



Improving Vocational Accompaniment as a Means of Enhancing the Effectiveness of Initial Formation of Marist Brothers at Marist International Centre in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract: The objective of this study was to investigate ways to improve vocational accompaniment as a means to enhance the effectiveness of the initial formation of Marist Brothers at MIC in Nairobi, Kenya. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, targeting a population of 84 participants, comprising of 78 religious Brothers in initial formation and 6 Formators. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data from the 78 religious Brothers in initial formation, and semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data from 6 Formators. The research was grounded in Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning in a social context through modelling, imitation, and observation. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. The study's findings, with an average mean score of 4.05, revealed that vocational accompaniment can be improved through the practice of non-judgmental listening, patience and diplomacy, effective communication, ongoing formation of vocational accompaniers, the sacrament of reconciliation, a regular feedback mechanism, workshops on religious life, a convenient time, and a suitable method of accompaniment. The study recommends that the initial formation of accompaniers and their ongoing formation should be considered a priority.

Key Words: Vocational Accompaniment, Initial Formation, Enhances Effectiveness, Discernment, Guidance

1.1 Background of the Study

From the spiritual and pastoral standpoint, accompaniment is walking beside the youth as they develop their human and Christian identities, acknowledging them as the agents and protagonists of their lives without disregarding the Holy Spirit. The word accompaniment has a special meaning for helping individuals understand God's will in their spiritual lives. The Church uses it as a tool and service to encourage genuine discipleship.

Guy Lespinay points out that the person in charge of formation journeys with the candidates to guide them and not to judge them. The individual contributes significantly to the work of grace. The person

makes it possible to discern well the feelings and motivations that move the candidate¹. Vocational accompaniment (VA) is a journey because the formator assists the individual in navigating the means for the religious to follow Christ exclusively. In this journey, the person discerns God's will in the candidate's life.

The process of journeying and mentoring others (young candidates) to answer the call God has given them is known as accompaniment. Accompaniment plays a crucial role in the development of a religious community. It serves as the primary method for guiding an individual through the gradual processes of evaluation, discernment, and growth through integration. This approach supports people in "becoming themselves" by helping them understand and embrace their true identities. As a result, it is critical to have someone with whom we can communicate, who will listen to the young Brothers throughout their dark and bright moments, and who can assist them in determining and clarifying the course they should follow in life.

According to the Gospel of Luke 24:13-35, Jesus traveled with two of His disciples to Emmaus. He became aware that they were arguing and chatting about Him. When he enquired about their conversation, they were discussing "the events that occurred to Jesus Christ, the prophet, who was powerful before God and everyone else in both speech and actions."² The disciples on the road to Emmaus talked about how the rulers and the chief priests took Jesus to be crucified. The two disciples were profoundly impacted by this accompaniment when Jesus revealed that it was essential for the Messiah to go through these trials to ascend into his grandeur. With the happy news that Jesus had risen, they swiftly returned to Jerusalem after recognizing him while breaking the bread. Since VA improves the lives of the young religious, it is quite important to find out its effectiveness and the impact it has on the initial formation of the Marist Brothers.

Adam Skreczko, in his journal, discussed the pastoral care of vocations and personal identity in Poland. He points out that in Europe, the church has been seeking appropriate methods, means, and formation strategies to help young people recognize their vocation³. Adam argues that although God is the one who calls, the person who responds to this call agrees to undergo ongoing, long-term formation. He therefore mentioned that personal accompaniment plays an important role in the person's formation because no one is capable of progressing towards human and spiritual maturity alone. Adams attempted to show how pastoral care that is given to the young people through vocational accompaniment (VA) can help in the development of a person's identity. He focused on the role that VA plays in the life of young people, such as helping them to seek a life project, develop a relationship with God, and personal transformation.

Pope Saint John Paul II, in his early years of priesthood, discovered a charism of accompaniment when he served as a University Chaplain at Krokow. He routinely invited youth to join him at weekend celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. These young people gradually formed an informal community where they shared their lives with the would-be Pope. He named this group his 'accompaniment', and these young men and women became his lifelong friends.⁴ It was from this group that the Pope created World Youth Day. When the future Pope realized that he accompanied a small group in the University, the

¹Cf GUY LESPINAY, *Vocation, and Their Formation Today: Formation in the Religious Life, Call Discernment, Adaptation* (New York: Mediaspaul 2018), 62.

