

INITIAL FORMATION POLICY

MARIST BROTHERS

PROVINCE OF AUSTRALIA

PRE-NOVITIATE: POSTULANCY

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

Revised and yet to be approved by the Provincial and Council

Version 16-09-15

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

*The **Postulancy** is the stage in Marist formation when a person, having already begun discerning whether or not he is being called to follow Jesus as a Marist Brother (Aspirancy), decides to continue that process by living in a Marist community for an extended period of time.*

- CONTENTS -

1.0 AIMS

2.0 ORGANISATION

- 2.1 From Aspirancy to Postulancy
- 2.2 Location
- 2.3 Length of Postulancy
- 2.4 Establishing the Postulancy program
- 2.5 Stages of the Postulancy
- 2.6 Family and social contacts
- 2.7 Finance
- 2.8 Postulancy to Novitiate
- 2.9 Postulancy to another vocational path

3.0 PERSONNEL

- 3.1 The Postulancy Coordinator
- 3.2 The Formation Community
- 3.3 Other Resource People

4.0 CONTENT

5.0 MEANS

- 5.1 Personal Accompaniment
- 5.2 Psychological assessments
- 5.3 Community experience
- 5.4 Program of studies
- 5.5 Ministry Experiences
- 5.6 Pilgrimage of Solidarity
- 5.7 Retreat

6.0 Evaluation

- 6.1 Postulancy Policy
- 6.2 Postulancy Program

*Throughout this document the following codes are used:
C: Constitutions
FG: Formation Guide*

1. AIMS

The aims of the Postulancy period of initial formation are:

- a) To assist the Postulant and the Marist Brothers to discern whether or not there has been in reality a call, with a fair degree of certainty and freedom, to follow Jesus in the Marist life.^{1 2}
- b) To assist in the personal growth of the Postulant, through a deeper self-awareness and a further integration of his gifts, qualities and attributes with Christian and Marist values.
- c) To adequately prepare the Postulant for the transition to the novitiate and into Marist religious life.

(Refer C 96; FG 134-137)

2. ORGANISATION

2.1 From Aspirancy to Postulancy

a) Criteria

The Criteria for accepting the Aspirant into the Postulancy are detailed in Appendix A.

b) Minimum age

The minimum age of entry into Postulancy is 21 years of age.

c) Psychological assessment

A complete psychological assessment with a Clinical Psychologist is required either towards the end of the Aspirancy or early on in the Postulancy.

The Postulant –

- Is informed that this assessment is a means of assisting him in the discernment of his vocation and is helpful in providing further information on the basic structure and dynamic of his personality and his physical capacity to deal with the demands of living as a Marist Brother.
- Is encouraged to approach the assessments in a spirit of openness.
- Must be assured that access to the report from the psychological assessment will remain confidential to the person conducting the testing, the Postulant himself, and the appropriate Superiors and formation personnel if permission is given by the

¹ This certainty is recognised through:

- Signs of maturity, personal potential and freedom;
- Signs of a capacity within the candidate to developing his personal potential for our Marist way of life;
- Signs of correct motivation;
- Signs of his attraction to the spirit, mission and lifestyle of the Marist Brothers.

² The discernment culminates in the Postulant choosing to seek admission to the novitiate or to choose another vocational path.

Postulant. (Refer FG 169) ³ ⁴

d) Transition process

- 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 Postulancy program.
- The Person accompanying the Aspirant and the Aspirancy Coordinator will discuss the readiness of the Aspirant for Postulancy.
- The Aspirancy Coordinator consults with 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.
- The Postulancy Coordinator ensures that all the necessary documents are obtained. ⁵
- Once the request for admission to the Postulancy is supported, the Aspirant is advised to put his request in writing to the Director of Initial Formation, who will forward the request to the Provincial. The Provincial will reply to the Aspirant in writing, acknowledging his request, welcoming him into the Postulancy Program.
- The Postulancy 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.
- The Postulancy Coordinator will meet with the Aspirant prior to Postulancy to discuss details of the Postulancy program.

