

Affective Maturity and Psychosexual Integration

Growing into Christ the Evangelizer with an Undivided Heart

I. INTRODUCTION

Every missionary vocation is fundamentally a vocation to love. Before it is expressed in preaching, pastoral ministry, leadership, or service, it is first lived in the heart of the missionary as an ever-deepening relationship with God, with oneself, and with others. Consequently, the quality of a missionary's apostolic life depends not only on theological knowledge, pastoral competence, or spiritual practices, but also on the degree of affective maturity and psychosexual integration that enables him to love with freedom, authenticity, and generosity.

The Claretian vocation calls a person to become conformed to Christ the Evangelizer, whose heart was wholly given to the Father and completely available for the service of humanity. Saint Anthony Mary Claret embodied this same undivided love. His apostolic zeal sprang from an integrated personality in which prayer, relationships, emotions, and missionary commitment formed a harmonious whole. Like Claret, every missionary is invited to grow into a person whose affectivity, sexuality, and relationships become channels of self-giving love rather than sources of inner conflict or divided loyalties.

Such growth does not occur automatically. Entering religious life does not instantly resolve the emotional wounds, developmental struggles, relational patterns, or sexual questions that are part of every person's human journey. Rather, formation provides the privileged environment in which these realities can be acknowledged, understood, purified, and integrated through grace, personal effort, accompaniment, and community life. Human formation therefore remains the indispensable foundation upon which spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and charismatic formation can flourish.

Affective maturity and psychosexual integration are often misunderstood. Some identify them merely with emotional stability or the absence of sexual difficulties. Others reduce them to the observance of celibacy or to behavioural control. Such views are incomplete. Affective maturity is the growing capacity to know oneself honestly, accept oneself realistically, regulate one's emotions wisely, form healthy and life-giving relationships, and love with freedom rather than dependency. Psychosexual integration is the lifelong process through which one's sexuality—embracing body, emotions, relationships, imagination, desires, and identity—is harmoniously integrated into the whole personality and directed toward authentic love and self-gift.

This understanding reflects the Christian vision of the human person. Sexuality is not a problem to be suppressed nor merely a biological reality to be managed. It is a precious gift of God, woven into the very fabric of human existence. It shapes how persons experience themselves, relate to others, express affection, and become capable of communion. When accepted with gratitude and integrated with maturity, sexuality becomes a powerful source of creativity, compassion, intimacy, and missionary fruitfulness. When neglected, repressed, or fragmented, however, it can lead to confusion, unhealthy attachments, loneliness, compulsive behaviours, or divided living.

The contemporary cultural context makes this aspect of formation even more urgent. Candidates today grow up in a world marked by rapid social change, digital technology, easy access to pornography, distorted understandings of sexuality, consumerism, individualism, and fragile interpersonal relationships. Many arrive in formation carrying emotional wounds, experiences of family instability, confusion regarding identity, or unrealistic expectations about intimacy and happiness. These realities do not disqualify a vocation, but they do require patient accompaniment, honest discernment, and intentional formation.

For missionaries called to celibate consecrated life, affective maturity assumes particular significance. Celibacy is not simply the renunciation of marriage or sexual activity. It is a positive vocation to love universally with an undivided heart. Such love is sustainable only when it rests upon emotional freedom, healthy friendships, interior security, self-knowledge, and a deep experience of God's unconditional love. Celibacy without affective maturity easily becomes burdensome, lonely,

or defensive. Conversely, affective maturity transforms celibacy into a joyful expression of evangelical freedom, generous service, and universal charity.

Formation, therefore, cannot be limited to teaching norms or preventing inappropriate behaviour. It must accompany the whole person in becoming emotionally balanced, relationally healthy, psychologically integrated, spiritually rooted, and apostolically available. This requires an atmosphere of trust in which Formandi can speak honestly about their struggles without fear of judgment, receive appropriate guidance, and gradually grow in self-awareness, self-mastery, and authentic freedom.

The purpose of this module is precisely to support that journey. It seeks to help Formandi understand the meaning of affective maturity and psychosexual integration within the Christian and Claretian vision of the human person, to recognize both the gifts and vulnerabilities of their own affective life, and to cultivate the attitudes, virtues, and practical skills necessary for living joyful, healthy, and fruitful missionary celibacy. At the same time, it offers formators practical guidelines for accompanying candidates with wisdom, compassion, realism, and hope.

Ultimately, affective maturity and psychosexual integration are not ends in themselves. They are ordered toward communion with God and generous service of others. As the missionary gradually becomes more integrated within himself, he also becomes more available for the mission entrusted to him. With an undivided heart, he is able to proclaim the Gospel not only through his words but through the witness of a life marked by freedom, integrity, compassion, and joyful self-giving. In this way, he becomes an authentic icon of Christ the Evangelizer, whose love continues to reach the world through the lives of His missionaries.

II. PURPOSE OF THE MODULE

This module seeks to foster the integral human and spiritual development of Claretian missionaries by promoting affective maturity and psychosexual integration as essential foundations for joyful consecrated life and fruitful missionary service. It aims to help Formandi understand their affective and sexual lives as gifts from God that are to be embraced with gratitude, integrated with wisdom, and directed toward authentic love and self-giving.

Formation in this area is not primarily about controlling impulses or avoiding inappropriate behaviour. Rather, it is about becoming an integrated person whose thoughts, emotions, relationships, sexuality, prayer, and apostolic commitment form a harmonious whole. Such integration enables the missionary to live celibate chastity not as a burden or mere obligation, but as a joyful expression of freedom, availability, and universal love. More specifically, this module seeks to:

- deepen the understanding of the Christian and Claretian vision of the human person, sexuality, affectivity, and consecrated celibacy;
- help Formandi appreciate sexuality as a positive gift from God that permeates the whole person and calls him to authentic love and communion;
- promote healthy affective development by fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, self-acceptance, and personal responsibility;
- assist Formandi in integrating their emotional life, sexual identity, relational needs, and vocational commitments into a coherent and balanced personality;
- cultivate the capacity to form healthy, respectful, and life-giving relationships characterized by appropriate boundaries, empathy, mutual respect, and emotional freedom;
- develop the virtues and practical skills necessary for living joyful and mature celibate chastity with integrity, inner freedom, and missionary availability;
- help Formandi recognize personal vulnerabilities, unresolved emotional wounds, unhealthy relational patterns, and other obstacles that may hinder healthy vocational development;
- encourage responsible use of accompaniment, spiritual direction, psychological support, and community life as privileged means of personal growth and ongoing integration;
- equip formators with practical principles and accompaniment strategies for fostering affective maturity while recognizing situations that require specialized intervention;

- promote a culture of openness, safeguarding, accountability, and mutual care within Claretian communities, where affective growth is seen as a lifelong journey rather than a problem to be solved;
- encourage every Claretian to take personal responsibility for his ongoing human formation so that he may become a joyful witness of the Gospel through an integrated, compassionate, and missionary life.

Expected Formation Outcomes

At the completion of this module, the Formandus should be able to:

- articulate the Christian understanding of affective maturity and psychosexual integration;
- demonstrate greater self-awareness regarding his emotions, relational patterns, personal needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities;
- relate to men and women with appropriate freedom, respect, empathy, and healthy boundaries;
- integrate sexual feelings and emotional experiences into a mature life of prayer, discernment, and celibate commitment;
- respond constructively to loneliness, attraction, disappointment, emotional stress, and relational challenges without resorting to unhealthy coping behaviours;
- develop healthy friendships that enrich missionary life without creating emotional dependency or exclusivity;
- recognize situations that require accompaniment or professional assistance and seek help responsibly;
- formulate a realistic personal growth plan for continued affective and psychosexual development;
- live consecrated celibacy with increasing joy, freedom, integrity, and missionary availability, becoming a credible witness to Christ's universal love.

III. BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND CLARETIAN FOUNDATIONS

Affective maturity and psychosexual integration are not merely psychological concerns; they are deeply rooted in God's plan for the human person. Christian formation begins with the conviction that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27). This dignity extends to the whole person—body, mind, emotions, relationships, and spirit. Consequently, human sexuality and affectivity are not accidental aspects of life but essential dimensions of the person through which God calls us to communion, love, and self-giving.

From the very beginning of creation, God declared that everything He had made was “very good” (Gen 1:31). This affirmation includes the human body, sexual identity, and the capacity to love. Sexuality is therefore not something to be feared or denied but a gift entrusted to every person. It enables us to move beyond ourselves, to form meaningful relationships, and to participate in God's own life of communion. Like every gift, however, sexuality requires growth, education, discernment, and integration so that it becomes an expression of authentic love rather than self-centred gratification.

The mystery of the Incarnation further confirms the goodness of our humanity. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God assumed a real human body, experienced human emotions, formed deep friendships, showed compassion, expressed joy and sorrow, and loved with an undivided heart. He did not reject His humanity but lived it in perfect harmony with the Father's will. In Christ we discover that holiness does not suppress authentic human feelings but perfects and integrates them. He is therefore the supreme model of affective maturity and psychosexual integration.

Jesus' relationships reveal remarkable emotional freedom. He loved deeply without possessing others. He welcomed children, showed tenderness toward the sick, wept with grieving friends, forgave sinners, respected women with exceptional dignity, and formed intimate friendships with His disciples. His love was neither distant nor emotionally dependent. It was free,

compassionate, truthful, and life-giving. For every missionary, this becomes the model of mature celibate love: to love many deeply without seeking to possess anyone.

Saint Paul presents the Christian vocation as a gradual transformation into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). This transformation embraces the whole person. It includes the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2), the purification of the heart (Mt 5:8), growth in the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), and increasing freedom from whatever enslaves or fragments the person. Chastity, therefore, is not simply the control of sexual behaviour but the integration of one's capacity to love according to one's vocation.

The Church consistently teaches that human maturity is the indispensable foundation for every vocation. Grace builds upon nature. The more integrated the human person becomes, the more freely he can respond to God's call and become an instrument of His love. For this reason, priestly and religious formation gives great importance to human formation, recognizing that psychological health, emotional balance, relational maturity, and spiritual growth are inseparable dimensions of one vocational journey.

For those called to consecrated celibacy, affective maturity acquires a particular significance. Celibacy is not merely the renunciation of marriage but a positive response to Christ's invitation to love with an undivided heart (1 Cor 7:32–35). It is a prophetic witness that God alone can fully satisfy the human heart and that one's capacity to love can be broadened to embrace all people without exclusion. Such a vocation is sustainable only when emotional needs, sexual energies, and relational capacities are gradually integrated into a life of generous self-giving.

Within the Claretian tradition, this vision finds a unique missionary expression. Saint Anthony Mary Claret understood himself as “a son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,” whose entire life was consumed by love for God and zeal for the salvation of all. His affective life was not narrowed but expanded through his intimate relationship with Christ and Mary. His missionary availability, compassion for the poor, capacity for friendship, tireless apostolic activity, and joyful sacrifices all flowed from a deeply integrated heart.

The Claretian Constitutions remind us that missionaries are called to follow Christ in evangelical chastity, poverty, and obedience so that they may be completely available for the service of the Kingdom. Chastity is not simply one evangelical counsel among others; it is a way of loving that frees the missionary to belong wholly to God and to become a brother to every person. This freedom is achieved not through repression but through the gradual integration of one's affective and sexual life into the service of love and mission.

Consequently, affective maturity and psychosexual integration should not be regarded as optional personal achievements or merely psychological goals. They are essential dimensions of vocational fidelity and missionary effectiveness. An integrated missionary is able to build healthy relationships, collaborate joyfully in community, accompany others with empathy, exercise authority responsibly, and proclaim the Gospel with credibility. His humanity becomes transparent to the love of Christ.

Formation, therefore, is a journey toward becoming an integrated disciple and missionary—a person whose heart, mind, body, emotions, relationships, and apostolic life increasingly reflect the person of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal is not simply emotional balance or behavioural correctness, but the growth of a missionary whose whole life becomes a living proclamation of the Gospel through authentic love, joyful freedom, and generous self-giving.

What Does Scripture Say?

The Scriptures repeatedly reveal that God desires not fragmented or divided hearts, but persons whose entire lives are integrated in love.

Genesis 1:26–31 – Human beings are created in God's image, and their embodied existence is declared “very good.”

Psalm 139:13–14 – “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” The human body is a gift to be received with gratitude.

Luke 2:52 – “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.” Human growth embraces intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual maturity.

