



The harvest is rich

Module II
for Vocational Animation Teams



augustinian
recollects



The harvest is rich

EPAV TRAINING INSTRUCTIONS



ORDER OF AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS
VOCATION AND YOUTH SECRETARIAT
VOCATION SECTION

Introduction

The pastoral ministry of vocation promotion in the Order of Augustinian Recollects, in harmony with the whole Church, continues to take firm steps towards creating a culture of vocations. It believes in careful cultivation that includes preparing the soil, depositing the seed and carefully accompanying its growth. All efforts in this direction will bear fruit when the Lord of the harvest sees fit.

The spirit of this pastoral style of vocation promotion is contained in the Augustinian Recollect Vocation Guide -IVAR-. In line with careful cultivation, we, the Augustinian Recollects, aim to lead the hearts of the new generations to a personal encounter with Christ and his Word. It is this encounter that will unleash the full power of the missionary discipleship received in baptism.

A palpable sign of the creation of vocation culture is the participation of the laity in the task of vocation promotion. The vocation promotion teams composed of lay people, priests and religious are not a luxury, but a clear expression of the maturity of the life of Christian communities. This second formation module is designed primarily for lay people who have perceived the Lord's call to collaborate in the mission of awakening and accompanying vocations.

There is no doubt that the ministry that the Church directly entrusts to some to promote vocations is, in itself, the task of all. However, those lay people who assume it as a task entrusted to them by the Lord himself, need and ask the same community to train them for their mission. For this reason, this second formation manual is provided in which some central themes of vocation promotion are addressed.

Following the first module, the topics dealt with in this instruction revolve around the deepening of the call of some biblical characters, the reflection on important aspects of Christian anthropology, some questions about faith that play an important role in the vocation search. And, finally, some pedagogical guidelines are given that serve as orientation for the practical part of vocation ministry: the vocation kerygma and accompaniment for vocation discernment.

Finally, deep gratitude is due to all the vocation agents in our local communities, especially the lay people, for their sacrifices and dedication. We hope that this material will be of help to the young people in finding God's design for them.

*Vocation and Youth Secretariat
Vocation Section*

Thematic development plan

Divine Callings in the Bible

1. Biblical figures: Abraham and Moses
2. Biblical Figures: St. Paul

Human Nature and Vocation

3. Desire
4. The meaning of life

Theological Reflection on Vocation

5. The Spirit and vocation spirituality
6. The Church, mother of vocations

Pastoral Care of Vocations

7. The vocation kerygma
8. Vocation accompaniment

BIBLICAL FIGURES: ABRAHAM AND MOSES

Objective

To know more closely the vocation itinerary of some of the great biblical figures and, in general, to verify the general characteristics of every call from God. In addition, to give tools to expose in talks, retreats or retreats this type of biblical-vocation approach to relevant figures of our faith.

Development of the theme

Biblical figures in the Old Testament

Before we dwell on one of the most important vocation figures in the Bible, let us read a text of St. Augustine in which he shows us how much it helped him to approach Sacred Scripture:

“Christ comes out to meet me in a manifest or hidden way and comforts me in my journey through the totality of those Books and those Scriptures, panting as I am from the fatigue of human condemnation. He also inflames my desire in the face of some difficulty in finding him, so that I may greedily devour my discovery and keep him healthily hidden within me” (Contra Faustum, 12, 27)

When we read the Sacred Scriptures it is always Christ who comes to meet us and teaches us something important, so now, with the disposition to learn something new and to increase our desire to live our vocation better and to serve with passion in the task of vocation promotion, let us see what the life of Abraham brings us.

A) Abraham

The cycle of Abraham begins in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis and extends to chapter 25:18. He is the “first believer” who is considered the ancestor of the chosen people. Christians consider him our father in the faith and Muslims call him “God’s friend”.

1. Sources¹

The fourteen chapters of Genesis dedicated to Abraham are a union or fusion of three traditions that go back originally to events that took place in the first half of the second millennium B.C. and that were elaborated, updated and written down after a long oral transmission during centuries. These traditions were collected between the 10th and 5th centuries B.C. They are the family and clan history of a wealthy nomad, who raised small animals, and who came from Mesopotamia to the fertile land of Canaan, settling in the south of the country, between Hebron and Beer-sheba, where he lived as a foreigner. His itineraries, genealogies and family

¹ Here the term “source” refers to the documents and objective data that we have to study the figure of a person or the history of a community. We understand something like this when a journalist talks about his “sources of information”, in this case he refers to the people or documents from which he obtained the information that allows him to publicize or support a news item.

vicissitudes are narrated, but above all his relationship with the only God who has revealed himself to him and whom he adores.

The common thread of Abraham's story is God's promise to him of a son, of numerous descendants and of the possession of the land of Canaan. Reality had taken care of contradicting these promises, because his wife Sarah was barren and he was already very old and the Canaanites were the legitimate owners of the country. But the promises begin to be fulfilled in the midst of a series of contradictions, since his son Isaac is born prodigiously and, at the end of his life, Abraham appropriates a part of the land of Canaan, the grotto of Machpelah in Hebron, where his wife Sarah was buried.

2. The man of faith

The most ancient tradition describes Abraham's vocation in the form of a categorical order from God to leave his native land to go to an unknown land and receive the blessing for himself, his lineage and all the nations.

Abraham accepted God's proposal without hesitation or doubt and left his homeland trusting exclusively in Him. The promise of land and descendants takes time to be realized, to the point of diminishing the confidence of the patriarch, who in a drought seeks refuge in Egypt, destines his kinsman Lot the best pastures and makes his servant Eliezer his heir. But God rejects all these human solutions, renews and concretizes the promises and makes with Abraham; a covenant that is equivalent to a solemn commitment to realize the plan of grace in favor of the patriarch.

The divine visit to Mamre, which is described in a particularly lively and anthropomorphic way, has the objective of announcing within a year a son to particularly infertile parents, but "is there anything difficult for the Lord?".

Sarah does not believe in the announcement, but Abraham does and meditates in silence on the surprising divine proposal. He thus becomes the Lord's close friend, and intercedes with great boldness for the salvation of the corrupt inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. A year later Isaac, the miracle son, is born. His father gets him a woman from Mesopotamia to preserve him from the seduction of the Canaanite religion and the temptation to abandon the land of promise.

Abraham professes his faith by obeying without hesitation the divine inspirations, even when they sometimes seem to oppose human possibilities, invoking the name of the Lord in the Canaanite sanctuaries and erecting monuments in memory of the divine appearances and the promises received.

3. The God-fearer

The acid test of Abraham's faith is related to us by the second tradition, that is, the Elohist tradition. It was a matter of determining whether the patriarch was willing to love God more deeply or the son he had received in fulfillment of the promises.

It seemed that God was contradicting himself. Isaac had been born thanks to a miracle, and now it turns out that God claims his life, still young, to destine it to a sacrifice. Although he does not understand God's attitude, Abraham obeys and is willing to sacrifice his firstborn son. In this way he demonstrates that he believes and trusts in God, not for his own benefit, but recognizes his supreme and absolute lordship, which can assume a paradoxical and contradictory form, but always with the purpose of doing good to the human being.

This is the true fear of God, that is, the respect and veneration due to the Lord before his mysterious powers and wisdom. The covenant that God makes with Abraham is sealed, according to the priestly tradition, with the rite of circumcision, which later becomes the sign of belonging to the community of the chosen people for those born in Israel.

4. The model of the Christians

In the New Testament, Abraham appears not only as the ancestor of the people of Israel, but also as the progenitor of the Levitical priesthood and the ancestor of the Messiah. The “bosom of Abraham” is a figure of the happiness beyond the earth, and heaven is imagined as the place where the banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is celebrated.

In the letters to the Galatians and Romans, St. Paul uses the example of Abraham to confirm, in contrast to Judaism, that the patriarch obtained justification not by works, that is, deserving of reward, but by faith, which presupposes absolute trust in the Word and work of God. In this way, Abraham is presented as the historical model and the prophetic pre-announcement of the economy of faith and grace.

