation curriculum for the philosophical and theological studies must extend over six full years, of which two full years are to be devoted to philosophy and four to theology. According to the CIC this curriculum can be continuous or carried out in parts. The FSDB made the choice, in line with our tradition, that it should be in two parts with the insertion between the philosophical and theological studies of the period of pastoral experience we know as practical training.

4.2 Admission to the diaconate

Ordination to the diaconate may take place only after the third year of theological studies has been concluded. This holds good for every kind of studentate, for formation communities, for faculties and for institutes aggregated or affiliated to them.

4.3 *Exercise of the diaconate*

After his ordination every deacon will already exercise his order during the summer vacation period in liturgical and pastoral functions which offer specific scope for it. During the fourth year of theology (in the case of normal studentates, whether affiliated or not), or during the first year of specialization (in the case of those taking the two-year course for the licentiate or equivalent degree courses), the deacon will continue such exercise, without interrupting his prescribed studies.

It is important and indeed crucial that the exercise of the diaconate shall in every case be carried out systematically and under guidance, with opportune evaluation on the part of those in charge of formation.

The "appropriate time" referred to in can. 1032, § 2 is to be measured with respect to both the individual candidate and the characteristics of our religious Institute, which has already provided for a previous solid pastoral preparation. For us the "appropriate time" will be that indicated above.

To facilitate the implementing of these obligations some brief guidelines will be drawn up and distributed, which may serve as points of reference for formation communities and commissions in drawing up their own local programmes. The priestly spirituality of Don Bosco will be the criterion which determines the objectives and suitable means to achieve them, in those areas to which we know we must give priority: the Word of God, Liturgy, Catechesis and pastoral work in general, the pastoral use of Reconciliation and the other sacraments, spiritual discernment, and various techniques particularly related to parish work.

4.4 *Admission to the priesthood*

After the fourth year of theology or the first year of studies for the licentiate, priestly ordination may be conferred.

4.5 *Exceptional cases*

If it should happen that a deacon, by way of exception, asks for a longer time before seeking priestly ordination:

- his motives, objectives and if possible also the length of time envisaged should be clarified;
- he should be placed in the best conditions for continuing his formation and reaching a mature decision;
- his ministerial experience should be followed not only by the community in which it is carried out, but also by the provincial council; and it should be evaluated during the period concerned and not only at its conclusion;
- the members of the community to which he belongs shall be asked

for their opinion in his regard, and the local council will accompany its judgement with detailed motivations;

— the provincial council, when considering the admission of the deacon to the priesthood, will take note of the remarks made in the scrutinies preceding admissions during the entire formation period.

4.6 *The Ratio*

All these norms and motivations will be included in the text of the FSDB, of which the revision is already in hand, so as to bring it up to date with respect to the new CIC and our own particular law.

The general council considers these norms important and calls upon all provincials to see that the practice in the field of formation in their own province conforms completely to them. We are certain that, taken together and because of the values they enshrine, they will help in the maturing of vocational motivations and lay the foundations for an efficacious ministry and for perseverance when vocational difficulties may arise.

3.3 CONCERNING THE INDULT FOR LEAVING THE INSTITUTE

Art. 23 of the Constitutions expresses efficaciously the meaning of salesian profession, and highlights its fundamental aspects:

— “a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters”;

— “one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make”;

— an obligation made “by publicly binding himself in the eyes of the Church, through whose ministry he is more intimately consecrated to the service of God”;

— “a mutual commitment between the professed member and the Society which receives him with joy”.

This total donation in complete liberty is made from the time of temporary profession with the intention, explicitly indicated in the profession formula, of offering himself to God for the whole of his life. It reaches its culmination and takes on a special irrevocable aspect at perpetual profession, which is made when the member “has reached the level of salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step” (C 117).

It is easy to understand therefore why can. 691, § 1 of the CIC requires that “a perpetually professed religious is not to seek an indult to leave the Institute, except for very grave reasons, weighed before the Lord”.