

SPIRITUAL FORMATION SELF-CAPACITIES

I. Introduction

Spiritual formation lies at the heart of missionary identity because it shapes the deepest orientation of the person toward God. The purpose of spiritual formation is not merely to teach religious practices or transmit doctrinal knowledge, but to form a person who lives in a **living relationship with God**, rooted in faith, sustained by prayer, and expressed through mission. In the Claretian vision, the missionary is gradually transformed through an interior process in which the Holy Spirit purifies the heart, clarifies motivations, and configures the person to Christ the Evangelizer. Formation therefore seeks to cultivate men whose lives become a **response to God's initiative**, where personal freedom increasingly aligns with the call and mission of the Gospel.

This transformation unfolds through the dynamic image of the **Forge of the Missionary**, where the Spirit acts as the fire that shapes the human person over time. The missionary is not instantly perfected; rather, he is progressively forged through prayer, discernment, community life, and apostolic experience. In this process, struggles, questions, and moments of uncertainty are not obstacles to growth but opportunities through which the Spirit deepens faith and interior freedom. Gradually, the missionary learns to interpret his life in the light of God's presence and to allow grace to shape his decisions, relationships, and mission. Spiritual formation therefore aims at the emergence of a **person whose inner life is rooted in God and whose outward life is animated by apostolic charity**.

An integral part of this journey is the development of **spiritual self-capacities**—interior abilities that enable a person to cooperate consciously and freely with the transforming action of grace. Grace always remains the primary agent of spiritual growth, yet the human person must gradually develop the interior dispositions that allow this grace to be received and integrated. These capacities do not replace divine action; rather, they form the interior ground where grace can take root and bear fruit. They help the person recognize God's presence, interpret spiritual movements, and respond to them with growing maturity. Without such capacities, spiritual experiences remain superficial or fragmented, whereas their development allows the person to live faith with depth, freedom, and coherence.

Within the broader framework of formation, these spiritual capacities sustain the integration of the different dimensions of missionary life. Prayer, discernment, community living, and apostolic mission are not isolated activities but interconnected expressions of a single spiritual journey. A missionary who develops these interior capacities learns to pray in the midst of ministry, to discern God's will within daily events, and to live community life as a place of grace and conversion. Over time, this integration enables the missionary to embody the unity between **contemplation and mission**, where action flows from communion with God and mission becomes an expression of interior transformation.

When these capacities mature, the missionary becomes increasingly attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of life. He learns to listen interiorly, to discern spiritual movements with wisdom, and to remain open to God's guidance even in complex or uncertain situations. His life gradually reflects a deeper harmony between prayer and service, silence and proclamation, contemplation and apostolic commitment. In this way, spiritual formation does not simply produce religious practitioners, but **forms contemplative missionaries—men capable of listening to God in silence and proclaiming the Gospel with freedom, courage, and joy**.

This formation module presents seven essential spiritual self-capacities that nourish a mature spiritual life:

- Trust in God
- Self-surrender
- Spiritual autonomy
- Gratitude

- Attentiveness to the Spirit
- Capacity for silence
- Receptivity to mystery

Each of these capacities helps form the missionary as vessels fully receptive of /open to the *action of the Spirit* (cf. GPF 22, 236), capable of living with faith, interior freedom, and apostolic availability.

II. Understanding Spiritual Self-Capacities

Spiritual self-capacities refer to the **interior dispositions and abilities that enable a person to live an authentic, conscious, and mature relationship with God**. They represent the inner readiness of the human person to receive grace, discern its movements, and respond to it with freedom and fidelity. In the journey of formation, these capacities are not simply spiritual ideals but **real developmental abilities** that grow over time through experience, reflection, and spiritual practice.

These capacities involve the integration of **psychological, spiritual, and relational dimensions** of the person. The psychological dimension provides the inner stability necessary for spiritual growth, such as emotional regulation, self-awareness, and the ability to reflect on one's experiences. The spiritual dimension refers to the person's openness to God's presence, expressed through prayer, faith, and discernment. The relational dimension allows the individual to encounter God not only in solitude but also through relationships, community life, and the concrete realities of mission. When these dimensions converge harmoniously, they create an interior environment where spiritual life becomes both authentic and sustainable.

Within the formation process, spiritual self-capacities enable the missionary to develop a deeper interior life that remains stable even amid the changing circumstances of mission. These capacities allow the missionary to **remain grounded in God during moments of uncertainty or difficulty**, recognizing that faith is not dependent on external conditions but rooted in trust in God's presence. They help the person become attentive to the subtle movements of grace, gradually learning to **discern the voice of the Spirit amid the complexity of personal emotions, relationships, and pastoral responsibilities**.

At the same time, these capacities sustain a **life of prayer and contemplation**, allowing the missionary to remain connected to God even in the midst of demanding apostolic activity. Spiritual maturity involves the ability to integrate prayer with daily life so that ministry does not become merely functional or activist. Through these capacities, the missionary learns to interpret spiritual experiences—moments of consolation, struggle, doubt, or inspiration—and to integrate them into a coherent spiritual journey. As this integration deepens, the missionary becomes increasingly capable of living mission with **humility, inner freedom, and openness to God's guidance**, rather than acting solely from personal ambition or external expectations.

It is important to recognize that spiritual self-capacities do not emerge spontaneously or automatically. They develop gradually through a lifelong process of formation and conversion. Spiritual growth often unfolds through ordinary experiences, including moments of struggle, confusion, or vulnerability. These experiences become formative when they are interpreted with honesty and faith. Through this process, the missionary learns that spiritual maturity is not the absence of difficulty but the **capacity to remain faithful and attentive to God within the realities of life**.

Several formative elements contribute to the development of these capacities. **Prayer and spiritual practices** create the interior space where the person becomes attentive to God's presence. Regular prayer, meditation on Scripture, and sacramental life nourish the relationship with God and deepen spiritual awareness. **Reflective interpretation of life experiences** helps the person recognize how God works through daily events, relationships, successes, and failures. Formation therefore encourages formandi to read their own life story as a place where grace is already at work.

Another essential element is **spiritual accompaniment**, which provides a supportive context in which spiritual experiences can be discerned and interpreted. Through dialogue with a formator or

spiritual guide, the missionary learns to distinguish between authentic movements of the Spirit and personal impulses that may arise from fear, ego, or emotional reaction. This accompaniment helps the person grow in spiritual wisdom and freedom.

Equally important is **community life**, which serves as a living environment where spiritual capacities are lived and deepened. Relationships within the community reveal hidden motivations, challenge self-centred attitudes, and invite growth in humility, patience, and forgiveness. Community therefore becomes a privileged place where spiritual life is not merely interior but expressed through concrete attitudes and actions.

Finally, spiritual self-capacities are often strengthened through **personal struggle and conversion**. Moments of failure, disappointment, or spiritual dryness can become occasions of deeper growth when they are embraced with faith and honesty. Through such experiences, the missionary gradually learns to rely less on personal control and more on God's grace, discovering that spiritual maturity emerges through perseverance, humility, and openness to transformation.

For this reason, spiritual formation can be understood as a **school of attentiveness**. It teaches the missionary to recognize God's presence not only in formal moments of prayer but also in the ordinary events of life. The missionary learns to perceive the voice of God in the silence of contemplation, in the challenges of community living, in the suffering of the people served in mission, and in the inner movements of the heart. Over time, this attentiveness transforms the missionary's way of seeing reality, enabling him to live with a deeper awareness that **God is continually present and active in every dimension of life and mission**.

III. Key Spiritual Self-Capacities

1. Trust in God

Definition

Trust in God is the **spiritual capacity to rely on God's providence, wisdom, and faithful love**, especially in moments when human understanding, plans, or resources seem insufficient. It reflects an interior disposition in which the person recognizes that life ultimately unfolds under the guidance of God's presence and care. Trust does not imply the absence of questions, difficulties, or fears; rather, it is the capacity to remain anchored in faith even when circumstances appear uncertain or confusing.

At a deeper level, trust in God expresses a fundamental conviction that **God accompanies the human journey and works through history**, including moments of fragility, limitation, and struggle. This conviction allows the believer to accept that not everything can be controlled or predicted. Instead of attempting to manage every outcome, the person gradually learns to entrust life to God, believing that divine grace is at work even in situations that remain unclear or unresolved.

Trust in God therefore becomes the interior foundation of spiritual life. Without this trust, prayer may become mechanical, mission may become driven by anxiety or self-reliance, and difficulties may lead to discouragement. With trust, however, the person learns to interpret life through the horizon of faith, recognizing that God's presence accompanies every stage of the vocational journey.

Importance in Formation

Trust in God is particularly essential in the context of missionary formation because the path of mission often unfolds within situations that demand faith and interior freedom. The missionary cannot rely solely on personal competence or external security. Instead, he must gradually develop the capacity to live with openness to God's guidance, even when the future is not fully visible. Missionary life frequently involves experiences such as:

- uncertainty about the future or about one's specific role in mission

- cultural transitions and adaptation to new contexts
- demanding pastoral situations that test patience and resilience
- encounters with suffering, injustice, and human fragility
- awareness of one's own limitations and inadequacies.

In these situations, trust in God becomes a stabilizing force that sustains perseverance. It prevents the missionary from becoming overwhelmed by anxiety, discouragement, or the desire to control outcomes. Instead, trust invites the missionary to recognize that **mission ultimately belongs to God**, and that the missionary participates as a humble collaborator in a work that transcends personal effort.

Trust in God also protects the missionary from the illusion of self-sufficiency. Formation gradually teaches the person that authentic spiritual maturity does not arise from controlling circumstances but from **living in faithful reliance on God's providence**. This trust allows the missionary to remain rooted in faith rather than in personal plans or expectations.

Examples in Missionary Life

In practical terms, trust in God becomes visible in many concrete attitudes and decisions within the missionary journey.

A missionary expresses trust in God when he **accepts an unexpected mission assignment with openness and faith**, recognizing that God may lead him to places or people he did not initially anticipate. Trust also appears when a missionary continues to serve faithfully even when pastoral results seem limited or when external recognition is absent.

Another expression of trust occurs when the missionary remains hopeful during **periods of spiritual dryness**, when prayer feels difficult or when God's presence seems distant. Instead of abandoning spiritual practices or becoming discouraged, the missionary perseveres in faith, believing that God continues to work beyond immediate emotional experience.

Trust in God is also evident when a missionary accepts personal limitations—such as fatigue, misunderstanding, or failure—without losing confidence in God's grace. Rather than interpreting weakness as defeat, the missionary learns to see it as a place where God's power can manifest.