In the Letter of the Apostle James -2:21-23- the patriarch Abraham appears as the type of man who pleases God by his good works based on faith.

5. Two notes to conclude

a) God also knows about vocation marketing

Regarding the first part of Abraham’s life, we can make the following conclusion our own: *God also knows about vocation marketing*². He does it in his own style, with the promises made to Abraham, which are not easy to achieve, because they are realized in the course of his life and require much personal effort. Above all, they demand full trust in God to assist him at every stage of his long journey:

- He points him to a land: he will not wander aimlessly, for God is his compass.
- He will make of him a great nation: a man of faith and his family clan will become a tribe and later a people. Everything has a purpose in God.
- He will bless him: that is, he will enjoy God’s favor at all times. Everyone who has been called and responds with sincerity, will participate in this blessing that goes beyond a help and consists in the continuous presence of God.
- He will make his name great: not for fame or recognition, but because it carries with it a great responsibility: to be a model of life for others.
- He will be a blessing to all: God’s favor through Abraham will extend to many.
- He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him: those who welcome the envoy, welcome God’s blessing; those who reject him, reject God and his blessing.

² A. ZAMBRANO, *La vocación en la Escritura*. In AUGUSTINIANS RECOLLECTS, *Permanent Formation Program* 2018: youth, faith, vocation 2018, p. 9.

b) Abraham's trust to the end

In the second part of his life, we see how this man of faith becomes aware that God's call requires a response until the end of life. Let us remember that this second moment begins with the new call and covenant that is confirmed with a very subtle sign, which consists in the change of name: 'Abram' will henceforth be called 'Abraham'. The signs of the new name and the circumcision confirm the importance of God's new entrustment and covenant with our character.³ What is really important is to note how Abraham responds to God's disconcerting request to deliver the son of the promise (Gen 22:1-11) with absolute availability.

All this is expressed very well in the following words of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*: "The God who asks Abraham to trust him totally reveals himself as the source from which all life comes. In this way, faith is placed in relation to the fatherhood of God, from which creation proceeds: the God who calls Abraham is the Creator God, who "calls into existence that which does not exist" (Rom 4:17), who "chose us before the foundation of the world... and destined us to be his children" (Eph 1:4-5). For Abraham, faith in God illumines the deepest roots of his being, enables him to recognize the source of the goodness that is at the origin of all things, and to confirm that his life does not come from nothingness or chance, but from a personal call and love.

The mysterious God who called him is not a strange God, but the God who is the origin of everything and who sustains everything. The great test of Abraham's faith, the sacrifice of his son Isaac, allows us to see to what extent this original love is capable of guaranteeing life even after death. The Word who was able to raise a son with his "half-dead" body and "in the barren womb" of Sarah (cf. Rom 4:19), will also be able to guarantee the promise of a future beyond all threat or danger (cf. Heb 11:19; Rom 4:21)" (Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, n. 11).

B) Moses

Moses is the most imposing figure in the history of Israel, since he is the great leader who liberated a part of the Jewish people from the oppression of the Egyptians. He is the mediator of the Sinai covenant, the prophetic-charismatic legislator who endowed the Hebrew people with a code of moral and civil laws. He is the founder of the cult and priesthood and, finally, the intercessor and friend of God. He is, therefore, at the origin of the faith and of the history that forever characterizes Israel.

1. Sources

The traditions about this gigantic character of the Bible are found in the books of Exodus and Numbers. These, in turn, are the result of a long oral transmission, in which different memories converge, containing different interpretations of the person and of the events linked to him, and which are the fruit of a later reflection full of admiration.

It is something that Moses, whose Egyptian name means "taken out of the waters", is a remarkable Jew who lived in Egypt and who led a group of fellow countrymen oppressed by the Pharaoh. He led them through the wilderness of Sinai, making known to them the God of the covenant, to the border of the land of their fathers, not without great difficulties and opposition from the people themselves.

³ Ibid.

2. Youth

The life of Moses can be divided into three periods of forty years each.

a) He was born in Egypt at the time of the genocide of the Jewish immigrants. He was saved from the waters of the Nile River and nursed by his own mother and then raised and educated by Pharaoh's daughter. At court he received the education of a scribe and was an important state official before his blood brothers. The realization of the oppression of his people excited him to the point that one day, seeing an Egyptian whipping a Jew, he killed him and buried him in the sand. When this is discovered, he had to flee.

b) Moses took refuge in the desert of Midian, near the Sinai mountain range, and became a shepherd who cared little for the fate of his brothers in bondage. He married the daughter of Jethro, who bore him two sons.

c) But God intervened to bring him out of his desert retreat and entrusted him with a superhuman mission: to free his brothers from Pharaoh's bondage. From a burning acacia bush on the mountainside, the Lord commanded him to go to Pharaoh, to obtain the liberation of the enslaved people and to bring them into the desert to give him a legitimate worship. God reveals to him his personal name, "Yahweh," and grants him miraculous powers. Moses raises some objections, but the Lord responds by assuring him of his help and that of his brother Aaron.

3. The liberator

Moses returns to Egypt and goes to Pharaoh. But the latter refuses to let the Jews leave and Moses causes the ten plagues.

The celebration of the Passover marks the beginning of the exodus, which includes the passage of the Sea of Reeds and the stay in the desert of Sinai for forty years. They are guided by a pillar of cloud of fire and their journey is characterized by the gift of manna and by water flowing from the rock.

In the desert, Moses is driven to anger, to punish idolatry and to pray that the people remain faithful to their vocation. To his prayer is due the victory over the Amalekites and salvation from the poisonous snakes. His intercession obtained divine forgiveness after the apostasy due to the worship of the golden calf.

One of the characteristic traits of Moses is his intimacy with God. The theophany at Sinai becomes a dialogue with the Lord. He has the privilege of beholding the glory of God. That is why, when he comes down from the mountain, he bears on his radiant face the sign of the divine presence.

4. The mediator

In the process of the covenant that God sealed with his people on Mount Sinai, Moses is the main protagonist and the only mediator. He promulgates the fundamental law of the Decalogue and the so-called code of the covenant, and seals the covenant by pouring over the altar - symbol of God - and over the people, the blood of the sacrificed victims, thus confirming the communion of life between the two signatories of the covenant.

All the laws that have emerged in the history of Israel, in tune with the different political and social circumstances, were attributed to Moses and gathered in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There is a black spot in the story of Moses, and that is the sin

attributed to him in the region of Kadesh that prevented him from entering the land of Canaan. After designating Joshua as his successor, he dies in solitude looking down from Mount Nebo on the land promised to the fathers in its entirety.

5. Moses in the New Testament

In the New Testament Moses is presented as the mediator of the divine revelation, that is, of the law. He is considered as the prophet who symbolically anticipates the coming of Christ, his resurrection from the dead, the mission among the pagans and the paschal event. In the transfiguration of Christ, he appears together with Elijah, as a qualified representative of the people of the old covenant. In affirming that all those who came out of Egypt were baptized in Moses, St. Paul projects the Christian reality onto the events of the past.

The glory of Moses spoken of in 2 Cor 3:7-11 highlights that of the beauty of the Gospel, because the discovery of the face of Moses before the Lord is assumed as conversion to Christ.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the reliability of Moses with respect to the house of God serves as a comparison to exalt the sovereign power of Christ. Moses participated in advance in the opprobrium of Christ and his song is taken up by the angels of Revelation before the seven scourges are unleashed.

