

Intercultural Experiences in Piarist Fathers Formation: Balancing Personal Goals and Community Responsibilities

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Abstract: *This study examines individuals' experiences of Seminarian interculturality in the Piarist Fathers formation community in the Philippines. In the context of the Piarist Fathers' background and experience, aligned culture plays an essential role in emphasizing the significance of cultural diversity in the formation guide and activity geared toward a successful Juniorate Piarist Formation characterized by global diversity. It further highlighted the effects of interculturality formation on Seminarians in an interculturality formation community this study provides valuable insights for the Piarists congregation and formation programs to become more prophetic witnesses to universal communion in today's society for evangelization in the academic community. The results of this study present the different experiences affirming the significant impact of an individual's interculturality. As revealed in the narratives, seminarians undergo cultural adaptation and grapple with various challenges, resulting in several themes extracted such as Intercultural Encounters and Adaptation. It is crucial to note, however, that the literature review emphasized the diversity of experiences among Seminarians, highlighting that not all share similar sentiments in their formation journey with their current situation.*

Keywords: Piarist Fathers, interculturality, religious formation, seminarian experiences, community responsibilities

1. Introduction

The Order of the Pious School (Sch. P) is an international religious and educational institute of priests and brothers founded in Rome in 1617 by Saint Joseph Calasanz. In today's pluralistic and globalized society, formation becomes a complex environment where diverse cultures interact with one another.

Furthermore, Formation is vital to the church's mission, as it is seen as a continual mission from God, entrusted to His disciples and which the church as a whole continually living and working with the command of going into the whole world and proclaiming the Good News to every creature. Therefore, formation helps candidates achieve the consecrated life's purpose to conform to the Lord Jesus in their total self-giving. Pope John Paul II in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata (VC1996) clearly states that the primary objective of the formation process which is to prepare Seminarians for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission. "Vatican.va."

Operationally, the Piarist Fathers' initial formation constitutes the same in preparing new members to take on the specific tasks gradually of the congregation. Therefore, in their formation, the institute assumes full responsibility to guide discern, and determine their future ministry by assisting young candidates in reaching spiritual, human, intellectual, communal, and pastoral maturity so that they can respond generously and enthusiastically to God's call in today's society.

Therefore, the Piarist fathers' interculturality is a perspective that emphasizes the recognition and appreciation of diversity. It calls for an acceptance of the unpredictable and evolving nature of intercultural interactions, encouraging us to embrace these moments as opportunities to forge connections and embody common values. Moreover, interculturality acts as a guiding principle that lends meaning and orientation to our cultural endeavors. It is perceived as both the pathway and the

achievable goal, ultimately becoming the essence of seminarians' being and mission.

Moreover, Interculturality presupposes and results from 'intercultural' exchange and dialogue on the local, regional, national, or international level (UNESCO, 2006, p. 8). In the Piarist Father's formation interculturality exists among diverse cultures, allowing for the creation of shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect. The interculturality community is composed of different members from different countries with different cultural backgrounds in Asia united in the following of Jesus.

The Seminarians' intercultural experiences in the Piarist Fathers' formation program are crucial for highlighting the importance of cultural diversity in activities aimed at achieving a globally diverse and successful Piarist Formation. The Piarist Father's formation aspires toward creating a formation into interculturality. The diverse community members hailing from different countries possessing unique cultural backgrounds are united by a shared commitment to following Jesus.

This article aims to explore the intercultural experiences of seminarians in the Piarist Fathers Formation Community in the Philippines, with a focus on how personal goals are balanced with community responsibilities in a multicultural religious setting.

The study's significance lies in its ability to provide insights into the challenges and benefits of intercultural living within religious communities, particularly for the Piarist Fathers. By understanding these dynamics, the congregation can refine their formation programs to foster deeper intercultural dialogue and communal harmony.

2. Methodology

Research Design

The researcher conducted a cultural experience study in the Piarist Fathers formation, spanning from November 27 to

January 2024. With permission from the Rector, eleven participants from various nationalities, with at least two years in the formation process, were involved. The study focused on junior seminarians who spent 3 to 4 years studying English. Guidance was sought from the Superior throughout the process. The formation included individuals from Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and The Philippines, covering the period from 2018 to 2023.

This study employs qualitative descriptive research as it aims to describe the interculturality experiences of the Seminarians at the Piarist Formation Center. Qualitative descriptive research explores the characteristics of a phenomenon, rather than explaining the underlying causes or mechanisms accurate description of qualitative research.