2.2 Location

The Postulancy is located in a community designated by the Provincial. (Refer C 96.7; FG 158, 191) ⁶

2.3 Length of Postulancy

³ Should the Postulant choose not to undertake the psychological assessment or medical examination, the Postulancy Coordinator will inform him that while he is free to choose not to undertake the assessments, such a refusal will mean that he (as Postulancy Coordinator) will not be able to support the Postulant's application for entry into the novitiate (Refer 2.7(b)).

⁴ It is important that the Brothers in the formation community are supportive in respect to the Postulant's approach to psychological assessment and take care not to project on to him any of their own fears and prejudices relating to this means of discernment.

⁵ Before accepting the Aspirant into the Postulancy program, the following documents are required:

- A National Police Clearance;
- A Working with Children Check, if applicable.
- Baptismal certificate;
- Confirmation certificate;
- Academic resume;
- Full medical examination certificate (Refer FG 190);
- References, including one from a recognised Church person.

⁶ The criteria for a suitable location of the Postulancy is as follows:

- Easy access to public transport
- Simplicity
- A suitable meeting area within the house
- Adequate interview space for accompaniment
- Provides opportunities for welcoming people
- Potential for parish involvement
- Reasonably close to other Marist communities

The length of the Postulancy depends on the readiness of the Postulant to enter into the next stage of initial formation, the novitiate. The minimum length of time for the Postulancy is six months. The maximum length is two years. (Refer C 96.6)

2.4 Establishing the Postulancy program

- a) The focus of the formation process is the Postulant since he is the one primarily responsible for discerning his vocation. Consequently, the Postulant needs to be willing to enter into all the means available to him within the Postulancy Program (Refer FG 180).
- b) The Postulancy Coordinator, in consultation with the Postulant, is responsible for formulating a Postulancy Program based on this policy.
- c) The program will:
 - Take into account the Postulant's particular stage of personal development and maturity.
 - Ensure that it progresses at a pace that promotes his growth and personal freedom.
 - Endeavour to be sensitive to the direction in which the Spirit is moving the Postulant, in relation to his call to follow Jesus Christ.

2.5 Stages of the Postulancy

There are five general stages within the Postulancy Program:

- a) **Orientation:** This stage sees the Postulant being gradually introduced to aspects of living in community and to the different elements of the Postulancy Program (accompaniment, program of studies, ministry experience).
- b) **Consolidation:** The Postulant, having settled into a rhythm within the Postulancy Program, experiences a movement within himself towards looking at deeper and more personal issues pertaining to his own personality, relationships, faith and motivation. There is usually a discovery of the inner-tension experienced in recognising the difference between who he is and who he would like to become, together with a developing identification with the Marist charism and community. Valuable learnings are gained through accompaniment and information from vocational (psychological) assessment. Refer 2.1(c).
- c) **Directed Retreat:** The directed retreat occurs when the Postulant has turned his mind to entering the novitiate. The retreat provides both a good reference point for evaluation of progress and an opportunity for the Postulant to focus more on his personal relationship with the Lord. There is also an opportunity to revisit the question of whether he is being called to Marist religious life. ⁷
- d) **Decision:** This stage involves the time leading up to and immediately after the directed retreat. During this time the Postulant, with the aid of the Postulancy Coordinator processes the directed retreat and reflects back on his experiences in community and of ministry. This stage culminates in his decision to either apply for entry into the novitiate by writing a letter to the Provincial seeking admission, or choosing to follow another vocational path.
- e) **Post-decision:** Once the decision has been made and affirmed by the Postulancy Coordinator, the Director of Initial Formation and the Provincial, there is a move towards

⁷ The retreat will normally be eight days in duration.

a gradual orientation for the Novitiate and closure of the Postulancy Program.