Finally, we can close this theme with a text on Moses addressed to young people:

"I am reminded of the words that God addressed to Abraham: "Go from your country, your homeland and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). These words are also addressed to you today; they are the words of a Father who invites you to "go forth" in order to launch yourselves into a future that is unknown but promising of certain fulfillment, a future in which he himself accompanies you. I invite you to listen to the voice of God that resounds in the heart of each one of you through the vital breath of the Holy Spirit" (Synod of Bishops. Young people, faith and vocation discernment. Preparatory Document. Letter of Pope Francis to young people)

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



1. What relationship or common ground do you find in these two biblical figures?
2. Which one do you identify with more?
3. If you had to prepare a talk or vocation theme with one of them, what title would you give it?

BIBLICAL FIGURE: SAINT PAUL

Objective

To know more closely the vocation itinerary of some biblical men and, in general, to verify the general characteristics of every call from God. In addition, to give tools to expose in talks, retreats or retreats this type of biblical-vocation approach based on important figures of our faith.

Development of the theme

A key figure of the New Testament

Just as we began the previous theme with a phrase of St. Augustine that allowed us to see the value that reading the Bible had for him, so let us begin this theme with an Augustinian text that develops in the same direction and in which St. Paul is explicitly mentioned:

"We [Catholics], on the contrary, read the books of the prophets and the apostles to remind us of our faith, console our hope and exhort us to love; books that show their mutual agreement, and with that agreement, as with a heavenly trumpet, they awaken us from the torpor of mortal life and set us straining towards the palm of the supreme vocation. When the Apostle mentions what is written in these prophetic books: The reproaches of those who reviled you fell on me, he immediately indicates why divine reading is useful: "Everything that was written before," he says, "was written for our instruction, so that through the patience and consolation that the Scriptures give us, we may have hope in God" (*Contra Faustum*, 13, 18).

This is a quotation from Rom 15:4, and it serves St. Augustine to show how useful it is for Catholics to read the Word of God, which has no other purpose than to make the three theological virtues - faith, hope and charity - grow, to "wake us up" when necessary and to direct us, not without tension, towards the goal of our vocation. Well, let us see how the Bible stirs this up in us by proposing the Apostle Paul as a model of vocation response.

St. Paul, the Apostle of Christ

We are better informed about this great religious genius of humanity and the first evangelizer of the Greco-Roman world than about any other figure in the New Testament. There are thirteen letters that bear his name and seven that came directly from his pen or from his lips. In addition, the Acts of the Apostles devotes sixteen chapters to the missionary work of the apostle.

1. The learned and brilliant man

He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia around 5/10 B.C. in a family of observant Jews. He received a rigorous formation and completed it in Jerusalem with Rabbi Gamaliel. He became very familiar with the Torah and rabbinical methods of interpretation. He belonged to the Pharisee group, very

committed to the observance of tradition, and distinguished himself among his contemporaries for his zeal in the observance of the law. He was closely linked to the Greek world, since he knew its language very well and in part its literature, as is attested by some quotations from Greek authors. He was a Roman citizen by birth. His original name was Saul, the name of the first king of Israel, but in all his letters he is called Paul, a Latin name.

We can say that he was a man of three worlds: Jewish by origin and training, Greek by birth and culture, Roman by citizenship. He had a sharp and original intelligence that made him the first theologian of Christianity, and an energetic will that made him carry out an enormous evangelizing work; founding different communities in the midst of continuous difficulties and persecutions. He had a passionate and uncompromising temperament in principles, but was gentle and understanding in practical matters, and very sensitive in human relations. He was at the same time impetuous and humble, shy and bold, independent and fearful of loneliness, affectionate and sarcastic, courteous and harsh, generous and bitter.

Paul was a preacher and writer, a missionary and church planter, a thinker and organizer, a pastor of souls and a mystic. Although he had a mysterious illness, his physique was resilient. In fact, it enabled him to cross the harsh regions of Asia Minor to reach the major centers of the eastern Mediterranean amidst innumerable fatigues and troubles.

2. Vocation

His deep adherence to the Jewish faith caused him to adopt an aggressive behavior against nascent Christianity. He persecuted especially the Hellenistic Christians, who allowed themselves to criticize the law of Moses and the temple of Jerusalem. In his view, it was impiety to recognize Jesus as the Messiah because all those who were condemned to die on the cross were considered to be cursed by God. But on the road to Damascus something unprecedented happened. The persecutor of the Church became, in an instant, the ardent apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul becomes another man, for not only does he believe in Christ, but he is also commissioned to proclaim the gospel especially to the pagans. He recognizes Jesus as the Son of God who, in order to save mankind, offers himself in sacrifice on the cross and is exalted to the right hand of the Father. It affirms that the cross is the supreme manifestation of the power and wisdom of God. What brings all people, and not only Jews, to salvation is not the law of Moses but exclusively faith in Christ.

Aware that he possessed the mission and authority of the twelve apostles, Paul dedicated all his strength to preaching the gospel. He was baptized in Damascus, preached in the outskirts of the city -Arabia-, then went up to Jerusalem and, not being understood by the Christians, retired to Tarsus, his hometown. Called some years later to Antioch, where the first mixed Christian community arose, composed of converted Jews and pagans, he spent a year instructing an immense multitude.

From Antioch he undertook three missionary journeys that took him first to Cyprus and southern Anatolia (Perge, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe), together with Timothy. They continue northwest to the Dardanelles, and reach Troas, from where they pass to Greece and finally, he embarks again to Tyre, Caesarea and Jerusalem, where he was arrested. In Corinth and Ephesus he wrote the various letters to the Churches he had founded and to prepare for his visit to Rome.

After his first missionary journey, St. Paul participates in Jerusalem in the first apostolic conference and defends that the converted Gentiles be exempted from observing the Mosaic

prescriptions. He was accused in Jerusalem, where he had gone to take the collection to the Church, by some resentful Jews, and was arrested by the Roman garrison of the city and taken to Caesarea Maritima, for security reasons. Here, at the headquarters of the Roman procurators, he spent two years in a mitigated prison regime.

St. Paul appealed to his right of Roman citizenship and appealed to the court of the emperor. He was taken by an escort to Rome, where he arrived after a complicated journey. There he spent two years in prison awaiting trial. According to the pastoral letters and apostolic writings, Paul would have gone to Spain and then to the East. He was arrested again and taken back to Rome, where, after a hard imprisonment, he was martyred in Aguas Salvas on the Via Ostiense.

3. The Apostle

St. Paul had a true passion for evangelization, which he saw as a necessity. He feels indebted to everyone, Jews and pagans, educated and uneducated, learned and ignorant, Greeks and barbarians. He is prepared to face all kinds of audiences. He proclaims Christ in praetoriums and prisons, in ships and public squares, in synagogues and schools. He deals very confidently with kings and princes, with Roman governors and members of the Areopagus, with masters and slaves, with the plebs of the port cities of the Mediterranean coasts and with the rustic inhabitants of the mountains of the region of Galatia.

The main instrument used by St. Paul to spread the Gospel is the “word”, understood as the first proclamation of salvation to non-believers, and also as a deepening of the faith among the already baptized members of the various communities he had founded. The letters sent to the Churches also tried to contemplate the evangelical teaching that had been done orally. To avoid any obstacle in the evangelization, he refused any economic help from the communities except from one, the community of Philippi.

In the Greek world, any manual labor reserved for slaves was considered degrading. But Paul, as a poor man of Christ, works as a “tentmaker”. He establishes very intimate relationships, which he expresses with the language of love and family, with his collaborators and with the Churches he founds. His whole life is marked by contradiction and suffering. His long journeys to quite inhospitable and dangerous regions were often carried out in terrible conditions. At night he dictated correspondence, received visitors and presided at liturgical meetings.

He was tortured and imprisoned. And he knew very well the contrasts, the contestation and the calumny from the non-believing Jews, from the Judaizing Christians and from the members of the Churches. But this did not diminish his zeal, which saw in the tribulations of apostolic life a participation in the suffering of Christ and a service to the brethren. Continuous and fervent prayer accompanied and at times substituted for apostolic work.