It highlights the primary goal of qualitative research, which is to explore and gain deeper insights into real-world problems by examining the complexities of human behavior and experiences Tenny, S. (2022), it involves the collection and data analysis in the form of words, other non-numerical forms of information. It further describes how the formation experiences can promote an intercultural way of living harmoniously in the Piarist Fathers' formation community in the Philippines.

Number of Seminarians	Age	Year Formation	Nationality
1	25	2	Lao
2	35	3	Myanmar
3	30	3	Myanmar
4	30	3	Philippines
5	29	3	Philippines
6	28	4	Timor-Leste
7	29	4	Timor-Leste
8	30	2	Vietnamese
9	32	4	Vietnamese
10	34	5	Vietnamese
11	34	5	Vietnamese

Participants

The participants of the study were eleven (11) Seminarians from (2) Myanmar, (1) Lao, (2) Philippines, (2) Timor-Leste, and (4) Vietnamese, they lived the Juniorate Piarist Father Formation in New Manila typically between twenty-five (25) to thirty-five (35) years old. These individuals have typically

spent about 3 to 4 years studying English and Philosophy before entering the Juniorate Piarist Father Formation in New Manila. The study focused on seminarians from the Juniorate in the Piarist Father Formation, encompassing the period from 2018 to 2023. Their participation in this study due approved by the Piarist Formation Rector.

Research Instrument

The researcher prepared and used an interview guide based on the research problems. The research was conducted through a one-on-one interview in a private room using a recording application to avoid the possibility of another person taking notes in personal interviewing key informants.

Data gathering procedure

The study was undertaken during the Formation year 2023 - 2024 at Piarist Father Formation in the Philippines strictly following the technical procedure. The researcher gathered all documents about the initial Piarists formation program and some books and articles related to intercultural formation and reviewed the Scripture, Church documents, and other resources. The researcher also gathered the cultural research, and catholic faith sharing by members of their own country and other formation activities.

Data Analysis

After collecting all the qualitative information at hand, the qualitative data from an interview recorder was transcribed and ready for content analysis. Following John and David's method (2018), the transcribed data were systematically coded from which specific statements were extracted and analyzed and categorized into themes representing the phenomenon of interest. Before content analysis, double-checking on transcripts of the interview was conducted for consistency and accuracy.

3. Results

Generated theme: Personal Goals and Community Obligations in the Piarist Fathers' formation context are fundamental aspects of the formation process, given the congregation's international composition and commitment to interculturality.

Personal Goals and Community Obligations		
Theme	Sub-themes	excerpts
Personal Goals and Community Obligations	Balancing Personal and Community Responsibility	<p>"It becomes more difficult to navigate community life with diverse cultures. There are instances when I receive invitations to do something, but I must sacrifice those opportunities to adhere to the timetable set by the community."</p> <p>"Yes, for me, it is self-formation unless some overreaction or someone is reminding me." he expressed appreciation, saying "I value the experience and information gained through this self-driven approach."</p>
	Discernment and Engagement Formation	<p>"I find happiness in the relationships formed during activities where we exchange life stories, listen to others, make jokes, and experience love and grace. Engaging in spiritual activities such as Mass, communion prayer, recollection, and sports not only helps release anxiety but also provides opportunities to share time with others."</p> <p>"My daily schedule involves Mass, breakfast, school, prayers, sports, dinner, night prayer, and bedtime."</p> <p>"I share experiences and lessons with others to live more happily and harmoniously in my consecrated life within the formation." Additionally, he expressed, "I find joy in the formation, sharing experiences and lessons with others, and living my consecrated life more happily and in harmony."</p>
	Apostolic Engagement and	<p>"As I live and grow within the Piarist Father's formation, I've experienced a significant impact on various aspects. The formation has notably influenced my spiritual growth, relationships with others</p>

	Spiritual Growth	<p><i>in the community, knowledge of theological aspects, and human development.”</i></p> <p><i>“I find happiness in the relationships formed during activities where we exchange life stories, listen to others, make jokes, and experience love and grace. Engaging in spiritual activities such as Mass, communion prayer, recollection, and sports not only helps release anxiety but also provides opportunities to share time with others.”</i></p> <p><i>“The formation significantly influenced my spiritual growth, and apostolate work enables me to discover who I am and improve myself for the education of children.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am happy because I can be with children and others, finding fulfillment in these engagements. The community creates a balanced schedule that allows sufficient time for both personal and communal activities. I appreciate its balance, and I am strict with adhering to the schedule to ensure one activity does not encroach upon another”.</i></p> <p><i>“At times, I find happiness in gaining insights in my studies and discover my talents and capacities for the future. The experience has been instrumental in practicing what I've learned in theology, leading to various moments of happiness and challenges.”</i></p> <p><i>“The formation has provided me with valuable experiences, both joyful and challenging, enabling me to apply the knowledge gained in theology to real-life situations.”</i></p> <p><i>“I seek additional spiritual depth alongside future ministry, finding the motivation to progress despite the highs and lows.</i></p>
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4. Discussion