For the Postulant who chooses to, and is accepted to, go to the novitiate, some time is given to explaining and clarifying its nature, objectives and program. Decisions are made regarding how the remaining time before novitiate entry can best be used in terms of ministry experience, family contact, holiday and preparations for the move into the novitiate.

The Postulant who requires more time to discern his call will be guided by the Postulancy Coordinator to re-orient himself and look at a possible program for that.

For those who choose to withdraw from the formation program, adequate support will be given in the closure of accompaniment and the move out of the formation community.

2.6 Family and social contacts

The Postulancy Coordinator and the Postulant will together determine holiday breaks after looking at the Postulancy Program. As a courtesy, the Postulant will be encouraged to inform the Postulancy Coordinator of his activities beyond the community.

2.7 Finance

- a) The Province is responsible for covering the costs related to the Postulant's formation such as course fees, travel, retreat costs and professional service fees.
- b) The Postulant –
 - Is responsible for managing his own financial affairs. This is to enable him to maintain independence, financial freedom and an awareness of current living costs. Therefore, the Postulant will be responsible for retaining his own bank account and payments into superannuation and medical schemes in which he is a member.
 - In principle, will be asked to pay a base fee for board and lodging, the amount being determined by the Postulancy Coordinator who consults with the Community Leader and Province Bursar. This will be discussed and negotiated with the Aspirant prior to his entry into Postulancy.
 - Will also finance other personal expenditure, such as clothing, toiletries, medical expenses, leisure and entertainmen, non-formation related travel and tertiary fees.
- c) To avoid drawing on personal financial reserves and any feelings of indebtedness, it may be necessary for a Postulant to cover living costs by undertaking employment, on a part or full-time basis. While this is acceptable and encouraged, it is essential that this does not impair the Postulant's full involvement in the Postulancy Program. ⁸

2.7 Postulancy to Novitiate

a) Criteria for admission

The Novitiate is understood as a time of initiation into Marist religious life prior to making a public commitment to follow Jesus in the Institute of the Marist Brothers. Therefore, suitability for entry to the novitiate is made on the basis of the discernment of a genuine vocation to live the Marist life by the Postulant and those Brothers involved in his formation.

⁸ When a Postulant is unable to provide for his expenses, the Postulancy Coordinator will approach the Director of Initial Formation to see if monies can be provided from the Formation account.

The Provincial makes the final decision. (Refer C 96.9)

Admission to the novitiate assumes that the Postulant has shown signs of personal progress during Postulancy and has satisfactorily completed the requirements set out in this document.

Refer Appendix B for the Criteria for assessing the suitability of the Postulant for the Novitiate.

b) Application for Admission

The Postulant, should he decide to apply for entry to the novitiate, is required to write a formal letter of application to the Provincial (Refer C 96.9; FG 166). The letter of application will detail his experience of Postulancy, his process of vocational discernment and his motivation for entering the novitiate.

The Postulancy Coordinator will provide either an oral or brief written report to the Provincial stating either his support or lack of support for the Postulant's application (Refer C 96.9). The report by the Postulancy Coordinator to the Provincial will be of a general nature. The Postulancy Coordinator is not required to disclose information to the Provincial that falls within the domain of confidentiality.⁹

The Provincial will communicate his decision to the Postulant in writing.

c) Immediate Preparation for the Novitiate

The Postulant will be fully informed of the nature, structure, content and requirements of the novitiate by the Novice Director. It is recommended that the Postulant visits the novitiate and meets with the Novice Director prior to entry. It is also recommended that the Novice Director, preferably in the company of the Postulancy Coordinator, visits the Postulant's family to discuss the Novitiate Program (Refer C 96.5; FG 166).

It is important that the Postulant clearly understands the time between notification of acceptance into the novitiate and actual entry is an integral part of the Postulancy program. This understanding is important in determining activities such as apostolic or community experiences, home holidays and closure of the Postulancy program. (Refer FG 166, 189).

