

Contemporary formation trends in Catholic Religious congregations in Vietnam

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Abstract

Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam are experiencing significant changes in their formation programs as they respond to rapid social, cultural, technological, and ecclesial developments. This study examines contemporary trends in the formation of candidates for consecrated life, focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and future directions facing religious institutes. Key challenges include the influence of globalization and digital culture, shifting family and social values, vocational discernment difficulties, psychological and emotional formation needs, and the demand for greater intercultural and pastoral competencies. At the same time, new opportunities have emerged through improved access to theological education, enhanced collaboration among congregations, greater awareness of holistic formation, and increased engagement with contemporary social realities. The study argues that effective formation must integrate human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions while remaining faithful to each congregation's charism and mission. It further highlights the importance of contextualized approaches that address the unique cultural and ecclesial circumstances of Vietnam. The paper proposes several future directions, including strengthened personal accompaniment, interdisciplinary formation, digital literacy, leadership development, and lifelong formation programs. By examining current trends and emerging needs, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam can form resilient, mission-oriented, and spiritually mature religious capable of serving the Church and society in an increasingly complex world.

Keywords: Catholic religious formation, consecrated life, religious congregations, Vietnam, vocation formation, holistic formation, digital culture, pastoral ministry

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1. Introduction

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth despite historical periods of political upheaval, social transformation, and religious restrictions. With more than seven million faithful, Vietnam possesses one of the largest Catholic populations in Southeast Asia and continues to experience a relatively vibrant culture of religious vocations compared to many Western countries. Religious congregations have long contributed significantly to evangelization, education, healthcare, social welfare, and pastoral ministry throughout the country. In recent decades, however, the context of religious formation has undergone profound changes due to globalization, technological advancement, urbanization, migration, economic development, and evolving cultural values. Young people discerning religious life today are members of a generation shaped by digital communication, social media, global networks, and increased access to higher education. These realities have transformed not only the vocational aspirations of candidates but also the methods and goals of religious formation (Francis, 2019).

The Catholic Church understands formation as a lifelong process of transformation through which candidates progressively conform themselves to Christ according to the charism and mission of their respective religious institutes (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CICLSAL], 2018). Formation encompasses spiritual growth, intellectual development, human maturity, pastoral competence, and missionary commitment. Consequently, contemporary formation programs must respond effectively to emerging social realities while remaining faithful to the Gospel and the traditions of consecrated life. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the importance of renewal and adaptation within religious institutes. The decree *Perfectae Caritatis* called religious communities to return to the spirit of their founders while adapting prudently to changing historical circumstances (Second Vatican Council, 1965). More recently, Pope Francis has highlighted the need for missionary discipleship, synodality, accompaniment, and pastoral creativity as essential dimensions of religious life in the contemporary world (Francis, 2013, 2020).

Within Vietnam, these developments have generated both opportunities and challenges for religious congregations. While vocational interest remains relatively strong, formation directors increasingly encounter candidates influenced by digital culture, individualism, consumerism, and rapidly changing social expectations. These realities require innovative approaches that integrate traditional spiritual values with contemporary educational and pastoral methodologies (Phan, 1943). This study examines the contemporary trends influencing the formation of candidates in Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the impact of digital technology, youth engagement, social justice initiatives, cultural adaptation, globalization, and synodality on religious formation. Understanding these trends is crucial for ensuring the continued vitality and effectiveness of consecrated life in Vietnam and throughout the wider Asian Church.

2. Literature review

2.1 Religious Formation and Consecrated Life

The Church views religious formation as a holistic and lifelong process aimed at fostering complete dedication to God and service to humanity. According to CICLSAL (2018), formation should cultivate a balanced integration of spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions. The objective is not merely professional preparation but transformation into a person capable of living authentically according to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Historically, religious formation emphasized discipline, community life, prayer, and doctrinal instruction. However, contemporary scholars argue that formation must also address psychological

maturity, emotional intelligence, intercultural competence, leadership development, and social engagement (O'Meara, 1999). The complexity of modern society demands that religious leaders possess skills that enable them to respond effectively to pastoral challenges and cultural diversity. According to Schneiders (2000), religious life represents a prophetic witness within society, calling individuals to radical discipleship and service. Therefore, formation must prepare candidates not only to preserve institutional traditions but also to engage creatively with contemporary realities. This perspective aligns with Pope Francis' vision of a missionary Church that reaches out to the peripheries and accompanies people in their lived experiences (Francis, 2013).