Matthew 22:37–39 – The greatest commandment calls us to love God wholeheartedly and our neighbour as ourselves, expressing the true purpose of affectivity.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 – Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and are called to glorify God.

Galatians 5:22–23 – The fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—are signs of an integrated Christian life.

Reflection Questions

1. How do I understand my sexuality—as a problem to manage or as a gift to integrate?
2. Which relationships have helped me grow in authentic freedom and love?
3. In what areas of my affective life do I experience greater integration, and where do I still feel fragmented?
4. How does the example of Jesus challenge my way of loving others?
5. What concrete invitation might God be extending to me at this stage of my formation journey toward greater human and missionary maturity?

IV. UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SEXUALITY

Human sexuality is one of God’s greatest gifts and one of the most profound dimensions of human existence. It influences how people perceive themselves, relate to others, express love, experience intimacy, and respond to God’s call. Far more than a biological function or a set of sexual behaviours, sexuality permeates the entire personality. It is present from the beginning of life until death, shaping the way a person thinks, feels, communicates, creates, serves, and enters into relationships.

For many years, sexuality was often discussed either with fear and silence or with excessive emphasis on moral prohibitions. In today’s culture, the opposite tendency is often found: sexuality is reduced to pleasure, personal preference, or individual fulfilment. Neither perspective reflects the Christian understanding. The Church proposes a richer and more integrated vision in which sexuality is seen as a gift entrusted to the human person, calling him to communion, responsible freedom, and self-giving love.

For the Claretian missionary, understanding sexuality is particularly important because consecrated celibacy is not a rejection of sexuality but a distinctive way of living it. A missionary who understands his own affective and sexual life can offer himself more freely to God, build healthier relationships, and serve others with greater compassion and integrity.

1. Sexuality: A Gift That Embraces the Whole Person

Sexuality is much more than genitality or sexual activity. It is a fundamental dimension of the human person that embraces the body, emotions, imagination, relationships, values, identity, and capacity for love. It influences how people experience themselves as men or women, how they communicate affection, how they build friendships, and how they seek intimacy and belonging.

Sexuality is therefore relational by nature. It draws the person beyond self-centredness toward encounter with others. Properly integrated, it becomes a powerful force for creativity, compassion,

tenderness, collaboration, and generous self-giving. It enables the missionary to establish healthy relationships, to accompany people with empathy, and to live fraternity with authenticity.

Because sexuality permeates the whole person, it cannot be separated from the spiritual life. Our relationship with God influences the way we relate to ourselves and to others. Likewise, unresolved emotional wounds, unhealthy attachments, or distorted understandings of sexuality often affect prayer, community life, and apostolic ministry. Human and spiritual growth therefore progress together.

2. Understanding Some Important Terms

A clear understanding of certain concepts helps avoid confusion and promotes healthy formation.

Biological Sex

Biological sex refers to the physical and genetic characteristics with which a person is born. These include chromosomes, reproductive organs, hormones, and other biological features that identify a person as male or female.

For Christians, biological sex is part of God's creative design and forms an important aspect of personal identity. It is received as a gift rather than constructed solely through personal choice.

Sexuality

Sexuality is the comprehensive way in which a person experiences and expresses himself or herself as an embodied human being. It includes biological, emotional, psychological, relational, cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions. It influences one's capacity for intimacy, friendship, love, creativity, and self-giving.

Every person, whether married, single, or consecrated, remains a sexual person throughout life.

Affectivity

Affectivity refers to the emotional dimension of the person. It includes the ability to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions; to form healthy attachments; to give and receive love; and to establish meaningful relationships.

Affective maturity enables sexuality to become a source of authentic communion rather than emotional dependency or isolation.

Intimacy

Intimacy is the capacity to know another person deeply while allowing oneself to be known. It involves trust, vulnerability, mutual respect, emotional openness, and appropriate boundaries.

Healthy intimacy is essential for every human being. Consecrated celibacy does not eliminate the need for intimacy but calls the missionary to live it through deep friendship, community life, spiritual accompaniment, and generous service rather than through exclusive possessive relationships.

Chastity

Chastity is the successful integration of sexuality within the person according to one's state of life. It is not merely abstinence from sexual activity but the virtue that enables a person to love authentically, respectfully, and freely.

Chastity educates desire, purifies affection, strengthens freedom, and directs the whole person toward self-giving love.

Consecrated Celibacy

Consecrated celibacy is a freely embraced evangelical vocation through which a person renounces marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is a positive choice to love Christ above all and to become universally available for mission.

Celibacy is fruitful only when it is supported by healthy affective maturity, rich interpersonal relationships, emotional balance, and deep intimacy with God.

3. The Different Dimensions of Human Sexuality

Human sexuality develops through several interrelated dimensions that together form an integrated personality.

Physical Dimension: This includes bodily growth, hormonal development, health, physiological responses, and care of the body. Respecting one's body through healthy habits, exercise, rest, and responsible self-care is part of vocational stewardship.

Emotional Dimension: This concerns feelings, attractions, desires, emotional needs, affection, vulnerability, and the capacity to regulate emotional responses. Emotional maturity allows a missionary to acknowledge feelings without becoming dominated by them.

Cognitive Dimension: This includes one's beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge, imagination, and decision-making regarding sexuality and relationships. Healthy formation helps replace myths, fears, and distortions with truthful understanding.

Relational Dimension: Sexuality profoundly shapes the way people establish friendships, collaborate, resolve conflicts, communicate affection, and live in community. Healthy sexuality promotes respect, empathy, equality, and mutual enrichment.

Spiritual Dimension: Sexuality ultimately finds its deepest meaning in communion with God. Grace does not suppress sexuality but gradually transforms it into a source of generous love, missionary availability, and joyful self-gift.

4. Sexual Feelings Are Not Sin

One of the greatest sources of confusion among many candidates is the tendency to identify spontaneous sexual feelings with moral failure. This misunderstanding often produces unnecessary guilt, anxiety, secrecy, or fear.

Sexual attraction, emotional affection, romantic feelings, dreams, physiological responses, and spontaneous desires are normal aspects of being human. They are not sinful in themselves. Their moral significance depends on how a person freely responds to them.

Maturity does not consist in never experiencing attraction or desire. Rather, it consists in recognizing these experiences calmly, discerning their meaning, integrating them wisely, and choosing responses that are consistent with one's vocation and values.

This understanding brings great freedom. Instead of fearing their humanity, Formandi are invited to understand it, accept it with gratitude, and gradually allow God's grace to transform every dimension of their lives.

5. Human Sexuality in the Service of Mission

For the Claretian missionary, sexuality ultimately finds its fullest meaning in love and mission. As affective and psychosexual integration grows, the missionary becomes more capable of forming healthy relationships, collaborating joyfully in community, accompanying others compassionately, exercising authority responsibly, and serving the People of God with an undivided heart.

Integrated sexuality enlarges the heart rather than narrowing it. It frees the missionary from possessiveness, emotional dependency, and self-centredness, enabling him to become a credible witness of Christ's universal love. The goal of formation, therefore, is not merely the avoidance of inappropriate behaviour but the gradual transformation of one's entire capacity for love into a generous and life-giving gift for God, the Church, and the world.

Key Takeaways

- Sexuality is a gift from God that embraces the whole person.
- Every person remains a sexual being throughout life, including those living consecrated celibacy.
- Healthy sexuality integrates body, emotions, relationships, intellect, and spirit.
- Chastity is the positive integration of sexuality according to one's vocation.
- Sexual feelings are part of normal human experience; maturity lies in how they are understood and integrated.
- An integrated sexuality enables the missionary to love with greater freedom, authenticity, compassion, and apostolic availability.

V. AFFECTIVE MATURITY: LEARNING TO LOVE AS CHRIST LOVED

Introduction

Every human being is created with the capacity to love and to be loved. This desire for love is one of the deepest energies of the human heart and is expressed through our emotions, relationships, hopes, dreams, and commitments. Throughout life, we seek acceptance, belonging, intimacy, affirmation, and meaningful relationships. These desires are not signs of weakness but expressions of our God-given nature.

For a Claretian missionary, however, love is called to undergo a gradual transformation. The desire to be loved gradually becomes the capacity to love generously. The need to receive gradually becomes the joy of giving. Personal affection expands into universal charity. This transformation is what we call **affective maturity**.

Affective maturity is not the suppression of emotions nor the elimination of emotional needs. Rather, it is the gradual integration of one's emotional life so that feelings, desires, relationships, and commitments work together in the service of authentic love. An affectively mature missionary is able to love deeply without becoming possessive, to form close friendships without unhealthy dependency, to experience attraction without losing inner freedom, and to live celibate chastity with serenity and joy.

This journey requires patience because affective maturity is never completed once and for all. It develops throughout life through prayer, relationships, community living, missionary experiences, self-reflection, accompaniment, and openness to God's grace.

1. What Is Affective Maturity?

Affective maturity is the progressive capacity to know oneself, accept oneself, govern one's emotions wisely, establish healthy relationships, and love others with freedom, responsibility, and generosity.

It is the harmonious integration of emotions, desires, attachments, and relationships into a personality that is increasingly centred on Christ and oriented toward self-giving love.

An affectively mature person is not one who never experiences fear, loneliness, anger, disappointment, attraction, or emotional pain. Rather, he is someone who can acknowledge these experiences honestly, understand their meaning, and respond to them constructively without becoming dominated by them.

In Christian formation, affective maturity means growing into the freedom to love as Christ loved—fully, faithfully, compassionately, and without possessiveness.

2. Why Is Affective Maturity Essential for Missionary Life?

The missionary vocation is fundamentally relational. Every day a Claretian is called to live in community, collaborate with fellow missionaries, accompany people in their joys and struggles, proclaim the Gospel, and build communion across cultures and generations.

Without affective maturity, these relationships can easily become marked by insecurity, emotional dependence, isolation, jealousy, manipulation, excessive need for recognition, or difficulties in collaboration. Such patterns not only affect personal well-being but also weaken community life and missionary witness. Conversely, affective maturity enables the missionary to:

- love without possessing;
- serve without seeking constant recognition;
- collaborate without rivalry;
- accept correction without becoming defensive;
- exercise authority with compassion and humility;
- form healthy friendships;
- accompany people with empathy and appropriate boundaries;
- remain faithful to his vocation during periods of loneliness, disappointment, or emotional stress.

Thus, affective maturity is not simply a personal achievement; it is a pastoral necessity and an essential condition for credible missionary witness.

3. Characteristics of an Affectively Mature Person

Although every person's journey is unique, certain characteristics consistently appear in individuals who are growing in affective maturity.

Self-awareness: He understands his strengths, limitations, emotional patterns, motivations, and vulnerabilities. He neither exaggerates his qualities nor denies his weaknesses but accepts himself realistically and gratefully.

Emotional Balance: He experiences a wide range of emotions but is not controlled by them. He is able to pause before reacting, regulate his responses, and make decisions guided by values rather than by passing moods or impulses.

Healthy Self-esteem: His sense of worth does not depend entirely on praise, success, popularity, or external achievements. Rooted in God's unconditional love, he possesses an inner security that allows him to appreciate himself while remaining humble and open to growth.

Capacity for Healthy Relationships: He establishes relationships marked by respect, trust, mutuality, honesty, and appropriate boundaries. He neither clings to others nor distances himself unnecessarily but relates with freedom and generosity.

Emotional Freedom: He is capable of loving others without becoming emotionally possessive or dependent. He can appreciate affection while respecting the freedom and dignity of others.

Responsibility: He takes responsibility for his emotions, behaviours, and decisions instead of blaming circumstances or other people. He learns from mistakes and remains open to conversion.

Capacity for Solitude: He is comfortable being alone without feeling abandoned or worthless. Solitude becomes a place of prayer, reflection, and personal renewal rather than loneliness or escape.

Capacity to Receive and Give Love: He accepts love with gratitude and expresses affection appropriately according to his vocation. His love becomes increasingly generous, inclusive, and life-giving.

4. Signs of Affective Immaturity

Growth also requires recognizing patterns that may hinder vocational development. These signs should not be viewed as reasons for discouragement but as invitations to deeper formation. Some common indicators include:

- excessive need for approval;
- inability to tolerate criticism;
- emotional instability;
- impulsive decision-making;
- exclusive friendships;
- possessiveness;
- jealousy;
- chronic loneliness despite constant relationships;
- emotional manipulation;
- avoidance of conflict;
- inability to forgive;
- fear of vulnerability;
- dependence on digital relationships or social media for emotional satisfaction;
- difficulty accepting authority or exercising it appropriately;
- seeking affection through inappropriate relationships;
- inability to remain faithful to ordinary daily commitments.

