

INITIAL FORMATION POLICY

MARIST BROTHERS

PROVINCE OF AUSTRALIA

PRE-NOVITIATE STAGE: ASPIRANCY

Based on the Marist Formation Guide (June 1994)
and adapted to Australia.

**Revised and Approved by Provincial and Council
12 December 2014**

*The **Pre-Novitiate** has two stages:
a time of enquiry, and a time of Postulancy. (C 96.1; F.G. #132)*

*While some initial enquiry occurs as part of Vocation Ministry, the stage of formal enquiry in the Australian Provinces is known as '**Aspirancy**'.*

To enter the Aspirancy stage a person needs to show a genuine desire to begin a formal process of discernment of his vocation, an interest in the vocation of the Marist Brother and a willingness to commit himself to regular accompaniment and other elements of the Aspirancy program.

- CONTENTS -

1.0 AIMS

2.0 ORGANISATION

- 2.1 Entry to Aspirancy
- 2.2 Length of Aspirancy
- 2.3 Establishing a personal program for the aspirant
- 2.4 Finance
- 2.5 From Aspirancy to Postulancy
- 2.6 From Aspirancy to another Vocation

3.0 PERSONNEL

- 3.1 The Person Accompanying the Aspirant

4.0 CONTENT

- 4.1 Anthropological Elements
- 4.2 Education in the Faith
- 4.3 Marist Elements

5.0 MEANS

- 5.1 Personal Accompaniment
- 5.2 Guided Reading
- 5.3 Personal prayer
- 5.4 Service experience
- 5.5 Community experience
- 5.6 Aspirant Gatherings

6.0 EVALUATION

- 6.1 Policy
- 6.2 Aspirancy Program

1.0 AIMS

The aims of the Aspirancy stage of formation are as follows:

- To assist the aspirant in **beginning a formal process of discernment** as to whether or not he is called to follow Jesus as a Marist Brother.
- To assist the aspirant in his **personal growth** throughout the period of Aspirancy.
- To assist the aspirant in **preparing for possible entry into the Postulancy**.

2.0 ORGANISATION

2.1 Entry to Aspirancy

2.1.1 This takes place in response to a request by an individual who desires to seriously explore the question of becoming a Marist Brother, by beginning a formal process of discernment with a person appointed by the Aspirancy Coordinator. The individual may be, but not necessarily, a member of the Province's House of Discernment. ¹ This request is processed through the Director of Vocations Ministry.

2.1.2 A formal interview is then arranged with the Aspirancy Coordinator to ascertain the suitability and readiness of the person for the Aspirancy stage.

It is essential that the individual has a current Working with Children clearance before he can be accepted into the Aspirancy program.

2.1.3 The criteria for entry into Aspirancy are noted in Appendix A.

2.1.4 If the applicant is considered suitable, the Aspirancy Coordinator will then choose an appropriate Brother or Lay Marist to accompany the aspirant (an Accompanier) and determine in concert with the accompanier a program of accompaniment. Refer 3.2. The Aspirancy Coordinator will then contact the applicant informing him of his acceptance into the Aspirancy Program and the name of the accompanier.

2.2 Length of Aspirancy

The minimum length of Aspirancy is six months. The maximum length is three years. Six months is regarded as the minimum time needed for someone to seriously enter into the initial stages of the discernment, even for someone who might be well known to a Brother or who is very keen to move into Postulancy. Through experience it is clear that giving time to individuals to attend to their questions, motivations, to reflect and pray is very important not only for dealing with the now but also for future stages. Given the regular accompaniment, in most cases three years is regarded as an adequate length of time for a person to clarify his vocational direction.

2.3 Establishing a personal program for the aspirant

2.3.1 Essential elements of the program are:

- Vocational discernment (accompaniment);
- Development and better integration of personal and faith life;
- Involvement in service experience at some stage (refer 5.4);
- Assessment of readiness for Postulancy.

2.3.2 In drawing up the program for each aspirant it is essential to recognize the individual's:

- Stage of development (physical, emotional, intellectual & spiritual);
- Occupation;

- Background;
- Personal responsibilities.

2.3.3 Realistic goals need to be set. They should be sufficiently challenging without being too burdensome. The "demands" of the program may need to be varied according to what is happening at certain times of the year. ²

2.3.4 Normally Aspirancy does not involve residency in a Marist Brothers' community.

2.4 Finance

A budget will be drawn up by the Aspirancy Coordinator and approved by the Director of Initial Formation. ³

2.5 From Aspirancy into Postulancy

2.5.1 This transition begins, after a period of regular accompaniment, when the aspirant expresses a desire to take the discernment process further by living in a Marist community and to enter into the different elements of the Postulancy program.