Reflection Questions

To deepen awareness of this capacity, the following questions may help guide personal reflection:

- When difficulties arise, do I rely primarily on God, or do I depend only on my own abilities and strategies?
- How do I react when events do not unfold according to my plans or expectations?
- Do I believe that God continues to act even when situations remain uncertain or unresolved?
- What experiences in my life have strengthened my trust in God's providence?
- How do I respond when prayer feels dry or when I experience spiritual doubt?

Reflecting on such questions can help the missionary recognize areas where trust is already present and areas where deeper faith is invited.

Formation Strategies

Because trust in God develops gradually, formation programs can support its growth through several intentional practices. One important strategy is **meditation on biblical narratives that reveal God's faithfulness**, such as the journeys of Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and the disciples. These stories show that faith often unfolds in situations of uncertainty where trust becomes the path toward deeper relationship with God.

Another helpful practice is the **reflective interpretation of personal experiences of providence**. Formandi are encouraged to revisit moments in their life where God's presence became visible through unexpected support, guidance, or transformation. Recognizing such moments strengthens confidence in God's continuing action.

Communal sharing of faith experiences within the formation community can also nurture trust. Hearing how others have encountered God's guidance in their lives often strengthens the awareness that God accompanies the journey of faith collectively as well as individually.

Finally, **spiritual direction and accompaniment** provide a space where formandi can reflect honestly on fears, doubts, and uncertainties. Through dialogue with a spiritual guide, the person gradually learns to reinterpret these experiences in the light of faith, discovering that trust in God grows precisely through confronting moments of vulnerability and uncertainty.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Trust in God

The development of **trust in God** can be explored through a reflective self-assessment process that helps the formandus become more aware of his interior attitudes toward faith, uncertainty, and reliance on divine providence. Such an assessment is not intended to measure spiritual life in a rigid or purely quantitative way. Rather, it serves as a **mirror for self-awareness**, encouraging the person to examine how deeply trust in God shapes his thoughts, emotions, and decisions.

Trust in God often becomes most visible not in moments of comfort but in situations of uncertainty, limitation, or vulnerability. For this reason, reflective assessment tools invite the person to examine how he responds when faced with challenges, unexpected changes, or experiences that exceed personal control. Through this process, the formandus begins to recognize patterns in his spiritual life—moments where trust is strong and areas where fear, anxiety, or excessive self-reliance may still dominate.

The following table can be used as a simple **self-scoring instrument**. Formandi may rate each statement on a scale from **1 to 5**, where:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating (1–5)
I believe that God accompanies me in every situation of my life.	
I remain hopeful even when circumstances are uncertain or difficult.	
I am able to entrust my future to God rather than trying to control everything myself.	
When I face difficulties, I turn to prayer rather than relying only on my own strategies.	
I can accept situations that I cannot fully understand or control, trusting that God is still present.	
I believe that God can bring good even out of setbacks, failures, or disappointments.	
I experience inner peace when I place my worries and concerns in God's hands.	
I am able to continue serving faithfully even when results are not immediately visible.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to reflect on their responses and identify patterns that may reveal areas of strength and areas that invite deeper growth. For example:

- **Higher scores** may indicate a stable foundation of trust in God, where faith provides inner security and hope even in challenging circumstances.

- **Moderate scores** may suggest that trust is present but sometimes weakened by anxiety, self-reliance, or fear of uncertainty.
- **Lower scores** may indicate that the person tends to depend primarily on personal control or external security rather than on faith in God's providence.

It is important to emphasize that this tool is **not meant as a judgment or evaluation of spiritual worth**, but as a means of fostering honest self-reflection. Spiritual growth unfolds gradually, and even mature believers continue to deepen their trust through new experiences of vulnerability and dependence on God.

For this reason, the assessment should ideally be used in the context of **spiritual accompaniment or formative dialogue**. A formator or spiritual guide can help the formandus interpret the results with wisdom and compassion, exploring questions such as:

- What experiences have strengthened my trust in God?
- What situations tend to weaken my confidence in God's providence?
- How does my prayer life influence my capacity to trust during difficult moments?

Through such reflection, the assessment becomes a **starting point for deeper spiritual growth**. It encourages the missionary to recognize that trust in God is not merely an abstract belief but a lived attitude that gradually shapes one's way of responding to life, mission, and the unfolding mystery of God's plan.

Spiritual Integration

Scripture consistently presents trust in God as the foundation of authentic faith. One of the clearest expressions appears in **Proverbs 3:5**: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding."* This passage reminds believers that human wisdom alone cannot fully grasp the mystery of God's plan. Trust invites the person to step beyond purely human calculations and to rely on God's guidance.

Ultimately, trust in God allows the missionary to live with interior freedom and serenity. It frees the person from excessive anxiety about results and enables him to participate in mission with humility and hope. When this capacity matures, the missionary becomes capable of living with the quiet conviction that **God remains present and active in every circumstance**, guiding both personal life and the unfolding of the mission.

2. Self-Surrender

Definition

Self-surrender is the **spiritual capacity to offer oneself freely to God's will**, allowing personal desires, expectations, and life plans to be gradually transformed by God's purposes. It is the interior disposition through which a person entrusts his life to God, recognizing that authentic freedom is found not in self-assertion but in loving obedience to the divine will.

This capacity does not imply passivity or resignation. Self-surrender is not a passive acceptance of circumstances nor the suppression of personal desires. Rather, it is an **active openness to God's guidance**, where the person willingly allows his own plans to be purified, redirected, and enriched by God's wisdom. True surrender involves cooperation with grace: the individual freely chooses to align his life with God's call.

At its deepest level, self-surrender reflects the fundamental dynamic of Christian discipleship—**the movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness**. The person gradually learns that life finds its fullest meaning when offered in love and service. Through this process, the missionary discovers that surrender to God does not diminish personal identity but transforms and fulfils it.

Importance in Formation

Self-surrender is essential in the journey of religious and missionary formation because the vocation itself is a response to God's call rather than a purely personal project. Entering religious life involves a continual process of conversion in which the individual learns to move beyond personal preferences and to embrace a life shaped by the Gospel and the needs of the mission.

Formation therefore invites formandi to undergo an inner transformation: **from seeking personal fulfilment to seeking God's will**, from self-directed ambition to apostolic availability. This shift requires the gradual purification of motivations, attachments, and expectations. The missionary must learn to discern when personal desires support the mission and when they need to be surrendered for the sake of a greater good.

Self-surrender also forms the interior foundation for living the evangelical counsels and the commitments of religious life. It enables the missionary to embrace:

- **Obedience**, understood as listening attentively to God's will as mediated through the Church, community, and mission.
- **Service**, expressed in the willingness to place one's gifts and abilities at the disposal of others.
- **Sacrifice**, the capacity to accept difficulties and renunciations for the sake of love and mission.
- **Apostolic availability**, a readiness to go wherever the mission calls, even when it requires leaving familiar environments or personal preferences behind. "Missionaries may rest assured, then, that they should go to no town, however good, unless they go under obedience; but that under obedience they should not hesitate to go to any town, however bad." (AUT 198).

Without the development of self-surrender, missionary life may become dominated by personal agendas, resistance to authority, or attachment to comfort and recognition. When surrender matures, however, the missionary becomes **interiorly free**, capable of responding generously to the needs of the Gospel.

Examples in Missionary Life

Self-surrender manifests itself in many practical attitudes and decisions within the daily life of a missionary.

One example is the **acceptance of community decisions**, even when they differ from personal preferences. Rather than reacting with resistance or frustration, the missionary seeks to discern God's will through communal discernment and remains open to the wisdom of the community.

Another expression of surrender occurs when a missionary **chooses mission over personal comfort**. This may involve accepting demanding pastoral assignments, living in unfamiliar cultural contexts, or serving in situations that require patience and perseverance.

Self-surrender is also visible when the missionary **offers personal talents for the service of others** rather than seeking recognition or personal advancement. Gifts and abilities are understood not as personal possessions but as resources entrusted by God for the building up of the Church and the service of the people.

Even in moments of misunderstanding or difficulty, self-surrender allows the missionary to maintain an attitude of humility and openness, trusting that God continues to guide the journey.

Reflection Questions

The following questions can help deepen awareness of one's capacity for surrender:

- Do I cling tightly to my own plans, or do I remain open to the possibility that God may lead me in unexpected directions?

- What attachments—such as comfort, recognition, control, or personal ambition—make it difficult for me to surrender more fully?
- How do I respond when my expectations are not fulfilled or when circumstances challenge my plans?
- Do I see obedience and service as burdens, or as opportunities to participate in God's mission?

Reflecting honestly on these questions helps the missionary recognize the areas where deeper surrender may be invited.

Formation Strategies

Because self-surrender develops gradually, formation programs can support its growth through intentional spiritual practices and formative experiences.

One important strategy is **meditation on the life of Christ**, especially his obedience to the Father. The Gospels reveal Jesus as one who continually seeks the will of the Father and freely offers his life for the salvation of the world. Contemplating Christ's obedience helps formandi understand surrender not as loss but as the path toward authentic love.

Ignatian discernment practices can also help formandi recognize how God guides decisions through interior movements of consolation and desolation. Discernment teaches the missionary to listen to God's voice rather than relying solely on personal impulses or preferences.

Another helpful practice is **reflection on personal attachments**. Through spiritual conversation and journaling, formandi can identify the desires, fears, and expectations that influence their decisions. Recognizing these attachments allows them to gradually release what prevents deeper freedom.

Finally, prayers of offering and self-dedication help cultivate a habitual attitude of entrusting one's entire life to God. This may include a simple daily act of surrender or the prayer recommended by St. Anthony Mary Claret in his *Autobiography*:

"O Virgin Mary and Mother of God! I surrender myself as your child, and in honour and glory of your purity I offer my soul and body, my mind and senses, and ask that you give me the grace never to commit any sin. Amen.

Mother, behold your son! (Then three times)

I have placed my trust in you, good Mother, and I shall never be confounded. Amen." (Aut 317)

By praying such prayers regularly, missionaries gradually develop a spirit of trust, availability, and complete surrender to God's will, placing themselves confidently under the maternal care of Mary.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Self-Surrender

The development of **self-surrender** in spiritual life can be explored through reflective self-assessment. Because surrender to God unfolds gradually through experience, prayer, and conversion, it is helpful for formandi to periodically examine how their attitudes toward God's will, authority, mission, and personal desires are evolving.

This assessment tool is designed to encourage **honest self-awareness** rather than perfection or self-criticism. It invites the missionary to reflect on how freely he is able to entrust his life, plans, and ambitions to God. The goal is not to measure spirituality with precision but to create a moment of **interior listening**, where the formandus can recognize the areas where surrender is already growing and the areas where attachments or resistance may still remain.