2.2 Consecrated Life in the Asian and Vietnamese Context

Religious life in Asia has developed within diverse cultural, religious, and social environments. Asian theologians emphasize the importance of contextual theology, intercultural dialogue, and inculturation in religious formation (Amaladoss, 2014). Formation programs must therefore equip candidates to engage respectfully with local cultures while remaining faithful to Catholic identity. Furthermore, Vietnam presents a distinctive context for religious formation. The Vietnamese Church has maintained strong devotional traditions, vibrant parish communities, and a culture that values family, education, and religious commitment. These characteristics contribute to the continued attraction of religious vocations despite social and political challenges. Research suggests that Vietnamese families play a critical role in nurturing vocational awareness. Religious practices within the family, participation in parish life, and respect for religious authority often influence young people's openness to consecrated life (CBCV, 2021). However, modernization, migration, and urbanization have begun to reshape traditional family structures and religious practices, creating new challenges for vocational discernment. Consequently, contemporary formation must address the tensions between traditional values and modern social realities. Candidates increasingly require guidance in navigating issues related to identity, technology, consumer culture, and intercultural engagement (Tran, 2023).

2.3 Digital Technology and Religious Formation

Digital technology has emerged as one of the most influential factors affecting contemporary religious formation. The proliferation of smartphones, social media platforms, artificial intelligence, and online learning systems has transformed communication, education, and spiritual practice worldwide (Campbell, 2021). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the Church's use of digital technologies for evangelization, catechesis, worship, and formation. Religious congregations adopted online retreats, virtual classrooms, livestreamed liturgies, and digital pastoral outreach programs to maintain continuity in ministry (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002). While digital technologies offer significant opportunities for evangelization and education, scholars also identify potential risks. Excessive digital engagement may contribute to isolation, distraction, superficial relationships, and diminished capacity for contemplation (Campbell, 2021). Consequently, formation programs must help candidates develop digital literacy, ethical discernment, and healthy technological habits. Recent studies emphasize that future religious leaders must be capable of engaging digital culture while preserving the contemplative and relational dimensions of religious life. Digital competence has therefore become an increasingly important component of formation curricula.

2.4 Youth Engagement and Vocational Discernment

The formation of young people remains a central concern for the Church. Pope Francis (2019) emphasizes that youth ministry and vocational discernment should prioritize accompaniment, dialogue, and authentic witness. Young adults are more likely to respond positively to religious vocations when they encounter communities characterized by joy, service, and genuine relationships. Research indicates that contemporary youth seek meaningful experiences, opportunities for service, and authentic spiritual guidance (Dean, 2010). Traditional authority structures alone are often insufficient to attract younger generations. Instead, personal accompaniment and participatory leadership models are increasingly important. Vietnamese religious congregations have responded by organizing youth camps, leadership programs, volunteer initiatives, music ministries, and vocational

discernment retreats (Le, 2023). These programs provide opportunities for young people to deepen their faith while exploring the possibility of religious life. Studies further suggest that mentoring relationships significantly influence vocational decision-making. Candidates who experience supportive relationships with religious mentors are more likely to persevere in vocational discernment and formation (Francis, 2019).

2.5 Social Justice and Mission-Oriented Formation

Contemporary religious formation increasingly incorporates social justice, ecological awareness, and community engagement. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes human dignity, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor as essential dimensions of Christian discipleship (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). Many religious congregations integrate social immersion experiences into formation programs. These experiences expose candidates to the realities of poverty, migration, environmental degradation, and social inequality, fostering empathy and pastoral sensitivity. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) further broadened the scope of formation by emphasizing ecological conversion and care for creation. Religious institutes increasingly encourage candidates to view environmental stewardship as an integral aspect of their vocation and ministry. Research demonstrates that social engagement strengthens vocational commitment by connecting theological reflection with practical service (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011). Consequently, mission-oriented formation has become an essential component of contemporary religious education.