St. Paul has always been-and will always remain-the perfect model of the follower of Christ, the indomitable missionary, the founder of churches, the theologian of faith and grace. With his ardent zeal, with his undaunted generosity, with the mysticism of suffering and prayer, he brought to the Greco-Roman world the Gospel of salvation that Jesus had preached in Palestine.

We could close this theme with some texts from his letters that especially reflect his experience of faith:

- *“Forgetting the road I have traveled, I press forward and run toward the goal, that I may attain the prize of the heavenly calling which God has given me in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 3:13-14).

- *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: the life which I still live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).*
- *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).*

Everything we have seen up to this point will undoubtedly lead us to continue thinking of St. Paul as a model of vocation response. Well then, let us close this theme with the following words that describe the profound experience of love that the Apostle lived:

“St. Paul was a man capable of loving, and all his work and suffering can be explained only from this center. The fundamental concepts of his proclamation can be understood only on this basis. Let us take just one of his key words: freedom. The experience of being loved to the depths by Christ had opened his eyes to the truth and to the path of human existence; that experience was all-encompassing. St. Paul was free as a man loved by God who, by virtue of God, was capable of loving together with him. This love is now the “law” of his life, and precisely such is the freedom of his life. He speaks and acts moved by the responsibility of love. Freedom and responsibility are here inseparably united. Because he is in the responsibility of love, he is free; because he is someone who loves, he lives totally in the responsibility of this love and does not consider freedom as a pretext for arbitrariness and selfishness” (Benedict XVI, Homily on the occasion of the inauguration of the Pauline Year, 28 June 2008).

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



1. O What strikes you most about the life of St. Paul?
2. What can his conversion, vocation and mission tell us believers today?

DESIRE⁴

Objective

To identify in the human heart the desire for God, which, if well educated and formed, helps man to fulfill himself fully as a person. For the believer, vocation is a way of responding to the deep desire for happiness.

Development of the theme

1. Man, a desiring animal

a) *Man in the Bible*

In biblical anthropology, man is seen from his origins (cf. Gen 2:7) as a living being who desires, who is in constant tension towards something that is always “beyond”, as an intense desire that can and must become a passion and that only God can fulfill.

The only desire: to see God. At the root, in fact, of all human desires is that which for the Bible is the only true and profound human desire: God, to see his face (cf. Ps 42:2; 63:2-3; 119:20; 123:2; 130:6; Is 26:8; Rev 22:20). A deep and constant desire and, at the same time, impossible to extinguish completely.

God’s desires. It is beautiful to think that God the Father also desires. He desires to manifest his love and to give salvation, but he also desires to give man the definitive certainty of his dignity, sowing in man’s heart the longing for God: “You have created us for you, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Augustine, Confessions I, 1, 1).

Full expression of the divine desire is the human heart of the incarnate Son of God, literally devoured by the desire for his Passover (cf. Lk 12:49; 22:15). Jesus is the manifestation, on the one hand, of divine desires-what God desires for man-and, on the other hand, of human desires-what man desires as the goal of his existence. The event of the Man God, Christ Jesus, allows us to glimpse something very important: in the human desires of every man there is always a trace of the divine desire, of what God desires for man and of what man aspires to as his first and ultimate desire, even if he does not know it, which is God himself.

b) *Desire and Vocation in Man*

On the level of the psychological experience that we all have lived and live as human beings, desire presents a complex and varied structure, as something that normally accompanies life and occupies the center of existence, especially in some crucial moments.

Definition of “desire”. To desire means to concentrate-channel all one’s energies in the direction of something that is important in itself and at the same time is considered central to one’s life. It is a significant tendency towards something that is valuable in itself, and that the individual discovers, feels and wants at the center of life and one’s future.

Components that make up desire. Desire is “made” in its essence of truth and freedom; of the capacity, first of all, to grasp something in its deep truth and, furthermore, of the freedom to feel it true also for one’s own life, to the point of experiencing liking and attraction for it.

⁴ Basically taken from A. CENCINI, “Desire”, in: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, Y L. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005, 1114-1150..

Manifestations of desire. Desire has two faces: satisfaction and non-satisfaction. Both are indispensable. In this sense, desire is born from a situation of non-satisfaction, from an emptiness, from the awareness of one's own limit, and leads to the opposite sensation, that of possession when the desire is realized.

Desire and decision. A desire becomes intense to the extent that the subject feels that the desired object will be able to fulfill his expectations, so he tends towards it with all his strength. He is not satisfied with anything else, endures the frustration of not being able to immediately possess that object, but continues to concentrate all his energies in the active tension towards it, making choices coherent with the desire itself. In this concentration of energy the decision is born.

Renunciation and waiting. Renunciation is the inevitable counterpart of desire; it is what makes it credible. In desiring one thing, one says no to its opposite, and, above all, one renounces everything that, in the meantime, while waiting, could induce the subject to be content with anything less or with a good inferior to that which is desired, blocking any path of transcendence and overcoming of the desire itself. For this reason, in desire, the capacity to wait is important, as a space for the purification of the same desire for the growth of desire. St. Augustine says in this regard:

"Suppose you wish to fill a bag and you know that what you are going to receive is much, much bigger; you stretch out the bag, the sack or the wineskin or any other object of that kind. You know the dimensions of that which you want to put in; by stretching it you increase its capacity. In the same way, God, by making you wait, enlarges the desire; by making you wait, he makes the soul grow, and by making the soul grow, he makes it capable of receiving him. Let us desire, therefore, brethren, for we shall be satisfied" (*In Ep. Io. 35, 4, 6*).

And also:

"God puts aside that which he does not want to give you right away so that you may learn to desire greater things with greater eagerness" (*Sermão 61*).

Desire and vocation. In this perspective, we must consider the relationship between desire and vocation, which is also the relationship between desire and identity. To desire means to open one's own life to something new, which one is not yet fully known and is not yet what one is, but which one feels as meaningful and attractive; it means to project oneself towards one's own future, towards that which one does not possess but in which one recognizes oneself, even if it is in terms that go far beyond one's present identity. This is the origin of these observations:

1) 1) The authentic vocation desire is that which outlines a way of being qualitatively superior to what one is; in other words, that desire is truly vocation only if it offers and dreams the maximum for the subject, the maximum that he/she can give. It is not an authentic vocation desire the one that thinks of the future in terms of accommodation (economic, sentimental, professional...) nor the desire that is content simply to choose something absolutely accessible

without any risk, without any novelty or without having to pay any price. In this sense, the real risk is that of becoming a photocopy of oneself and repeating oneself throughout one's life, while the vital desire is replaced by a passing weariness.

2) This second observation is closely linked to the previous one. In order to choose well, it is not enough to have the (pretended) certainty of being able to respond to the demands of the vocation; it is essential to be attracted by what it means and by its beauty. He who chooses because he is attracted will continue to desire that ideal, even in trials; he who chooses only because he feels capable will no longer feel many desires when he feels somewhat less capable. In fact, only an increasingly intense desire keeps the tension for the search and the realization of one's vocation high. And vice versa: vocation fidelity makes the attraction to it stronger and stronger.

3) It is not enough to choose and dispose oneself to realize a vocation just because "it is the will of God", but it is necessary that the person perceives an attraction and is internally motivated to make this choice. It will certainly be necessary to discern the quality and the motive of the desire, but in any case the vocation works only if it exerts a certain attraction on the subject. And it works only if, in addition to pleasing God, this choice also pleases the one who chooses it; otherwise it will only be moralism or perfectionism more or less relevant, but with very little consistency over time and poor in its quality of witness.

2. Vocation pedagogy of desire

As we have seen, desire is not only an uncontrollable instinct of attraction, but the end of a journey that is largely attributable to human freedom and responsibility. That is to say, it is possible to educate desire. The pastoral care of vocations is, basically, a process of formation of desire that is articulated in two pedagogical moments.

a) Education of desires

To educate means to "bring out" (e-ducere), to bring out first of all the truth of the person. That truth that in a totally particular way emerges and is hidden precisely in the desires.