Formandi may rate each statement on a scale from **1 to 5**, using the following guide:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**

- 2 – Occasionally true
- 3 – Sometimes true
- 4 – Often true
- 5 – Consistently true

Statement	Rating
I am open to God's plan for my life even when it differs from my personal expectations.	
I can accept decisions that differ from my preferences without resentment.	
I desire to serve God and the mission above personal ambitions or recognition.	
I am willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of mission.	
I try to discern God's will before making important decisions.	
I am able to let go of personal control when I recognize that God is guiding the situation differently.	
I accept community guidance and authority as part of discerning God's will.	
I can remain peaceful when my plans change unexpectedly.	

After completing the assessment, the formandus is encouraged to review the results and reflect on the following points:

- **Areas of strength:** Statements with higher scores may indicate attitudes where surrender to God is already present and active. These areas can become sources of gratitude and encouragement in the spiritual journey.
- **Areas for growth:** Statements with lower scores may reveal attachments, fears, or expectations that make surrender more difficult. These areas invite deeper reflection, prayer, and dialogue with a spiritual guide.

This process becomes particularly fruitful when integrated into **spiritual accompaniment or formation dialogue**. A formator or spiritual director can help the formandus interpret the results with sensitivity and realism, exploring questions such as:

- What situations make it difficult for me to surrender my own plans?
- What fears or attachments prevent me from trusting God more fully?
- In what moments have I experienced peace after entrusting something to God?

Through this reflective process, the assessment becomes a **tool for spiritual growth rather than evaluation**. It helps the missionary recognize that self-surrender is not a one-time decision but an ongoing movement of the heart. As the person learns to entrust more areas of life to God, he gradually experiences a deeper sense of freedom, peace, and availability for mission.

Spiritual Integration

The deepest model of self-surrender is found in the life of Jesus Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing suffering and death, Jesus prays: *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42)

This moment reveals the essence of Christian surrender. Jesus does not deny his human desire to avoid suffering, yet he entrusts himself completely to the Father's will. His prayer expresses both honesty and obedience—an authentic human struggle that culminates in total trust.

For the missionary, this example becomes a guiding path. Self-surrender is not a single act but a **daily movement of offering one's life to God**, allowing personal desires, fears, and ambitions to be gradually transformed. Through this ongoing surrender, the missionary grows in freedom, discovering that true fulfilment lies in participating in God's loving plan for the world.

In this sense, self-surrender becomes the **heart of Christian discipleship**, shaping a life that is continually offered to God in faith, service, and mission.

3. Spiritual Autonomy

Definition

Spiritual autonomy is the **capacity to sustain and nurture one's spiritual life through personal responsibility, interior conviction, and self-motivated commitment**, rather than relying exclusively on external structures, supervision, or expectations. It reflects a stage of spiritual maturity in which the person freely assumes ownership of his relationship with God and actively cultivates it through prayer, reflection, and discernment.

This capacity does not imply spiritual individualism or independence from community life. Rather, spiritual autonomy represents a **mature integration of freedom and responsibility**, where the individual remains deeply connected to the spiritual tradition, community, and mission of the Church while personally taking initiative for his spiritual growth. The missionary learns that spiritual life cannot be sustained only by external discipline or institutional requirements; it must become an interior movement of love and desire for God.

At its deepest level, spiritual autonomy reflects the transformation of faith from **external obligation to interior commitment**. In the early stages of formation, spiritual practices may depend largely on schedules, community expectations, or guidance from formators. As the person matures, however, the motivation for prayer and spiritual growth increasingly arises from within. The missionary prays not merely because it is required but because **his heart seeks communion with God**.

Importance in Formation

Spiritual autonomy is an essential goal of formation because missionary life eventually unfolds in contexts where external structures may be limited. During initial formation, formandi often benefit from well-defined schedules of prayer, communal spiritual practices, and regular accompaniment. These structures help establish habits and rhythms that nurture spiritual growth.

However, formation ultimately aims to prepare missionaries who can sustain their spiritual life even when such structures are less visible or less frequent. Missionary life often includes situations where:

- the community schedule may vary due to pastoral demands
- spiritual directors or formators may not always be immediately available
- ministry responsibilities may become intense or unpredictable
- the missionary may live in isolated or culturally unfamiliar environments.

In such contexts, the missionary must possess the interior capacity to **maintain his relationship with God independently of external supervision**. Spiritual autonomy ensures that the person does not abandon prayer or spiritual reflection when external structures weaken or when ministry becomes demanding.

Without this capacity, spiritual life may gradually diminish under the pressures of pastoral activity, leading to activism, burnout, or loss of interior grounding. With spiritual autonomy, however, the missionary remains rooted in prayer and discernment, allowing mission to flow from communion with God rather than from mere efficiency or obligation.

Spiritual autonomy therefore becomes a crucial safeguard for **long-term fidelity in vocation**. It allows the missionary to remain spiritually alive throughout the different stages of life and mission.

Examples in Missionary Life

Spiritual autonomy manifests itself through concrete attitudes and practices in daily life.

One example is the **maintenance of personal prayer discipline without external pressure**. Even when the missionary's schedule becomes busy or when communal prayer structures are less consistent, he remains committed to setting aside time for personal prayer and reflection.

Another example is the ability to **seek God's presence amid demanding ministry**. Rather than allowing pastoral activity to consume all energy and attention, the missionary remains attentive to God during ministry itself—through brief moments of prayer, interior recollection, or reflection on the experiences of the day.

Spiritual autonomy also appears when the missionary **takes initiative in his own spiritual development**. He may choose to deepen his understanding of Scripture, engage in spiritual reading, participate in retreats, or seek spiritual guidance when needed. Instead of waiting passively for formation opportunities, he actively pursues growth in his relationship with God.

In this way, spiritual autonomy allows the missionary to remain spiritually alive even when external circumstances are complex or unpredictable.

Reflection Questions

The following questions may help formandi reflect on their level of spiritual autonomy:

- Do I pray primarily because it is required by the community schedule, or because I personally desire communion with God?
- Can I maintain my spiritual practices even during busy or stressful periods?
- Do I actively seek opportunities for spiritual growth, or do I wait for others to initiate them?
- How do I respond when my usual spiritual routines are disrupted?
- Do I experience prayer as a personal relationship with God or mainly as a religious duty?

Reflecting on these questions can reveal whether spiritual life is becoming an **interior source of motivation** or remains dependent primarily on external expectations.

Formation Strategies

The development of spiritual autonomy can be fostered through several formative practices that gradually encourage formandi to take responsibility for their spiritual lives.

One important strategy is the **development of a personal rule of life**. A rule of life helps the formandus establish a consistent rhythm of prayer, reflection, and spiritual practices that can be sustained across different contexts. It encourages intentionality in nurturing one's relationship with God.

Another strategy involves **cultivating daily prayer practices** that can adapt to various circumstances. For example, formandi may learn to integrate moments of silent prayer, Scripture meditation, and brief recollections throughout the day. Such practices allow prayer to remain present even during demanding schedules.

Personal spiritual reading also contributes to spiritual autonomy. By engaging with Scripture, spiritual classics, and theological reflection, the missionary continues to deepen his understanding of faith and nourish his interior life independently of formal instruction.

Finally, formation should encourage **interior motivation for spiritual practices**. Rather than emphasizing discipline alone, formators help formandi discover the joy and meaning of prayer as a living encounter with God. When spiritual practices are experienced as life-giving rather than merely obligatory, the person naturally assumes responsibility for maintaining them.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Spiritual Autonomy

The development of **spiritual autonomy** can be explored through a process of reflective self-assessment that encourages formandi to examine how actively they assume responsibility for their spiritual life. Because spiritual autonomy involves the transition from externally supported practices

to **interiorly motivated spiritual commitment**, it is important for formandi to reflect periodically on how their prayer life and spiritual growth are sustained.

This assessment tool provides a structured yet simple way to examine the degree to which a missionary takes initiative in nurturing his relationship with God. It invites the formandus to reflect not only on the frequency of spiritual practices but also on the **motivation and intentionality** behind them. The goal is not to measure spiritual life quantitatively but to encourage honest awareness of how personal responsibility for spiritual growth is gradually developing.

Formandi may rate each statement using the following scale:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating
I take responsibility for nurturing my spiritual life.	
I maintain personal prayer even when there are no external reminders.	
I actively seek opportunities for spiritual growth.	
I continue my spiritual practices even during demanding ministry or study.	
I cultivate personal habits that strengthen my relationship with God.	
I make time for prayer even when my schedule becomes busy.	
I reflect on my spiritual experiences and seek to understand how God is guiding me.	
I take initiative in reading Scripture or spiritual books that nourish my faith.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to reflect on the pattern of their responses. Statements that receive higher ratings may indicate areas where spiritual autonomy is already developing. These areas can be acknowledged with gratitude as signs of growth in personal responsibility for spiritual life. Lower ratings, on the other hand, may reveal areas where spiritual practices are still dependent primarily on external structures such as community schedules, reminders from formators, or institutional expectations.

This reflection should not lead to discouragement or self-criticism. Spiritual autonomy develops gradually through experience, prayer, and the maturing of faith. Even deeply committed missionaries may discover moments when spiritual life becomes overshadowed by fatigue, busyness, or discouragement. Recognizing these patterns is itself a valuable step toward deeper awareness and renewed commitment.

For this reason, the assessment tool should ideally be used within the context of **formation dialogue or spiritual accompaniment**. A formator or spiritual guide can help the formandus interpret the results thoughtfully and explore questions such as:

- What motivates my desire to pray and grow spiritually?
- What situations tend to weaken my commitment to personal prayer?
- How can I strengthen the habits that sustain my relationship with God?

Through this process, the assessment becomes a **means of fostering spiritual responsibility and maturity**. It helps the missionary recognize that spiritual life cannot depend solely on external guidance or structured schedules but must gradually become an interior commitment sustained by love for God and desire for communion with Him.

Ultimately, the purpose of this assessment is to help the formandus grow in the awareness that spiritual autonomy is not isolation but **mature fidelity**—the ability to remain rooted in prayer, discernment, and faith regardless of changing circumstances in community life or mission.

Spiritual Integration

Spiritual autonomy represents an important stage in the maturation of faith. In the early stages of formation, faith may rely heavily on **external guidance, community expectations, and structured practices**. As spiritual maturity develops, these external supports are gradually internalized. Prayer becomes a personal desire rather than a mere obligation, and spiritual growth becomes an intentional pursuit rather than a passive expectation.

In this way, spiritual autonomy reflects the movement from **externally sustained faith to interiorly grounded commitment**. The missionary becomes capable of sustaining a living relationship with God regardless of changing circumstances, cultural contexts, or pastoral demands.