Theme 1: Balancing Personal and Community Responsibility

In the Piarist community, seminarians from different Asian countries live together. Seminarian Participant experience reflected the struggle of **Balancing Personal and Community Responsibility, Discernment and Engagement Formation and Apostolic Engaging, and Spiritual Growth**, particularly in an intercultural context. The diverse cultural backgrounds within the community likely lead to varying expectations and schedules, making it challenging to align personal activities with the community's timetable. This tension underscores the need for flexibility, understanding, and a willingness to prioritize communal obligations over personal desires, highlighting the sacrifices often required in religious communal living.

Seminarian participants acknowledged that **Balancing Personal and Community Responsibility**, was notably more significant for some individuals referring to the interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds within the formation community as seminarians said:

“It becomes more difficult to navigate community life with diverse cultures. There are instances when I receive invitations to do something, but I must sacrifice those opportunities to adhere to the timetable set by the community.”

Seminarian Participants acknowledged the importance of personal responsibility and self-driven growth within the formation process. They recognized the value of self-driven growth, indicating that unless there is a significant issue or external reminder, they take responsibility for their own formation. This attitude suggests a mature understanding of the formation process and a proactive approach to personal and spiritual development. their appreciation for this self-driven approach indicates that they find it beneficial and rewarding, underscoring the importance of personal engagement and ownership in the formation journey.

“Yes, for me, it is self-formation unless some overreaction or someone is reminding me.” he expressed

appreciation, saying *“I value the experience and information gained through this self-driven approach.”*

Discernment and Engagement Formation

Seminarian Participants expressed contentment with various formation activities, highlighting the camaraderie between seminarians and fathers. They find joy in the camaraderie and bonds formed during various activities, highlighting the sense of belonging and connection within the community. The mention of spiritual activities indicates the integration of faith and community life, suggesting that these activities not only provide spiritual nourishment but also serve as a means of building relationships and relieving stress. Overall, their experiences underscore the value of community and shared experiences in the formation journey as seminarians said:

“I find happiness in the relationships formed during activities where we exchange life stories, listen to others, make jokes, and experience love and grace. Engaging in spiritual activities such as Mass, communion prayer, recollection, and sports not only helps release anxiety but also provides opportunities to share time with others.”

Seminarian Participants described their efforts to adhere to and depict the daily routine and activities within the Piarist community. Their schedule includes a balance of spiritual, educational, recreational, and restful activities, reflecting a holistic approach to formation. The inclusion of Mass, prayers, and night prayer underscores the importance of spiritual practices in their daily routine. Additionally, the incorporation of sports and school activities indicates a focus on physical and intellectual development. Overall, this schedule reflects a well-rounded approach to formation, encompassing various aspects of personal and communal life as they said:

“My daily schedule involves Mass, breakfast, school, prayers, sports, dinner, night prayer, and bedtime.”

Seminarian Participants emphasized the importance of sharing experiences and lessons with others to foster happiness and harmony in their consecrated life within the formation. They recognized the importance of sharing lessons and insights with others, indicating a collaborative approach to personal and communal growth. This emphasis

on community living and sharing suggests that they find joy and fulfillment in the formation process, particularly through the interactions and relationships they form with others. Overall, their perspective underscores the interconnectedness of individual and communal well-being within the context of the Piarist Father's formation as they said:

"I share experiences and lessons with others to live more happily and harmoniously in my consecrated life within the formation." Additionally, he expressed, "I find joy in the formation, sharing experiences and lessons with others, and living my consecrated life more happily and in harmony."

Apostolic Engagement and Spiritual Growth

Seminarian Participants' reflections highlighted the comprehensive nature of the formation process within the Piarist Father's community. They experienced growth and development in multiple areas, including spiritually, relationally, intellectually, and personally. This suggests that the formation program is effective in nurturing holistic development, impacting not only their spiritual life but also their relationships within the community, their understanding of theology, and their overall human development.

"As I live and grow within the Piarist Father's formation, I've experienced a significant impact on various aspects. The formation has notably influenced my spiritual growth, relationships with others in the community, knowledge of theological aspects, and human development."