² COLACRAI ANGELO, *et al*, *The New African Bible*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2011), Luke 24:13-35.

³ ADAM SKRECZKO, "Pastoral Care of Vocational and Pastoral Identity" 20, 1 (2021), 150.

⁴ Cf. KARANJA KAMAU, REMIGIUS IKPE AND DANIEL KITONGA, "Young People and Discernment of Vocations According to the Teachings of Saint John Paul II," *The Person and the Challenges* 11,2 (2020): 95

dream and vision to accompany the youth of the whole world came into existence. About two hundred and fifty young people converged around John Paul II in 1985 in Rome. The presence of about two hundred and fifty young people who came together in 1985 is a good indicator that they could take responsibility. This was the first celebration of World Youth Day where the Pope had group accompaniment with the youth.

There is little explicit mention of the necessity of one-on-one vocational accompaniment (VA) in the formation process in the early publications that followed the Vatican II council.⁵ Rather, there is a growing focus on the development of the individual as a whole, including their human, Christian, and professional elements. It has been observed that a lot of emphasis has been laid on psychological assessment, spiritual direction, guidance, and counseling. Group accompaniment has sometimes been a common practice in religious formation communities. There has been little emphasis on one-on-one VA. This indicates that there has been a low level of commitment to one-on-one accompaniment. The researcher, therefore, sees a need to strengthen VA and then find out how it can be improved so that it enhances the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

In addition, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke in the United States of America wrote an essay in an attempt to explain the dramatic decline in Catholic vocations and revival in North America and the majority of Western Europe. It was revealed that the Roman Catholic religious vocation has been rapidly declining for the past thirty years. "In 1965, for instance, the United States of America (USA) had 48,046 seminarians, 12,255 Brothers, and 181,421 Nuns".⁶ During that year, 4,337 religious, mostly women, quit Religious Life. A common reason cited for the decline in religious affiliation is the Church hierarchy's reluctance to accommodate new groups of Catholics who resist the traditional sacrifices required for priests and religious figures. The study gives statistics of the decline of the number of vocations into religious life in the USA and in Western Europe, but ignores the increase in vocations in Asia and Africa. The study also does not discuss the positive impact that vocational accompaniment (VA) has, and how it could be improved to enhance its effectiveness in the initial formation.

In Asia, John Hazelman conducted a study on the significant factors of vocational accompaniment (VA). The main objective of the study was to determine the significant factors of personal VA that have influenced discernment and growth as perceived by graduates and accompaniers of Marist Asia Pacific Centre (MAPAC). In his study, the focus was on the factors that influence personal VA, such as goals and benefits of personal VA techniques and methods, the role of accompaniers, and the relationship between personal VA and spiritual direction. The target population included 38 religious brothers in initial formation and 10 formators. The study employed a qualitative method of data collection using questionnaires. The result also indicated that acquiring interpersonal skills had a more positive influence than applying accompaniment techniques and methods⁷. Furthermore, the language of accompaniment was a barrier for some Brothers in expressing themselves during accompaniment sessions. The language used in the accompaniment session raises serious concerns because communication cannot go through if the accompanier and the one being accompanied do not understand each other. Hazelman focused on the significant factors of accompaniment that influence discernment and growth.

⁵BRENDA DOLPHIN, "The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation," (n.d) http://augustinians.net/uploads/downloads/formation/dolphin_en.pdf," accessed 08/10/2024.

⁶ RODNEY STARK & ROGER FINKE, "Catholic Religious Vocation: Decline and Revival," *Review of Religious Research*, 42,2 (2000): 125-128

⁷ JOHN HAZELMAN, *Significant Factors of VA that Influence Discernment and Growth as Perceived by Graduates and Accompaniers of Marist Asia Pacific Centre* (Ma Thesis, De La Sale University, Asia, 2007), 76-84.