To unearth desire. It is above all a matter of helping the person to discover what he or she truly desires, what his or her true objective is, which is not always identified with the explicitly desired object. There is a truth that is beyond the appearance of the words that are said, the ambitions that are confessed, the fears that are declared. The vocation educator has the function precisely to make this excavation, to grasp what is hidden behind what the young person says about himself and believes about himself.

Prayer, the place of discovery. By praying... one digs. To pray, in fact, means to be before the truth of God and the truth of oneself. Nothing like prayer has the power to uncover unconfessed tendencies, latent selfishness, fears never looked in the face, that hidden desire that lies behind the expressed desire (in every desire), especially when one prays in the light of the Word, a two-edged sword that scrutinizes in depth, and before the Father rich in mercy.

The vocation beyond denial. Beyond fears or resistances, interior censures and anything else that can be used to deny the vocation, there exists in the depths of the human being a vocation predisposition as a willingness to let oneself be called, which has marked his origins

(call to life) and will continue to mark his existence. The true drama of man is not to be called by anything or anyone: it would be a sign of the most absolute insignificance. And the higher the caller is on the scale of beings, the more dignity the call bestows and the more binding it becomes for the one who is called. For this reason there exists in man a demand or expectation of relationship within which a demand or desire for vocation is born.

“Education” of vocation desire. We can already understand what vocation education means: a look that knows how to go beyond appearances, or the ability to interpret rejection, denial, disinterest, without closing the dialogue or withdrawing the vocation proposal. It also means patience to wait for the times of maturation and intuition that captures its germs or minimal signs. It also requires the ability to ask the right question, the one that allows to retrace the path of the dormant and denied desire, together with the art of remembering one’s personal history in order to rediscover the lost mystery of the call. And all this can be done starting from any human desire expressed by the young person; every human desire hides a vocation desire.

b) Formation of desires

It is not enough to educate; it is also necessary to form, that is, to propose a form. A form is suggested as a norm of life in which one comes to delineate and recognize the vocation identity, the form of Christ.

This is the phase of the formation of desires. These, after having been discovered and recognized, can also be converted and formed, so that the form-norm of life proposed and made one’s own is also the object of the young person’s desire and there is no suspicion of obligation or imposition of any kind.

Scaling up desires. If to educate means to unearth desire, to form means above all to escalate it, that is, to reach its highest point, the maximum tension to which it can reach, in a certain sense, to overcome it or, at least, to ask oneself if one is really in a position to satisfy the object to which one explicitly aspires as the objective of desire and to satisfy the individual who desires it.

Specifically, scaling desires means placing each desire (and each young person who desires) before these questions: where can this desire lead me or what lies behind its immediate gratification? The desired object, does it not refer me to a later objective? how could it be fully realized? what is its true point of arrival?

From multiplicity to unity, from dispersion to concentration. This is also the first rule for the growth of vocation desire: to return to the unity of the heart in order to concentrate one’s energies in the tension towards the natural center of human life, God. In other words, it is a matter of avoiding the dispersion of energies, as a consequence of a life that is undoubtedly believing, but not sufficiently coherent with the professed creed, more or less plagued, therefore, by contradictions and mediocrity, by choices that are always delayed and never radical... This is the case of so many incoherent young believers, whose desires are dispersed in a confused way and never manage to concentrate on a single and unitary life project.

To aim high in order to desire the most. If the excavation of desire is a kind of “descent into hell,” climbing the ladder of desire means the opposite: having the courage to keep the young person’s gaze or tension high, but avoiding, in any case, suggesting and, even less, imposing. For example, the search for success or self-affirmation could be satisfied simply by triumph in front of everyone and the consequent applause from all. Some spiritual director might consider this simply as a pagan desire to be eliminated, but in reality, does it not contain the search for

something more? Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that success does not satisfy, but rather creates dependence and increases a certain anguish?

The search for success, therefore, could it not be interpreted as a sign of a desire that opens man to projects of another kind, far superior to those of the one who resorts or is impelled to resort to a certain uniquely human event? Is not the universal desire for happiness in itself a sign of self-transcendence? The habitual need to love, to be loved and to love, does it not already indicate in itself that famous Augustinian restlessness? The banal desire to have fun, does it not indicate, at its root, the need for relationship, and to distance oneself a little from oneself and from a reality to which one is too attached?

The intelligent vocation formator does not mock or scorn any of these expectations, but is one who helps to understand that within each of them there is something more, much more. Even that the human object that is coveted and hopefully already savored is only the pre-gustation of a different reality that God has prepared for man, that the heart of the young person is searching for, that he can certainly find and enjoy. To scale desire means, therefore, to teach how to read desire itself, projecting it beyond itself.

To look high and help to look high means to welcome and take advantage of all these desires, all human desire, to show its natural and supernatural point of arrival. This is the condition or the way to ask the young person to desire to the highest degree, not to be content with partial or illusory gratifications, with deceitful goals..., but to come to desire for himself everything and nothing less than what God desires for him.

Prayer, the place where desires are twisted. At this point, vocation formation means prayer, and a certain type of prayer. If at the time of the education of desire, prayer was the ideal place to unearth it, in the logic of formation, prayer is fundamental for another singular operation: the twisting of desire.

By twisting we mean the transformation or, in its literal sense, the turning of the trunk on itself, which does not mean the annulment of human desires or their devitalization, but on the contrary, it is a matter of turning desire with all its energy towards its natural destiny or final objective. This is what inevitably overturns the merely human measure of youthful aspirations and opens the door to the unlimited space of divine desire. Movement that is natural, like the sunflower that "seeks" the sun, but also painful and risky.

The twisting may arouse fear and the will to cancel everything, contenting oneself with much less and listening to softer advice. Hence it is important that the young person lives all this in prayer, in the rediscovery of a new relationship with God. Only in prayer can the human being open himself to this diverse, unforeseen and incomprehensible reality, since prayer, at this point, is above all God's action in the one who prays, it is the Word and love and energy of the God who desires in the one who prays.

The spark of vocation decision. At this point the desire could and should already become a decision. We have seen in the first part that there is a very close relationship between desire and decision: the one leads to the other, the second confirms the first. This is also the case in vocation decisions. And if today many young people seem to multiply experiences but without deciding, this could be due to an insufficient attention to the dynamism of desire, especially in the existing relationship between the excavation of desire and the escalation of desire. In fact, the two movements should ideally bring forth the desire of man and the desire of God. The first purified of so many incrustations and interferences and open to the call, the second, as root and destiny of the human desire. Such movements are, normally, inversely proportional to each other: the deeper one reaches, the higher the other climbs, and the more one digs, the more one climbs; the more one educates, the more one forms.

In any case, the encounter between the two desires should spark that spark from which the vocation decision is born; as a place where the desire of the young person coincides with that of God. On the one hand, the call of God attracts the heart-mind-will of the young person; on the other hand, the young person can affirm in all truth that he now chooses what pleases God, which, in turn, is what also pleases him. This is the full freedom of human desire.

The words of St. Augustine, for whom man is a being of desires, can help us to conclude this theme and move on to a moment of personal reflection and community dialogue, as he used to do with his friends and brothers:

“The whole life of the good Christian is a holy desire. What you desire you do not yet see, but by desiring it you enable yourself so that, when what you are to see arrives, you will be filled with it (...). Our life consists precisely in this, in exercising ourselves to desire” (Commentary on the First Letter of John, 4, 6)

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



- 1- At what moments in your life do you experience the desire for God or happiness?
- 2- In what way can this theme be treated with young people, so that it can be useful in the elaboration of a vocation project of life?

MEANING OF LIFE⁵

Objective

This material aims to help to recognize that every vocation supposes discovering that life has meaning. Therefore, it is necessary to ask oneself, at some point in one's life, the question: What is the meaning of my life? This material can serve as a basis for vocation ministers to ask young people the question about the meaning and fundamental orientation of their lives.