2.6 Synodality and Collaborative Leadership

Research The concept of synodality has become a defining theme of contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. Synodality emphasizes listening, dialogue, participation, and shared discernment among all members of the People of God (International Theological Commission, 2018). Religious formation programs increasingly seek to cultivate collaborative leadership skills that enable candidates to work effectively with clergy, religious, and laypersons. This approach reflects Pope Francis' vision of a Church that journeys together in mutual accompaniment and discernment (Francis, 2021). Synodal leadership requires humility, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and openness to diverse perspectives. These competencies are particularly relevant in multicultural and rapidly changing societies. For Vietnamese religious congregations, synodality offers a framework for strengthening community participation, transparency, and shared responsibility in formation and ministry.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Church's framework of Integral Formation, which emphasizes the holistic development of candidates through four interrelated dimensions: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). These dimensions provide the conceptual lens through which contemporary formation trends are analyzed. Human formation seeks to foster emotional maturity, psychological well-being, interpersonal competence, and ethical responsibility. Spiritual formation focuses on deepening one's relationship with God through prayer, sacramental life, discernment, and fidelity to the evangelical counsels. Intellectual formation develops theological knowledge, critical thinking, and the capacity to engage contemporary issues from a faith perspective. Pastoral formation prepares candidates for effective ministry through practical experiences, leadership development, and service to the Church and society (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). The integration of these four dimensions reflects the Church's conviction that authentic religious formation must address the whole person. In the contemporary Vietnamese context, integral formation provides a useful framework for understanding how religious institutes respond to challenges arising from globalization, digitalization, cultural change, and evolving pastoral needs.

4. Methodology

Research Design - This study employed a qualitative documentary research design to examine contemporary trends influencing the formation of candidates in Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam. Documentary

research is particularly appropriate for studies seeking to understand ecclesial developments, religious practices, and institutional responses to social change because it enables systematic analysis of existing texts, reports, and scholarly literature (Bowen, 2009). The study utilized content analysis and thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to religious formation. Particular attention was given to issues concerning digital technology, youth engagement, social ministry, globalization, cultural adaptation, and synodality.

Sources of Data - Data were gathered from three major categories of documents:

- Ecclesiastical Documents: Vatican documents, Apostolic exhortations, Conciliar documents, Guidelines for religious formation
- Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, Books on consecrated life, Studies on religious formation.
- Contextual Documents: Reports from religious congregations, Pastoral letters, Publications concerning Catholicism in Vietnam, Formation manuals and educational materials

Data Analysis - This Documents were analyzed using thematic coding. Themes emerging from the literature were categorized according to the four dimensions of integral formation:

- Human Formation refers to the development of personal maturity, emotional and psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, ethical values, and the capacity for responsible community living.
- Spiritual Formation focuses on fostering a deep relationship with God through prayer, sacramental life, discernment, spiritual accompaniment, and commitment to the evangelical counsels.
- Intellectual Formation involves the development of theological knowledge, critical thinking skills, academic competence, and the ability to engage contemporary social, cultural, and ecclesial issues from a faith perspective.
- Pastoral Formation aims to prepare candidates for effective ministry through practical experience, leadership development, pastoral sensitivity, missionary commitment, and service to the Church and society.

This framework enabled a comprehensive evaluation of contemporary trends and their implications for candidate formation.

Ethical Considerations - This Since the study relied exclusively on published documents and publicly available materials, no direct human participation was involved. Nevertheless, academic integrity was maintained through proper citation, faithful representation of sources, and objective analysis.

5. Findings and Results

Analysis of the literature revealed six major trends shaping contemporary formation within Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam

5.1 Digital Transformation of Religious Formation

One of the most significant developments in contemporary religious formation is the integration of digital technology into educational, spiritual, and pastoral practices. The widespread use of digital platforms has transformed the manner in which candidates access theological resources, participate in online learning, and engage in evangelization. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many religious institutes adopted virtual classes, online retreats, and digital pastoral initiatives to ensure continuity in formation and ministry (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002). The literature suggests that digital technology offers opportunities for broader

access to theological education and facilitates communication within and beyond religious communities (Campbell, 2021). At the same time, concerns have emerged regarding excessive dependence on technology, which may contribute to reduced interpersonal interaction, fragmented attention, and diminished opportunities for silence and contemplation. Consequently, contemporary formation programs increasingly emphasize digital literacy and ethical engagement with technology as essential competencies for future religious leaders (Tran, 2023).