Vitus Osuji carried out a study in Nigeria about the impact of motivation, religiosity, and intrapersonal conflict on consistency in religious brotherhood vocation. The aim of the study was “to explain from the psychological perspective, the noticed inconsistency in religious brotherhood vocation”. Osuji used the sample size of 17 aspirants who had applied to join a male congregation in Nigeria. He equally used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data. The study revealed that young men who join religious life are extrinsically motivated and have the utilitarian type of religiosity⁸. Osuji later further points out that since the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962 and 1965), exit from religious life has been frequent and steady due to new policies introduced in the church. According to Osuji, there is an inconsistency in the religious brotherhood vocation, with a frequent and steady rate of exit. The inconsistency could be a clear indicator that the candidates have low Christian values. Inconsistency is a significant issue that requires attention. VA should be improved so that it helps them to be consistent in their religious life.

Justus Musya published a book on the role of the church in using technology as a practical guide in mentoring youth programs in Kenya. In the first chapter of his book, Musya emphasizes the importance of mentoring youth. He argues that mentoring is very crucial for the spiritual and personal development of young people⁹. According to Musya, when the church plays its role in mentoring young people, this activity can help the youth to receive support, guidance, and encouragement as they navigate the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood. While Musya considers mentoring an activity that provides support, guidance, and encouragement to young people, Chiroma points out that mentoring is beneficial to an organization because it bridges the leadership gap and also develops other leaders¹⁰. There are many parallels between mentorship and VA. Youths are leaders of tomorrow who need accompaniment or mentorship so that they can become the best leaders in the future. When VA does what it is meant to do, such as supporting the young person, providing guidance, and encouragement to the young person, it fosters a good relationship among the people and with God.

Following the Marist *Constitutions and Statutes* 47.1, during the initial stage, the Provincial Superior and the Formators discuss with each temporarily professed Brother to determine his future ministry and formation path.¹¹ This means that the Provincial Superior and the Formators carry out vocational accompaniment (VA) with the candidates in the initial formation so that they can discern their vocation. Accompaniment should help them have a deeper meaning in their religious consecration, prepare them for active involvement in the Marist mission, and lead them to decide whether to commit themselves perpetually to Christ through the evangelical counsels. Therefore, there is a need to find out ways to improve VA so that it enhances the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers.

It has been noted and acknowledged that a lot of literature has been written about the vocational accompaniment (VA) of young religious at the global, continental, and local levels. While some of the studies, as mentioned earlier, explain how VA improves lives, develops the person's identity, improves discernment and decision making, gives guidance, support, and encouragement, and help young religious

⁸ VITUS OSUJI, “Impact of Motivation, Religiosity and Intrapersonal Conflict on Consistency in Religious Brotherhood Vocation in Africa,” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 8,10 (2018): 51.

⁹ JUSTUS MUSYA, *The Role of the Church in Using Technology: A Practical Guide in Mentoring Youth Programs* (Nairobi: The Kairos Book Publisher, 2023), 5.

¹⁰ NATHAN CHIROMA, *Mentoring: A Sustainable Means for Developing Young Leaders for the Church in Africa* (Stellenbosch University, South Africa: Master's Thesis, 2008), 17.

¹¹ Cf. The Marist Brothers of the Schools, *The Constitution and Statutes* (Rome: Institute of the Marist Brothers, 202), 47.1.

to have a deeper meaning in their religious consecration, other studies show that lack of VA leads to religious inconsistency, decline in religious vocation, and lack of motivation. None of these studies has tackled ways of improving VA. It is on this note that the researcher wants to find out ways of improving VA so that it enhances the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya, appears to have been ineffective. The effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi depends heavily on vocational accompaniment (VA). However, challenges such as inadequate accompaniment, lack of structured guidance, and external societal pressures affect the ability of young Brothers to fully embrace their vocation. Many Brothers who are in initial formation complain that they do not feel supported in their spiritual, emotional, and community integration journey. Some of them feel that they are not adequately listened to. While others even quit their vocation despite being accompanied for four years in the Marist International Centre (MIC). To improve this, at MIC, other formation programs must strengthen VA frameworks, ensure that qualified formators are available, and integrate holistic pastoral care to support young Brothers emotionally and spiritually. If these issues remain unaddressed, the retention rate of young Brothers may decline, leading to a weakened religious community and a shortage of committed Marist Brothers in Kenya and beyond. This study, therefore, sought to establish ways in which vocational accompaniment (VA) can be improved to enhance its effectiveness in the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.3 Research Objective

The study aims to establish ways in which vocational accompaniment can be improved to enhance the effectiveness of the initial formation of Marist Brothers at the Marist International Centre, Nairobi, Kenya.