Development of the theme

1. Factors in understanding existence

The human being is characterized by the use of reason. Using reason means becoming aware of the challenges and demands that life presents at different levels (psychological, existential and spiritual), in search of possible solutions to maintain physical, emotional and spiritual balance, and to pursue the instinct for happiness that we all carry within us.

The use of reason is summarized in the understanding and interpretation that bring together the complex mechanism of perception, attention and synthetic evaluation of things. This marvelous combination favors a typically human experience,⁶ which finds its scope of expression in language,⁷ in what is communicated and shared.

Language is a sign and a channel of manifestation of the mystery of human life which, at the same time, testifies that the human being is intelligent, free, creative, sociable and deeply religious.

The human being asks himself the question about the meaning of existence from the moment he realizes that he is a living being situated in this world, together with his fellow human beings. Specifically, this question is triggered fundamentally for two reasons. First, by the recognition of the set of basic needs of the body, satisfied or unsatisfied. And, secondly, by the presence of different desires, including spiritual ones, in the inner dynamisms. Both realities push the human being to assume values and generate values, and to give a direction to one's own life from ideals and, normally, from transcendence.⁸

Curiously, the question of the meaning of life becomes more demanding the more aware the person is of himself and the more deeply involved he becomes in existence. Existence that is defined in historical, geographical, anthropological and religious coordinates. And which, evidently, is in constant development from the moment of conception to the day of death, passing through various vital stages.

The human being, in his totality, is an inseparable whole of nature - character and temperament - and culture - learning, values, traditions, environment, etc. - that gradually comes

5 Cfr. NICCOLE, P., "Sentido de la vida", in: BORILE, E., CABBIA, L., Y MAGNO, V. (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005.

6 All this means that by using reason what we do is judge reality (facts) by perceiving them at first and making an assessment that supposes the synthesis of an experience of encounter with said reality. Something that animals cannot do.

7 Language is only possible between human beings, it is a characteristic of humanity and not of the animal world. Language is an expression of the use of our reason.

8 Our spiritual dimension tells us that we are not only body, we are that and more. Man is made for transcendence..

to define and concretize himself in a life project, based on self-knowledge, relationships with others, work, social context, etc.

The human being is thus situated historically, through the various stages of life, from birth to death. And the question of the meaning of life is a consequence of becoming aware of oneself and taking oneself seriously in this course of life. This situation obliges him to take responsibility for himself, among other things, by giving an account of the type of life project he wants to build, of the direction and meaning he wants to give it, of the values he assumes, of the way he involves himself in life and in the decisions he makes and, above all, of his relationship with God.

2. Life and ideals

The German philosopher and thinker Max Scheler writes, "in a certain sense, all the fundamental problems of thought and the search for truth can be resolved in the answer to the question of what man is and what place and position he occupies in life, in the world and before God".

Throughout the history of humankind, human beings have tried to answer many questions and, in particular, the question of the meaning of life. The great thinkers of every age have done so with special interest. And in the same direction, religion has also made a great effort, albeit from another perspective, to give meaning to life.

However, although many others have attempted various answers to the meaning of human life, no one is exempt from the personal effort to draw his or her own conclusions in this regard. In fact, one's own lifestyle, one's personal attitude towards things and the characteristic way in which freedom is exercised are profoundly conditioned, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the kind of answer we give to this question.

Man inevitably asks himself where he comes from and where he is going⁹, what purpose or aim induces him to act in a certain way and not in another, and so on. And he does so, of course, from himself, but never disconnected from others, from his fellow men.

Therefore, the answer to the meaning of life is elaborated from the same interaction with the surrounding world. And, especially, the response to the meaning of life is reached little by little from the personal decision that each person assumes before *transcendence*¹⁰, that is, before God. If openness to transcendence is positive, the human being will understand himself as a singular "creature", sustained and accompanied in life.

Finally, nothing like this question - what is the meaning of my life - triggers the most diverse experiences that, little by little, will be the collection of experiences that will help to elaborate one's own answer to this question and to express it in a practical lifestyle, in ethical choices and in religious life.

⁹ The questions of philosophy are those that every man can ask himself: where did I come from? Where I go? who I am? They can be considered as a human community: where do we come from? where we go? about us?

¹⁰ The word "transcendence" refers to what is above what we can experience through our senses, but which is still real. God is transcendent, that is, God is not a product of culture nor is he identified with nature, he is above all of it.

3. Life and values

The human being is spirit and body, understanding and feelings, freedom, creativity and project; a being in constant relationship with himself, with others, with the world and with God... For this reason, it is normal that the more he is aware of himself, the easier it is for the question about the meaning of life to emerge.

The human condition is a gift from God. It must be accepted, assumed and deployed responsibly in all areas of life in which it is involved: knowledge, will, language, sexuality, sociality, responsibility... The human being is therefore structured in a certain way but, at the same time, he is even a mystery to himself because of his uniqueness, originality and unrepeatability. For this reason, he reacts, decides and makes choices in an absolutely unique and particular way.

The commitment he makes, the choices he makes, the efforts he invests and which set him in motion in life, have a lot to do with what he finds interesting and valuable for himself and for others, especially for the people he loves. It is true that sometimes personal interests may clash with other instances, such as society. However, "healthy" reason tells us what is good to privilege and what to avoid.

Discerning and weighing correctly what we do and the intentions for which we act, invites us to be alert and prudent. In the context of our modern culture, we are highly exposed to political, economic and even religious ideologies, and to the overbearing invasion of the media, mainly through advertising, into the sphere of private life.

In this sense, an authentic culture of values must offer a hierarchy of options and commitments that promote an integral humanism. In this way, we are asked to be attentive to understand the signs of the times, to help and serve the establishment of the civilization of love.

The tension that exists in our modern world between values and counter-values (life-death, good-evil, happiness-happiness, etc.) is of singular importance as a criterion for discerning authentic life and love. And it is so insofar as it educates pedagogically for authentic freedom. In this way, it trains the intelligence, will and sensitivity to face the tensions that arise in a fruitful way, to realize what is truly worthwhile and to put a stop to the disordered insinuations of human selfishness.

In interpersonal and intercultural dialogue, an important aspect of the meaning of human life becomes clear, namely, the recognition that in personal life there coexist fact and value, particularity and universality, corporeality and spirituality, autonomy and dependence, life and death, greatness and misery... This leads us to realize and affirm that, above the transient and transitory, there is the horizon of what is immutable¹¹, and that this constitutes a fundamental reference point for the meaning of human life.

4. Philosophy and religion

Philosophical reflection and religious experience are thus two privileged ways to reach and clarify the meaning of existence; and both are oriented towards truth. These two forms of "knowing and knowing" demand the active collaboration of the human being, who is confronted with the mystery of God and with the need to feel "safe" or "saved".

At the heart of his autobiography, that is, the book of The Confessions, St. Augustine acknowledges before God that he has become a "great question" for himself. Question as problem or question as mystery? In the sense of the mystery of life. The human person, as a spiritual subject, cannot be dissected and become exhaustive in the analysis of all the dimensions of his being; the person is free, by the grace of God, to become not even what

¹¹ This word means "not subject to change", that is, it is not mutable.

he suspects. For this reason, the human person, as a mystery, resists the various attempts of modern science to reduce it to an empirical datum of control and experimental verification.

The living person, *imago Dei* (image of God), is a special divine symbol in the world, insofar as he or she is in direct dialogue with the Creator and is the bearer of germs of life, of thirst for happiness, authenticity and eternity. St. Augustine says:

**“You have made us, Lord, for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”
(cf. Confessions I,1).**

Philosophy can approach the mystery of the human being and propose possible answers to the meaning of life. Religion, on the other hand, brings, from the light of what God has communicated to us, the provocation that challenges us to design a response to the meaning of human life based on love, faith and hope. Religious faith does not mortify or fight against reason, but orients it and leads it to recognize its limits. Therefore, the response that leads to the meaning of life, one and the other, can be complementary and reciprocal.