2.8 Postulancy to another vocational path

When the Postulant decides to withdraw from the Postulancy program, or when his application to the novitiate is not accepted, the Postulancy Coordinator will offer whatever pastoral support is necessary to help him make a smooth transition on to another vocational path.

3 PERSONNEL

3.1 The Postulancy Coordinator

⁹ The Postulant Coordinator's assessment of the candidate's suitability and readiness for the novitiate will be aided by:

- * His accompaniment of the Postulant;
- * Personal observations made during the course of the Postulancy;
- * Evaluations made by the formation community;
- * The psychological and medical assessments of the Postulant.

The Postulancy Coordinator:

- Is appointed by, and is accountable to, the Provincial, through the Director of Initial Formation, for all matters pertaining to the formation of the Postulant and the carrying out of his role.
- Must be perpetually professed. (Refer C 96.8).
- Endeavours to play his part in collaborating with the Holy Spirit as the Postulant discerns his vocation. (Refer FG 179)

The Postulancy Coordinator:

- a) Oversees the establishment and coordination of the Postulancy Program;
- b) Discusses with the local community its role as a formation community, and ensures there are periods of evaluation;
- c) Accompanies the Postulant on a regular basis;
- d) Meets with the Postulant's family prior to entry and during Postulancy;
- e) Liaises with professional personnel associated with the program;
- f) Gives the Provincial, at the conclusion of the discernment, indications of the presence or absence in the Postulant of a vocation to the life of a Marist Brother;
- g) Liaises with other formation personnel in assisting the transition from Postulancy to Novitiate;
- h) Liaises with Aspirants moving towards Postulancy and with the persons accompanying them;
- i) Regularly communicates with, and seeks the advice from, the Director of Initial Formation and the Initial Formation Committee;
- j) Undertakes supervision and/or spiritual direction to assist his objectivity in accompanying the Postulant;
- k) Evaluates regularly the Postulancy Program;
- l) Draws up a budget for the Postulancy Program;
- m) Provides the Novice Director, once the Postulant has been accepted into Novitiate, with copies of Birth, Baptismal, Confirmation, and any Medical certificates and Psychological assessment reports.

3.2 The Formation Community

- a) The formation community is an important formative dimension for the Postulant, as much is learnt about Marist values, spirituality, mission and personal attitudes by living with the Brothers. For this reason the appointment of Brothers to this community warrants careful consideration.
- b) The formation community will include Brothers other than the Postulancy Coordinator. Ideally, the Brothers should be men who try to be faithful in the living out of their Marist vocation, who have the capacity to welcome and relate with younger people and also are prepared to support the aims of the Postulancy. The formation community has a responsibility for taking an active part in the Postulant's formation through prayer, witness, personal interest and support given by each of the Brothers. (Refer C 96.8)
- c) Each of the Brothers in the community needs to be conscious of his attitude and expectations in regard to the Postulant. Above all, they must keep in mind that the Postulant is not a Brother. Consequently it is important for each to adopt an attitude that ensures the Postulant's freedom in exploring his vocation and avoid projecting expectations regarding the nature of his call and his choice of a particular vocational path.
- d) The Postulancy Coordinator will guide the Brothers to a clear understanding of the Postulancy Program and encourage them to make a positive contribution to it.

- e) While the total community is viewed as a formation community, the professed Brothers still form a religious community who, unlike the Postulant(s), seek to live in accordance with the Institute's Constitutions. In practice this will mean exercising a different rhythm of personal and community prayer and time apart from the Postulant(s) to reflect on and discuss their lives as Brothers.
- f) The Community Leader and the Postulancy Coordinator need to work closely together, each understanding the other's role in supporting the Postulant's formation and the achievement of the aims of Postulancy. The Community Leader also plays an important role in the personal support of the Postulancy Coordinator.

3.3 Other Resource People

The Postulancy Coordinator, at his discretion, may draw on other resource people to assist in achieving the aims and requirements of Postulancy.