1.4 The Significance of the Study

The findings will assist formators in the postulancy and novitiate to make their accompaniment more effective. The findings will also assist Psychotherapists, Spiritual Directors, Counselors, and Mentors in acquiring knowledge on how to improve the sessions with their clients. This research will be significant because it assists the accompanier and their candidates to become aware of the immeasurable value of VA. In addition, the findings will help to promote a positive attitude towards VA for candidates undergoing religious formation. Furthermore, the findings of this study will also help the candidates in both priestly and religious life to make informed choices. It will provide valid information about the vocation to the consecrated life, and therefore, candidates will be enlightened to make informed decisions.

1.5 Literature Review on Improving Vocational Accompaniment.

In the USA, Campbell and Carani pointed out that fostering a space of patient listening improves VA.¹² The foremost duty of the accompanier is to provide the one he or she accompanies with a presence of patient listening. Campbell and Carani further explain that the practice of listening requires humility, patience, readiness to understand, and readiness to formulate answers in a new way. When vocational accompaniers relate to the ones they accompany with patience, love, respect, non-judgmental and

¹² COLLEEN CAMPBELL and CARANI THOMAS. *The Art of Accompaniment: Theological, Spiritual, and Practical Elements of Building a More Relational Church* (Washington Dc: Catholic Apostolate Centre, 2019), 18.

fidelity, then the space of patient listening is created, and this makes listening transformative. It also reflects the way God interacts with humanity.

Campbell and Carani's thoughts about fostering a space of listening aligned with the thoughts of Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, who points out that listening is one of the core skills of counselling, in which the mentor or counsellor has to practice non-judgmental listening. This helps the accompanier to gain a greater understanding and awareness of how the one he/she accompanies feels about a particular situation. Okpalaenwe further points out qualities of a good listener, such as respect, genuine interest, empathy, and silence.¹³

As far as the Order of Saint Augustine is concerned, VA can be improved when the formator plays his/her role well, by accompanying the candidate patiently and with diplomacy. This enables the formator to probe more deeply into areas of life that bring the candidate up for discussion. By this, the formator creates a conducive atmosphere where there is trust and safety.¹⁴ This method of improving VA, according to the Order of Saint Augustine, is similar to the method pointed out by Campbell and Carani. They argue that an accompanier should accompany young religious with patience, love, respect, and be non-judgmental.

Communication is very important in all aspects of human life. It bridges the gap between communities and promotes human interaction. In Indonesia, Widia Ningsih researched on communication and religious mission problems. The research aimed to identify and analyse communication problems faced in religious missions and establish recommendations to improve communication effectiveness in the religious context¹⁵. Furthermore, the purpose of the research was also to explore how a more inclusive and adaptive communication approach contributes to bridging cultural differences and thus reducing problems that surface in religious missions. Ningsih used a qualitative descriptive method in the study. The study also used primary and secondary data obtained from library research. The data collection technique included observation, interviews, and research. The research revealed that "the use of language that does not match the audience's background can create misunderstanding and make the message difficult to receive". Also, the monological approach of conveying a message is less effective in communication.

While Ningsih emphasises an inclusive and adaptive communication approach which can improve communication between the accompanier and the one being accompanied, Campbell and Carani suggested that the accompanier should pay more attention to the influence of education, social media, and technology, which give young religious people several choices in life other than religious vocation. The current researcher, therefore, deduces that improvement in communication by using the language that is common to the accompanier and the young brother can improve VA sessions. In addition, the respect for and openness to cultural differences can also improve VA. When the young brother feels that his culture is accepted by the accompanier, he feels at home and thus he can open up and freely share his concerns. One-to-one method can also improve VA than the use of technology such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

¹³ ELIZABETH OKPALAENWE, *Psychological Counselling for Africa: Handbook on Psychotherapy and Cultural Counselling in African Contexts* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2020), 291-292.

¹⁴The Order of Saint Augustine, *The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation*, 4.

http://www.augustinians.net/uploads/downloads/formation/dolphin_en.pdf. accessed May 2025.

¹⁵ WIDIA NINGSIH "Communication and Religious Mission Problems" *Islamic Journal* 1,1 (2024): 11.