Such autonomy does not isolate the missionary from community or tradition. Instead, it strengthens his participation in them, because he engages in prayer, mission, and discernment with a deeper sense of personal responsibility and interior freedom. Through this maturation, the missionary becomes a person whose spiritual life remains **rooted in God, resilient in mission, and faithful throughout the changing seasons of vocation**.

4. Gratitude

Definition

Gratitude is the **spiritual capacity to recognize, receive, and appreciate the gifts of God present in daily life**. It is the interior disposition that allows a person to perceive life not merely as a series of events or responsibilities but as a continuous expression of divine generosity. Through gratitude, the missionary becomes attentive to the countless ways in which God's grace is manifested—in relationships, opportunities, challenges, and even in moments of weakness.

At its deepest level, gratitude reflects a **theological vision of life** in which everything is understood as gift. The believer recognizes that life, vocation, community, talents, and mission are not achievements to be possessed but blessings to be received and shared. This awareness cultivates a spirit of reverence toward God and fosters humility, because the person realizes that what he has received cannot be fully attributed to his own merit or effort.

Gratitude also opens the heart to grace. When the person learns to recognize God's presence in daily experiences, even ordinary moments become opportunities for encounter with the divine. In this way, gratitude transforms the perception of life: what might otherwise appear routine or burdensome becomes an occasion for thanksgiving and spiritual growth.

Importance in Formation

Gratitude plays a crucial role in spiritual formation because it shapes the missionary's interior attitude toward life, community, and mission. Formation environments often involve challenges such as discipline, shared responsibilities, and the gradual purification of expectations. In such contexts, gratitude helps the formandus maintain a balanced and hopeful perspective.

One of the most important functions of gratitude is that it **protects against attitudes that can undermine spiritual growth**. For example, gratitude counteracts **entitlement**, the tendency to believe that one deserves particular privileges, recognition, or opportunities. When a person lives with gratitude, he understands that everything—including vocation itself—is a gift rather than a personal entitlement.

Gratitude also protects against **discouragement**. In the journey of formation and mission, setbacks, misunderstandings, or periods of spiritual dryness are inevitable. A grateful person is able to remain attentive to the blessings that continue to exist even in difficult moments. This attitude fosters resilience and prevents the heart from becoming dominated by negativity or disappointment.

Another challenge addressed by gratitude is **comparison with others**. Formation communities bring together individuals with diverse talents, backgrounds, and personalities. Without

gratitude, comparison can easily lead to jealousy or feelings of inadequacy. Gratitude, however, allows the person to rejoice in the gifts of others and to appreciate his own unique vocation within the broader mission of the Church.

In this way, gratitude fosters a **spirituality of joy and appreciation**, enabling the missionary to live with a spirit of thanksgiving rather than complaint. This joyful outlook becomes a powerful witness to the Gospel, because a grateful heart naturally radiates hope and generosity.

Examples in Daily Life

Gratitude becomes visible through simple but meaningful attitudes in everyday life.

One example is **giving thanks for small daily blessings**—such as the gift of community life, the beauty of nature, meaningful conversations, or moments of peace in prayer. Recognizing these small gifts cultivates a constant awareness of God’s presence.

Gratitude also appears when a person **recognizes and affirms the gifts of others**. Instead of focusing on differences or shortcomings, the grateful missionary appreciates the talents, efforts, and generosity of fellow community members. This recognition strengthens relationships and fosters mutual respect.

Another expression of gratitude is **appreciating opportunities for mission**. Even demanding pastoral tasks can be embraced with gratitude when the missionary recognizes them as opportunities to serve God and encounter Christ in others.

Through such attitudes, gratitude transforms ordinary experiences into occasions of praise and thanksgiving.

Reflection Questions

The following questions may help formandi deepen their awareness of gratitude in their spiritual life:

- Do I notice and appreciate the blessings present in my daily life?
- Do I express gratitude toward the people who contribute to my growth and mission?
- How often do I thank God during my prayer?
- When difficulties arise, am I still able to recognize God’s presence and gifts?
- Do I rejoice in the gifts and successes of others?

Reflecting on these questions helps the missionary identify whether his spiritual outlook is primarily shaped by appreciation or by dissatisfaction.

Formation Strategies

Gratitude can be intentionally cultivated through several formative practices that encourage attentiveness to God’s gifts.

One important strategy is the **daily examen with a focus on gratitude**. At the end of the day, formandi are invited to recall moments for which they are thankful. This practice gradually trains the mind and heart to recognize God’s presence throughout daily experiences.

Another helpful practice is **gratitude journaling**, where formandi write down moments of grace, encounters, or blessings experienced during the day or week. Recording such experiences strengthens awareness of God’s action over time.

Communal thanksgiving prayer also nurtures gratitude within formation communities. When members share expressions of gratitude together—during prayer services, community gatherings, or celebrations—they reinforce a collective culture of appreciation and joy.

Finally, formandi are encouraged to **reflect consciously on God’s gifts** in their vocation, talents, relationships, and opportunities for service. Such reflection deepens the recognition that life itself is a gift entrusted to them for the mission of the Gospel.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Gratitude

The development of **gratitude as a spiritual capacity** can be explored through a reflective self-assessment that invites the formandus to examine how frequently and deeply he recognizes God's gifts in daily life. Gratitude is not merely an emotional response but a **habit of perception**—the ability to notice blessings, appreciate relationships, and interpret life through the lens of God's generosity.

Because gratitude shapes a person's outlook on life, this assessment focuses on attitudes and patterns of awareness rather than on isolated actions. The goal is to help the missionary recognize whether his spiritual perspective tends toward **thankfulness and appreciation** or toward dissatisfaction, comparison, or discouragement.

Formandi may rate each statement using the following scale:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating
I regularly thank God for the blessings present in my life.	
I appreciate and acknowledge the contributions and gifts of others.	
I am able to recognize positive aspects of life even during difficulties.	
I express gratitude through words or actions toward those who support me.	
I see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than only as obstacles.	
I notice and appreciate the small blessings of daily life.	
I rejoice in the successes and gifts of others without jealousy or comparison.	
I express gratitude during prayer, not only requests or concerns.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to review their responses and reflect on what they reveal about their spiritual outlook. Statements with higher ratings may indicate areas where gratitude already shapes the person's perception of life. Lower ratings may suggest that certain attitudes—such as discouragement, comparison, or self-focus—sometimes overshadow the recognition of God's gifts.

This process of reflection should not lead to judgment or discouragement. Gratitude is a capacity that **develops gradually through spiritual awareness and practice**. Even deeply committed individuals may occasionally struggle to perceive blessings during periods of fatigue, disappointment, or difficulty. Recognizing these patterns is itself an important step toward cultivating a more grateful heart.

The assessment can become especially fruitful when discussed in **formation dialogue or spiritual accompaniment**. A formator or spiritual guide may invite the formandus to explore questions such as:

- What experiences in my life have awakened a deeper sense of gratitude toward God?
- What situations make it difficult for me to maintain a grateful perspective?
- How can I intentionally cultivate habits that strengthen gratitude in daily life?

Through such reflection, the assessment becomes a tool for **spiritual growth rather than evaluation**. It encourages the missionary to develop a habit of noticing God's presence in ordinary experiences and to respond with appreciation, humility, and joy.

Ultimately, the purpose of this assessment is to help the missionary recognize that gratitude transforms the way one lives vocation and mission. A grateful heart perceives life as gift, approaches ministry with joy, and naturally expresses praise to God and appreciation to others.

Spiritual Integration

Gratitude occupies a central place in the biblical vision of faith. The apostle Paul encourages believers with the exhortation: “*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

This instruction does not suggest ignoring suffering or difficulties. Rather, it invites believers to maintain a spirit of thanksgiving even amid challenges, trusting that God continues to act within every situation. Gratitude therefore becomes an expression of faith in God’s presence and providence.

For the missionary, gratitude transforms spiritual life into a continuous act of thanksgiving. Prayer becomes praise, mission becomes a response to God’s generosity, and daily life becomes an opportunity to celebrate the gifts received from God.

In this way, gratitude nurtures a **joyful and humble missionary spirit**, enabling the person to live each day with openness, appreciation, and readiness to share the gifts received with others.

5. Attentiveness to the Spirit

Definition

Attentiveness to the Spirit is the **spiritual capacity to perceive, interpret, and respond to the subtle movements of God’s presence within one’s inner life and within the events of daily life**. It involves a cultivated sensitivity to the ways in which the Holy Spirit communicates guidance, inspiration, correction, or consolation through prayer, relationships, circumstances, and the inner movements of the heart.

This attentiveness requires both **interior listening and spiritual awareness**. The Spirit often speaks not through dramatic signs but through quiet invitations, gentle inspirations, or subtle shifts in the heart. These may appear as movements of peace, conviction, compassion, or renewed courage. To perceive these movements, the missionary must develop the habit of pausing, reflecting, and listening deeply.

Attentiveness to the Spirit therefore becomes a form of **spiritual perception**. The missionary learns to interpret life not merely through practical reasoning or emotional reactions but through a spiritual lens that seeks to recognize where God may be acting. This capacity gradually transforms the way one relates to life, allowing the person to become more responsive to the guidance of the Spirit in both prayer and mission.

Importance in Formation

Attentiveness to the Spirit is essential for missionary formation because the life of mission constantly involves decisions, challenges, and unexpected situations that require discernment. Missionaries often face complex pastoral realities where clear answers are not immediately available. In such situations, spiritual attentiveness helps the missionary discern how God may be guiding the next step.

Without this capacity, decisions may be shaped primarily by **personal preferences, emotional impulses, or external pressures**. A missionary might act according to efficiency, popularity, or habit rather than according to the deeper promptings of the Spirit. Over time, such patterns can lead to activism without spiritual grounding.

When attentiveness to the Spirit is cultivated, however, the missionary becomes capable of listening beyond immediate reactions. He learns to ask deeper questions about what God may be inviting him to do in a particular situation. This attentiveness nurtures **spiritual discernment**, enabling the missionary to distinguish between movements that lead toward greater love, freedom, and faithfulness, and those that lead toward discouragement, ego, or self-protection.

Furthermore, attentiveness to the Spirit sustains **missionary creativity**. When the missionary remains attentive to the Spirit, he becomes open to new possibilities and unexpected ways of

responding to pastoral needs. Rather than relying solely on established routines, he becomes capable of recognizing new opportunities for evangelization, service, and reconciliation.