2.5.2 Initially the accompanier and the Aspirancy Coordinator discuss the readiness of the aspirant for Postulancy. The decision to accept the aspirant into Postulancy is based upon an evaluation of the aspirant's readiness and to what extent he would meet the criteria as noted in Appendix B.

2.5.3 The Aspirancy Coordinator then consults the Postulancy Coordinator and the Director of Initial Formation as to whether or not the aspirant's desire to move to Postulancy should be supported. Once the request is supported, the aspirant is advised to put his request in writing to the Director of Initial Formation. The Provincial replies to the aspirant in writing, acknowledging his request, welcoming him into the Postulancy Program.

2.5.4 The Vocations Coordinator will arrange to visit the family of the aspirant to discuss the Postulancy and clarify questions or areas of concern they may have about Marist formation. ⁴

2.5.5 Where possible, the Postulancy Coordinator will meet with the aspirant prior to Postulancy to discuss details of the Postulancy program. ⁵

2.5.6 Where an aspirant's request is not supported because at the time he is judged not to be ready, yet he shows some potential, the accompanier talks this through with the aspirant and encourages him to continue the personal accompaniment.

2.6 From Aspirancy to another vocation

The accompanier ensures that appropriate and adequate personal support is given to the aspirant who chooses to discontinue being part of Aspirancy.

3.0 PERSONNEL

3.1 The Aspirancy Coordinator

3.1.1 Appointment

The Provincial and his Council appoints the Aspirancy Coordinator.

3.1.2 Role description

As the person responsible for the Aspirancy Program, the Aspirancy Coordinator will:

- a) Ensure the implementation of the Aspirancy policy.
- b) Liaise with both the Vocations Coordinator and the Postulancy Coordinator as needed.
- c) Choose, after consultation with the Director of Initial Formation, the accompanier for each aspirant.
- d) Ensure the accompanier is adequately prepared and briefed for his role.
- e) Notify the aspirant who his accompanier is to be.
- f) Discuss with the accompanier the progress of an aspirant.
- g) Arrange, in consultation with the accompanier, a Marist community experience.
- h) Arrange aspirant gatherings.
- i) Ensure that the aspirant is informed about, and has a solid understanding of the detail contained in, the Province's Child Protection policy.
- j) Regularly evaluate the Aspirancy Program, in conjunction with the Director of Initial Formation.
- k) Draw up a budget for the Aspirancy Program.

3.1.3 Accountability

The Aspirancy Coordinator is accountable to the Provincial and Council, through the Director of Initial Formation, in all matters pertaining to the implementation of the Aspirancy Program. He communicates regularly with, and seeks advice from, the Director of Initial Formation and the Formators' Network.

3.2 The Person Accompanying the Aspirant (accompanier)

3.2.1 The Brother or Lay Marist accompanying the Aspirant is chosen by the Aspirancy Coordinator in recognition of the person's ability and capacity to accompany an aspirant. It is desirable that the accompanying person has participated in some formation in the skills of accompaniment.⁶

3.3.2 The accompanier is responsible for:

- Being available for regular accompaniment of the aspirant.
- Being aware of the requirements of the Aspirancy Program and his/her role within that program.
- Developing a suitable program for the aspirant in consultation with the Aspirancy Coordinator.
- Monitoring the aspirant as he engages in ministry.
- Ensuring that there are adequate supervisory child protection processes in place for the duration of any ministry with children.
- Keeping the Aspirancy Coordinator informed about the general progress of the aspirant.
- Being open to the possibility of talking to a trusted supervisor/spiritual director about personal issues that may surface in accompaniment.

4.0 CONTENT

In drawing up an aspirant's personal program, the content chosen must be balanced, suited to the needs of each aspirant, and seen in the context of later stages of formation. It is important that the program include aspects from each of the following elements (F.G. 139-154):

4.1 Anthropological Elements

These lead the aspirant to a better self-awareness and understanding of his personality,

abilities and talents. It entails exploring a balance of the following aspects: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Sexuality, Volitional, Spiritual, Social and Creative dimensions.

4.2 Education in the Faith

This leads the aspirant to developing a more personal relationship with the God who is calling him by name. This will require a basic education in:

- The person of Jesus Christ;
- Different prayer forms and styles;
- Models of Church and the sacramental life;
- Church responses to social issues;
- Living Christian values.