In Zimbabwe, Zishiri and Marambanyika, conducted research on the role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting the holistic development of students in higher education. The study revealed that spiritual accompaniment faces challenges because Personnel in chaplaincy departments have been involved in the abuse of power. Students who seek spiritual accompaniment become discouraged when spiritual accompaniers take advantage of their trust, especially when students share about issues concerning their relationships. In addition, students who seek spiritual accompaniment abuse the essence of it when they use it to try to cover up their immoral behavior. The research revealed that some spiritual accompaniers in the chaplaincy department are not up to the task because they lack specialized training.¹⁶ The training of accompaniers improves VA as they learn new skills in carrying out the noble task entrusted to them.

Neglect of ongoing formation is one of the challenges of VA. In Nigeria, Edwin Omorogbe carried out a study on the formation of formators. The study aimed to examine the formation of those responsible for the formation of candidates to priesthood. This was because he observed that seminarians who were faithful to the church's teachings became soothsayers after their ordination, whereby they attempted to prophesy. He also observed that priests trained to form people in faith were instead deforming the faith of people.¹⁷ According to Omorogbe, these limitations found in the priest were indicators that their formation was never effective in the seminary. He identified two ways of the ongoing formation of a formator. These included practical knowledge that is acquired from years of experience and formal programs for the formator. Omorogbe pointed out that the final goal syndrome and lack of mandatory ongoing formation of formators are obstacles to the formation of formators.¹⁸

From the two research studies carried out by Christopher Zisheri, Guide Marambanyika, and Edwin Omorogbe, respectively, their concern is about the limitations that accompaniers have due to a lack of training and a lack of ongoing formation that enhances effectiveness in VA. These two studies suggest that the formation of formators who carry out VA should be a priority before they are appointed to the formation houses. The studies also suggest that those who have served as vocational accompaniers should go for mandatory ongoing formation so that they can renew their experiences and skills in accompaniment. Formation of formators and ongoing formation can improve accompaniment because new skills are learnt, and that can improve the effectiveness of initial formation. Although these two studies focus on the limitations concerning the formation of formators, neither of them talks about the setbacks that may arise from the young brother, such as a lack of willingness to come for accompaniment, a lack of commitment, spiritual dryness, and a lack of trust.

At the local level, Mwangi Charles Maina carried out a study in Nairobi, Kenya, about the challenges of ministering to the youth in the Presbyterian church of East Africa in Langata Parish. He used the mixed research method and sampled sixty-three respondents from whom he collected data. The study revealed that a lack of adequate training for those handling youths, conservativeness,¹⁹ lack of adequate funding, youth perception of adults, issues of youths not well captured, and adults' perception of youths are some of the challenges facing accompaniment of youths in the Presbyterian church of East Africa, Langata

¹⁶ Cf. ZISHIRE AND MARAMBANYIKA, "Role of Spiritual Accompaniment in Promoting the Holistic Development of Students in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: Qualitative Analysis." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8, 1 (2024), 83.

¹⁷Cf. EDWIN OMOROGBE, "Formation to the Priesthood: Forming the Formators," *Ekpoma Review* (2021):194.

¹⁸Cf. OMOROGBE, "Formation to the Priesthood: Forming the Formators," 196.

¹⁹Cf. MAINA MWANGI, *Challenges of Ministering to Youths: A Case Study of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Langata Parish, Nairobi County* (PhD diss, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, 2015), 112.

Parish in Nairobi.²⁰ The study suggests that accompaniers should be adequately trained for VA. This will improve VA.

Several studies have been carried out on how Vocational accompaniment (VA) can be improved. The current study is different from the previous studies in terms of location and context. The study by Campbell and Carani was carried out in the USA, which pointed out that patient listening improves VA. In Indonesia, Widia Ningsih argues that effective communication bridges the cultural difference and improves VA. Also, Zishiri and Marambanyika in Zimbabwe suggested that the training of accompaniers improves VA. Similarly, in Nigeria, Edwin Omorogbe pointed out that the final goal syndrome and lack of mandatory ongoing formation of formators are obstacles to the formation of formators, which directly affect VA of seminarians. Most of the studies were done outside Kenya. Therefore, the focus of this study is on ways to improve VA in the Marist International Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. Furthermore, the context of the study by Elizabeth Ngozi is on counselling, while the study by Zishiri and Marambanyika focuses on the schools. Also, the study by Edwin Ororogbe focuses on the formation of future priests. The current study focuses on the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the social learning theory of Albert Bandura. Bandura's social learning theory points out that learning takes place through modelling and observation. The Marist brothers, who are in the initial stage, learn from their formators by observing what they do and then practicing what they observe. They learn how to listen without being judgmental, being patient, giving regular feedback, and communicate effectively.