These patterns do not define the person. Rather, they point to areas requiring greater awareness, accompaniment, healing, and growth.

5. Affective Maturity Is a Lifelong Journey

No missionary becomes affectively mature simply by entering religious life or making perpetual profession. Growth continues throughout life because every new stage of ministry, community life, intercultural experience, and personal transition brings fresh opportunities for integration.

The journey often includes periods of enthusiasm, struggle, failure, healing, and renewal. Emotional wounds from childhood, family experiences, disappointments, or previous relationships may surface unexpectedly. Instead of hiding these experiences or feeling ashamed of them, the mature missionary learns to bring them into prayer, accompaniment, and honest dialogue.

Grace does not eliminate our humanity; it gradually transforms it. Every experience—whether joyful or painful—can become an opportunity for deeper freedom when lived with humility and openness to God.

Example

Case 1: The Need for Recognition

Brother Joseph is generous and hardworking in community. However, whenever his efforts are not publicly acknowledged, he becomes discouraged and withdraws from community activities. Through accompaniment, he gradually discovers that his reactions are rooted in an early experience of constantly seeking approval from significant authority figures. As he grows in awareness of God's unconditional love and develops healthier self-esteem, he becomes capable of serving joyfully without constantly seeking recognition.

This illustrates that affective maturity does not eliminate emotional needs but gradually frees the person from being controlled by them.

Key Takeaways

- Affective maturity is the growing capacity to love with freedom, responsibility, and generosity.
- Emotional maturity is not the absence of feelings but their wise integration.
- Healthy relationships require both intimacy and appropriate boundaries.
- Emotional wounds can become opportunities for growth when accompanied with honesty and hope.
- Affective maturity is essential for joyful celibacy, healthy community life, and fruitful missionary service.
- Growth in affective maturity continues throughout one's entire vocational journey.

VI. PSYCHOSEXUAL INTEGRATION: GROWING INTO AN INTEGRATED PERSON

Introduction

Every human person is called not only to psychological maturity but also to the harmonious integration of his sexuality into the whole of his personality. Psychosexual integration is not concerned simply with sexual behaviour; it is about becoming a unified person whose body, emotions, sexuality, relationships, values, and spiritual life are brought into increasing harmony. It is the gradual process through which one's capacity to love becomes freer, more authentic, and more fully directed toward God and the service of others.

This integration is especially important in consecrated life. A missionary who has not integrated his affective and sexual life may experience inner conflict, divided loyalties, unhealthy attachments, or emotional instability that weaken his freedom for mission. On the other hand, an integrated missionary is able to live celibate chastity with serenity, develop healthy relationships, collaborate fruitfully in community, and become a credible witness of Christ's universal love.

Psychosexual integration is therefore not an optional aspect of formation but an essential component of human, spiritual, and missionary maturity.

1. What Is Psychosexual Integration?

Psychosexual integration is the lifelong process of bringing together the physical, emotional, relational, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality into a harmonious and unified personality. It enables a person to:

- accept his body with gratitude;
- appreciate his sexual identity as a gift from God;
- understand and regulate sexual feelings responsibly;
- form healthy relationships;
- integrate emotional needs with vocational commitments;

- channel sexual energy into creative, relational, and apostolic love.

Rather than eliminating sexual desires, psychosexual integration enables the person to understand them, place them within the larger context of his vocation, and direct them toward authentic love and self-giving.

An integrated person does not live in conflict with his sexuality but allows it to become a source of compassion, creativity, tenderness, and generous service.

2. Psychosexual Integration Is a Developmental Journey

Psychosexual integration develops gradually throughout life. It is influenced by family relationships, childhood experiences, friendships, culture, education, spiritual formation, community life, and personal decisions.

No one enters religious life as a fully integrated person. Every candidate brings with him strengths as well as unfinished developmental tasks, emotional wounds, learned patterns of relating, fears, hopes, and personal struggles.

Formation therefore seeks not perfection but growth. Through prayer, accompaniment, community living, psychological insight, and missionary experience, the Formandus gradually develops greater freedom and integration.

Growth is rarely linear. There are periods of progress, setbacks, confusion, healing, and renewed commitment. Patience with oneself and confidence in God's grace are essential throughout the journey.

3. Dimensions of Psychosexual Integration

Psychosexual integration involves several dimensions that develop together.

Physical Integration

The person accepts his body as God's gift and cares for it responsibly through healthy habits, exercise, nutrition, adequate rest, and respect for personal health.

He neither idolizes nor despises his body but recognizes it as a temple of the Holy Spirit and an instrument of mission.

Emotional Integration

He becomes increasingly aware of his emotional life and learns to recognize feelings such as attraction, loneliness, affection, disappointment, frustration, and joy without becoming overwhelmed by them.

Instead of repressing emotions or acting impulsively, he learns to reflect, pray, discern, and respond wisely.

Relational Integration

Healthy sexuality always leads toward healthy relationships. An integrated missionary develops friendships marked by:

- mutual respect;
- openness;
- appropriate boundaries;
- freedom;
- trust;
- generosity;
- equality.

He avoids possessiveness, exclusivity, manipulation, emotional dependence, or using relationships to satisfy unmet emotional needs.

Cognitive Integration

The missionary develops a mature understanding of sexuality that is informed by Scripture, Church teaching, sound psychology, and personal reflection.

He gradually replaces myths, unrealistic expectations, shame, or fear with truth, wisdom, and gratitude.

Spiritual Integration

Ultimately, psychosexual integration reaches its fullness when sexuality becomes fully integrated into the person's relationship with Christ.

Prayer, the Eucharist, spiritual direction, reconciliation, community life, and apostolic service gradually transform sexual energy into compassionate love, joyful self-giving, and missionary availability.

4. Integrating Sexual Feelings

One of the greatest challenges in formation is learning to deal constructively with sexual feelings and attractions.

Every human being experiences moments of attraction, affection, romantic interest, fantasy, curiosity, or desire. These experiences are normal aspects of human development.

Psychosexual integration does not ask: "How can I stop having these feelings?" Rather, it asks: "How can I understand these experiences and respond to them in a way that is faithful to my vocation?"

Healthy integration involves several steps:

- acknowledging the experience honestly;
- avoiding panic or unnecessary guilt;
- reflecting on its meaning;
- discerning the deeper emotional need it may reveal;
- discussing persistent struggles in accompaniment when appropriate;
- choosing behaviours consistent with one's vocational commitment.

This approach transforms moments of temptation into opportunities for greater self-knowledge and spiritual growth.

5. Integrating Emotional and Sexual Energy

Sexual energy is fundamentally life energy. When integrated, it becomes a source of creativity, compassion, enthusiasm, commitment, and apostolic generosity. Missionaries channel this energy into:

- prayer;
- study;
- missionary service;
- artistic expression;
- healthy recreation;
- meaningful friendships;
- physical exercise;
- community life;

- accompaniment of others;
- works of charity.

This process, often called **sublimation**, does not suppress sexuality but redirects its energy toward life-giving forms of love and service. Such integration enlarges the heart instead of narrowing it.

6. Obstacles to Psychosexual Integration

Certain attitudes and behaviours may hinder healthy integration if left unaddressed. Common obstacles include:

- unresolved childhood wounds;
- emotional deprivation;
- low self-esteem;
- chronic loneliness;
- fear of intimacy;
- emotional dependency;
- exclusive friendships;
- compulsive use of pornography;
- digital addiction;
- secrecy;
- perfectionism;
- shame regarding sexuality;
- inability to seek help;
- avoidance of emotional vulnerability;
- lack of healthy recreation;
- isolation from community life.

Recognizing these obstacles honestly is not a sign of failure but the first step toward healing and growth.

7. Signs of Healthy Psychosexual Integration

A missionary who is growing in psychosexual integration generally demonstrates the following characteristics:

- he is comfortable with his identity as a consecrated missionary;
- he accepts his body with gratitude;
- he experiences attraction without losing emotional balance;
- he forms healthy friendships with both men and women;
- he respects personal and professional boundaries;
- he lives celibate chastity with increasing peace and joy;
- he does not seek emotional fulfilment through exclusive relationships;
- he is transparent in accompaniment;
- he takes responsibility for his emotional and sexual life;
- he becomes increasingly available for mission and service.

These signs do not indicate perfection but ongoing growth toward greater personal integration.

Example

Case 2: Learning Healthy Integration

Brother Michael notices that he has developed a strong emotional attraction toward a colleague during pastoral ministry. Initially he feels guilty and attempts to suppress every feeling. Through conversations with his spiritual director and formator, he comes to understand that attraction itself is not sinful. He gradually recognizes that the experience reveals his human capacity for affection and intimacy. Instead of withdrawing or nurturing unrealistic expectations, he establishes healthy boundaries, deepens his prayer life, strengthens community relationships, and renews his commitment to celibate love.

The experience, rather than weakening his vocation, becomes an opportunity for deeper self-understanding and greater emotional freedom.

Key Takeaways

- Psychosexual integration is the harmonious integration of sexuality into the whole personality.
- It is a lifelong developmental process rather than a one-time achievement.
- Sexual feelings are normal; maturity lies in how they are understood and integrated.
- Healthy integration requires growth in the physical, emotional, relational, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of life.
- Consecrated celibacy flourishes when sexuality becomes an expression of generous, universal, and missionary love.
- Grace, accompaniment, community life, and honest self-reflection are indispensable for ongoing psychosexual integration.

VII. THE DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNEY OF AFFECTIVE AND PSYCHOSEXUAL MATURITY

Introduction

Affective maturity and psychosexual integration do not develop overnight. They are the fruit of a lifelong process that begins at birth and continues throughout adulthood. Every stage of life presents new developmental tasks, opportunities, and challenges that shape the person's capacity to love, relate, make responsible choices, and live his vocation with freedom.

Candidates entering religious formation do not begin with a "blank slate." Each brings a unique personal history that includes family experiences, childhood attachments, friendships, successes, disappointments, emotional wounds, cultural influences, and previous relationships. These experiences become part of the person who is now responding to God's call. Formation therefore does not erase the past; rather, it helps the Formandus understand it, reconcile with it, and integrate it into a healthy vocational future.

Recognizing this developmental journey helps both Formandi and formators understand that many present struggles are not signs of failure but invitations to continued growth. Emotional reactions, relational patterns, fears, insecurities, or difficulties with intimacy often have deeper developmental roots. Understanding these roots enables the person to respond with greater wisdom, compassion, and responsibility.

1. Childhood: Learning Trust and Secure Attachment

The earliest years of life lay the foundation for future relationships. Through the love and care of parents or caregivers, children gradually develop a sense of safety, belonging, and trust. When children experience consistent affection, protection, and acceptance, they begin to believe that they are lovable and that others can be trusted.

These early experiences influence later relationships with authority figures, friends, community members, and even one's relationship with God.

When childhood is marked by neglect, rejection, excessive criticism, abuse, or inconsistent care, the person may carry into adulthood deep fears of abandonment, excessive dependency, difficulty trusting others, or a constant need for approval.

Formation cannot change childhood experiences, but it can help the person recognize their influence and gradually experience healing through healthy relationships, community life, accompaniment, and God's unconditional love.

2. Adolescence: Discovering Identity and Sexuality

Adolescence is a period of profound physical, emotional, intellectual, and social change. Young people begin to ask fundamental questions:

- Who am I?
- Where do I belong?
- What kind of person do I want to become?
- How do I relate to others?
- What is the meaning of my sexuality?

During this period, sexual feelings become more intense, friendships deepen, emotional sensitivity increases, and the desire for independence grows. Healthy development during adolescence involves learning to:

- accept one's body;
- appreciate one's identity;
- form healthy friendships;
- manage emotional ups and downs;
- develop appropriate boundaries;
- make responsible decisions.

When these developmental tasks remain incomplete, the person may later struggle with insecurity, identity confusion, emotional dependency, poor self-esteem, or unhealthy ways of seeking affection.

3. Young Adulthood: Learning Intimacy and Commitment

Young adulthood is characterized by the capacity to establish mature relationships while developing personal responsibility and vocational commitment.

For those called to consecrated life, this period involves integrating normal human desires for intimacy and belonging into the evangelical call to celibate love.