These people may include:

- Medical doctor - general medical examination;
- Psychologist/therapist - vocational (psychological) assessment;
- Tutors/lecturers for study units;
- Retreat director.

4 CONTENT

- a) In choosing the content of the Postulancy Program, the Postulancy Coordinator needs to be aware of what has already covered during Aspirancy, together with the Postulant's stage of development. Any content chosen needs to cover all aspects of the human person. (Refer FG 139-154)
- b) More specifically the content of the Postulancy Program will be drawn from the following three elements:
 - 1) **Anthropological Elements:** These build upon the experience of the Aspirancy and lead the Postulant 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.
 - 2) **Education in the Faith:** The Postulant will be guided to a deeper understanding and a more personal relationship with the God who is calling him in love. This will require an ongoing education in:-
 - The person of Jesus Christ, through the Gospels and Jesus' call to discipleship;
 - A basic introduction to Scripture, in particular some of the Gospels;
 - Personal and communal prayer and the sacramental life;
 - Basic Catholic Social Teaching;
 - Living Christian values.
 - 3) **Marist Elements:** The Postulant will learn much about the Marist elements through his community experience. In addition, it is important that he be introduced to:-
 - Marcellin Champagnat's story; his vocational journey;
 - Mary: her call and how she responded in faith; Mary as the faithful disciple;
 - The spirit and mission of the Marist Brothers;
 - The essential elements of Marist religious life and the vocation of the Brother.

5 MEANS

5.1 Personal Accompaniment

- a) Regular and frequent Personal accompaniment with the Postulancy Coordinator is an essential means of assisting the Postulant in continuing to discern the nature of his call and in nurturing his personal growth. ¹⁰ (Refer C 96).
- b) More specifically, accompaniment helps the Postulant better understand himself, his relationships with others, God and nature. It allows him to examine his qualities, actions and motives within the context of daily life. From this awareness he gradually learns how to better integrate Christian and emerging Marist values into his life. It also helps him to learn to attune himself to the movement of the Holy Spirit (Refer FG 168-174).
- c) The content of accompaniment at this stage may entail:-
 - Looking at his personal history: family and other relationships, education, employment, faith and church.
 - Deepening his understanding of his personal history: his relationships, the events which have impacted on his life, how he recognises God's presence within his lived experience.
 - Examining the authenticity, truth and maturity of his motivation for being drawn to Marist religious life.
 - Promoting growth in personal, communal and liturgical prayer.
- d) In some cases the Postulancy Coordinator may come to a point where he believes that the Postulant would benefit from an additional, more specialized form of accompaniment (eg. therapy or professional counselling), to help address personal issues that are not within the competency of the Postulancy Coordinator. In such cases the Postulancy Coordinator will negotiate with the Postulant and the professional person concerned.

5.2 Psychological assessments: Refer 2.1 (c) above.

5.3 Community Experience ¹¹

The Postulant spends the duration of Postulancy living in a Marist community designated by Provincial. This experience provides an opportunity for the Postulant to gradually involve himself in different aspects of Marist community life:-

- Community prayer and Eucharist;
- Community responsibilities and tasks;
- Community meetings and weekends away;
- Community projects;
- Community celebrations, gatherings and outings.

5.4 Program of studies

The program of studies is individually tailored and designed by the Postulancy Coordinator in consultation with the Postulant. It aims to assist the Postulant in his discernment and personal growth by stimulating thinking and enriching understandings and learnings. The type of program and the units of study will depend on the Postulant's previous studies, his learning

¹⁰ The duration of each accompaniment session will be no longer than an hour.

¹¹ Refer also 2.2, 3.2; FG 177-178.

capacity, his interests and the amount of time at his disposal.

The study programs may be within three areas:

- Internal programs;
- Units available through Spirituality, Adult Faith Formation Centres or Theological Colleges;
- External academic studies.

Refer Appendix C for more detail on these three areas.