1.7 Methodology

A convergent parallel design was used in this study, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed independently. The convergent parallel design is beneficial because it provides a comprehensive approach by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, enabling a deeper understanding of the research problem. The study includes 73 Marist Brothers using the census sampling method. Data was collected using questionnaires and an interview guide from 67 brothers in the initial formation and 6 formators, respectively. The descriptive and thematic analysis methods were used for quantitative and qualitative data from questionnaires and interview guides, respectively. The study guaranteed participant safety, upheld confidentiality and privacy, and complied with ethical standards for voluntary participation. Permission was obtained from the community superior of Marist International Centre (MIC) before the researcher embarked on data collection. The responders were not paid for revealing information. By using codes, anonymity was protected and confidentiality was upheld. Respondents were given anonymity throughout and after completing the questionnaire, and confidentiality was assured that no participant's name was revealed. The results of the investigation were presented truthfully and accurately.

1.8 Study Findings

To achieve the research objective, data were collected from the candidates using the Likert scale questionnaires, while data were collected from the formators using the interview guide. Ten statements were used to collect data from Brothers in initial formation, while one open-ended question was used to collect data from the formators. Tables 1 illustrate the results of the study. Respondents were asked to tick their opinion on the Likert scale using the following score: SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, SW = Somewhat Agree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

²⁰Cf. MWANGI, *Challenges of Ministering to Youths*, 113.

Table 1. How can Vocational Accompaniment be Improved to Enhance the Effectiveness of the Initial Formation of Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya (n=67)

S.N	Statements	SD	D	Sw.A	A	SA	M	Std
1	The practice of non-judgmental listening can improve vocational accompaniment and enhance effectiveness in initial formation	2 3.0%	1 1.5%	4 6.0%	30 44.8%	30 44.8%	4.27	.880
2	Patience and diplomacy improve vocational accompaniment	3 4.5%	2 3.0%	5 7.5%	31 46.3%	26 38.8%	4.12	.993
3	Effective communication improves vocational accompaniment	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 6.0%	26 38.8%	37 55.2%	4.49	.612
4	Ongoing formation of vocational accompaniers improves vocational accompaniment	1 1.5%	7 10.4%	29 43.3%	0 0.0%	30 44.8%	4.30	.779
5	One-on-one accompaniment can improve vocational accompaniment than group accompaniment	0 0.0%	4 6.0%	4 6.0%	32 47.8%	27 40.3%	4.22	.813
6	The sacrament of reconciliation can improve vocational accompaniment	3 4.4%	5 7.5%	17 25.4%	24 35.8%	18 26.9%	3.73	1.081
7	A regular feedback mechanism should be implemented.	1 1.6%	0 0.0%	9 13.4%	34 50.7%	23 34.3%	4.16	.771
8	Workshops about religious life can improve accompaniment	1 1.5%	4 6.0%	8 11.9%	36 53.7%	18 26.9%	3.99	.879
9	The time for vocational accompaniment is convenient for me	4 6.0%	6 9.0%	12 17.9%	35 52.2%	10 14.9%	3.61	1.044
10	The method of vocational accompaniment is appropriate	3 4.5%	5 7.5%	16 23.9%	34 50.7%	9 13.4%	3.61	.969
Average							4.05	.882

Key: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, Sw.A= Somewhat Agree, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, M= Mean, Std= Standard Deviation

Source: Field data, 2025

Responding to the statement, whether the practice of non-judgmental listening can improve vocational accompaniment (VA) and enhance effectiveness in initial formation, 44.8% strongly agreed, 44.8% agreed, while 6.0% somewhat agreed. However, 3.0% strongly disagreed, while 1.5% disagreed. The mean score was 4.27, and the standard deviation of .880 was obtained. This implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the practice of non-judgmental listening can improve the VA.