The missionary gradually learns that intimacy is not limited to romantic relationships. Genuine intimacy can flourish through:

- deep friendship;
- community life;
- spiritual accompaniment;
- collaboration in mission;
- compassionate pastoral service;
- communion with Christ.

This stage requires learning how to love deeply without becoming possessive, how to give oneself generously without losing one's identity, and how to remain emotionally available without creating unhealthy dependencies.

4. Ongoing Adult Development

Human growth does not stop after religious profession or priestly ordination. Every stage of missionary life presents new developmental challenges.

The first years of ministry often involve learning responsibility, collaboration, and resilience. Middle adulthood may bring leadership responsibilities, intercultural assignments, physical changes, or vocational fatigue.

Later adulthood often invites greater wisdom, deeper interiority, and renewed generativity through mentoring younger missionaries.

Each transition calls for fresh integration. A missionary who continues growing remains emotionally flexible, spiritually alive, intellectually curious, and pastorally fruitful.

5. How Unfinished Developmental Tasks Affect Formation

Not every developmental task is completed at the expected time. Sometimes unresolved issues remain hidden until they surface during formation or ministry. Examples include:

- an excessive need for approval rooted in childhood insecurity;
- fear of authority resulting from harsh parental relationships;
- difficulty trusting others because of past betrayals;
- emotional dependency arising from unmet needs for affection;
- inability to establish boundaries because of fear of rejection;
- avoidance of intimacy due to previous emotional wounds;
- perfectionism developed as a way of earning acceptance.

These unresolved issues should not automatically be interpreted as lack of vocation. Rather, they invite deeper self-understanding and appropriate accompaniment.

Formation becomes an opportunity to continue developmental growth that may have been interrupted or delayed.

6. The Healing Power of Formation

One of the greatest gifts of religious formation is that it offers a community where growth can continue.

Through daily community life, apostolic experiences, prayer, study, fraternal correction, spiritual direction, and accompaniment, many old patterns gradually come to light.

This process is sometimes uncomfortable because formation exposes hidden fears, unresolved conflicts, unrealistic expectations, and immature ways of relating. Yet precisely through these experiences, God continues the work of healing and transformation.

Healthy formation does not simply teach new behaviours. It gradually transforms the heart. The community becomes a “school of relationships” where the Formandus learns:

- to trust;
- to forgive;
- to receive correction;
- to resolve conflicts;
- to collaborate;
- to express emotions appropriately;
- to accept personal limitations;
- to celebrate the gifts of others.

These experiences foster the emotional freedom necessary for lifelong missionary service.

7. Cooperating with the Process of Growth

Growth requires active cooperation. No formator can make another person mature. Every Formandus must assume responsibility for his own development. Some practical attitudes that foster continued growth include:

- cultivating honest self-awareness;
- reflecting regularly on personal experiences;
- seeking accompaniment without fear or shame;
- accepting constructive feedback;
- maintaining healthy friendships;
- caring for physical and emotional well-being;
- engaging in regular prayer and discernment;
- embracing community life with openness;
- learning from failures instead of becoming discouraged;
- trusting that God's grace works patiently through ordinary life.

Human maturity develops gradually through thousands of ordinary choices rather than through dramatic moments alone.

Example

Case 3: Understanding the Roots of Present Behaviour

Brother David frequently becomes anxious whenever his formator asks him to discuss his personal life. Initially he interprets this anxiety as evidence that he is unsuited for religious life. Through accompaniment, however, he discovers that as a child he was often criticized whenever he expressed his feelings. He gradually realizes that his present fear is less about formation itself than about past experiences of judgment. As trust develops within the formation community, he becomes increasingly open, emotionally secure, and capable of receiving guidance without excessive fear.

His growth illustrates an important principle: understanding the origins of one's reactions often becomes the first step toward genuine freedom.

Key Takeaways

- Affective maturity develops throughout the whole of life.
- Early family experiences influence later relationships but do not determine one's future.
- Formation is a privileged opportunity for continued human development and healing.
- Unfinished developmental tasks are invitations to growth rather than reasons for discouragement.
- Community life, accompaniment, prayer, and mission all contribute to psychosexual integration.
- Every missionary remains a lifelong learner in the school of human and spiritual maturity.

VIII. HUMAN AFFECTIVE NEEDS: UNDERSTANDING THE HEART THAT GOD CREATED

Introduction

Every human being is created with legitimate emotional and relational needs. These needs are not signs of weakness, immaturity, or lack of faith. Rather, they are part of God's design and reflect the truth that we are created for love and communion. From infancy until old age, every person seeks acceptance, belonging, affection, security, meaning, and intimacy.

For those called to consecrated life, these needs do not disappear with profession or ordination. Neither are they automatically fulfilled by prayer or ministry alone. They remain part of

our humanity and must be acknowledged, understood, and integrated wisely within the context of our vocation.

Many difficulties in religious life do not arise because these needs exist, but because they are ignored, denied, or fulfilled in unhealthy ways. A missionary who does not understand his emotional needs may unconsciously seek their fulfilment through excessive work, unhealthy attachments, digital addiction, emotional dependency, compulsive behaviours, or the search for constant recognition. Conversely, one who understands these needs can respond to them in healthy, life-giving ways that foster freedom, joy, and missionary availability.

Formation therefore helps the Formandus neither to suppress nor to idolize these needs, but to integrate them into a mature life centred on Christ.

1. The Need to Love and Be Loved

The deepest human need is the need to love and to be loved. This reflects the very image of God, who is eternal communion and self-giving love.

Every person longs to know that he is accepted, valued, and cherished simply for who he is. This need is not overcome by becoming a religious. Rather, it is gradually transformed. The missionary discovers that he is profoundly loved by God and, rooted in this experience, becomes increasingly capable of loving others with freedom and generosity.

Healthy Expression

- deep friendship
- fraternity
- compassionate service
- openness in community
- intimacy with Christ
- generous pastoral charity

Unhealthy Expression

- emotional dependency
- possessiveness
- exclusive friendships
- constant search for admiration
- fear of being alone
- manipulation to gain affection

The mature missionary gradually moves from asking, *“Who will love me?”* to asking, *“How can I become a person who loves as Christ loves?”*

2. The Need for Belonging

Every human being desires to belong. We naturally seek a community where we are welcomed, understood, and appreciated.

For Claretians, this need is fulfilled through fraternity and shared mission. Community is not simply a place to live; it is the family in which the missionary grows, serves, celebrates, suffers, and discovers God’s presence through his brothers.

When this need is unmet, a person may seek belonging through exclusive friendships, ideological groups, virtual communities, or emotional alliances that weaken community life. Healthy belonging strengthens communion; unhealthy belonging creates division.

3. The Need for Security

Security allows a person to face life with confidence and hope.

Children initially receive security from their caregivers. As adults, this security gradually becomes interiorized through self-acceptance, healthy relationships, and trust in God's providence. An emotionally mature missionary experiences security not because life is free of difficulties but because his identity rests in God's faithful love. When this need is unhealthy or unresolved, it may appear as:

- fear of change;
- resistance to transfers;
- excessive attachment to familiar places;
- anxiety about the future;
- inability to trust others;
- excessive need for control.

Healthy security enables missionary availability.

4. The Need for Acceptance

Every person longs to be accepted as he truly is.

Healthy formation creates an atmosphere where Formandi experience both acceptance and challenge. Acceptance does not mean approving every behaviour; rather, it means recognizing the dignity of the person while helping him continue growing. Those who have not experienced sufficient acceptance often become:

- perfectionists;
- excessively self-critical;
- afraid of failure;
- dependent on praise;
- unable to receive correction peacefully.

The Gospel reminds us that our deepest acceptance comes from being beloved children of God.

5. The Need for Esteem and Recognition

People naturally desire that their efforts be appreciated.

Healthy recognition encourages growth and strengthens motivation. However, when self-worth depends entirely upon praise or success, emotional instability easily develops.

An integrated missionary learns to receive appreciation with gratitude while remaining free from the constant need for recognition.

He serves because he loves Christ, not because he seeks applause.

6. The Need for Friendship

Friendship is one of God's greatest gifts.

Jesus Himself formed deep friendships with Lazarus, Martha, Mary, John, Peter, and the other disciples. These friendships enriched His humanity and supported His mission.

Likewise, every missionary needs healthy friendships. Healthy friendships are characterized by:

- mutual respect;
- transparency;
- reciprocity;
- freedom;
- appropriate boundaries;

- encouragement toward holiness.

Friendship becomes unhealthy when it becomes:

- exclusive;
- possessive;
- secretive;
- emotionally dependent;
- controlling;
- resistant to community life.

Healthy friendships enlarge the heart; unhealthy attachments narrow it.

7. The Need for Intimacy

Intimacy is often misunderstood.

It is not identical with romantic involvement or sexual expression. Rather, intimacy is the capacity to know another person deeply while allowing oneself to be known honestly.

Consecrated celibacy does not eliminate the need for intimacy. Instead, it transforms the way intimacy is lived. Missionaries experience healthy intimacy through:

- deep friendship;
- community sharing;
- spiritual direction;
- collaborative ministry;
- compassionate accompaniment;
- personal prayer with Christ.

The inability to experience healthy intimacy often results in emotional isolation or unhealthy dependency.

8. The Need for Autonomy

Healthy maturity includes the capacity to make responsible decisions and assume personal responsibility.

Autonomy is not independence from everyone else. Rather, it is the freedom to think, choose, and act responsibly while remaining in communion with others. An autonomous missionary:

- accepts responsibility;
- exercises initiative;
- collaborates willingly;
- seeks advice without becoming dependent;
- remains faithful to commitments.

Autonomy and obedience are complementary rather than contradictory.

9. The Need for Meaning and Purpose

Perhaps the deepest human need is the need for meaning.

People can endure remarkable suffering when they know why they are living.

For the Claretian missionary, this meaning is found in following Christ the Evangelizer and participating in God's saving mission. When this sense of purpose weakens, a person may experience:

- boredom;
- discouragement;
- vocational fatigue;

- loss of motivation;
- excessive self-focus;
- escapist behaviours.

Mission renews the heart because it continually reminds the missionary why he has given his life.

10. Integrating Human Needs in Consecrated Life

Consecrated life does not ask missionaries to eliminate their human needs. Instead, it invites them to integrate these needs into a broader horizon of love. For example:

- the need to be loved becomes openness to God's unconditional love;
- the desire for intimacy becomes deep friendship and communion with Christ;
- the search for belonging becomes joyful participation in community;
- the need for recognition becomes humble service;
- sexual energy becomes generous pastoral charity;
- the desire for fulfilment becomes wholehearted dedication to the Kingdom.

This transformation is gradual and requires continual conversion. It is one of the beautiful works of grace within the human heart.

Example

Case 4: From Dependency to Freedom

Brother Andrew noticed that whenever he felt lonely, he immediately sought the company of one particular confrere. Over time, this friendship became increasingly exclusive, and he felt anxious whenever they were separated. During accompaniment, he gradually recognized that beneath his behaviour was a deep need for acceptance and emotional security that had remained unresolved since adolescence.

Rather than ending the friendship, he learned to broaden his relationships within the community, deepen his prayer life, engage more fully in apostolic work, and become more aware of God's constant presence. His need for affection did not disappear, but it became integrated into healthier relationships characterized by greater freedom and wider fraternity.

Key Takeaways

- Emotional needs are part of God's design and are not signs of weakness.
- Consecrated life transforms rather than suppresses human needs.
- Healthy fulfilment of emotional needs strengthens vocational fidelity.
- Unmet emotional needs often underlie unhealthy attachments and compulsive behaviours.
- Community life, friendship, prayer, mission, and accompaniment are privileged means through which God gradually heals and integrates the human heart.
- The mature missionary increasingly experiences that God is the ultimate source of love, security, identity, and fulfilment, enabling him to love others with an undivided heart.

IX. LIVING CONSECRATED CELIBACY WITH JOY: AN INTEGRATED WAY OF LOVING

Introduction

Consecrated celibacy is one of the most beautiful and demanding expressions of Christian discipleship. It is often misunderstood both within and outside the Church. Some see it merely as the renunciation of marriage or sexual activity. Others perceive it as a burden or an impossible ideal. In reality, celibacy is first and foremost a gift of God, a particular vocation through which a person freely chooses to follow Christ with an undivided heart and to place his entire capacity for love at the service of God's Kingdom.

For the Claretian missionary, celibacy is inseparable from mission. Saint Anthony Mary Claret desired to belong entirely to Christ so that he could belong completely to the people entrusted to his care. His celibate life was not marked by emotional emptiness but by an expansive love that embraced every person he encountered. The missionary who lives celibacy with maturity does not love less; he loves more broadly, more freely, and more generously.