The Christian faith does not eliminate the historical dialectic between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, between virtue and vice... What the Christian faith does is to enable us to face both the positive and the negative, and it provides the human being with orientations for the testimonial and missionary commitment, to implant the paradoxes of the Gospel in the redeemed life of the followers of Jesus Christ.

The baptized and believing human being, “who has passed from death to life” thanks to the redeeming work of the Savior, is called to live in the world as a bearer and witness of the values contained in the sermon of the beatitudes. These values are, among other things, the expression of the failure of worldly idolatries and the proclamation of the meaning of the limitations of redeemed human existence, in expectation of the glorious manifestation of the Lord at the end of history.

5. Today’s youth experiences and the role of the community

In the document *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis pointed out some of the experiences that many young people of today go through: experiences of uprootedness, emptiness of meaning, orphanhood, etc. On the other hand, he suggested the type of service that parish or educational communities could offer in the face of these situations. What should we do as agents of vocation ministry?

As a Church we can neither ignore the reality nor ignore an important part of the community such as youth. What can we do for young people who go through experiences of emptiness of meaning?

Let us read together the text of Pope Francis looking for an answer:

“In all our institutions we need to develop and enhance much more our capacity for cordial welcome, because many of the young people who arrive do so in a profound situation of orphanhood. And I am not referring to certain family conflicts, but to an experience that concerns children, young people and adults alike, mothers, fathers and children. For so many orphans, our contemporaries, perhaps even ourselves, communities such

as the parish and the school should offer paths of gratuitous love and promotion, of affirmation and growth.

Many young people today feel that they are children of failure, because the dreams of their parents and grandparents were burned at the stake of injustice, of social violence, of every man for himself. So much uprooting! If young people grew up in a world of ashes, it is not easy for them to sustain the fire of great illusions and projects. If they grew up in a desert empty of meaning, how can they be willing to sacrifice themselves in order to sow? The experience of discontinuity, of uprootedness and the fall of basic certainties, fostered in today's media culture, provoke this feeling of profound orphanhood to which we must respond by creating fraternal and attractive spaces where people can live with meaning" (*Christus vivit* 216).

Evidently we are challenged as agents of vocation ministry, we are invited to broaden the horizons of our action to facilitate the question of the meaning of life. We need a certain amount of creativity and courage for our vocation ministry to bear fruit.

And to audacity we must add depth, listening, wisdom, grace... For this, spiritual discernment, which the person carries out with all that he or she is - body and soul - is a valuable resource, since it allows us to discover a unique and unrepeatable project:

"It is true that spiritual discernment does not exclude the contributions of human, existential, psychological, sociological or moral wisdoms. But it transcends them. Even the wise norms of the Church are not enough. Let us always remember that discernment is a grace. Even if it includes reason and prudence, it surpasses them, because it is a matter of glimpsing the mystery of the unique and unrepeatable plan that God has for each one and that is realized in the midst of the most varied contexts and limits. What is at stake is not only temporary well-being, nor the satisfaction of doing something useful, nor even the desire to have a clear conscience. What is at stake is the meaning of my life before the Father who knows and loves me, the true purpose of my existence, which no one knows better than he" (*Gaudete et exultate*, 170).

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



- 1- Do you think that the lack of meaning in life is a consequence of the fact that many young people do not have a clear vocation life project? Why?
- 2- In what way can we accompany young people who have had experiences of emptiness of meaning in life and as a consequence, suicide attempts?
- 3- In light of the theme developed, what strategies do you consider necessary in working with young people, so that they may have a clear sense of life that will encourage them to project themselves with a vision of the future?

THE SPIRIT AND VOCATION SPIRITUALITY

Objective

To propose the fundamental elements of a spirituality that nourishes one's vocation and allows the unfolding of God's qualities and gifts for vocation promotion.

Development of the theme

1. The Holy Spirit and vocation promotion

We have already spoken of God the Father who loves and calls to life, of the Son who calls and is the reason and model of every vocation. Now, we cannot fail to reflect on the Holy Spirit and his way of assisting the vocation response.

The Holy Spirit assists the Church in all her life and mission. This is an indisputable fact of the Church's faith. Well then, vocation ministers and every believer are aware that they need to let themselves be led by the Spirit in order to be a reflection, although approximate and never perfect, of Jesus, the Lord.

For this reason, the spirituality of the vocation minister is not a second-order issue that can be neglected. Vocation promoters must be "evangelizers who open themselves without fear to the action of the Holy Spirit" (Evangeli Gaudium, n. 259), "evangelizers who pray and work" (ibid., n. 262). If vocation is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of vocation promotion must be, in turn, a "spiritual" ministry, because it comes from the Holy Spirit, is an instrument or mediation of the Spirit and is at the service of the Spirit, the Giver of every vocation.

In this sense, we can say that there are two important principles that make vocation promotion a convinced ministry¹²: if he is not a person of God, it will be difficult for him to speak of Him and, in addition, his ministry must always be oriented to the life and holiness of the Church.

- Every vocation promoter must be a disciple-missionary. A vocation promoter is a person who lives a stable relationship with Jesus, and therefore continues to strive like his Master for the things of the Father. Hence, united to Jesus, he seeks what he seeks, loves what he loves and speaks of the One he knows;
- A vocation promoter is someone who passionately loves the Church. Vocation promotion is a passion for Jesus as we have said, but at the same time, a passion "for the good of his body which is the Church" (Col 1,24). There is, therefore, no authentic vocation promotion without empathy with the Church, with her sufferings, with her disconcerts, with her fears and her shortcomings... But also and, above all, with her joys and her hopes, which are many because she lives from a promise. It is a passion in the key of fidelity. Fidelity can only be creative because it places us within the horizon of love and service to the Church, and disposes us to support her in her needs, to help her in her necessities, to help her grow in holiness, to keep her united and in mission, to go to the peripheries, to broaden her horizons and, also, to help her grow with new vocations.

12 Cfr. MART OS, J. C., *Salir y sembrar. Dos tareas vocacionales prioritarias y urgentes*, Madrid 2017, 44-80.

2. Vocation Spirituality

Before reflecting on the spirituality of vocation promotion, a word of caution is in order. The word spirituality today evokes very varied and different ideas that respond, in turn, to diverse anthropological models and ways of conceiving the relationship of the human being with Transcendence. In a generic sense, the word spirituality designates that relationship directed to someone or something that is situated beyond the visible, the tangible and the material. Here we understand spirituality, in a more precise sense, as the way of life of the disciple of Jesus who allows himself to be guided by his Spirit. On the other hand, let us remember that for St. Augustine the Holy Spirit, who is Gift and Love, has an important role in our life of faith, in fact, He enkindles and elevates us in the love of God:

“Things less ordered are restless: they are ordered and at rest. My weight is my love, it carries me wherever I am carried. Your gift [the Holy Spirit] enkindles us and by it we are carried upward: we are enkindled and we walk; we climb the ascents set in our hearts” (Confessions, XIII, 9).

Moreover, it is his inner motions (admonitiones) that help us to find how to strengthen our spiritual communion with God (cf. beata u. 35). To be in tune with the Holy Spirit is to live in harmony with Jesus and the Father.

Now, the vocation promoter has his own way of living his spirituality, which is the way of “living in the Spirit”, the concrete way of feeling and living faith, communion and mission. In other words, spirituality expresses the way of assuming one’s own existence from God, in the way of Jesus, being led and animated by his Spirit in this Church. This implies discovering a new existential relationship with oneself, with God, with others and with the world in which one lives.

We list below those spiritual traits that seem to us to be the most suitable for vocation promotion:

1- Yes to confidence, no to optimism

The present times are not times of optimism. But they should be times of hope. They offer us an opportunity to place our trust not in the efficacy of our efforts and resources, but in God himself.