4.3 Marist Elements ⁷

Introduction to basic material on:

- The story of Marcellin Champagnat;
- The spirit and ministries of the Marist Brothers;
- Mary and her importance to the Brothers.

5.0 MEANS

5.1 Personal Accompaniment

5.1.1 Accompaniment, at the Aspirancy stage, is a means used in helping to begin a **process of discernment** that will normally reach completion at the end of the Postulancy stage. The aspirant chooses to enter a process of vocational accompaniment which will assist him to begin to explore more systematically the question of whether or not he is being called to become a Marist Brother. This involves the aspirant gradually sharing with his accompanier something of his life, family, relationships, interests, beliefs, questions, fears, hopes, dreams and resistances.

5.1.2 Therefore, the **aims of accompaniment** at the Aspirancy stage are:

- a) To assist the aspirant in gradually developing a deeper self-understanding, as well as skills in reflecting on his personal life, his prayer and spiritual development. ⁸
- b) To provide an opportunity for the aspirant to clarify and deepen his understandings of the lifestyle, spirit, mission and ministries of the Marist Brothers.
- c) To provide an opportunity for the accompanier to discern whether or not he believes there are signs in the aspirant of a vocation to Marist religious life.
- d) To guide the aspirant to a point where he can decide whether he wants to continue the discernment by living in a Marist Community (c.f. 2.5) or by seeking another vocational path in life (c.f. 2.6).

5.1.3 The **process of accompaniment** requires skill and a sensitivity to ensure that it is:

- Purposeful: the purpose being clear to both the aspirant and the accompanier.
- Progressive: so that the aspirant is gradually challenged to further growth.
- Comprehensive: so that all facets of the Content (c.f. 4) and Means (c.f. 5) are drawn upon.

5.1.4 In planning and establishing the process, the accompanier will ensure the accompaniment:

- Occurs at least every 4 weeks, though not more often than fortnightly.
- Lasts no longer than an hour.
- Is located in a place that will ensure sufficient privacy and freedom for the aspirant to discuss personal issues.
- Assures strict confidentiality.
- Has goals, clearly understood by the aspirant and the accompanier.
- Always entails consideration of what is happening in the life of the aspirant.
- Recognizes the value of open-ended questions in drawing out the aspirant.

5.1.5 The progress and development of accompaniment is periodically **evaluated**.⁹

5.1.6 In the **initial stages of accompaniment**:

- a) The aspirant and accompanier will together establish the time and location of meetings.
- b) Time needs to be allowed for a rapport to develop between the aspirant and the accompanier. This does not mean a "best of friends" relationship but one that enables the aspirant to feel at ease and free to explore the nature of his call.
- c) In introducing the aspirant to accompaniment, it is important to make clear from the beginning its aim and what is involved. The accompanier will avoid either giving a lot of detail that may overload or frighten him or give the impression it is a 'laissez-faire' arrangement.
- d) Information about family background, educational or employment experience, likes and dislikes, interests etc. will be obtained. It is important not to probe too much too soon.
- e) An invitation to join a Marist community for prayer and meals will be extended.

5.2 Guided Reading

This comprises articles and books that may help the aspirant broaden or deepen his understanding of areas or issues being dealt with in personal accompaniment or for his own education (c.f. 4.0 Content).

5.3 Personal prayer¹⁰

This entails a basic introduction and gradual nurturing of the aspirant's personal prayer life by:

- Encouraging him to gradually set aside some time for regular personal prayer.
- Encouraging openness in prayer, to develop a prayer style with which he is comfortable and to learn to be 'at home' with the God who is calling him by name.
- Opening himself to coming to know and love Jesus and Mary in the prayer encounter.

5.4 Service experience

- a) The aspirant is encouraged to consider undertaking some service experience.¹¹
- b) The aspirant is to be appropriately prepared prior to any service experience or ministry. Where the service experience involves working with children, the aspirant

is required to have a thorough knowledge of the Province's Child protection policy and must be able to demonstrate his understanding of the policy and its contents.

5.5 Community experience

This is intended to enable the aspirant to gain a "taste" of Marist community life and assess what the experience means to him in terms of his vocational choice.¹² The Aspirancy Coordinator, in liaison with the Accompanier, arranges the community experience for the aspirant.

5.6 Aspirant Gatherings

These gatherings provide opportunities for aspirants to meet and interact with each other. They could also serve as an opportunity for covering some aspects of the Aspirancy content together (c.f. 4.0).