Such a life, however, is not sustained simply by discipline or good intentions. Joyful celibacy rests upon a mature human foundation, a rich spiritual life, healthy relationships, supportive community life, and continual openness to God's transforming grace.

1. The Meaning of Consecrated Celibacy

Consecrated celibacy is a positive vocation rather than merely a renunciation. It is a joyful response to Christ's invitation to leave everything and follow Him more closely for the sake of the Gospel (Mt 19:12). By professing celibate chastity, the missionary freely offers to God:

- his capacity to love;
- his desire for intimacy;
- his future plans for marriage and family;
- his emotional and sexual energies;
- his entire person.

These are not rejected but transformed. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, they become sources of universal charity, apostolic zeal, and generous availability for mission.

Celibacy is therefore not an escape from love but a distinctive way of loving.

2. Celibacy Is a Way of Loving

Every vocation is ultimately a vocation to love.

Marriage expresses love through exclusive covenant and family life.

Consecrated celibacy expresses love through universal availability and total dedication to Christ and His mission. This means that the celibate missionary is called to develop:

- a broad and inclusive heart;
- deep compassion;
- authentic friendships;
- emotional generosity;
- pastoral tenderness;
- availability to all.

The success of celibacy is not measured simply by avoiding sexual misconduct but by the quality of one's love.

A missionary who becomes emotionally cold, isolated, or incapable of meaningful relationships is not fully living the positive meaning of celibacy.

3. The Human Foundations of Joyful Celibacy

Celibacy flourishes when supported by healthy human development. Important foundations include:

A Deep Experience of Being Loved by God: Only a heart that knows it is deeply loved by God can gradually become free to love others without constantly seeking emotional fulfillment from them. Prayer is therefore not merely a duty but the living source of celibate joy.

Healthy Self-Acceptance: The missionary accepts himself with gratitude, including his strengths, limitations, emotions, sexuality, and personal history. Self-rejection often becomes the hidden source of unhealthy attachments.

Healthy Friendships: Authentic friendships nourish emotional life, reduce isolation, and strengthen perseverance. Friendship is not opposed to celibacy; it is one of its greatest supports when lived with maturity and appropriate boundaries.

Community Life: Fraternal community provides daily opportunities to love, forgive, collaborate, celebrate, and grow together. A healthy community protects against loneliness and emotional isolation.

Meaningful Mission: Mission gives direction to emotional energy. A missionary who finds joy in evangelization, accompaniment, and service experiences his celibacy as fruitful rather than empty.

4. Challenges to Living Celibacy Today

Modern culture presents particular challenges that require wisdom and discernment.

Individualism: Contemporary culture often emphasizes personal fulfillment over self-giving, making lifelong commitment appear restrictive.

Hyper-sexualization: Digital media frequently presents sexuality as entertainment, consumption, or personal entitlement. Such messages gradually influence attitudes unless critically examined.

Loneliness: Despite constant online connectivity, many people experience profound emotional loneliness. Missionaries are not immune to this reality.

Emotional Exhaustion: Pastoral ministry, intercultural living, leadership responsibilities, and constant availability can gradually deplete emotional resources if adequate self-care is neglected.

Digital Relationships: Social media and instant communication create new opportunities for friendship but also increase the possibility of emotional dependency, secrecy, inappropriate intimacy, and blurred boundaries. These challenges call not for fear but for greater awareness, maturity, and ongoing formation.

5. Healthy Practices That Sustain Celibate Joy

Joyful celibacy is sustained through ordinary daily practices. These include:

Spiritual Practices

- daily Eucharist;
- personal prayer;
- meditation on the Word of God;
- Eucharistic adoration;
- regular confession;
- spiritual direction;

- Marian devotion.

Human Practices

- healthy friendships;
- physical exercise;
- adequate rest;
- hobbies and recreation;
- emotional self-awareness;
- balanced lifestyle;
- ongoing learning.

Community Practices

- shared meals;
- community recreation;
- open communication;
- mutual support;
- celebration of important moments;
- honest dialogue;
- reconciliation after conflicts.

Apostolic Practices

- generous service;
- pastoral accompaniment;
- collaboration in ministry;
- missionary creativity;
- concern for the poor;
- regular reflection on apostolic experiences.

These ordinary practices gradually nourish the heart and protect the missionary from emotional isolation.

6. Healthy Friendships and Appropriate Boundaries

Healthy friendships are indispensable in consecrated life. Jesus Himself enjoyed profound friendships while remaining completely faithful to His mission. Healthy friendships are characterized by:

- openness;
- reciprocity;
- honesty;
- respect;
- emotional freedom;
- transparency;
- integration within community life.

Healthy boundaries ensure that friendships remain life-giving. Appropriate boundaries include:

- avoiding secrecy;
- maintaining transparency with the formator or superior when appropriate;
- ensuring that no friendship becomes exclusive;
- respecting emotional and physical boundaries;
- balancing personal friendships with community relationships;
- remaining available to the wider mission.

Boundaries do not diminish love; they protect it.

7. When Celibacy Becomes Difficult

There are moments when every missionary may experience:

- loneliness;
- attraction;
- disappointment;
- emotional fatigue;
- discouragement;
- questions about vocation;
- desire for greater intimacy.

These experiences are part of ordinary human life and should not automatically be interpreted as vocational failure. What matters is the response. Healthy responses include:

- honest prayer;
- accompaniment;
- conversation with a trusted formator;
- healthy recreation;
- renewed attention to community life;
- physical self-care;
- patient discernment.

Unhealthy responses include:

- secrecy;
- emotional withdrawal;
- compulsive behaviours;
- exclusive relationships;
- excessive work as escape;
- digital addiction;
- refusal to seek help.

Seeking help is a sign of maturity rather than weakness.

8. Celibacy as Missionary Fruitfulness

The purpose of celibacy is not merely personal holiness. Its deepest purpose is missionary fruitfulness. Freed from exclusive family commitments, the missionary becomes available:

- to accompany many people;
- to cross cultural boundaries;
- to respond generously to the needs of the Church;
- to build fraternity wherever he is sent;
- to become a visible witness that God alone is sufficient.

A joyful celibate life proclaims that authentic happiness comes not from possessing others but from giving oneself completely in love.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Healthy Friendship

Brother Thomas develops a close friendship with another confrere. They pray together, collaborate in ministry, encourage one another, and remain fully involved in community life. Their friendship enriches both of them and strengthens their missionary commitment.

Reflection: This is an example of mature friendship because it remains open, balanced, transparent, and integrated within community life.

Case Study 2: Exclusive Attachment

Brother Peter gradually begins spending nearly all his free time with one pastoral collaborator. He becomes disappointed whenever she is unavailable and slowly withdraws from community recreation. Although no inappropriate behaviour occurs, his emotional dependence grows.

During accompaniment, his formator helps him recognize the growing exclusivity of the relationship. Brother Peter broadens his friendships, renews his participation in community life, and strengthens his prayer and apostolic focus.

Reflection: Early awareness and accompaniment prevented an unhealthy attachment from developing into a deeper crisis.

Key Takeaways

- Consecrated celibacy is a positive vocation to universal love rather than merely the renunciation of marriage.
- Joyful celibacy depends upon affective maturity, psychosexual integration, healthy friendships, vibrant community life, meaningful mission, and deep intimacy with Christ.
- Loneliness, attraction, and emotional struggles are normal human experiences; what matters is how they are integrated.
- Healthy friendships strengthen celibate life, while exclusive or secretive relationships gradually weaken vocational freedom.
- Celibacy reaches its fullest meaning when it enlarges the missionary's heart, making him increasingly available to love, serve, and evangelize with the compassionate heart of Christ.

X. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO AFFECTIVE MATURITY AND PSYCHOSEXUAL INTEGRATION

Introduction

Every generation faces particular challenges in living a mature and integrated human life. Today's candidates for consecrated life grow up in a rapidly changing world shaped by digital technology, globalization, shifting cultural values, and unprecedented access to information. These realities have brought many positive developments, but they have also created new pressures that profoundly influence identity, relationships, sexuality, and emotional well-being.

Formation today cannot simply repeat approaches developed for previous generations. Formators need to understand the social and psychological context in which candidates have grown up. Many young people arrive in formation carrying invisible burdens: family instability, loneliness, emotional deprivation, unrealistic expectations about relationships, excessive dependence on digital technology, or confusion about identity and sexuality. These experiences become part of the formation journey and require compassionate accompaniment rather than judgment.

The purpose of this section is not to create fear or suspicion but to foster awareness. Recognizing contemporary challenges enables both Formandi and formators to respond proactively, cultivating healthy habits, seeking timely assistance when needed, and growing in the freedom of the children of God.

1. Hypersexualized Culture

Modern society constantly communicates messages about sexuality through films, television, advertising, music, social media, and digital entertainment. Sexuality is frequently presented as a commodity, a source of pleasure, or a means of self-expression detached from love, commitment, and responsibility.

These repeated messages gradually shape attitudes and expectations, often without conscious awareness. Candidates entering formation may therefore carry assumptions that differ significantly from the Christian understanding of sexuality. Healthy formation helps the Formandus to:

- develop critical thinking;
- evaluate cultural messages in the light of the Gospel;
- appreciate the dignity of the human person;
- understand sexuality as a gift ordered toward authentic love and self-giving.

The goal is not withdrawal from culture but mature discernment.

2. Digital Technology and Social Media

Digital technology has transformed communication, learning, and evangelization. It provides extraordinary opportunities for missionary work, ongoing formation, and maintaining healthy relationships. However, it also presents significant risks. Excessive digital engagement can gradually lead to:

- reduced face-to-face relationships;
- superficial communication;
- emotional isolation;
- constant comparison with others;
- reduced capacity for silence;
- fragmented attention;
- compulsive internet use.

Social media can unintentionally encourage a search for approval through “likes,” followers, and online recognition, making self-worth increasingly dependent upon external validation.

The integrated missionary learns to use technology as a tool rather than becoming controlled by it.

3. Pornography and Compulsive Sexual Behaviour

One of the greatest challenges facing many young adults today is the widespread accessibility of internet pornography.

Pornography distorts the meaning of sexuality by reducing persons to objects of gratification rather than subjects worthy of dignity and love. Repeated exposure may gradually affect imagination, emotional development, relationships, expectations regarding intimacy, and the capacity for genuine self-giving.

For many individuals, pornography is not merely a moral issue but also a symptom of deeper emotional needs such as:

- loneliness;
- anxiety;
- stress;
- boredom;
- unresolved emotional wounds;
- low self-esteem;

- desire for escape.

Formation should therefore address pornography with both truth and compassion. The appropriate response includes:

- honest self-awareness;
- regular prayer;
- accountability;
- healthy lifestyle habits;
- spiritual accompaniment;
- psychological assistance when necessary;
- confidence in God's mercy.

Shame and secrecy often strengthen unhealthy patterns, whereas openness and appropriate accompaniment promote healing.

4. Emotional Loneliness

Paradoxically, many people today experience profound loneliness despite living in an increasingly connected world. Missionaries are not immune to this reality. Loneliness may arise from:

- geographical distance from family;
- intercultural assignments;
- demanding ministry;
- community conflicts;
- inability to establish healthy friendships;
- emotional isolation.

Loneliness itself is not a sign of failure. It becomes problematic only when one attempts to escape it through unhealthy means. Healthy responses include:

- prayer;
- community participation;
- meaningful friendships;
- exercise;
- hobbies;
- missionary engagement;
- accompaniment.

Loneliness often becomes an invitation to deepen one's relationship with Christ and with the community.

5. Emotional Dependency

Human beings naturally seek affection and support. Problems arise when emotional security depends almost entirely upon one particular person. Signs of emotional dependency include:

- excessive need for one person's approval;
- fear of separation;
- inability to make decisions independently;
- possessiveness;
- jealousy;
- emotional instability when the relationship changes;
- neglect of community life.

Such dependency gradually restricts vocational freedom and missionary availability. Formation helps the person develop broader, healthier, and more balanced relationships.

6. Consumerism and the Search for Immediate Satisfaction

Modern culture often encourages immediate gratification. Waiting, sacrifice, and perseverance are frequently viewed negatively. This mentality can affect religious life by creating unrealistic expectations regarding:

- community;
- ministry;
- personal happiness;
- obedience;
- relationships;
- prayer.