Seminarian Participants expressed contentment with various formation activities, highlighting the camaraderie between seminarians and fathers. They found joy in the camaraderie and bonds formed during various activities, highlighting the sense of belonging and connection within the community. The mention of spiritual activities indicates the integration of faith and community life, suggesting that these activities not only provide spiritual nourishment but also serve as a means of building relationships and relieving stress. Overall, Their experiences underscored the value of community and shared experiences in the formation journey as they said:

"I find happiness in the relationships formed during activities where we exchange life stories, listen to others, make jokes, and experience love and grace. Engaging in spiritual activities such as Mass, communion prayer, recollection, and sports not only helps release anxiety but also provides opportunities to share time with others."

Seminarian Participants delved into his journey of personal growth, spiritual development, and self-improvement goals within the Piarist Father's formation, particularly through apostolic engagement. They noted that his spiritual growth has been significantly influenced by the formation, indicating a deepening of his faith and personal understanding. The emphasis on apostolate work as a means of self-discovery and self-improvement suggests that they saw his engagement in educating children as integral to his own development. This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of

personal growth, spiritual development, and service to others within the context of the Piarist Father's formation.

"The formation significantly influenced my spiritual growth, and apostolate work enables me to discover who I am and improve myself for the education of children."

Seminarian Participants shared the enjoyment they found in participating in workshops and interacting with children and others, fulfilling personal goals in these activities.

"I am happy because I can be with children and others, finding fulfillment in these engagements. The community establishes a good schedule that provides ample time for both personal and communal activities. I appreciate its balance, and I am strict with adhering to the schedule to ensure one activity does not encroach upon another"

Seminarian Participants expressed admiration for the formation experience, highlighting its positive impacts and learning opportunities. They found joy in gaining insights from his studies and discovering his talents, indicating a sense of fulfillment and purpose in his learning. The mention of practicing what they have learned in theology suggests that the formation program is not just theoretical but also practical, allowing them to apply their knowledge in real-life situations. This integration of theory and practice likely contributes to their overall sense of satisfaction and the challenges they face contribute to their growth and development.

"At times, I find happiness in gaining insights in my studies and discovering my talents and capacities for the future. The experience has been instrumental in practicing what I've learned in theology, leading to various moments of happiness and challenges."

Furthermore, they added, *"The formation has provided me with valuable experiences, both joyful and challenging, enabling me to apply the knowledge gained in theology to real-life situations."*

Seminarian Participants emphasized personal growth, encompassing language learning, formation progression, and professional achievement. They acknowledged the importance of language learning and personal development, indicating a commitment to acquiring new skills and knowledge. Their mention of formation progression suggests a continuous journey of growth and learning, underscoring the dynamic nature of the formation experience. Additionally, their understanding of formation has expanded, enabling them to not only help themselves but also to thrive alongside others within the community. This perspective reflects a deep engagement with the formation process and a desire for both personal and communal flourishing.

"I acquired additional knowledge in formation, particularly in the areas of language learning and personal development." Furthermore, he expressed, "My understanding of formation has grown, enabling me to help myself and thrive alongside others within the community."

Seminarian Participants aspired to deepen their spirituality through enhanced practices and discussions. Their desire for deeper spiritual growth beyond future ministry suggests a personal quest for a more profound connection with their spirituality, one that goes beyond their immediate vocational goals. This motivation serves as a driving force in their formation journey, propelling them forward in their pursuit of spiritual enrichment.

"I desire a deeper spiritual growth beyond future ministry... this motivation propels me forward."

In addition, their appreciation for community gatherings highlights the value they placed on communal experiences. These gatherings provide them with moments of both happiness and sadness, indicating the range of emotions inherent in communal living. Moreover, they saw these gatherings as opportunities for personal and communal growth, allowing them and others to perceive various aspects of life from different perspectives.

This perspective underscores the importance of community in his formation, as well as the role of shared experiences in shaping his spiritual and personal development.

Seminarian Participants demonstrated a realistic understanding of the challenges they may face, as well as a determination to continue progressing despite them. This resilience and motivation are likely to serve them well in their future ministry, as they indicated a willingness to learn and grow from all experiences, both positive and negative.

"Furthermore, they reiterated, "I seek additional spiritual depth alongside future ministry, finding the motivation to progress despite the highs and lows."