6.0 EVALUATION

6.1 Policy

This document is reviewed every three years by the Formators' Network and a report given to the Provincial and Council by the Director of Initial Formation. The Provincial and Council will then ratify any changes.¹³

6.2 Aspirancy Program

The Aspirancy Coordinator annually evaluates the program in conjunction with the Director of Initial Formation.

Appendix A:

The criteria for entry into Aspirancy (Refer 2.1.3)

- An understanding and acceptance, on the part of the applicant, of the requirements of the Aspirancy Program (c.f. section 5.0).
- Has completed secondary education
- Has an appropriate level of maturity
- A certain level of good will: openness, enthusiasm, good intention, and honesty.
- A desire to develop and grow as a person.
- A suitable period of connection with a Brother through the Marist Contact program.
- Availability and openness to accompaniment and discerning his vocation.
- Good common sense in real-life situations.
- A generosity in serving others.
- Good physical health.
- Psychological balance.
- Intellectual capacity to cope with study at tertiary level.
- A practicing, baptized and confirmed Catholic.
- An openness and interest in the Marist charism.
- Freedom from any canonical or other impediments: existing marriage, or membership in another institute of consecrated life (C 643).
- Possesses a current Working with Children clearance.

Appendix B:

Criteria for Readiness of Aspirant into Postulancy (Refer 2.5.2)

- a) Signs of growth and a willingness to further his:
 - Self-knowledge
 - Self-understanding
 - Affective domain
 - Relational skills

- b) Signs of growth and a willingness to further his:
 - Relationship with Christ
 - Personal prayer life

- c) Some evidence, through accompaniment, of:
 - Openness and generosity
 - Attraction to Marcellin Champagnat
 - Certain Marial attitudes and values, interest in Mary
 - Aptitude for living in community
 - Valuing of manual work
 - Aptitude for Marist ministries

¹ The House of Discernment was set up in 2014 to provide young men, who are interested in the life of a Marist Brother, with an opportunity to discern their call to Religious Life by:

- deepening their experience of human and Christian life;
- growing in self-awareness;
- being converted to the Gospel as a disciple of Jesus;

-
- providing an experience of Marist community.

² For example: during holiday times there may be no accompaniment; if the person is a student, one doesn't impose a lot of reading around exam or assignment time; the involvement in a service activity may be left to the latter half of the year.

³ The budget will cover costs of: Travel; Aspirancy gatherings; Resource material; Formation of accompanying brothers and Administration costs.

⁴ The Province's relationship with the parents is through the Vocations Co-ordinator and the Director of Initial Formation.

⁵ If the Postulancy Coordinator is not able to meet personally with the aspirant, the Vocations Coordinator and/or the Director of Initial Formation meet(s) with the aspirant.

⁶ Normally it is a Brother who is chosen as the accompanier. If a Brother is the person accompanying, he is usually from a community close to where the Aspirant lives. Where a Brother is not available, a Lay Marist is chosen. What is important to keep in mind is that the accompanier must have the appropriate skills to accompany; a lay Marist with good skills is likely to be the most appropriate person to accompany the aspirant. Where a lay Marist is the accompanier, other brothers are assigned when, at times, the input of a brother is needed. It is necessary that the aspirant is happy to have a lay Marist accompany him, if a lay Marist is being considered for the role.

⁷ Many of the Marist elements will be gained through the aspirant's relationship with the accompanying Brother and visits to Marist communities.

⁸ This may be achieved by means of the "Structured Autobiography".

⁹ In evaluating the progress and development of accompaniment it is recommended that the Accompanier keeps a record of each accompaniment session for the purpose of enabling continuity in the conversation and vocational journey with the aspirant. The record would note: areas and issues raised by the aspirant; observations and intuitions about the aspirant; any materials distributed (articles, books, tapes, videos etc) and reflection on his own style, personal reactions and issues that surface in the session.

¹⁰ Practices such as journaling and a simplified 'Review of the Day' may also be helpful in developing the aspirant's prayer life together with the self-knowledge and understanding that are important for any growth in prayer.

¹¹ Such areas for service might include: St. Vincent de Paul; REMAR; Marist Holiday Projects; Working with the disabled, aged or poor; Marist ministries, such as schools, retreats, welfare; Opportunities within local parish.

¹² The recommended duration of the community experience is anything from two days to a month.

¹³ This policy was last reviewed in December 2014.