With regards to whether patience and diplomacy improve vocational accompaniment (VA), 46.3% agreed, 38.8% strongly agreed, while 7.5% somewhat agreed. However, 4.5% strongly disagreed, while 3.0% disagreed. The mean score was 4.12. The standard deviation of .993 was obtained. This indicates that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that patience and diplomacy improve VA.

Concerning the statement that effective communication improves vocational accompaniment (VA), 55.2% strongly agreed, 38.8% agreed, and the remaining 6.0% somewhat agreed. The mean score was 4.49, and the standard deviation of .612 was obtained. This means that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that effective communication improves VA.

Investigating whether the ongoing formation of vocational companions improves vocational accompaniment (VA), 44.8% strongly agreed, while 43.3% somewhat agreed. However, 10.4% disagreed, while 1.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 4.30, with a standard deviation of .779. This indicates that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the ongoing formation of vocational companions improves VA.

Finding out if one-on-one accompaniment can improve vocational accompaniment (VA) than group accompaniment, 47.8% agreed, 40.3% strongly agreed, and 6.0% somewhat agreed. On the contrary, 6.0% disagreed. The mean score was 4.22, and the standard deviation of .813 was obtained. This implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that one-on-one accompaniment can improve VA.

When asked if the sacrament of reconciliation can improve vocational accompaniment (VA), 35.8% agreed, 26.9% strongly agreed, 25.4% somewhat agreed, 7.5% disagreed, and 4.4% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.73, while the standard deviation was 1.081. This implies that the majority of the respondents moderately agreed that the sacrament of reconciliation improves VA.

The candidates were asked if a regular feedback mechanism should be implemented to allow brothers in the initial formation to share their experiences and suggest ways to improve vocational accompaniment (VA), 50.7% agreed, 34.3% strongly agreed, and 13.4% somewhat agreed. However, 1.6% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 4.16, and the standard deviation was .771. This implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that a regular feedback mechanism should be implemented to allow brothers in initial formation to share their experiences.

On the statement on whether workshops about religious life can improve accompaniment, on the one hand, 53.7% agreed, 26.9% strongly agreed, while 11.9% somewhat agreed. On the other hand, 6.0% disagreed, while 1.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.99, and the standard deviation obtained was .879. This means that the majority of the respondents moderately agreed that workshops about religious life can improve VA.

About the question of whether the time for vocational accompaniment (VA) is convenient for the candidates, 52.2% agreed, 17.9% somewhat agreed, and 14.9% strongly agreed. Furthermore, 9.0% disagreed, while 6.0% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 6.61, while the standard deviation was 1.044. This implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the time for VA is convenient for candidates.

The majority agreed 50.7%, 23.9% somewhat agreed, while 13.4% strongly agreed that the method of vocational accompaniment (VA) is appropriate. The remaining 7.5% disagreed, while 4.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.61, and the standard deviation of .969 was obtained. This signifies that the majority of the respondents moderately agreed that the method of VA is appropriate, which improves VA.

Furthermore, the participants on the interview guide were asked to explain how vocational accompaniment (VA) can be improved so that it enhances the effectiveness of initial formation. The majority of the participants explained that there is a need for thorough training of the formators at MIC and that VA needs to consider the signs of time. Considering the signs of the times means being fully aware of the needs and aspirations of the present young generation. VA should be open, confidential, and friendly. This creates a conducive atmosphere where young people can share. Formators should also practice empathetic listening.

Discussion of the Findings

The statements concerning how vocational accompaniment (VA) can be improved to enhance the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya, had an average mean score of 4.05. This implies that the majority of respondents agreed that non-judgmental listening, patience, diplomacy, effective communication, ongoing formation of the accompanier, regular feedback mechanisms, workshops on religious life, and the time and method of accompaniment can improve VA and enhance the effectiveness of initial formation for Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

The researcher observed that while the candidates demonstrate this level of agreement with the statements, the formators are in support when they suggested in the interview guide that there is a need for thorough training of the formators at Marist International Centre (MIC), formators should practice patience, empathetic listening, and that vocational accompaniment (VA) should be open, confidential, and friendly. These findings concur with the thoughts of Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, who pointed out that listening is one of the core skills of counselling, in which the mentor or counsellor has to practice non-judgmental listening. This can improve VA sessions and thus enhance the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers. Despite this support from the formators, one of them explained that there is a need for the induction of Brothers in initial formation so that they perceive accompaniment not as a forum to find faults but as a process to help them grow in their vocation. He suggested that Brothers in initial formation should have a journal where they can write their daily experiences and share freely and openly. There is also a need to convince them that accompaniment is for their good. He observed that some Brothers in initial formation are forced to go for accompaniment. That is not a good sign, and so their formation cannot be effective.