Thus, attentiveness to the Spirit allows the missionary to live with a dynamic awareness that **God is actively guiding both personal life and apostolic mission.**

Examples in Missionary Life

Attentiveness to the Spirit becomes visible in various aspects of spiritual and missionary life. One example is the ability to **recognize inner movements during prayer**. During moments of silence or meditation on Scripture, the missionary may experience feelings of peace, conviction, inspiration, or concern. Rather than ignoring these movements, he reflects on them to discern what they may reveal about God's invitation.

Another example is the practice of **discerning consolation and desolation**, a key element of Ignatian spirituality. Consolation refers to movements that bring deeper faith, hope, love, and openness to God. Desolation refers to movements that bring discouragement, confusion, or spiritual heaviness. Recognizing these patterns helps the missionary understand the spiritual dynamics influencing his decisions.

Attentiveness to the Spirit also appears when the missionary **perceives God's call through life events**. Encounters with people in need, unexpected opportunities for service, or moments of personal challenge may reveal new directions for mission. Instead of viewing these events as random circumstances, the attentive missionary asks how God may be speaking through them.

In this way, everyday experiences become potential places of divine communication.

Reflection Questions

The following questions can help formandi deepen their awareness of attentiveness to the Spirit:

- Do I notice the interior movements that arise during prayer or reflection?
- Do I take time to reflect on my experiences and interpret them in the light of faith?
- Do I actively seek God's guidance before making important decisions?
- When I experience strong emotions or impulses, do I pause to discern their deeper meaning?
- How often do I ask where the Spirit may be leading me in my life and mission?

Such reflection encourages the missionary to cultivate a habit of **spiritual listening** rather than reacting impulsively to circumstances.

Formation Strategies

Formation can foster attentiveness to the Spirit through practices that develop spiritual awareness and discernment.

One of the most effective practices is the **Ignatian examen**, a daily prayer of reflection that invites the person to review the events of the day and identify moments where God's presence was experienced. Through this practice, the missionary gradually learns to recognize patterns of grace and spiritual movement within daily life.

Another helpful strategy is **spiritual journaling**. Writing about one's experiences in prayer, relationships, and ministry allows the missionary to observe recurring themes, emotions, and inspirations. Over time, journaling reveals how God may be guiding the person through specific experiences.

Spiritual direction or accompaniment also plays an essential role. Through dialogue with a spiritual guide, the missionary can interpret interior movements with greater clarity and avoid confusion between authentic spiritual inspiration and personal impulses.

Finally, formandi can practice **structured discernment methods**, such as reflecting on decisions in the presence of God, examining motivations, and seeking confirmation through prayer, Scripture, and community wisdom.

Through these practices, the missionary gradually develops the ability to listen more attentively to the Spirit's guidance.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Attentiveness to the Spirit

The development of **attentiveness to the Spirit** can be explored through a reflective self-assessment that helps formandi become more aware of how they listen to and interpret God's presence in their daily experiences. Because the movements of the Spirit are often subtle and interior, this assessment encourages the missionary to examine whether he intentionally cultivates habits of **spiritual listening, reflection, and discernment**.

The purpose of this tool is not to measure spiritual life with precision but to help the formandus recognize how actively he seeks God's guidance in prayer, decisions, and life events. Attentiveness to the Spirit grows gradually as the person learns to pause, reflect, and interpret experiences through the light of faith. This assessment therefore invites the formandus to consider how consistently he engages in practices that nurture spiritual awareness.

Formandi may rate each statement using the following scale:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating
I regularly reflect on my experiences in the light of faith.	
I seek God's guidance when making important decisions.	
I notice interior spiritual movements during prayer.	
I try to discern whether my decisions lead toward deeper faith and love.	
I reflect on daily events to recognize where God may be acting.	
I take time to pause and listen before reacting to situations.	
I try to distinguish between impulses that lead toward God and those that lead away from Him.	
I review my day to recognize moments of consolation or desolation.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to examine their responses thoughtfully. Statements with higher ratings may indicate areas where attentiveness to the Spirit is already becoming a habitual part of their spiritual life. These areas can be acknowledged with gratitude as signs of spiritual growth.

Lower ratings may reveal areas where the formandus may be living more reactively than reflectively, perhaps responding primarily to external demands or emotional impulses rather than engaging in deliberate spiritual discernment. Such insights should not be interpreted as failure but as **invitations for deeper attentiveness and growth**.

This assessment becomes especially meaningful when used within the context of **spiritual accompaniment or formation dialogue**. A formator or spiritual guide can help the formandus explore questions such as:

- What helps me become more aware of the Spirit's presence in my life?
- In what situations do I tend to act quickly without seeking God's guidance?
- How can I strengthen habits of reflection that allow me to recognize God's action in daily life?

Through such reflection, the assessment becomes a tool for **developing spiritual discernment and attentiveness**. It encourages the missionary to cultivate a reflective attitude toward life, where prayer, experience, and mission are continually interpreted in the light of the Spirit's guidance.

Ultimately, the purpose of this assessment is to help the formandus grow into a person who lives with a heightened spiritual awareness—someone who not only acts for God but also **listens for God**, discerning the quiet movements of the Spirit that guide the journey of faith and mission.

Spiritual Integration

Scripture often portrays God's guidance as gentle and subtle rather than overwhelming or dramatic. One powerful example appears in **1 Kings 19:12**, where the prophet Elijah encounters God not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in a **"gentle whisper."**

This biblical image illustrates the nature of the Spirit's communication. God often speaks quietly, inviting attentive listening rather than dramatic spectacle. Only a heart that is attentive and receptive can perceive this voice.

For the missionary, developing attentiveness to the Spirit means learning to listen to this quiet guidance within the complexities of daily life. As this capacity grows, the missionary becomes increasingly capable of discerning God's presence in prayer, relationships, decisions, and mission. His life gradually becomes shaped by the awareness that **the Holy Spirit continually accompanies and guides the journey of faith and mission**.

6. Capacity for Silence

Definition

Capacity for silence is the **spiritual ability to remain interiorly attentive and receptive to God beyond words, activity, and constant stimulation**. It is the capacity to create an inner space where the person becomes present to God, to oneself, and to the deeper movements of the heart. Silence is not merely the absence of sound or external activity; rather, it is an **interior disposition of attentive stillness** that allows the soul to listen.

In many ways, silence is the environment in which authentic spiritual life grows. Human life is often filled with noise, distractions, and constant activity. Without intentional silence, the person may remain absorbed in external demands and may never encounter the deeper dimension of spiritual awareness. Silence allows the missionary to move from superficial busyness to **interior presence**, where God's voice can be recognized.

Capacity for silence therefore represents a fundamental spiritual competence. It enables the person to remain calmly attentive in the presence of God, allowing prayer to deepen beyond words into contemplation. Through silence, the missionary learns not only to speak to God but also **to listen to God**.

Importance in Formation

Silence plays a vital role in formation because it creates the interior conditions necessary for authentic spiritual growth. In formation environments where schedules, studies, community activities, and pastoral experiences occupy much of daily life, the deliberate cultivation of silence becomes essential.

Silence provides the **spiritual space in which prayer deepens**. While vocal prayers and communal liturgies are important, deeper communion with God often emerges in quiet moments where the heart rests in God's presence. In such moments, prayer moves from speaking to **simply being with God**.

Silence also allows **self-knowledge to grow**. When the noise of activity subsides, the person becomes more aware of thoughts, emotions, desires, and fears that may otherwise remain hidden. This awareness is essential for formation because spiritual growth requires honesty about one's inner life. Silence allows the missionary to recognize both the movements of grace and the areas where further conversion may be needed.

Furthermore, silence is essential for **discernment**. Decisions in missionary life often require careful reflection and attentive listening to God's guidance. Without silence, decisions may be made impulsively or under the influence of external pressures. Silence allows the missionary to step back from immediate reactions and seek clarity through prayerful reflection.

When silence is neglected, spiritual life risks becoming **superficial or purely functional**. Prayer may become routine, discernment may weaken, and interior awareness may diminish. The missionary may remain constantly active but lose contact with the deeper spiritual source that sustains mission.

For this reason, formation seeks to cultivate the capacity for silence as an essential element of a balanced spiritual life.

Examples in Missionary Life

The capacity for silence becomes visible through various concrete practices and attitudes.

One example is the practice of **silent prayer**, where the missionary spends time in quiet presence before God, allowing the heart to rest in divine companionship. In this form of prayer, words may be few or absent, and the emphasis is on attentive awareness rather than verbal expression.

Another expression of silence is the cultivation of **interior recollection** during daily activities. Even in the midst of ministry, the missionary may remain inwardly connected to God through brief moments of quiet awareness or short interior prayers. This habit allows the person to carry a sense of God's presence throughout the day.

Silence also appears when the missionary **withdraws periodically for reflection**. Retreats, recollection days, or personal moments of solitude provide opportunities to step back from routine activities and reflect more deeply on one's relationship with God and the direction of one's life.

These practices help ensure that the missionary's life remains rooted in contemplation as well as action.

Reflection Questions

The following questions may help formandi reflect on their relationship with silence:

- Am I comfortable with silence, or do I feel the need to fill every moment with activity or conversation?
- Do I intentionally create moments of quiet reflection in my daily life?
- How do I respond when I encounter interior stillness during prayer?
- Do I experience silence as a place of encounter with God, or as an empty or uncomfortable space?
- What distractions most frequently prevent me from entering into silence?

Reflecting on these questions helps formandi recognize whether silence is becoming a natural part of their spiritual life or remains something they tend to avoid.

Formation Strategies

The capacity for silence can be intentionally cultivated through specific formative practices. One important strategy is the **regular practice of silent prayer periods**. Setting aside daily time for quiet prayer helps the formandus gradually become comfortable with interior stillness. Over time, the person learns to remain peacefully present before God without the constant need for words or activity.

Another valuable practice is participation in **retreats and recollection days**, where extended periods of silence allow deeper reflection and spiritual renewal. These experiences help the missionary reconnect with the deeper motivations of his vocation.

Contemplative practices, such as meditation on Scripture, centering prayer, or silent Eucharistic adoration, also help develop attentiveness and interior calm. Through such practices, the missionary learns to listen to God with greater depth.

In the contemporary world, cultivating silence also requires **digital discipline**. Constant exposure to digital media and communication can fragment attention and make silence difficult. Intentional limits on digital distractions help create the mental and emotional space necessary for deeper reflection and prayer.

Through these practices, silence gradually becomes not merely an occasional activity but a **habitual attitude of interior openness**.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in the Capacity for Silence

The development of the **capacity for silence** can be explored through reflective self-assessment that helps formandi become aware of their relationship with quietness, stillness, and interior attentiveness. In contemporary life, where constant stimulation and activity often dominate daily experience, cultivating silence requires deliberate intention and spiritual discipline. This assessment tool invites the missionary to examine whether silence is becoming a meaningful and integrated part of his spiritual life.