5.2 Increased Emphasis on Youth Accompaniment

A second trend concerns the increasing emphasis on youth engagement and vocational accompaniment. Contemporary young people often seek authenticity, meaningful relationships, and opportunities for active participation in ecclesial life (Francis, 2019). Religious congregations in Vietnam have responded by developing youth-oriented ministries, leadership programs, vocational camps, and service-learning initiatives that facilitate discernment and spiritual growth. Research indicates that vocational discernment is significantly influenced by personal accompaniment and the witness of committed religious communities (Dean, 2010). The findings suggest that effective vocation promotion depends less on institutional recruitment strategies and more on the capacity of religious communities to provide authentic models of consecrated life. In this regard, youth engagement serves not only as a pastoral strategy but also as a formative process that nurtures future vocations.

5.3 Expansion of Social and Pastoral Ministries

The study further revealed an increasing integration of social justice concerns into formation programs. Inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, many congregations encourage candidates to engage directly with marginalized communities through ministries related to education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and environmental stewardship (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). These experiences help candidates connect theological reflection with practical service, thereby fostering pastoral sensitivity and missionary commitment. Scholars argue that engagement with social realities contributes to the development of empathy, compassion, and a deeper understanding of the Church's mission among the poor and vulnerable (Dorr, 2012). In Vietnam, religious congregations continue to play an important role in addressing social needs while promoting human dignity and social solidarity.

5.4 Cultural Adaptation and Inculturation

Another significant finding concerns the growing importance of inculturation within religious formation. Vietnamese congregations increasingly seek to integrate Catholic spirituality with local cultural traditions and values. Such efforts include the incorporation of Vietnamese language, music, customs, and communal practices into formation programs and liturgical celebrations. Asian theologians emphasize that effective evangelization and formation require meaningful dialogue between faith and culture (Amaladoss, 2014). Within the Vietnamese context, inculturation strengthens candidates' ability to minister effectively within their cultural environment while maintaining fidelity to the universal Church. The findings indicate that cultural adaptation contributes to the relevance and sustainability of religious life in contemporary Vietnamese society.

5.5 Globalization and International Collaboration

Globalization has also emerged as a major influence on contemporary religious formation. Increased mobility, international partnerships, and access to global educational resources have expanded opportunities for collaboration among religious congregations. Vietnamese religious institutes increasingly participate in international formation programs, theological exchanges, and missionary initiatives (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011). Such collaborations provide candidates with broader perspectives on ecclesial life and mission while enhancing intercultural competencies. However, globalization also presents challenges related to cultural identity, consumerism, and the homogenization of values. Formation programs are therefore required to cultivate critical awareness and intercultural sensitivity to help candidates navigate these complexities (Amaladoss, 2014).

5.6 Synodality and Collaborative Leadership

The final theme emerging from the analysis is the growing emphasis on synodality and collaborative leadership. Recent ecclesial developments have highlighted the importance of listening, participation, discernment, and co-responsibility within the life of the Church (International Theological Commission, 2018). Formation programs increasingly seek to develop leadership models based on collaboration rather than hierarchical authority alone. Candidates are encouraged to cultivate communication skills, communal discernment, and openness to diverse perspectives. This approach reflects Pope Francis' vision of a synodal Church that journeys together in mission and dialogue (Francis, 2021). The findings suggest that synodal formation prepares candidates to engage more effectively with the realities of contemporary pastoral ministry.

6. Discussion

The findings reveal that contemporary religious formation in Vietnam is characterized by a dynamic interaction between continuity and change. While the essential goals of consecrated life remain rooted in the Gospel and the evangelical counsels, formation programs are increasingly adapting to contemporary social, cultural, and ecclesial realities. The integration of digital technology demonstrates how religious institutes are responding to the demands of a rapidly changing world. Digital tools have expanded opportunities for learning, communication, and evangelization; however, they also raise questions concerning human relationships, spiritual discipline, and contemplative practice (Campbell, 2021). Formation directors therefore face the challenge of promoting technological competence while preserving the reflective and communal dimensions of religious life.

Similarly, the emphasis on youth accompaniment reflects broader shifts in pastoral theology. Pope Francis (2019) argues that young people require accompaniment rather than merely instruction. The findings support this perspective, indicating that authentic witness, mentoring relationships, and participatory experiences are more effective in fostering vocational discernment than traditional recruitment strategies alone. This suggests a movement toward relational models of formation that prioritize dialogue, discernment, and personal growth. The increased emphasis on social justice and ecological responsibility reflects the influence of Catholic Social Teaching and contemporary papal teaching. Candidates are no longer formed solely for internal community life but are increasingly prepared for active engagement with social and environmental challenges (Francis, 2015). Such an approach aligns with the Church's mission of promoting human dignity and integral human development.