The literature review also supports the findings of the data collection because, according to Edwin Omorogbe, who carried out a study on the formation of formators, the ongoing formation of formators can improve vocational accompaniment (VA) and enhance its effectiveness in initial formation²¹. Zishiri and Marambanyika also researched the role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting the holistic development of students in higher education. They recommended that vocational accompaniers should be trained properly.²²

In response to the findings, Widia Ningsih researched communication and religious mission problems.²³ He emphasized that the use of language that does not match the audience's background can create misunderstanding and make the message difficult for the audience to receive. Thus, effective communication requires that the accompanier and the one being accompanied should understand each

²¹ OMOROGBE, "Formation to the Priesthood: Forming the Formators," 196.

²² Cf. ZISHIRE AND MARAMBANYIKA, "Role of Spiritual Accompaniment in Promoting the Holistic Development of Students in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: Qualitative Analysis.", 83

²³ NINGSIH, "Communication and Religious Mission Problems", 15.

other through a common language. In addition, the findings concur with the Order of Saint Augustine, which pointed out that vocational accompaniment (VA) can be improved when the formator plays his/her role well, by accompanying the candidate patiently and with diplomacy.²⁴ Campbell and Carani also support these findings when they pointed out that fostering a space of patient listening improves VA.²⁵

Concerning statements regarding whether the time and method of vocational accompaniment (VA) are convenient and appropriate, respectively, the researcher does not agree with the respondents, where 52.2% agreed that the time is convenient, while 50.7% also agreed that the method is convenient. According to the researcher, some of the accompaniment sessions are done late in the evening when the candidates are tired after heavy academic work during the day. In addition, the method of VA varies from one accompanier to another, while some have a longer duration and some have a shorter one. Some candidates are not regular, and there is little or no follow-up.

The findings of the study align with the work of scholars and church authorities like the Order of Saint Augustin. This implies that there is credibility and shows that the local experience of vocational accompaniment (VA) in Marist International Centre (MIC) reflects broader concerns and religious formation. Since some of the Brothers in initial formation see VA as a fault-finding mission, it suggests that VA should be rebranded and introduced clearly as a growth-oriented, supportive, and formative process. Concerning the researcher's dissatisfaction about the timing and method of VA sessions, this implies that there is a need to review the structure and scheduling of accompaniment. The findings also imply that MIC should prioritize the training of accompaniers.

1.9 Conclusion

The study affirms that patience, diplomacy, effective communication, non-judgmental listening, and ongoing formation of accompaniers are important elements that significantly enhance the effectiveness of the initial formation of the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, Kenya. Although most respondents perceived that the timing and method of vocational accompaniment (VA) are appropriate, the feedback from the formators and the researcher's observation suggest that the structure of VA and the timing should be reviewed. The researcher emphasizes that VA should be a supportive, confidential, and empathetic process, focusing mainly on growth rather than fault-finding. The study emphasizes that proper training of formators and consideration of the needs of younger Marist Brothers are essential for making VA more impactful and meaningful in the formation journey.

1.10 Recommendations

To give formators professional accompanying skills, including empathy, non-judgmental listening, good communication, and knowledge of generational dynamics, the Marist Internal Centre should offer ongoing, structured training programs;

Vocational accompaniment should be rebranded and communicated to brothers in initial formation as a formative and supportive process rather than a fault-finding exercise. This will help reduce fear, resistance, and misunderstandings; and

²⁴ THE ORDER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE, *The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation*, 4.

²⁵ COLLEEN CAMPBELL and CARANI THOMAS. *The Art of Accompaniment*, 18.

There should be regular and anonymous feedback systems to give room for the Marist Brothers in initial formation to express their views and suggest improvements to the vocational accompaniment process. This will foster a more participatory and responsive accompaniment environment.

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