The goal of this assessment is not to judge spiritual maturity but to encourage **honest awareness of how one relates to silence and interior reflection**. Silence is not simply an external condition but an interior disposition that allows the person to become attentive to God's presence. Through reflection on these statements, formandi can recognize whether they intentionally cultivate silence or whether distractions, noise, and constant activity tend to fill their interior space.

Formandi may rate each statement using the following scale:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating
I regularly spend time in silent prayer.	
I am comfortable with interior stillness and quiet reflection.	
Silence deepens my awareness of God's presence.	
I intentionally create moments of silence in my daily life.	
I can remain attentive and calm without constant external stimulation.	
I am able to sit quietly before God without feeling the need to fill the time with words.	
I can disconnect from digital distractions in order to create space for reflection.	
I value silence as an important part of my spiritual growth.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to review their responses and reflect on what they reveal about their relationship with silence. Higher scores may indicate that the formandus has begun to develop comfort with stillness and has integrated silent prayer and reflection into daily life. Lower scores may suggest that silence remains challenging or that distractions and constant activity make it difficult to enter into deeper interior reflection.

Such awareness is not meant to produce discouragement. The capacity for silence develops gradually as the person learns to **slow down, become attentive, and embrace interior stillness**. Many people initially experience discomfort when entering silence because it exposes thoughts,

emotions, or anxieties that are usually hidden beneath activity. With patience and practice, however, silence becomes a place of peace rather than discomfort.

This assessment can be especially fruitful when used within **spiritual accompaniment or formation dialogue**. A formator or spiritual guide may invite the formandus to explore questions such as:

- What prevents me from entering silence more deeply?
- What practices help me remain attentive and present before God?
- How can I create healthier rhythms of silence in the midst of daily responsibilities?

Through such reflection, formandi gradually discover that silence is not an absence of meaning but a **spiritual environment where deeper awareness emerges**. In silence, the heart becomes more receptive to God's presence, and the person learns to listen beyond the surface level of thoughts and words.

Ultimately, the purpose of this assessment is to help the missionary recognize that silence is not emptiness but a **sacred space of encounter**—a place where God's voice can be heard, where the heart learns to listen, and where the roots of spiritual life grow deeper.

Spiritual Integration

The capacity for silence occupies a central place in the Christian spiritual tradition because it creates the interior space where the human person becomes receptive to God's presence. Throughout Scripture and the history of Christian spirituality, silence is presented as the privileged environment where the believer encounters God not merely through words but through attentive presence. In silence, the restless movement of thoughts and activities gradually settles, allowing the heart to become aware of the deeper reality of God who dwells within.

The biblical tradition repeatedly highlights the importance of silence in encountering God. One of the most profound images appears in the experience of the prophet Elijah, who discovers that God is not revealed through dramatic manifestations of power but through a "**gentle whisper**" (1 Kings 19:12). This passage teaches that the voice of God is often subtle and requires a quiet and attentive heart to be perceived. When life is dominated by noise, distraction, and constant activity, this gentle voice can easily remain unheard. Silence therefore becomes the condition that allows the believer to perceive God's quiet presence.

Jesus himself frequently sought silence as a place of communion with the Father. The Gospels describe how he withdrew from crowds and activity in order to pray in solitude. These moments of silence were not escapes from mission but sources of spiritual strength that nourished his ministry. In the same way, the missionary learns that silence is not opposed to action; rather, it is the **spiritual wellspring from which authentic mission flows**.

Within the life of formation, silence serves as a path toward deeper self-awareness and discernment. When the external noise of activity diminishes, the person becomes more aware of interior movements—desires, fears, inspirations, and resistances. Recognizing these movements allows the missionary to discern how God is working within his life and how he is being invited to grow. Silence therefore becomes a space where **self-knowledge and spiritual awareness converge**.

Furthermore, silence fosters a contemplative attitude that allows the missionary to remain attentive to God even amid the demands of ministry. A person who has cultivated interior silence learns to carry a sense of recollection into daily life, maintaining an awareness of God's presence while engaging in apostolic work. In this way, silence gradually shapes the missionary into a contemplative in action—someone who serves actively while remaining rooted in interior communion with God.

Ultimately, the capacity for silence reveals that God's presence does not depend on constant activity or external expression. Instead, God is encountered in the quiet depth of the heart. When the missionary learns to embrace silence, he discovers that it is not emptiness but a **sacred space of**

encounter, where God speaks gently, the heart listens attentively, and spiritual life grows in depth and authenticity.

7. Receptivity to Mystery

Definition

Receptivity to mystery is the **spiritual capacity to recognize that God ultimately transcends human comprehension and to remain open, humble, and attentive before the depth of divine reality**. It involves the willingness to live with reverence before the mystery of God rather than attempting to reduce faith to concepts that can be fully explained or controlled.

Human understanding naturally seeks clarity, explanations, and certainty. While reason and theology play an important role in deepening faith, the Christian tradition also recognizes that God's reality always surpasses the limits of human intellect. Receptivity to mystery therefore invites the believer to approach God with **humility, awe, and openness**, acknowledging that divine truth is always greater than human formulations.

This capacity allows the missionary to remain spiritually receptive even when life presents questions that cannot be immediately resolved. Instead of becoming frustrated by ambiguity or uncertainty, the person learns to trust that the mystery of God unfolds gradually within the journey of faith.

Importance in Formation

Receptivity to mystery is essential for authentic spiritual maturity because the life of faith is not merely an intellectual system but a living relationship with the infinite God. Formation must therefore help formandi develop not only knowledge about God but also a **reverent openness to the depth of God's presence and action**.

Without receptivity to mystery, faith can easily become rigid or overly intellectualized. A person may attempt to reduce spiritual life to clear formulas, fixed explanations, or simplistic answers. While such approaches may offer temporary security, they can limit the capacity to encounter the living God who continually exceeds human expectations.

Developing receptivity to mystery helps prevent several attitudes that can weaken spiritual growth:

- **Spiritual rigidity**, where faith becomes inflexible and unable to respond to new experiences or deeper insights.
- **Excessive rationalism**, where intellectual understanding is treated as the only valid way of approaching God.
- **Reductionism**, where the richness of faith is simplified into explanations that leave little room for wonder or contemplation.

In missionary life, this capacity becomes particularly important because the missionary often encounters cultural diversity, complex pastoral situations, and human suffering that cannot be explained easily. Receptivity to mystery allows the missionary to remain faithful and hopeful even when life's situations cannot be fully understood.

Instead of demanding complete answers, the missionary learns to trust that God's wisdom is present even within ambiguity and complexity.

Examples in Missionary Life

Receptivity to mystery becomes visible in everyday attitudes and responses to life's deeper questions.

One example is the ability to **accept unanswered questions with faith**. Rather than becoming discouraged by uncertainty, the missionary recognizes that some aspects of God's plan unfold gradually and remain beyond immediate understanding.

Another expression of this capacity is **recognizing the limits of human understanding**. The missionary acknowledges that theological reflection and personal insight can deepen understanding, yet God's reality always remains greater than human comprehension.

Receptivity to mystery also appears when the missionary **remains open to God's surprising action**. God may work through unexpected people, events, or circumstances that challenge preconceived expectations. A receptive heart is able to welcome these surprises as possible manifestations of divine grace.

In this way, mystery becomes not a problem to solve but **a space of encounter with God's infinite wisdom**.

Reflection Questions

The following questions may help formandi reflect on their openness to mystery in spiritual life:

- Am I comfortable with questions that do not have immediate answers?
- Do I allow God to remain greater than my understanding?
- How do I react when spiritual experiences challenge my expectations or beliefs?
- Do I approach faith with a sense of wonder and reverence, or mainly as a system of explanations?
- Can I remain peaceful when I encounter spiritual ambiguity or complexity?

Reflecting on these questions helps the missionary examine whether his spiritual outlook is characterized by humility and openness or by the need for complete certainty.

Formation Strategies

Receptivity to mystery can be cultivated through formative practices that deepen spiritual awareness and contemplation.

One important practice is **contemplative prayer**, where the person rests quietly in God's presence without the need to fully analyse or explain the experience. Such prayer fosters openness to the mystery of God beyond words and concepts.

Theological reflection also supports this capacity by helping formandi appreciate the richness and depth of Christian tradition. Studying theology not merely as academic information but as a path toward understanding the mystery of God encourages humility before divine truth.

Another helpful practice is **meditation on the mysteries of Scripture**. Biblical narratives often reveal that God's action unfolds in surprising and paradoxical ways. Reflecting on these mysteries helps formandi accept that divine wisdom may exceed human expectations.

Finally, **dialogue between faith and experience** allows formandi to integrate life events with spiritual reflection. Through this dialogue, they learn that many aspects of faith unfold gradually through lived experience rather than through immediate clarity.

These practices help cultivate a spiritual attitude marked by **wonder, humility, and openness**.

Assessment Tool: Evaluating Growth in Receptivity to Mystery

The development of **receptivity to mystery** can be explored through a reflective self-assessment that invites formandi to examine how they relate to the depth and transcendence of God. Because faith involves encountering a reality that surpasses human understanding, this assessment

encourages the missionary to reflect on whether he approaches God with **humility, openness, and reverence**, or whether he feels the need to resolve every question with immediate clarity.

In spiritual life, mystery is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be contemplated and received. This assessment therefore focuses on attitudes that reveal whether the formandus is capable of remaining peaceful and trusting even when faced with unanswered questions or spiritual ambiguity. It helps the missionary recognize whether his faith is characterized by **openness to the unfolding mystery of God** or by an excessive need for certainty and control.

Formandi may rate each statement using the following scale:

- **1 – Rarely true of me**
- **2 – Occasionally true**
- **3 – Sometimes true**
- **4 – Often true**
- **5 – Consistently true**

Statement	Rating
I am comfortable living with questions that do not have immediate answers.	
I acknowledge that God's reality is greater than my understanding.	
I remain open to new insights that deepen my understanding of faith.	
I can accept spiritual ambiguity without becoming discouraged.	
I approach faith with wonder and reverence rather than seeking complete control over explanations.	
I remain attentive to unexpected ways in which God may act in my life.	
I am able to trust God even when I do not fully understand His plans.	
I allow spiritual experiences to deepen my faith rather than forcing them into simple explanations.	

After completing the assessment, formandi are encouraged to review their responses and reflect on the attitudes that shape their approach to faith. Statements with higher ratings may indicate a growing openness to the mystery of God and a capacity to remain peaceful within uncertainty. Lower ratings may suggest a tendency to seek complete explanations or to become uneasy when confronted with ambiguity or unanswered questions.