The findings also highlight the importance of inculturation within Vietnamese religious formation. Consistent with Asian theological perspectives, cultural adaptation enables candidates to integrate their faith with local traditions and social realities (Phan, 1943). This process strengthens both religious identity and pastoral effectiveness. Furthermore, globalization and synodality are reshaping understandings of leadership and mission. International collaboration broadens perspectives and enhances intercultural competence, while synodality promotes participatory leadership and shared responsibility (International Theological Commission, 2018). Together, these developments suggest that future religious leaders must be prepared to serve within increasingly diverse, interconnected, and collaborative ecclesial environments. Overall, the findings support the Church's understanding of integral formation as a holistic process encompassing human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). Contemporary formation programs that successfully integrate these dimensions are better positioned to prepare candidates for effective ministry in the twenty-first century.

Educational implication - As an education-focused study, the findings of this research provide several important implications for religious educators, formation directors, candidates, and educational institutions involved in Catholic formation programs.

Implications for Formation Practitioners and Educators - The findings suggest that formators and educators should adopt a holistic educational approach that integrates human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. Formation programs should move beyond purely academic instruction and incorporate mentoring,

accompaniment, reflective practice, psychological support, digital literacy education, and experiential learning opportunities. Formators are increasingly required to function not only as instructors but also as mentors, facilitators, and spiritual companions capable of responding to the developmental needs of contemporary candidates.

Implications for Students and Candidates - For candidates in religious formation, the findings emphasize the importance of active participation in their own formative journey. Formation should encourage self-reflection, emotional maturity, spiritual growth, intercultural competence, digital responsibility, and social engagement. Candidates who actively integrate these dimensions are better prepared to respond to the pastoral and missionary challenges of contemporary society.

Implications for Religious Schools and Formation Institutions - The findings indicate that religious institutes, seminaries, and Catholic educational institutions should develop curricula and formation programs that respond to contemporary realities while remaining faithful to ecclesial traditions. Educational policies should support digital competency, social immersion experiences, intercultural formation, synodal leadership development, and lifelong learning. Institutions should also establish systems of accompaniment, mentorship, and ongoing evaluation to ensure the holistic development of candidates.

Significance of the Findings for Catholic Education - This study contributes to Catholic educational research by demonstrating that contemporary religious formation requires an integrated and contextually responsive educational model. The findings affirm that effective formation in Vietnam depends on balancing fidelity to religious tradition with openness to technological innovation, cultural adaptation, social engagement, and collaborative leadership. Such an approach strengthens the capacity of religious formation programs to prepare future leaders for service in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Recommendation - Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the formation of candidates in Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam.

Strengthening digital formation. Formation programs should incorporate digital literacy, media ethics, and responsible technology use while encouraging healthy digital habits that support learning, prayer, and community life. Such preparation will enable future religious leaders to engage constructively with digital culture while maintaining the contemplative and relational dimensions essential to consecrated life (Campbell, 2021).

Enhancing human and psychological formation. Religious institutes should promote balanced human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral development through mentoring, spiritual accompaniment, psychological support, and reflective learning. Strengthening the human dimension of formation contributes significantly to the development of integrated and balanced religious leaders capable of responding to pastoral challenges with wisdom and compassion (O'Meara, 1999).

Expanding pastoral and social immersion. Increase pastoral and social engagement. Candidates should participate in structured pastoral ministries and community outreach that foster compassion, leadership, and commitment to the Church's mission. Congregations should therefore continue to promote ministries that address social inequalities and environmental concerns as integral components of candidate formation (Dorr, 2012).

Promoting inculturation and cultural competence. Religious institutes should encourage greater appreciation for Vietnamese cultural heritage within the formation process. Candidates should be guided to integrate local traditions, values, and expressions into their spiritual and pastoral lives while remaining faithful to the teachings of the universal Church. This approach strengthens both religious identity and pastoral effectiveness, enabling future religious leaders to engage more meaningfully with the communities they serve (Amaladoss, 2014).