Whenever difficulties arise, there may be a temptation to seek quick solutions instead of patient growth.

A mature missionary gradually learns that authentic freedom grows through perseverance, discipline, sacrifice, and hope.

7. Narcissism and Excessive Self-Focus

Contemporary society often places great emphasis on self-promotion, personal image, and individual success. When these attitudes become excessive, they may lead to:

- constant need for admiration;
- inability to receive correction;
- lack of empathy;
- competition within community;
- difficulty collaborating;
- excessive concern with personal reputation.

The Gospel proposes a radically different model. Jesus teaches servant leadership, humility, compassion, and generous self-giving.

Missionary formation therefore helps the Formandus move from self-centredness toward communion and service.

8. Difficulty with Long-Term Commitment

Many young adults today have grown up in environments marked by instability. Examples include:

- family breakdown;
- changing relationships;
- frequent relocation;
- temporary employment;
- rapidly changing social values.

Consequently, lifelong commitments may appear intimidating. Formation gradually strengthens:

- perseverance;
- resilience;
- vocational identity;
- confidence in God's faithfulness;
- realistic expectations about religious life.

Commitment grows through daily fidelity rather than dramatic moments alone.

9. Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion

Missionaries often dedicate themselves generously to pastoral ministry. Without balance, however, generous service can gradually become exhaustion. Burnout commonly develops when there is:

- excessive workload;
- insufficient rest;
- lack of recreation;
- emotional isolation;
- inability to delegate;
- neglect of prayer;
- unrealistic expectations.

Symptoms may include:

- chronic fatigue;
- irritability;
- loss of enthusiasm;
- emotional numbness;
- cynicism;
- declining pastoral effectiveness.

Healthy missionary life requires a balanced rhythm of prayer, work, study, community, recreation, and rest. Self-care is not selfishness; it is responsible stewardship of God's gift.

10. Safeguarding: Creating Healthy and Safe Relationships

One of the greatest responsibilities of every missionary is to protect the dignity and safety of every person entrusted to his care.

Safeguarding is much more than compliance with policies. It is a way of living relationships marked by respect, transparency, accountability, and appropriate boundaries. An integrated missionary:

- respects personal boundaries;
- avoids situations that create unnecessary ambiguity;
- relates appropriately with children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults;
- exercises authority responsibly;
- understands professional boundaries in pastoral ministry;
- seeks supervision and accountability when necessary.

Healthy safeguarding begins long before any crisis. It grows from affective maturity, self-awareness, integrity, and authentic love.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Digital Dependency

Brother Samuel notices that he spends several hours each evening browsing social media. Gradually his prayer becomes distracted, his sleep decreases, and he participates less in community recreation.

During accompaniment he develops a digital well-being plan that includes limiting screen time, establishing technology-free periods, exercising regularly, and engaging more intentionally in

community life. Within several months he experiences renewed interior peace and greater attentiveness in prayer.

Case Study 2: Emotional Burnout

After several years of intense pastoral ministry, Father Joseph begins feeling emotionally exhausted. He becomes impatient with parishioners, neglects prayer, and isolates himself from the community.

Rather than continuing alone, he speaks honestly with his superior. Together they establish a healthier rhythm that includes spiritual renewal, recreation, regular accompaniment, and shared pastoral responsibilities. His energy and missionary joy gradually return.

Key Takeaways

- Contemporary culture presents both opportunities and challenges for affective and psychosexual development.
- Awareness of these challenges helps missionaries respond proactively rather than reactively.
- Digital technology, pornography, loneliness, emotional dependency, consumerism, narcissism, and burnout require ongoing discernment and healthy formation.
- Safeguarding is an expression of mature love, respect, accountability, and vocational integrity.
- The most effective protection against contemporary challenges is not fear but an integrated life rooted in Christ, nourished by prayer, strengthened by community, supported by accompaniment, and sustained by joyful missionary service.

XI. FORMATION PRACTICES FOR GROWING IN AFFECTIVE MATURITY AND PSYCHOSEXUAL INTEGRATION

Introduction

Affective maturity and psychosexual integration do not develop simply by acquiring knowledge. Reading books, attending conferences, or understanding psychological theories can increase awareness, but genuine growth occurs only when insight is translated into daily living. Formation is ultimately about becoming a different kind of person—one whose emotions, relationships, sexuality, prayer, and mission are increasingly integrated around the person of Christ.

This growth requires intentional practice. Just as physical fitness develops through regular exercise, affective maturity develops through repeated habits of self-awareness, prayer, healthy relationships, honest dialogue, responsible choices, and continual conversion. Every ordinary day of formation becomes an opportunity to grow in freedom, love, and vocational authenticity.

The following practices are not rigid rules but formative disciplines that gradually shape an integrated missionary personality.

1. Cultivate a Deep Relationship with Christ

The foundation of all affective maturity is the experience of being loved unconditionally by God. A missionary who knows himself deeply loved by Christ becomes increasingly free from the constant need to seek emotional fulfillment elsewhere.

Daily prayer should therefore become a place where the Formandus not only speaks to God but also allows God to reveal His unconditional love. Helpful practices include:

- daily meditation on the Gospel;
- Eucharistic adoration;
- praying with personal experiences and emotions;
- regular celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;

- Marian devotion;
- silent contemplation.

Prayer gradually transforms the heart, making it more capable of loving others with freedom and generosity.

2. Grow in Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the doorway to personal growth. We cannot integrate what we refuse to acknowledge. Formandi should regularly ask themselves:

- What am I feeling today?
- Why am I reacting this way?
- What emotional need lies beneath this reaction?
- What is God inviting me to learn?
- What patterns are repeating in my life?

Keeping a personal journal can greatly assist this process. Writing honestly about daily experiences, emotions, relationships, and prayer often reveals patterns that would otherwise remain hidden.

Self-awareness should always be accompanied by self-compassion. The goal is not self-condemnation but truthful understanding that opens the way to growth.

3. Develop Healthy Emotional Literacy

Many people have learned to suppress emotions or express them impulsively. Formation should instead teach the language of emotions. A mature missionary learns to:

- identify emotions accurately;
- distinguish emotions from behaviours;
- express feelings respectfully;
- tolerate emotional discomfort;
- avoid reacting impulsively;
- recognize the emotions of others.

Learning to say, “I feel disappointed,” rather than “Everything is wrong,” is already a step toward emotional maturity.

Healthy emotional expression strengthens both community life and pastoral ministry.

4. Build Healthy Friendships

Friendship is one of God’s ordinary means of forming the human heart. Healthy friendships provide:

- encouragement;
- accountability;
- emotional support;
- shared joy;
- opportunities for honest dialogue.

Formation should encourage friendships that are:

- open;
- balanced;
- reciprocal;
- respectful;

- integrated within community life.

At the same time, Formandi should be helped to recognize signs of unhealthy attachment, possessiveness, secrecy, or emotional exclusivity before they become deeply rooted.

5. Live Community Life Intentionally

Community is one of the greatest schools of affective maturity.

Daily community life inevitably brings differences of personality, culture, expectations, and opinions. Rather than viewing these differences as obstacles, the missionary learns to see them as opportunities to grow. Community teaches:

- patience;
- forgiveness;
- empathy;
- collaboration;
- conflict resolution;
- generosity;
- emotional flexibility.

Every disagreement handled respectfully becomes an exercise in mature love.

6. Develop Healthy Habits of Self-Care

The body and mind are gifts entrusted to our care.

Healthy affective functioning is closely connected to physical well-being. Important habits include:

- adequate sleep;
- balanced nutrition;
- regular exercise;
- personal hygiene;
- healthy recreation;
- sufficient rest;
- time in nature.

Ignoring physical health often weakens emotional resilience and increases vulnerability to discouragement, impulsivity, and unhealthy coping behaviours.

Responsible self-care is an expression of gratitude for God's gift of life.

7. Practise Responsible Digital Living

Digital technology should support formation rather than dominate it. Healthy practices include:

- setting daily limits for recreational screen time;
- avoiding unnecessary internet browsing;
- establishing technology-free periods;
- using social media intentionally;
- avoiding isolation through excessive online activity;
- protecting times of silence and prayer.

A missionary who governs technology rather than being governed by it enjoys greater freedom and interior peace.

8. Seek Regular Accompaniment

No one matures alone. Regular accompaniment helps the Formandus:

- recognize blind spots;
- understand recurring patterns;
- discern God's action;
- receive encouragement;
- remain accountable.

A relationship of trust with a formator or spiritual director creates a safe space where the Formandus can speak honestly about his emotional life, relationships, attractions, fears, successes, and struggles.

Seeking help is a sign of wisdom and maturity.

9. Integrate Work, Prayer, and Rest

An integrated life is characterized by balance. Excessive activism may hide unresolved emotional needs.

On the other hand, excessive passivity weakens growth. A healthy rhythm includes:

- prayer;
- study;
- apostolic work;
- community life;
- recreation;
- solitude;
- rest.

Such balance protects both psychological well-being and vocational perseverance.

10. Learn from Failures

Growth is rarely free from setbacks.

Every missionary experiences:

- mistakes;
- disappointments;
- temptations;
- misunderstandings;
- emotional struggles.

The important question is not whether one fails but how one responds. An integrated missionary:

- acknowledges mistakes honestly;
- avoids discouragement;
- learns from experience;
- seeks forgiveness when necessary;
- renews his commitment.

Failure can become one of God's most effective teachers when approached with humility and hope.

11. Create a Personal Growth Plan

Every Formandus should intentionally identify one or two areas for affective growth each year. Examples include:

- becoming more patient;
- improving emotional communication;
- strengthening community participation;
- developing healthier friendships;
- managing digital media wisely;
- learning to receive correction;
- growing in emotional freedom.

Growth plans should be:

- realistic;
- measurable;
- discussed with the formator;
- reviewed periodically.

Small, consistent changes often produce the greatest long-term transformation.

Practical Formation Exercises

Daily Exercise

At the end of each day, ask yourself:

- What gave me life today?
- What drained my energy?
- What emotion was strongest today?
- How did I respond?
- Where did I experience God's presence?

Weekly Exercise

Choose one significant interpersonal interaction each week.

Reflect:

- What happened?
- What did I feel?
- What did I need?
- How did the other person experience me?
- What would I do differently next time?

Monthly Exercise

During the monthly recollection:

- review emotional growth;
- identify recurring patterns;
- celebrate progress;
- choose one concrete area for the coming month;
- discuss important insights during accompaniment.

Example

Case Study: Learning Emotional Awareness

Brother Anthony frequently became irritated during community meetings but insisted that “nothing was wrong.” Through journaling and regular accompaniment, he gradually discovered that his irritation often arose whenever he felt unheard or undervalued. Rather than suppressing these feelings or reacting defensively, he learned to express them respectfully and to listen more attentively to others.

Over time, both his emotional awareness and his relationships within the community improved significantly. His growth did not come through extraordinary experiences but through the faithful practice of daily reflection, honest dialogue, and openness to grace.

Key Takeaways

- Human growth requires consistent daily practice rather than occasional inspiration.
- Prayer, self-awareness, friendship, community life, healthy self-care, and accompaniment work together in fostering affective maturity.
- Small daily habits gradually shape an integrated missionary personality.
- Setbacks are opportunities for learning and renewed commitment.
- Formation practices are not ends in themselves but means by which Christ gradually forms the missionary into a joyful, compassionate, and emotionally integrated evangelizer.

XII. THE ROLE OF THE FORMATOR IN FOSTERING AFFECTIVE MATURITY AND PSYCHOSEXUAL INTEGRATION

Introduction

The growth of affective maturity and psychosexual integration is ultimately the work of God’s grace, but grace ordinarily works through human relationships, especially through the ministry of accompaniment. Among these relationships, the formator occupies a privileged place. His role is not merely to supervise external behaviour or ensure compliance with community rules, but to accompany the gradual growth of the whole person toward freedom, integration, and missionary availability.

This ministry requires much more than good intentions. It demands emotional maturity, spiritual wisdom, psychological sensitivity, pastoral charity, and deep respect for the dignity and uniqueness of every Formandus. The formator is not called to replace the conscience of the Formandus or to solve every problem. Rather, he creates the conditions in which the Holy Spirit can work through dialogue, reflection, discernment, and personal responsibility.

A mature formator understands that growth cannot be forced. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, he walks with the person, listens attentively, asks thoughtful questions, illuminates the journey with the light of the Gospel, and patiently accompanies the gradual unfolding of God’s work in the heart.

