



Becoming an Assumption Sister

STAGES OF FORMATION



“What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

— *Mary Oliver*

The call to religious life is a gift that asks for a personal response. You take your “one wild and precious life” in your open hands and put it in the hands of God. But you don’t do that alone.

In the Assumption, we seek God together in our prayer and community life, values that accompany us when we’re sent out on mission. Our life is beautiful, but it’s not easy. It’s something we have to choose again and again -- every day, really. But before someone can choose it, she has to know it. That’s the work of the three stages of initial formation.



STEP 1

Postulancy

**“God has done so much for me:
I want to do something in return.”**

—St. Marie Eugénie Milleret



Who?

A **postulant** (from Latin: postulare, to ask) is someone who asks for a taste of consecrated life. In the Assumption, that “taste” is designed to give the postulant and the community a chance to discern together concerning her vocation to the Assumption.

Why?

Postulancy is an opportunity for a woman to pray about and share her thoughts and hopes, her fears and desires with someone who’s ready both to listen and to respond. Another way to put this is that postulancy gives a person time and space to sort things out, to pay attention to whatever Christ is asking from her, to see what she might “do in return” with her life.

How?

A postulant lives with one of our religious communities, taking part in the everyday life of prayer and time together that we live. She takes her turn in the kitchen and the garden, and participates in one or more of our ministries. She maintains complete control over her personal finances

and property. (So, for example, if you owned your own car, you’d continue to use and maintain it as you chose.)

What?

Postulancy is a kind of apprenticeship: a postulant studies and learns about many things, from prayer and Scripture to her own spiritual and psychological needs. These are all tools to help her “dig into” her discernment.

How long?

The Assumption recognizes that each person’s journey is unique. Some people will need as few as six months; others may take up to eighteen. However long it takes, it takes. Nobody is “on the fast track” (or the slow track) among us. The idea is that by the end of it all, the postulant will have the capacity to choose freely either to ask to enter the novitiate or to leave religious formation for something else.

And then?

If she wants to continue, she’ll write a letter to the Provincial and her Council explaining why she’d like to be admitted to the novitiate.



STEP 2

Novitiate

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue.”

– Rainer Maria Rilke



Who?

A **novice** is someone who's willing "to try to love *the questions themselves*." Deep questions of the heart like: "*Who am I to God and who is God to me?*" "*How can I give back or carry forward all that I've received?*" "*What does God want from me?*" Tough questions that often feel as if they're "written in a very foreign language." But a novice is someone who wants to learn that language, whatever the cost.

How?

Through patience. And listening. And risk-taking. And also through living and learning in a house set up for the purpose, a *novitiate*, with the help of the *mistress of novices* and the support of the other members of the community, whether other novices or other professed sisters. During this time, the novice depends on the community for her financial support as well (all her needs, including her health insurance, etc.). Her property is still completely her own, but she asks someone she trusts to look after it for her so that she doesn't have to. This would include a car – often the hardest thing to let go of!

How long?

Two years, each with a different purpose:

The first or canonical year is designated by the Church for all novices seeking to make vows. It's a time set apart from the ordinary hustle and bustle of apostolic life. The focus is on learning about prayer, Scripture, the Rule of Life (particularly the meaning of the vows), the congregation's past and present and yourself. You get a chance to go deeper into the contemplative aspect of life in the Assumption.

The second year is a time for trying things out – living with sisters in other communities and working with them in their ministries. It's a time when you begin to discover how contemplation informs our action and vice versa, and how that feels for you. (We call this experience "being en stage.")

And then?

If, after the two years are completed, both novice and novice mistress believe that she's ready to make temporary vows (valid for three years), she writes to the Provincial and her Council. They, in turn, write to the Superior General and her Council with their recommendation.



STEP 3

Temporary Vows (Juniorate)

**“The house of my soul is too small
for you to enter: make it more
spacious by your coming.”**

– St. Augustine

Who?

A **Sister in temporary vows (a junior)** is someone who longs to continue to enlarge the “house” of her soul. Throughout the novitiate, she’d already been remodeling – adding a room here, bumping out a porch there, laying on some new paint, planting new roses. When she began, she might have been tempted to think that her profession of vows would mark the day she’d be “done.” But as that day got closer and closer, she’d recognized two key things. She’d come to understand God as the Master Builder, whose plans are always much wider and more daring than hers. At the same time, however, she’d learned that the Builder welcomes and even seeks her cooperation. So the junior is someone who understands that her house will be built, bit by bit, by her living the vows. For an Assumption sister, this will mean living in the company of others who’ve made the same vows and who’ve been building with the Builder ever since.

How?

Juniors normally do several years of theology study after first vows; sometimes they study in another province, living with the Sisters there. In addition to being enriched academically, they experience firsthand the diversity and wealth of cultures that mark the Assumption. They can also be assigned to an apostolate of their province and participate fully in ministry. In whatever community they live, they help to build and execute the *local project* of the community, that is, the plan the sisters make each year to orient their life and work together. Because they

are still in initial formation, juniors can count on having someone to accompany them in their journey. They continue to own their property, but as with the novitiate, they ask someone else to manage it for them during this period. If they make a vow of poverty for life (in final profession), they dispose of their property as they see fit at that time.

How long?

First vows are made for three years. Normally, after those three years, if someone wants to continue, she will ask to renew them for another two.

And then?

By the time she’s renewed her vows once or even twice, a person knows her own mind and heart pretty well. She will either ask to make vows, “freely and forever,” as our *Rule of Life* says, or she’ll decide to leave. Even if she leaves, nothing of what she’s lived as a sister in the Assumption can be considered as wasted. Her experience will travel with her and inform her life as she seeks the path that’s right for her.

And if she stays, she will continue to build her religious life—and the house of her soul—on all that she’s been given, from God and from others. Those gifts cover not only the few years since she entered the Assumption, but really the whole of her “one wild and precious life.” Her religious life will give her the space to cherish those gifts and the desire to share them with those to whom she is sent.

**“The person who looks
for God at all times
finds joy everywhere.”**

*— St. Marie Eugénie Milleret
Founder of the Religious of the Assumption*

**Want to learn more?
Have questions?**

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