Developing intercultural and global competencies. In response to the realities of globalization, formation programs should provide opportunities for intercultural learning and international collaboration. Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, language development, and exchange programs can enhance candidates'

understanding of the global Church and prepare them for ministry in increasingly multicultural contexts. These experiences foster openness, adaptability, and intercultural competence, qualities that are increasingly necessary in contemporary religious life and mission (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011).

Integrating synodal leadership formation. Another important priority is the incorporation of synodal principles into candidate formation. The contemporary Church increasingly emphasizes listening, participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Formation programs should therefore cultivate leadership models grounded in collaboration and communal discernment rather than exclusively hierarchical approaches. Candidates who develop these competencies will be better prepared to contribute to a synodal Church that values co-responsibility and active participation among all members of the People of God (Francis, 2021; International Theological Commission, 2018).

Promoting lifelong formation. Religious institutes should reaffirm the importance of ongoing formation beyond the period of initial preparation. Initial formation should be viewed as the foundation of a continuous process of spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and professional development. Ongoing education, theological renewal, leadership training, and opportunities for personal reflection are essential for enabling religious men and women to respond effectively to evolving pastoral realities throughout their lives. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and renewal, congregations can ensure that their members remain faithful to their charisms while responding creatively to the needs of the Church and society (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CICLSAL], 2018).

Adopting a holistic model of formation. Ultimately, the recommendations point toward the need for an integrated formation model that harmonizes spiritual, human, intellectual, pastoral, cultural, and technological dimensions. Such a holistic approach will better prepare candidates to address the opportunities and challenges of contemporary society while remaining faithful to the mission and values of consecrated life. This integrated vision can contribute significantly to the vitality, relevance, and sustainability of religious congregations in Vietnam in the years to come (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016).

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the contemporary trends shaping the formation of candidates in Catholic religious congregations in Vietnam within the context of rapid social, cultural, technological, and ecclesial transformation. The analysis revealed that digitalization, youth engagement, social and pastoral involvement, inculturation, globalization, and synodality have become significant influences on contemporary formation practices. These developments reflect the broader challenges and opportunities facing the Catholic Church as it seeks to prepare religious men and women for effective ministry in an increasingly interconnected and complex world. The findings demonstrate that while the fundamental purpose of religious formation remains rooted in the Gospel and the evangelical counsels, the methods and approaches employed by religious congregations are evolving in response to contemporary realities. Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for learning, communication, and evangelization, while also requiring greater attention to ethical discernment and spiritual balance (Campbell, 2021). Similarly, the emphasis on youth accompaniment highlights the importance of authentic relationships, mentorship, and participatory approaches in fostering vocational discernment and commitment (Francis, 2019).

The study further underscores the growing importance of social engagement and inculturation within religious formation. By integrating pastoral experiences with marginalized communities and promoting dialogue between faith and culture, religious congregations help candidates develop a deeper understanding of the Church's mission and a stronger capacity for service in diverse contexts (Dorr, 2012). At the same time, globalization and international collaboration have broadened opportunities for intercultural learning and missionary outreach, while the emergence of synodality has encouraged more collaborative and participatory models of leadership within religious communities (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011; International Theological Commission, 2018). Taken together, these trends affirm the Church's vision of integral formation, which seeks to foster the holistic development of

candidates through the integration of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). Effective formation in the contemporary Vietnamese context requires not only fidelity to the charism and traditions of religious institutes but also openness to innovation, cultural engagement, and ongoing renewal. Such a balance enables candidates to remain firmly rooted in their vocation while responding creatively and responsibly to the changing needs of the Church and society.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on consecrated life and religious formation in Asia by highlighting the specific realities and emerging priorities of Catholic congregations in Vietnam. Future research may further explore the lived experiences of formation directors and candidates through empirical studies, interviews, and case analyses of particular congregations. Such investigations would deepen understanding of how contemporary formation practices are implemented and how they continue to shape the future of consecrated life in Vietnam. Ultimately, the vitality and sustainability of religious life in Vietnam will depend on the ability of congregations to embrace a holistic and contextually responsive approach to formation. By integrating spiritual depth, pastoral commitment, cultural sensitivity, digital competence, and synodal leadership, Catholic religious congregations can continue to form men and women who are prepared to witness faithfully to the Gospel and contribute meaningfully to the mission of the Church in the twenty-first century (Francis, 2021; CICLSAL, 2018).

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