1. Create a Climate of Trust and Psychological Safety

Growth begins where trust exists.

Formandi will only speak honestly about their struggles, attractions, fears, emotional wounds, or personal questions when they know they will be received with respect rather than judgment. The formator therefore seeks to create an atmosphere characterized by:

- respect for personal dignity;
- confidentiality within appropriate limits;
- empathy;
- attentive listening;
- patience;

- acceptance without permissiveness;
- truth spoken with charity.

Such an environment encourages openness rather than secrecy, responsibility rather than fear.

2. See the Whole Person

One of the greatest temptations in formation is to reduce a person to a particular weakness or difficulty. A mature formator sees the whole person. He recognizes:

- strengths as well as weaknesses;
- gifts as well as limitations;
- progress as well as struggles;
- vocation as well as vulnerability.

He understands that behaviour often expresses deeper emotional realities. Instead of asking only, “*What is wrong?*” he also asks, “*What is happening within this person?*” and “*How is God inviting him to grow?*”

This holistic perspective prevents superficial judgments and promotes genuine accompaniment.

3. Foster Self-Awareness Rather Than Dependence

The purpose of accompaniment is not to make the Formandus dependent upon the formator but to help him become increasingly responsible for his own growth.

Rather than giving immediate answers, the formator frequently invites reflection through thoughtful questions such as:

- What were you feeling in that situation?
- What do you think was happening within you?
- What need were you trying to satisfy?
- How did this affect your relationship with others?
- Where do you sense God inviting you to grow?

These questions help the Formandus gradually develop the capacity for self-reflection and discernment.

4. Normalize the Human Experience

Many Formandi experience unnecessary guilt because they misunderstand ordinary human emotions. The formator helps normalize experiences such as:

- loneliness;
- attraction;
- disappointment;
- grief;
- fear;
- anger;
- emotional fatigue;
- uncertainty.

He explains that these experiences are part of normal human development and become opportunities for growth when integrated wisely.

This approach reduces shame while encouraging responsible choices.

5. Encourage Healthy Emotional Expression

Some candidates suppress emotions. Others express them impulsively. Both patterns require accompaniment. The formator encourages the Formandus to:

- identify emotions accurately;
- express them respectfully;
- understand their deeper meaning;
- distinguish feelings from actions;
- avoid both repression and impulsiveness.

Healthy emotional expression contributes to healthier community life, better pastoral ministry, and deeper prayer.

6. Observe Behaviour Over Time

Important conclusions should rarely be drawn from isolated incidents. The formator pays attention to recurring patterns such as:

- repeated emotional dependency;
- chronic isolation;
- inability to collaborate;
- excessive need for recognition;
- avoidance of responsibility;
- recurring conflicts;
- persistent dishonesty;
- unhealthy digital habits;
- resistance to accompaniment.

Patterns usually reveal more than isolated behaviours. Observation should always be patient, objective, and free from prejudice.

7. Give Constructive Feedback

Effective feedback is one of the most valuable gifts a formator can offer. Constructive feedback is:

- timely;
- specific;
- balanced;
- respectful;
- behaviour-focused rather than personality-focused;
- oriented toward growth.

Instead of saying, “*You are immature,*” the formator might say, “*I noticed that during the community discussion you became defensive when your ideas were questioned. Let us reflect together on what you experienced and how you might respond differently next time.*”

Such feedback invites reflection rather than defensiveness.

8. Respect Professional Boundaries

The formator is an accompanier, not a therapist.

Although he should possess basic psychological understanding, he must recognize the limits of his competence. When difficulties involve:

- significant trauma;

- persistent depression;
- compulsive behaviours;
- addiction;
- severe anxiety;
- personality disorders;
- suicidal thoughts;
- serious psychosexual difficulties;

Appropriate referral to qualified professionals becomes an act of responsible care rather than failure.

Collaboration between the formator, spiritual director, and mental health professionals—while respecting confidentiality and safeguarding ethical boundaries—often provides the best support for the Formandus.

9. Model the Maturity You Wish to Form

The most powerful formation tool is the life of the formator himself. Formandi learn not only from conferences but from daily observation. A mature formator demonstrates:

- emotional balance;
- humility;
- patience;
- healthy boundaries;
- transparent relationships;
- responsible use of authority;
- ability to apologize;
- capacity to forgive;
- joy in community life;
- fidelity to prayer and mission.

The credibility of the formator often shapes the credibility of the formation process itself.

10. Promote a Culture of Safeguarding

Every formator has the responsibility to cultivate communities where every person feels respected, protected, and valued. This includes educating Formandi regarding:

- healthy boundaries;
- responsible use of authority;
- appropriate interpersonal relationships;
- respect for personal dignity;
- accountability;
- transparency;
- safeguarding policies.

Safeguarding is not simply about preventing abuse; it is about creating communities where authentic human flourishing becomes possible.

Practical Guidelines for Accompaniment

During regular accompaniment, the formator may explore questions such as:

Self-Awareness

- What has given you joy recently?

- What has been emotionally difficult?
- What patterns do you notice repeating in your relationships?
- What have you learned about yourself this month?

Relationships

- Which relationships have helped you grow?
- Are there relationships that require healthier boundaries?
- How are you contributing to community life?
- Is anyone becoming emotionally indispensable to you?

Celibate Living

- How are you experiencing your vocation at this stage?
- How do you respond to loneliness or attraction?
- What supports your fidelity?
- Where do you need greater freedom?

Spiritual Integration

- How has your prayer influenced your emotional life?
- Where have you experienced God's love most deeply?
- How has mission shaped your affective growth?

These conversations should always be conducted with respect, discretion, and genuine pastoral concern.

Case Study

Case Study: Accompanying Without Controlling

Brother Michael repeatedly avoided community recreation and spent most evenings alone. Rather than immediately concluding that he lacked community spirit, his formator invited him into several conversations over a period of months.

Gradually it emerged that Michael had grown up in a family where expressing emotions was discouraged. Community recreation made him anxious because he feared saying something foolish or being judged.

Instead of forcing greater participation, the formator patiently encouraged small steps: joining shorter recreational activities, developing friendships with different confreres, reflecting on his fears during spiritual direction, and gradually increasing his participation in community life.

Within a year, Michael had become significantly more relaxed, confident, and engaged. His transformation occurred not through pressure but through patient accompaniment that respected both his dignity and his pace of growth.

Key Takeaways

- The formator accompanies growth rather than controlling behaviour.
- Trust, empathy, confidentiality, and respectful dialogue are the foundation of effective accompaniment.
- Formators help Formandi develop self-awareness, responsibility, and vocational freedom.
- Persistent behavioural patterns deserve careful discernment and, when necessary, appropriate professional referral.
- The most effective formators teach by the witness of their own integrated lives.
- Patient accompaniment, inspired by the example of Christ, enables Formandi to grow into emotionally mature, psychosexually integrated, and joyfully committed Claretian missionaries.

XIII. SELF-ASSESSMENT AND FORMATION TOOLS

Introduction

Growth in affective maturity and psychosexual integration requires regular self-reflection. Without honest evaluation, it is easy to overestimate one's progress or to overlook areas that need attention. At the same time, self-assessment should never become an exercise in perfectionism or self-criticism. Its purpose is to foster greater self-awareness, encourage gratitude for growth already achieved, and identify areas where God's grace continues to invite conversion.

The following tools are designed to help Formandi reflect prayerfully on their affective, relational, and vocational development. They are intended for personal use and may also serve as valuable resources during accompaniment, annual evaluations, retreats, and the preparation of the Personal Project of Formation.

The assessment is not a psychological test or a diagnostic instrument. Rather, it is a formative aid that encourages honest dialogue with oneself, with God, and, when appropriate, with one's formator or spiritual director.

A. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF AFFECTIVE MATURITY

Instructions

Read each statement carefully and rate yourself using the following scale:

- 1 = Rarely true of me
- 2 = Occasionally true
- 3 = Sometimes true
- 4 = Usually true
- 5 = Consistently true

Statement	Rating
I have a realistic understanding of my strengths and weaknesses.	
I can identify and express my emotions appropriately.	
I accept constructive criticism without becoming defensive.	
I recover reasonably well after disappointments or failures.	
I am comfortable being alone without feeling abandoned or empty.	
I maintain healthy friendships without becoming emotionally dependent.	
I respect appropriate emotional and interpersonal boundaries.	
I can forgive those who hurt me.	
I take responsibility for my mistakes instead of blaming others.	
My emotions usually support rather than control my decisions.	

Reflection

My greatest strengths are:

The areas where I most need growth are:

B. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PSYCHOSEXUAL INTEGRATION

Statement	Rating
I accept my body as a gift from God.	
I experience my sexuality with gratitude rather than shame.	
I can acknowledge sexual feelings without panic or unnecessary guilt.	
I understand the relationship between my emotional needs and my sexual feelings.	
I respond responsibly when I experience attraction.	
I seek help when I struggle rather than hiding my difficulties.	
My relationships reflect freedom, respect, and appropriate boundaries.	
I live consecrated celibacy with increasing peace and joy.	
I avoid situations that unnecessarily compromise my vocational commitment.	
My affective life supports my missionary vocation.	

Reflection

What helps me grow in psychosexual integration?

What situations usually challenge me?

C. RELATIONSHIP INVENTORY

Reflect prayerfully on the important relationships in your life.

My Relationship with God

- How open am I with God?
- Do I bring my emotions into prayer?
- Is Christ becoming the centre of my affective life?

My Relationship with Myself

- Do I accept myself?
- Am I patient with my limitations?
- Do I care for my physical and emotional health?

My Relationship with Community

- Am I approachable?
- Do I collaborate willingly?
- Can I receive correction peacefully?
- Do I contribute to a positive community atmosphere?

My Relationships with Men and Women

- Are my relationships respectful and balanced?
- Do I maintain appropriate boundaries?
- Is any relationship becoming emotionally exclusive?

My Relationship with Mission

- Does my ministry expand my heart?

- Do I remain available for all, or only for those I prefer?

D. CHECKLIST FOR HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Tick those that are generally true of you.

- ☐ I maintain appropriate emotional boundaries.
- ☐ I avoid secrecy in important relationships.
- ☐ I do not depend excessively on one person.
- ☐ I respect the personal space of others.
- ☐ I use digital communication responsibly.
- ☐ I seek accountability when necessary.
- ☐ I avoid behaviour that may create confusion or misunderstanding.
- ☐ I maintain transparency with my formator or spiritual director.
- ☐ I balance personal friendships with community life.
- ☐ My relationships foster freedom rather than dependency.

E. MONTHLY PERSONAL REVIEW

At the end of each month, spend time in prayer with the following questions.

Gratitude

1. For what growth in my affective life do I thank God?
2. Which relationships have brought me closer to Christ?

Awareness

1. What emotions have been strongest this month?
2. Which situations challenged my emotional freedom?
3. Have I noticed recurring patterns?

Growth

1. What helped me grow?
2. What hindered my growth?
3. What is God inviting me to change?

Resolution

Choose one concrete objective for the coming month.

My objective:

The practical steps I will take:

F. ACCOMPANIMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions may guide personal accompaniment.

Self-Knowledge

- What have you learned about yourself recently?
- What emotions do you find most difficult to express?
- What gives you life and energy?

Relationships

- Which relationships nourish your vocation?
- Are there relationships that require healthier boundaries?
- How do you normally deal with conflict?

Celibate Living

- How are you experiencing celibate chastity at this stage?
- What supports your fidelity?
- What situations make you vulnerable?

Mission

- How has ministry influenced your emotional life?
- Where do you experience the greatest joy in serving others?

Prayer

- How has your relationship with Christ affected your affective growth?
- What invitation is God placing before you today?

G. PREPARING MY PERSONAL GROWTH PLAN

After completing this assessment, identify the three areas that most deserve attention during the coming year.

Priority Area 1

Current reality:

Goal:

Concrete actions:

Priority Area 2

Current reality:

Goal:

Concrete actions:

Priority Area 3

Current reality:

Goal:

Concrete actions:

Final Prayer**Lord Jesus,**

You know me completely and love me unconditionally. Thank You for the gift of my humanity, my emotions, my relationships, and my vocation. Give me the courage to know myself honestly, the humility to accept my limitations, the wisdom to seek help when I need it, and the generosity to grow each day in love. May my affective life become ever more integrated with Your own Heart, so that I may live consecrated celibacy with joy, freedom, and missionary zeal. Form me into a missionary

whose whole life reflects Your compassion, integrity, and self-giving love. Through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Saint Anthony Mary Claret, may I become ever more fully available for the service of the Gospel. **Amen.**

Key Takeaways

- Regular self-assessment promotes self-awareness and ongoing conversion.
- Honest reflection is a sign of maturity, not weakness.
- The purpose of evaluation is growth, not perfection.
- Accompaniment transforms self-knowledge into concrete vocational growth.
- Every assessment should lead to realistic commitments that foster greater affective maturity, psychosexual integration, and joyful missionary discipleship.