5.5 Ministry Experiences

The Postulant will engage in a variety of ministry or service experiences. The Postulancy Coordinator, with the Postulant, plans and prepares these ministry experiences.¹²

Ministry experiences:

- Assist the Postulant in learning more about himself and the way he relates and works with others.
- Provide a possible guide for the Postulant in his future choice of Marist ministry.
- Are an important learning experiences; the placements need to be chosen carefully, involving both preparation and follow-up.

5.6 Pilgrimage of solidarity

The Postulant is encouraged to undertake some form of a "pilgrimage of solidarity" with the poor, disadvantaged or marginalised. This may help to facilitate a possible conversion of thinking and acting, to see the world through the eyes of the poor and learning to live the brotherhood of Christ with all.

Different from a ministry experience, the 'pilgrimage of solidarity' commits the Postulant to spending an extended period of time with the poor.

The Postulancy Coordinator will work with the Postulant in his choice of placement and ensure adequate attention is given to preparation, debriefing and evaluation of the experience.

5.7 Retreat

The Postulant is required to undertake a retreat to continue his discernment as to whether he will apply to enter the novitiate or not.¹³(Refer FG 166)

6 EVALUATION

6.1 Postulancy Policy

¹² Ministry experiences may include any of the following:

- Primary/secondary School;
- Assisting a REMAR group;
- Contact with the disadvantaged, disabled, people in need;
- Retreat work or school camps;
- Working with aboriginal youth or some other mission experience.

¹³ It is recommended that the retreat be a 'directed retreat', of at least five days, and the director be someone other than the Postulancy Coordinator. This is to enable the Postulant to be totally free at this stage of discernment. There will need to be a close liaison between the retreat director and the Postulancy Coordinator in setting up the retreat.

This document is to be reviewed every three years by the Initial Formation Committee and a report given to the Provincial and Council by the Director of Initial Formation. The Provincial and Council will then ratify any changes.¹⁴

6.2 Postulancy Program

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

¹⁴ This policy was last reviewed in September 2016

Appendix A

Criteria for accepting the Aspirant into the Postulancy (Refer 2.1)

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 following criteria:-

- 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

Appendix B

Criteria for consideration in assessing the suitability of the Postulant for the novitiate are as follows (Refer 2.7(a) and FG 176):

The Postulant:

- a) Has an attraction for the person of Jesus Christ and His message, along with a determination to follow Him as Mary did.
- b) Is attracted by the personality and charism of Marcellin Champagnat.
- c) Has an aptitude for some ministry of the Marist Brothers and a willingness to engage in manual work.
- d) Has the capacity to enter relationships with simplicity; and is happy to be of service to others.
- e) Exhibits proof of his capacity to accept himself and to live with renunciations, frustrations and separations.
- f) Is open and has a capacity to give an account of what he is living.
- g) Has sufficient basic knowledge of scripture and theology.
- h) Shows a capacity to handle personal finances in a spirit of poverty and sharing.
- i) Has an objective capacity to go through the novitiate experience.
- j) Has sufficient freedom from any pressure from family and other influences.

Appendix C

Areas within the Program of Studies (Refer 5.4)

1. Internal study program:

This may include:

- a) **Guided reading:** This comprises articles and books that may help the Postulant broaden or deepen his understanding of areas or issues being dealt with in personal accompaniment or for his own spiritual development and faith education. (Refer 4.0 above)
- b) **Weekly tutorial sessions:** These sessions, which are usually one hour duration and with the Postulancy Coordinator, aim to provide the Postulant with an opportunity to identify key learnings, explore how the content relates to the his experience and to discuss any arising questions.

2. Units available through Spirituality, Adult Faith Formation Centres or Theological Colleges:

The Postulant may be directed to undertake introductory units in areas such as personal development, basic theology and spirituality, communication skills and pastoral ministry issues, through Spirituality, Theological or Adult Faith Formation Centres.

3. External Academic Studies:

The Postulant may undertake courses of study at tertiary institutions or TAFE College towards gaining a certificate, diploma or degree.