This reflection should not lead to self-criticism but to deeper awareness. Receptivity to mystery develops gradually as the person grows in humility, prayer, and trust. Spiritual maturity often involves learning to remain faithful even when understanding is incomplete.

This assessment can be especially meaningful when used within **spiritual accompaniment or formation dialogue**. A formator or spiritual guide may invite the formandus to reflect on questions such as:

- What spiritual questions in my life remain unresolved?
- How do I react when I encounter aspects of faith that I cannot fully explain?
- What helps me remain peaceful and trusting in the presence of mystery?

Through such reflection, the formandus learns that faith does not require the elimination of mystery but rather the **embrace of mystery as a space where God reveals Himself gradually**. Instead of seeking to control or fully comprehend divine reality, the missionary learns to stand before it with humility, trust, and reverent openness.

Ultimately, the purpose of this assessment is to help the missionary cultivate a heart that remains **open to the depth of God's presence**, capable of living with wonder and trust as the mystery of faith continues to unfold throughout life and mission.

Spiritual Integration

Receptivity to mystery lies at the heart of the Christian experience of God. Scripture repeatedly reminds believers that God's ways surpass human understanding. The prophet Isaiah expresses this truth with the words: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord*" (Isaiah 55:8).

This biblical insight invites believers to approach God with humility and trust rather than with the expectation of complete comprehension. Faith involves entering into a relationship with the living God whose wisdom and love extend far beyond human reasoning.

In the Christian tradition, mystery is not understood as something obscure or inaccessible but as a **reality so profound that it can never be exhausted by human understanding**. The mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist reveal a God who invites human participation while remaining infinitely greater than human comprehension.

For the missionary, receptivity to mystery nurtures a contemplative attitude toward life and mission. It allows the person to encounter God in unexpected places, to remain hopeful amid uncertainty, and to approach the journey of faith with reverence and wonder.

Ultimately, receptivity to mystery transforms spiritual life into a **pilgrimage of discovery**, where the believer continually encounters new depths of God's presence. Instead of seeking to master divine reality, the missionary learns to stand before it with humility, trust, and joyful openness to the unfolding mystery of God's love.

IV. Formation Practices to Cultivate These Capacities

The spiritual self-capacities described in this module—trust in God, self-surrender, spiritual autonomy, gratitude, attentiveness to the Spirit, capacity for silence, and receptivity to mystery—do not develop automatically. Like all aspects of human and spiritual growth, they require **consistent spiritual practices that gradually shape the interior life**. Through regular engagement with these practices, the missionary learns to become more attentive to God's presence, more aware of the movements of grace, and more responsive to the invitations of the Spirit.

Spiritual formation therefore emphasizes not only theoretical understanding but also **concrete spiritual disciplines** that create the conditions for inner transformation. These practices function as the "spiritual environment" in which the person's relationship with God deepens over time. By regularly engaging in these practices, the missionary remains spiritually rooted even amid the demands of study, community life, and apostolic ministry.

Each of these practices contributes in a particular way to the cultivation of the spiritual capacities necessary for mature missionary life.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, or sacred reading of Scripture, is one of the most foundational practices of Christian spirituality. It is a prayerful approach to the Word of God that invites the believer to read, meditate, pray, and contemplate the Scriptures in a spirit of attentive listening. Through this process, the missionary encounters the Word not merely as a text to be analysed but as a **living voice through which God speaks personally**.

Practicing Lectio Divina nurtures several spiritual capacities. It deepens **trust in God** by revealing the fidelity of God throughout salvation history. It fosters **attentiveness to the Spirit** by helping the missionary listen for God's invitation within the biblical text. It also encourages **receptivity to mystery**, since Scripture often reveals God's action in ways that surpass human expectations.

Over time, the Word of God begins to shape the missionary's vision of life and mission, allowing him to interpret daily experiences through the light of the Gospel.

Eucharistic Adoration

Eucharistic adoration invites the missionary to remain in silent prayer before Christ present in the Eucharist. In this form of prayer, the emphasis is not primarily on speaking but on **being present before the Lord in reverence and love**.

This practice strengthens the **capacity for silence**, allowing the missionary to become comfortable with quiet attentiveness in God's presence. It also fosters **self-surrender**, as the person gradually learns to entrust his life to Christ. In moments of adoration, the missionary experiences the depth of Christ's love and is invited to respond with gratitude and openness.

Eucharistic adoration also nurtures **gratitude**, because it continually reminds the believer that the Eucharist is the ultimate gift of God's self-giving love.

Daily Examen

The daily examen is a prayer of reflection that helps the missionary review the events of the day in the presence of God. Traditionally practiced in Ignatian spirituality, the examen invites the person to recognize moments of grace, express gratitude, seek forgiveness for failures, and discern the movements of the Spirit within daily experiences.

Through this practice, the missionary develops **attentiveness to the Spirit** by learning to notice where God has been active throughout the day. The examen also strengthens **gratitude**, since it encourages the recognition of God's gifts and blessings even in ordinary events.

Over time, the daily examen cultivates a reflective attitude that allows the missionary to interpret life spiritually rather than merely reacting to circumstances.

Silent Retreats

Silent retreats provide extended periods of quiet reflection and prayer away from the usual rhythm of daily activities. These retreats create a spiritual environment where the missionary can step back from routine responsibilities and focus more deeply on his relationship with God.

Retreats are particularly effective in cultivating the **capacity for silence** and **receptivity to mystery**. In the absence of constant activity and noise, the missionary becomes more aware of the deeper movements of the heart and the subtle invitations of the Spirit.

Such periods of silence also encourage **self-surrender**, as the person places himself more fully before God and becomes open to spiritual renewal and transformation.

Spiritual Accompaniment

Spiritual accompaniment, often practiced through spiritual direction or regular formative dialogue, provides a space where the missionary can reflect on his spiritual experiences with the guidance of a trusted companion. In this setting, the formandus shares insights, struggles, questions, and discernment regarding his spiritual journey.

Through this process, the missionary develops greater **attentiveness to the Spirit**, since spiritual accompaniment helps interpret interior movements and discern God's guidance. It also supports **spiritual autonomy**, as the formandus gradually learns to take responsibility for his spiritual life while receiving guidance and support.

Spiritual accompaniment encourages honesty, humility, and openness to growth, helping the missionary recognize both the presence of grace and the areas that require further conversion.

Communal Prayer

Communal prayer forms an essential part of missionary life because it expresses the shared faith and unity of the formation community. Through common prayer—such as the Liturgy of the

Hours, Eucharistic celebration, and shared devotions—the missionary participates in the prayer of the Church.

Communal prayer nurtures **gratitude**, as the community gathers to praise and thank God together. It also strengthens **trust in God**, reminding the missionary that faith is lived not only individually but also within the communion of believers.

Furthermore, communal prayer reinforces the missionary's awareness that his personal vocation is part of a **larger ecclesial mission**.

Journaling and Reflection

Journaling provides a practical tool for deepening spiritual awareness. By writing about experiences in prayer, relationships, and ministry, the missionary develops the habit of reflecting on how God may be acting within his life.

Through journaling, the missionary becomes more attentive to **interior movements**, strengthening his capacity for discernment. This practice also encourages **receptivity to mystery**, since it allows the person to revisit experiences and discover new insights that may not have been immediately apparent.

Over time, journaling becomes a valuable record of the spiritual journey, helping the missionary recognize patterns of growth, moments of grace, and areas where deeper trust or surrender may still be needed.

Integrating Spiritual Practices

When practiced consistently, these spiritual disciplines form a **rhythm of life that sustains spiritual growth**. They help the missionary remain connected to God amid the many responsibilities of community life and apostolic mission.

Together, these practices allow the missionary to remain within what the Claretian formation tradition describes as **the fire of the Spirit**—the transformative presence of God that purifies, guides, and strengthens the person over time. By remaining faithful to these practices, the missionary gradually develops the spiritual capacities that enable him to live with deeper faith, discernment, and availability for mission.

In this way, spiritual practices are not merely devotional activities but **formative pathways** through which the missionary's heart is continually shaped by the Spirit and oriented toward the service of the Gospel.

V. Role of the Formator

The development of spiritual self-capacities does not occur in isolation. Although spiritual growth is ultimately a personal response to God's grace, the presence of wise and attentive formators plays a crucial role in helping formandi recognize, interpret, and deepen their spiritual experiences. Within the formation process, the formator serves not merely as an instructor or supervisor but as a **spiritual guide who accompanies the formandus in learning to live attentively before God**.

The task of the formator is therefore deeply pastoral and spiritual. Through attentive listening, thoughtful guidance, and personal example, formators help formandi gradually cultivate the interior dispositions necessary for a mature spiritual life. They assist formandi in recognizing how God is already present and active in their journey and encourage them to respond with increasing freedom, trust, and openness.

Several aspects of the formator's role are particularly important in fostering these spiritual capacities.

Encouraging Reflective Prayer

One of the fundamental responsibilities of the formator is to help formandi develop a meaningful and reflective prayer life. While formation programs may include structured times of prayer, formandi often need guidance in learning how to pray deeply and attentively rather than merely fulfilling external requirements.

Formators can support this growth by encouraging formandi to approach prayer as a **personal encounter with God** rather than as a routine obligation. They may help formandi explore different forms of prayer—such as meditation on Scripture, contemplative prayer, or the daily examen—so that each person can discover ways of praying that nurture attentiveness to God’s presence.

By encouraging reflective prayer, formators help cultivate capacities such as **trust in God, gratitude, attentiveness to the Spirit, and receptivity to mystery**.

Guiding Discernment Processes

Missionary life involves many important decisions, including vocational commitment, apostolic responsibilities, and responses to pastoral challenges. Formators play an important role in guiding formandi through these discernment processes so that decisions emerge from prayerful reflection rather than impulsive reactions or external pressures.

Through dialogue and spiritual guidance, formators help formandi examine their motivations, emotions, and interior movements. They may invite formandi to reflect on questions such as what brings deeper peace, freedom, or openness to God. In this way, discernment becomes a **spiritual practice of listening to the Spirit rather than simply choosing between alternatives**.

Guided discernment strengthens capacities such as **self-surrender, spiritual autonomy, and attentiveness to the Spirit**.

Fostering an Atmosphere of Silence and Contemplation

Formation environments strongly influence the spiritual attitudes of formandi. When a formation house encourages constant activity without moments of quiet reflection, it becomes difficult for formandi to develop the capacity for silence and contemplative awareness.

Formators therefore contribute to spiritual formation by **cultivating an atmosphere that values silence, reflection, and prayer**. This may involve ensuring regular times for silent prayer, organizing retreats or recollection days, and encouraging healthy rhythms that balance study, ministry, and contemplation.