XIV. FORMATION EXERCISES AND CASE STUDIES

Introduction

Formation is most effective when it engages not only the intellect but also the heart and daily life. Knowledge alone does not produce maturity. Affective maturity and psychosexual integration develop through repeated experiences of self-reflection, honest dialogue, interpersonal relationships, community living, prayer, and apostolic service. Practical exercises help Formandi become aware of their emotional patterns, identify areas requiring growth, and gradually integrate their human experience with their vocational commitment.

The following exercises are intended to be adapted according to the age, stage of formation, cultural context, and personal readiness of the Formandi. They should never be used as examinations or psychological tests, but as opportunities for growth and accompanied reflection.

A. PERSONAL REFLECTION EXERCISES

Exercise 1: My Story of Growth

Objective: To become aware of the significant people and experiences that have shaped one's affective development.

Instructions: Prayerfully reflect on your life and identify:

- people who taught you how to love;
- experiences that strengthened your confidence;
- experiences that caused emotional pain;
- moments when you felt deeply accepted;
- moments when you experienced rejection or loneliness.

After reflecting, write a one-page narrative entitled: "The Journey of My Heart."

Reflection Questions

- What have I learned about myself?
- Which experiences continue to influence my relationships today?
- Where do I recognize God's healing presence?

Exercise 2: My Emotional Landscape

During one week, record your strongest emotions each day.

For each emotion ask:

- What happened?
- What did I feel?
- What did I need?
- How did I respond?
- What would have been a healthier response?

At the end of the week identify recurring emotional patterns.

Exercise 3: My Relationship Circle

Draw three concentric circles.

In the centre write your own name.

In the first circle write the people with whom you experience the greatest trust.

In the second circle write people with whom you have ordinary relationships.

In the third circle write relationships that are difficult or distant.

Reflect:

- Are my relationships balanced?
- Is any relationship becoming emotionally exclusive?
- Am I neglecting anyone?
- Who may need greater attention from me?

B. COMMUNITY EXERCISES

Exercise 4: Appreciative Sharing

Small groups of four or five participants.

Each person shares:

- one relationship that has helped him grow;
- one lesson learned about friendship;
- one challenge he presently faces in community life.

The listeners do not interrupt or give advice.

After everyone has shared, each participant receives one affirmation from the group.

Purpose: To foster listening, empathy, and mutual encouragement.

Exercise 5: Receiving and Giving Feedback

Working in pairs: Each participant completes the following statements.

“I appreciate in you...”

“I have learned from you...”

“One area where I believe you can continue growing is...”

The person receiving the feedback may only ask clarifying questions.

No defending.

No explaining.

The exercise concludes with mutual gratitude.

Exercise 6: Community Dialogue

Reflect together: “What qualities make a community emotionally healthy?”

Prepare two lists.

Community attitudes that foster growth

Examples:

- trust;
- openness;
- forgiveness;
- humour;
- shared prayer;
- hospitality;
- accountability.

Community attitudes that hinder growth

Examples:

- gossip;
- secrecy;
- favouritism;
- emotional isolation;
- chronic criticism;
- passive aggression.

The community then identifies one practical commitment for the coming month.

C. FORMATION CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: The Need to Be Appreciated

Brother Daniel works generously in every apostolic activity. However, whenever someone else receives recognition, he becomes withdrawn and discouraged.

Questions

- What emotional need may lie beneath his reaction?
- How should the formator accompany him?
- What practical steps could Daniel take toward greater emotional freedom?

Case Study 2: An Exclusive Friendship

Brother Stephen has developed a close friendship with another confrere. Over time, they spend nearly all their free time together and gradually withdraw from community recreation.

Neither notices anything inappropriate in the friendship.

Questions

- What positive elements exist in this friendship?
- What warning signs are emerging?
- How can the friendship remain healthy without becoming exclusive?
- What role should the formator play?

Case Study 3: Struggling with Loneliness

A newly professed missionary assigned to another country feels profoundly lonely. Instead of sharing his struggles, he spends long hours on social media and gradually distances himself from the community.

Questions

- What human needs are evident?
- What healthy responses would you recommend?
- How might the community support him?

Case Study 4: Attraction During Ministry

A young missionary discovers that he feels emotionally attracted to a pastoral collaborator. He feels confused and ashamed and considers requesting a transfer.

Questions

- Is attraction itself a failure?
- What healthy steps should he take?
- How can this experience become an opportunity for growth?

Case Study 5: Difficulty Receiving Correction

Whenever the superior offers suggestions, Brother Anthony immediately becomes defensive and later avoids conversation.

Questions

- What emotional patterns might explain this behaviour?
- How could the formator approach him constructively?
- What personal work might Anthony need to undertake?

D. ROLE-PLAY EXERCISES

These role-plays may be conducted in small groups.

Scenario 1: A confrere notices that another brother is becoming emotionally dependent on one person. How should he approach him respectfully?

Scenario 2: A missionary confides that he is struggling with loneliness and discouragement. How should another confrere listen?
What responses are helpful?
What responses should be avoided?

Scenario 3: A formator must speak with a Formandus whose use of digital media has become excessive.

Conduct the conversation focusing on:

- empathy;
- truthfulness;
- accountability;
- practical planning.

E. PERSONAL GROWTH PLAN

After completing the exercises, each Formandus prepares a one-page personal growth plan.

My greatest strengths

Areas needing growth

One emotional pattern I want to change

Three practical actions I will take

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

People who can support my growth

Date for review

Guidelines for Formators

These exercises should always be adapted according to the maturity and readiness of the participants. Formators should remember that:

- participation should be voluntary whenever sensitive personal experiences are involved;
- confidentiality must always be respected;
- sharing should never become forced self-disclosure;
- the emphasis should remain on growth rather than evaluation;
- difficult emotional reactions should be accompanied with patience and compassion;
- when deeper psychological concerns emerge, appropriate professional referral should be considered.

The goal is not to expose vulnerabilities but to help Formandi grow in freedom, self-awareness, and vocational integration.

Final Reflection

Affective maturity is formed in ordinary life. Every conversation, every community meeting, every apostolic encounter, every misunderstanding, every act of forgiveness, every moment of prayer, and every generous service becomes part of God's ongoing work of shaping the heart of the missionary.

The more honestly a Formandus embraces these daily opportunities for growth, the more he becomes a joyful witness of Christ's love. Psychosexual integration is not achieved through extraordinary experiences but through the faithful integration of everyday life with the grace of God. In this way, the missionary gradually learns to love with an undivided heart, becoming ever more available for the proclamation of the Gospel and the service of God's people.

XV. CONCLUSION: GROWING INTO THE HEART OF CHRIST THE EVANGELIZER

Every vocation is a journey of transformation. God does not call men because they are already fully mature; He calls them with all their gifts, limitations, hopes, wounds, and possibilities, and patiently forms them throughout their lives. Affective maturity and psychosexual integration are therefore not prerequisites that must be perfectly achieved before entering religious life, but lifelong processes through which the Holy Spirit gradually shapes the missionary into the likeness of Christ.

This journey invites every Claretian to embrace his humanity with gratitude rather than fear. Our emotions, relationships, sexuality, and affective needs are not obstacles to holiness but dimensions of our humanity that are called to be transformed by grace. When these realities are

honestly acknowledged and wisely integrated, they become powerful sources of compassion, creativity, resilience, and apostolic fruitfulness. Conversely, when they are ignored, denied, or lived without discernment, they can gradually weaken freedom, damage relationships, and diminish missionary effectiveness.

The Christian understanding of maturity is not measured by the absence of struggle but by the increasing capacity to respond to life's challenges with freedom, truth, and love. Every missionary will experience moments of loneliness, attraction, disappointment, misunderstanding, emotional fatigue, and personal vulnerability. These experiences do not diminish the vocation. Rather, they become privileged moments in which Christ continues to purify the heart, deepen trust, and enlarge the capacity to love.

For the Claretian missionary, celibate chastity finds its deepest meaning in universal love. It is not simply the renunciation of marriage but the joyful choice to belong completely to Christ so as to become available to all people without distinction. Such love requires emotional maturity, healthy friendships, supportive community life, ongoing conversion, and profound intimacy with God. The missionary who is affectively mature does not become emotionally detached; rather, his heart becomes more open, more compassionate, and more capable of embracing the joys and sufferings of others.

The formation community plays an indispensable role in this process. It is much more than a place of residence or study; it is a school of relationships where the missionary learns to listen, forgive, collaborate, receive correction, celebrate diversity, and grow through daily encounters with his brothers. Likewise, the ministry of the formator is not simply one of supervision but of accompaniment, helping each Formandus discover God's action in his life and assume responsibility for his own growth. Within this environment of trust, dialogue, and mutual support, human maturity gradually becomes missionary maturity.

The process of affective growth continues well beyond initial formation. Every assignment, every new community, every pastoral responsibility, every intercultural experience, and every stage of life offers fresh opportunities for deeper integration. The missionary who remains open to lifelong formation continues to learn, to heal, to grow, and to love with increasing freedom. He never considers himself "finished," but remains a humble disciple who allows Christ to shape his heart day by day.

Saint Anthony Mary Claret offers a compelling model of this integrated way of life. His extraordinary missionary zeal flowed from a heart wholly centred on Christ and deeply open to humanity. His love for God was inseparable from his love for people. His prayer nourished his mission, and his mission deepened his prayer. He lived with remarkable affective freedom, generous charity, profound humility, and tireless apostolic dedication. Every Claretian is invited to walk the same path, allowing the Heart of Christ and the Heart of Mary to shape his own heart.

Ultimately, affective maturity and psychosexual integration are not ends in themselves. They are ordered toward communion and mission. The more integrated the missionary becomes, the more transparent he becomes to the presence of Christ. His relationships become more authentic, his service more generous, his community life more fraternal, and his proclamation of the Gospel more credible. His entire life becomes a living witness that true freedom is found not in self-centred fulfilment but in joyful self-giving.

May every Claretian embrace this lifelong journey with courage, humility, and hope. Supported by the grace of God, nourished by the Eucharist, guided by the Word of God, accompanied by the Church, strengthened by community life, and inspired by Saint Anthony Mary Claret, may he grow each day into an integrated missionary with an undivided heart, one who loves deeply, serves generously, and proclaims the Gospel with the joy and freedom of Christ the Evangelizer.

Recommended Reading for Further Study

Psychology and Human Formation

- Amedeo Cencini. *Virginity and Celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven*.
- Amedeo Cencini. *The Sentiments of the Son*.

- Amedeo Cencini & Alessandro Manenti. *Psychology and Formation*.
- Conrad W. Baars & Anna Terruwe. *Healing the Unaffirmed*.
- Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Wounded Healer*.
- Kevin P. McClone. *Embracing Human Formation*.
- Stephen J. Rossetti. *Why Priests Are Happy*.

Emotional and Relational Growth

- Daniel Goleman. *Emotional Intelligence*.
- Brené Brown. *The Gifts of Imperfection*.
- John Bowlby. *A Secure Base*.
- Sue Johnson. *Hold Me Tight* (for understanding attachment and healthy relationships).
- David G. Benner. *The Gift of Being Yourself*.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

You called us to follow You with an undivided heart and to proclaim the Gospel through the witness of our lives. Continue to form us into missionaries whose humanity reflects Your compassion, purity, humility, and generous love.

Teach us to accept ourselves as Your beloved children, to embrace our humanity with gratitude, to integrate our emotions with wisdom, and to live our sexuality according to the beauty of our vocation. Grant us the courage to face our weaknesses honestly, the humility to seek help when needed, and the perseverance to continue growing each day.

Through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Saint Anthony Mary Claret, make us joyful witnesses of Your Kingdom, capable of loving without possessing, serving without seeking recognition, and giving ourselves completely for the salvation of all.

May our hearts become ever more like Yours, so that wherever we are sent, people may encounter in us Your tenderness, Your truth, and Your boundless mercy.

Amen.