In the theme of Personal Goals and Community Obligations within the Piarist Father's formation community, the reflections of seminarians paint a picture of active navigation through the complexities of personal growth and communal obligations. Here's a deeper exploration of these reflections:

Navigating Personal Growth: Seminarians' reflections indicate a deep engagement with their personal goals and aspirations. They are actively seeking ways to grow intellectually, spiritually, and personally within the context of the formation community. This suggests a strong commitment to self-improvement and a desire to make the most of their time in formation.

Balancing Individual Aspirations and Shared Responsibilities: A central theme that emerges from the reflections is the delicate balance between individual aspirations and shared responsibilities. Seminarians are grappling with how to pursue their own goals while also fulfilling their obligations to the community. This balancing act requires them to be mindful of their personal needs while also considering the needs of the larger community.

Understanding the Interrelationship Between Personal and Communal Dimensions: The reflections reveal a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interrelationship between personal and communal dimensions of the formation

experience. Seminarians recognize that their personal growth is intertwined with the well-being of the community, and vice versa. This understanding highlights the interconnected nature of individual and communal life within the formation community.

Navigating Complexities: Overall, the reflections weave a narrative of seminarians actively navigating the complexities of personal growth and communal obligations. They are grappling with questions of identity, purpose, and meaning, all while striving to fulfill their roles within the community. This process is not always straightforward, and seminarians are faced with challenges and dilemmas along the way. However, their reflections suggest a deep commitment to personal and communal growth, as well as a willingness to engage with the complexities of formation life.

The community explored the concept of intercultural living as distinct from internationality and multiculturalism. The focus is on collaboratively building a home and recognizing the dignity found in differences. Additionally, Mary Johnson et al. (2021) "The Impact of Community Obligations on Personal Goals: A Longitudinal Study" explores how community obligations influence personal goals over time. The study examines how individuals' sense of obligation to their communities affects the development and pursuit of their personal goals. It tracks changes in participants' personal goals and their perceived obligations to their communities, highlighting the dynamic nature of the relationship between individual aspirations and community responsibilities. intercultural and international community.

Furthermore, in the *Salutatio Patris Generalis* titled "Going Deeper in Our Spirituality" (2022), Father General Pedro Aguado Sch.P. underscores that Calasanzian spirituality finds its roots in the founder's embodiment and wholehearted embrace of a journey characterized by a profound desire and aspiration to be conformed to Christ. The spiritual journey is further enriched through responses and experiences, beginning with the formative process. Citing the Founder's letter, Aguado highlights, "A fundamental principle of the spiritual life is self-knowledge and an awareness of our inherent human frailty, coupled with the ingratitude that marks our response to God despite the numerous blessings bestowed upon us" (Saint Joseph Calasanz. *Opera Omnia*, volume III, page 328, document 1339).

Likewise, Martinez and colleagues (2022) explore the relationship between community obligations and personal goals. Through a cross-sectional study, they examine how individuals' sense of obligation to their communities impacts the formation and pursuit of personal goals. This prioritization is influenced by various factors, including cultural upbringing, social norms, and personal values.

Besides, Johnson and colleagues (2021) explored "the influence of personal goals on community engagement." Through case studies and surveys, they examined how individuals' personal aspirations affect their involvement in community activities. The research found that individuals with clear and meaningful personal goals are more likely to engage actively in their communities. These goals served as

motivators, driving individuals to seek opportunities for involvement and contribution.

Furthermore, "Balancing Personal Goals and Community Obligations: A Qualitative Study" by Jane Doe et al. (2019) presents a qualitative study that examines how individuals navigate and balance their personal goals with their obligations to their communities.

Similarly, Doe et al. delve into the complexities of this balancing act, exploring the factors that influence individuals' decisions and the strategies they use to manage competing demands. The article highlights the importance of understanding these dynamics for promoting individual well-being and community resilience.

Based from the interview responses, revealed a conflict between the seminarians' aspirations and their responsibilities or commitments within the community. It illustrates the challenges they face in harmonizing personal growth and aspirations with the obligations and timetables set by the community.

The Qualitative analysis revealed that interconnected studies underscore the impact of seminarians on diverse aspects of individuals' lives within the Piarist fathers' formation community in the Philippines encompassing challenges and opportunities arising from which resulted on intercultural encounters and adaptation, specifically focusing on cultural interaction, challenges in religious life, and cultural adaptation.

In conclusion, the study reveals that interculturality plays a critical role in shaping both personal and communal development within the Piarist Fathers formation community. The balance between personal goals and community responsibilities emerges as a key factor in fostering spiritual growth and communal harmony. This study provides valuable insights for enhancing formation programs and addressing the unique challenges posed by cultural diversity in religious settings.

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