When silence and contemplation are valued within the community, formandi gradually learn that interior stillness is not an interruption of mission but a **necessary foundation for authentic spiritual life**.

Helping Formandi Interpret Spiritual Experiences

Formandi often experience a wide range of spiritual movements during formation, including moments of consolation, periods of dryness, questions about faith, or deeper insights about their vocation. Without guidance, these experiences can sometimes be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Formators assist formandi by helping them **reflect on and interpret these spiritual experiences** in the light of faith. Through attentive listening and thoughtful questions, the formator helps the formandus identify patterns of grace, recognize areas of growth, and understand challenges as part of the spiritual journey.

This interpretive role helps formandi develop deeper **self-awareness and spiritual discernment**, enabling them to integrate their experiences more consciously into their vocational journey.

Modelling Trust and Surrender in Their Own Lives

Perhaps the most powerful influence of a formator is personal example. Formandi learn not only from instructions but also from observing how formators live their own spiritual lives. When formators demonstrate humility, prayerfulness, trust in God, and openness to the Spirit, they provide a living witness of the attitudes that formation seeks to cultivate.

A formator who lives with **authentic trust in God, gratitude for vocation, and willingness to surrender personal plans to the mission** becomes a concrete model for formandi. Such witness communicates that spiritual capacities are not abstract ideals but real attitudes that can shape daily life.

Through their own example, formators help formandi understand that spiritual maturity involves a lifelong journey of conversion and openness to God.

Accompaniment as a Path of Discovery

Ultimately, the role of the formator is to accompany formandi in discovering the presence and action of God within their lives. Through attentive dialogue and patient guidance, formators help formandi recognize moments where grace is already at work—sometimes in ways the formandus may not have previously noticed.

This accompaniment invites formandi to respond to God's action with **greater freedom, deeper trust, and increasing availability for mission**. Rather than imposing spiritual experiences or directing every aspect of the formandus's journey, the formator helps create the conditions where the formandus can gradually assume responsibility for his spiritual growth.

In this way, formation becomes a collaborative journey in which **God's grace, the formandus's freedom, and the formator's accompaniment converge**. As these elements interact, the missionary gradually develops the spiritual capacities necessary to live a life of prayer, discernment, and apostolic commitment in the service of the Gospel.

VI. Conclusion

Spiritual self-capacities constitute the **interior foundation upon which the life and mission of a missionary are built**. While external formation structures provide guidance, knowledge, and pastoral preparation, the true depth of missionary identity emerges from the gradual development of an interior life rooted in God. Without this spiritual depth, missionary activity risks becoming merely functional or activist. With it, mission becomes a living expression of communion with God.

The capacities explored in this module—**trust in God, self-surrender, spiritual autonomy, gratitude, attentiveness to the Spirit, capacity for silence, and receptivity to mystery**—represent essential dimensions of this interior foundation. Each of these capacities helps the missionary cultivate a spiritual disposition that enables him to live faithfully in the presence of God while engaging actively in the service of the Gospel.

Through **trust in God**, the missionary learns to rely not only on personal abilities but on the providence and guidance of God, especially during moments of uncertainty or difficulty. Through **self-surrender**, he gradually learns to place his plans, ambitions, and expectations at the service of God's will, embracing the path of discipleship marked by humility and availability.

Spiritual autonomy allows the missionary to sustain his spiritual life with interior motivation, ensuring that prayer and reflection continue even in demanding mission contexts where external structures may be limited. **Gratitude** nurtures a joyful outlook that recognizes God's gifts in daily life, protecting the missionary from discouragement and cultivating a spirit of appreciation toward God and others.

Through **attentiveness to the Spirit**, the missionary becomes capable of discerning God's subtle guidance within prayer, relationships, and life events. **Capacity for silence** creates the interior space where this discernment becomes possible, allowing the missionary to listen deeply and remain

grounded in God's presence. Finally, **receptivity to mystery** helps the missionary approach faith with humility and wonder, recognizing that God's wisdom always surpasses human understanding.

Together, these capacities enable the missionary to develop a spiritual outlook that sustains both prayer and mission. They allow the missionary to:

- **discern God's presence within the ordinary events of daily life**
- **remain faithful and hopeful during challenges or uncertainty**
- **sustain a life of prayer even amid the demands of ministry**
- **serve the Gospel with interior freedom and generosity**

In this way, spiritual life becomes not a separate activity from mission but the **source from which mission flows**. Prayer, discernment, and apostolic service become integrated dimensions of a single vocational response to God's call.

Within the **Claretian formation process**, the cultivation of these spiritual capacities is particularly significant. The Claretian charism calls missionaries to be men deeply rooted in the Word of God, attentive to the movements of the Spirit, and available for the evangelizing mission of the Church. The image often used within the Claretian tradition—the missionary being formed in the **"forge" of God's Spirit**—expresses this transformative process.

Just as metal is shaped and strengthened through fire, the missionary is gradually shaped through prayer, reflection, community life, and mission. Over time, these experiences purify motivations, deepen faith, and strengthen the capacity to respond generously to God's call.

When these spiritual capacities mature within the formation journey, they shape missionaries who are truly **contemplatives in action**. Such missionaries remain deeply rooted in communion with God while actively engaging the needs of the world. Their mission is not driven merely by obligation or efficiency but by a living relationship with Christ and a constant openness to the guidance of the Spirit.

Ultimately, the cultivation of spiritual self-capacities prepares missionaries to live with **interior freedom, spiritual depth, and apostolic availability**. Rooted in God and attentive to the Spirit, they become capable of responding creatively and faithfully to the mission of the Kingdom, serving the Gospel with courage, humility, and enduring hope.

Appendix

Formator Observation Rubric: Evaluating Self-Capacities in Spiritual Formation

The following rubric is designed to assist formators in **observing and evaluating the development of spiritual self-capacities in formandi** during the formation process. Unlike academic evaluation, spiritual growth cannot be measured only through external performance. It becomes visible through attitudes, behaviours, patterns of prayer, and the way the formandus interprets life experiences in the light of faith.

This rubric therefore focuses on **observable indicators of spiritual maturity** that reflect the presence and growth of the spiritual capacities discussed in this formation module. The goal is not to judge the formandus' holiness but to support **discernment, accompaniment, and formative guidance**.

Formators may use the rubric during:

- periodic formation reviews
- spiritual accompaniment conversations
- annual formation evaluations
- vocational discernment processes

Rating Scale

Level	Description
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1 – Emerging	Capacity rarely visible; formandus depends heavily on external structures.
2 – Developing	Capacity appears occasionally but remains inconsistent.
3 – Growing	Capacity generally present but still requires guidance and strengthening.
4 – Mature	Capacity consistently evident and integrated into the formandus's spiritual life.

Observation Rubric Table

Spiritual Capacity	Emerging (1)	Developing (2)	Growing (3)	Mature (4)
Trust in God	Frequently anxious about the future; relies primarily on personal control.	Occasionally expresses trust but becomes discouraged in difficulties.	Generally trusts God but may struggle during prolonged uncertainty.	Demonstrates deep confidence in God's providence even during challenges.
Self-Surrender	Strong attachment to personal plans; difficulty accepting authority or mission decisions.	Accepts guidance but with noticeable resistance.	Usually open to God's will though occasional personal attachment remains.	Freely embraces mission, authority, and service with humility and availability.
Spiritual Autonomy	Spiritual life depends almost entirely on external reminders or community structures.	Attempts personal spiritual practices but lacks consistency.	Maintains personal prayer life with moderate consistency.	Takes full responsibility for nurturing a disciplined and personal spiritual life.
Gratitude	Often focuses on problems, complaints, or comparisons.	Recognizes blessings occasionally but may remain negative in difficulties.	Frequently expresses appreciation toward God and others.	Displays a consistently grateful outlook that fosters joy and humility.
Attentiveness to the Spirit	Rarely reflects on spiritual experiences; decisions guided mostly by impulse.	Shows some awareness of spiritual movements but lacks discernment.	Reflects on experiences spiritually and seeks guidance in decisions.	Demonstrates deep discernment and attentiveness to the movements of the Spirit.
Capacity for Silence	Uncomfortable with silence; seeks constant activity or stimulation.	Tolerates silence but struggles to maintain interior stillness.	Regularly practices silence and reflection.	Deeply comfortable with silence; interior recollection evident even in activity.
Receptivity to Mystery	Seeks rigid answers; uncomfortable with ambiguity or uncertainty in faith.	Accepts some ambiguity but may become uneasy with unresolved questions.	Generally open to the depth of faith and willing to live with mystery.	Demonstrates humility, wonder, and reverence toward the mystery of God.

Guidelines for Using the Rubric

1. Observe Patterns Rather Than Isolated Behaviours: Formators should evaluate formandi based on **consistent patterns over time** rather than single events. Spiritual maturity develops gradually, and temporary struggles are normal within the formation journey.

2. Combine Observation with Dialogue: The rubric should not replace personal dialogue with the formandus. Instead, it should serve as a **starting point for reflective conversation** in accompaniment sessions or formation reviews. For example, if a formandus shows difficulty with trust in God, the formator may explore:

- experiences that generate anxiety or control
- moments where trust has grown
- practices that strengthen faith.

3. Encourage Growth Rather Than Judgment: The purpose of the rubric is **formative rather than evaluative**. It should help formandi recognize areas where spiritual capacities are already developing and identify areas where further growth is invited.

4. Integrate Spiritual and Human Development: Spiritual capacities often interact with psychological and relational dimensions. For example:

- difficulty with self-surrender may be linked to attachment patterns
- lack of silence may reflect anxiety or overstimulation
- difficulty trusting God may relate to unresolved personal fears.

Formators should therefore approach evaluation with **pastoral sensitivity and holistic awareness**.

Signs of Healthy Spiritual Growth

When spiritual self-capacities mature within the formation process, certain characteristics typically emerge in the formandus' life:

- prayer becomes personal and interior rather than merely obligatory
- discernment becomes more reflective and less impulsive
- challenges are faced with faith rather than discouragement
- gratitude and joy become more visible in community life
- silence and contemplation are valued rather than avoided
- openness to mystery replaces rigid or defensive attitudes.

These signs indicate that the formandus' spiritual life is becoming **interiorly grounded and integrated**.

Final Insight

The goal of evaluating spiritual self-capacities is not simply to measure spiritual practices but to recognize **the gradual transformation of the person's interior life**. Formation seeks to help the formandus grow into a missionary who is deeply rooted in God, attentive to the Spirit, and free to respond generously to the needs of the Church and the world.

When these spiritual capacities mature, the missionary becomes capable of living the Claretian ideal of being a **contemplative in action**—a person who remains united with God while courageously serving the Gospel in mission.