

Religious Formation Conference October 2025

On-Going Formation for Aging Religious

RFC Participant Input Sessions 1 & 2

I. Identifying Priorities and Processes for Input

Goal: Understanding the wants and needs of Sisters to guide development of on-going formation programming.

Key Points:

- **Diverse feedback methods:** Combine group brainstorming (idea boards, email, printed forms) with **private, individual conversations** for honest input.
 - **Critical questions:**
 - “What is the one thing a Sister would want to do as ministry?”
 - “What is the spirit inviting you to do and learn?”
 - “How is God working in you?”
 - **Balance individual and communal:** Honor both personal preferences and shared mission.
 - **Spiritual framing:**
 - “The dark spirit drives, the good spirit invites.”
 - “No one should feel responsible for the weight of the world.”
 - “It’s not just about what we do, but who we are in the world.”
 - “We are on a communal journey.”
 - **Use care and spiritual staff** as partners for gathering authentic feedback—they often know Sisters’ interests and capacities best.
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II. Engagement and Participation Strategies

Goal: Create meaningful, flexible, and sustainable ways for Sisters to engage in ongoing formation.

Key Points:

- **Adapt and simplify:** Offer small-scale, flexible, low-stress opportunities that fit energy levels and interests.
- **Balance offerings:** Avoid overloading; ensure joy, engagement, and rest are all part of formation.

- **Encourage Sister-led initiatives:** Empower Sisters to host or co-lead events; staff offer backup if challenges arise.
 - **Incorporate spirituality and prayer:** Regular prayer services as formation tools—can integrate learning, sharing, and community building.
 - **Acknowledge limits:** It’s okay if not everyone participates in everything.
 - **Food helps:** Simple incentives like refreshments increase attendance and connection.
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III. Communication and Information Sharing

Goal: Ensure all Sisters receive clear, consistent, and accessible information.

Key Points:

- **Consolidate communications:** Use a **monthly printed and emailed newsletter** (arrives on the 1st) to reduce email volume.
 - **Varied formats:**
 - Paper-based tools (posters, bulletin boards, handouts) for those with limited technology.
 - Videos, photos, and stories for Sisters who can’t attend in person.
 - **Consistency:** Keep predictable scheduling—certain events always on specific days.
 - **Technology aids:**
 - Encourage peer tech mentoring (“pair a techy Sister with others”).
 - Use **Zoom Rooms** and **Amazon Echo devices** for participation and sharing.
 - **Distribution lists:** Maintain an opt-in list for Sisters who want all updates and invitations.
 - **Staff collaboration:** Coordinate with care staff to distribute materials and identify interested participants.
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IV. Community Connection and Storytelling

Goal: Deepen communal bonds through shared experiences and narrative.

Key Points:

- **“Share stories – where one of us is, all of us are.”**
- **Storytelling formats:** Encourage use of photos, videos, and testimony to highlight the BVM mission and communal spirit.
- **Mourning and memory:** Virtual sharing of memories during funeral services broadens connection.

- **Visual unity:** T-shirts and other symbols reinforce shared purpose and belonging.
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V. Organizational and Structural Supports

Goal: Build systems that sustain engagement and minimize stress.

Key Points:

- **Directional groups:** Organize around chapter themes—core groups of active and prayer Sisters.
 - **Shared updates:** Each group reports back, ensuring everyone feels informed and connected.
 - **Staffing awareness:** Recognize limited staff capacity; design programs that don't overextend teams.
 - **Continuous adaptation:** Regularly reassess what's working; adjust formats, timing, and content accordingly.
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Summary Insight

Sisters want **connection, meaning, and manageable engagement**, not more activity.

Formation should be **inviting, personal, communal, and sustainable**, rooted in **shared spirituality and adaptability**.