Trust is a basic vital attitude deeply rooted in the human being. Experts say that, for a country’s economy to function, there must be a climate of trust in its legal system, in labor legislation, in the functioning of the markets, etc. In our pastoral fields, however, we are witnessing a globalized weakening of spontaneous trust. Sometimes this is also seen in vocation ministry.

But vocation promotion must be based on the biblical principle of trust. It is founded on the certainty that God will not abandon his people and that everything that happens, however negative and gloomy it may seem, will in the end serve for good. Thus:

- *We trust that God continues to call. He takes the initiative and his word makes us live, die and resurrect, exist and love, laugh, cry and hope. We are part of a project of love and life in which we are all invited to participate;*
- *We trust in the generous hearts of young people. Because we are God’s creatures, there is in every human being an inner tension that makes us restless and mobilizes all of*

us, in a reflex or latent way, towards him. Young people are also captivated by this mysterious attraction;

- *We trust that, despite our inertia and contradictions, we have something very great to offer. God's gift exceeds our persons and our institutions. We do not preach ourselves, but the Lord who became incarnate and remains in his community.*

2- Yes to responsibility, no to victimhood

When a vocation promoter repeatedly experiences the futility of his efforts, he often begins to feel like a "victim". A victim-promoter tends to believe that his frustrations are always "outside". In this way, he attributes his apostolic setbacks to the prevailing mediocrity, to the poor functioning of our projects, to third parties who get in the way... It is incredible the ability that can be awakened to blame others for the failures and setbacks that come with vocation ministry.

The role of victim, however, never gives the promoter the peace he seeks. Victimhood is a potion that only produces inner bitterness and bitterness. How to react to victimhood? The only valid answer is responsibility. The finger that points at others must be turned around until it points at oneself, because the truth is that everything depends to a great extent on each one of us. This demands from the frustrated vocation promoter the maturity to assume his own responsibilities.

Honesty of heart is the ideal disposition for vocation ministry. It is always wiser to face difficulties directly than to hide or run away from them, projecting them onto others. God has not created automatons and robots, but beings free to assume their own responsibilities in the midst of such apostolic difficulties. But such a responsibility is not born automatically: it is the fruit of the experience of trust of which we spoke earlier.

3- Yes to hope, no to nostalgia

On many occasions, in our Christian and religious communities, nostalgia for the past is palpable. We cannot deny it... We miss the glorious years of vocation abundance with full seminaries and the atmosphere of Christianity favorable to the Church. But we know that nostalgia produces sadness and sadness generates passivity.

The alternative to paralyzing nostalgia is confident hope. For St. Thomas Aquinas, hope constitutes the possibility of enjoying one's own life. In fact, its task is to strengthen desire, especially in the face of difficulties; a desire of such density that it provides a tone of pleasure to life, a light in adversity and a vigorous impulse for commitment. With regard to vocation promotion, what can we hope for, and in what can we place our trust?

There is a human hope linked to our life instinct, which always pushes us to fight, to look for ways out, not to give up. Without it, human life would be impossible because "man cannot live without hope: his life, condemned to insignificance, would become unbearable" (Evangelii Gaudium 275). It is the hope that pushes human beings in terminal situations to make a last effort to survive.

But as believers we speak of another, more essential hope. This theological hope is a gift from God that allows us to trust in him in spite of all the setbacks that come our way. This hope is grounded in God and in Jesus: "Christ is our hope" (1 Tim 1:1). Hope should remove from those who promote vocations that nostalgic and melancholic look at the past, and guide them to build with realism the possible future and to prepare the definitive one.

4- Yes to happiness, no to success

Happiness is often confused with success. If we look at the end of Jesus, we can easily see that he was not very successful among his people: he died crucified on a cross! However, we can imagine that he was happy because he gave himself completely to the love of the Father. For this reason, his resurrection is, among other things, an expression of his happiness and ours.

Keeping this difference between happiness and success in mind, let us retain a wise lesson of life and pastoral action: we must sow much in order to reap little. But it is necessary to sow. We must ask for the grace and joy of fidelity in a time of scarce fruitfulness. We must appropriate the words of Simon Peter: "We have been working all night without catching anything; but since you say so, I will let down the nets" (Lk 5:5). And we have no doubt that we will continue to count on apostles who, in his name, will continue to work on the job, aware that they are asked, above all, for fidelity, not results.

5- Yes to patience, no to haste

One of the evils that afflicts our days, and not only vocation ministry, is the deification of immediacy and speed in achieving results. However, vocation ministry is not an exact science nor does it work automatically. The correct application of what is foreseen and programmed does not give as an immediate result the desired numerical fruits.

There is no room for "efficiency" or acceleration. Statistics should not, therefore, define without appeal the validity or nullity of vocation promotion. Nor should it be a reason to overwhelm those most directly responsible with unattainable demands. Under no circumstances.

Moreover, the processes of discernment and vocation decision are slow and laborious. Inner fears and the setbacks of life exasperate the accelerated. The haste interrupts prematurely the processes, instead of maturing them. Pastoral patience, daughter of hope, is the most necessary virtue in this field.

It is committed to prioritizing processes before seeking immediate results, which are often ephemeral and frustrating. He does not trust automatisms because he recognizes that it is impossible to know exactly what moves a person's heart. He does not lose his sense of slowness and calm because we are in the sowing season and not the fishing season. And sowing requires time: not to stop sowing in all fields; to let the seed fall into the ground and die; to water; to accompany with care the sprouts when they appear.

6- Yes to the appreciation of the small, no to the ambition for the great

Appreciation for the small is not a "consolation prize" for when we cannot reach "the big". The small and the small have evangelical nobility. And the small is always within our reach. What are the small things that we can do and that are within our reach? Let us list a few:

- First of all, to live our vocation well, to speak joyfully of it, to manifest publicly the satisfaction of serving the People of God in our own way of life;
- To make ourselves more visible, recognizing that healthy visibility - not exhibitionism - recovers in a positive way the appreciation for this way of realizing ourselves as persons;
- To decide to deal frequently with the vocation theme in our conversation and in our ordinary activities;

- To take care of families and educators, because of the importance they have for vocations. To involve them, to offer them formation and to make them responsible;
- To take care that there is catechesis on vocation at all levels and pastoral instances of our platforms;
- To form and take care of small teams of vocation promoters who take care of the pastoral care of all vocations in our centers. Without forgetting that the first urgency, today, is the family;
- To promote in the Christian community a strong movement of prayer; without forgetting the elderly and the sick, who collaborate effectively with the offering of their pains and sufferings in favor of vocations;
- To celebrate vocation days with dignity (for example, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations).

7- Yes to the option for the poor, no to indifference

“The kerygma has an inescapably social content” (Evangelii Gaudium 177) because “there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor” (ibid., n. 48). These words conceal a warning for everyone: “To turn a deaf ear to the cry of the poor, when we are God’s instrument for listening to the poor, places us outside the Father’s will” (ibid., n. 197). Pastoral work for vocations cannot ignore the reality of the poor and needy.

How should vocation ministry be oriented in order to be in tune with the concern for the poor?

- Pastoral work for vocations is tensioned by a double attraction: for the poor and humble Christ and, also, for the poor. The vocation proposal must be very clear that Jesus always calls from the perspective of the poor. One of the surest indicators of a correct vocation approach is if it succeeds in awakening in the one called a sensitivity towards the poor (cf. Galatians 2:10), avoiding any ideology and any attempt to use them. Purified of other interests, the pastoral care of vocations must seek above all the Kingdom of God and his justice, and the rest will be given to it as well;
- It is appropriate to establish as an obligatory criterion of discernment for new vocations their sensitivity, closeness and service to the most needy and poor. This is an authentic vocation sign that must be verified.
- We must not forget that our lifestyle emits a permanent signal that is picked up by our interlocutors. All stimuli leave a sediment in them. Austerity, religious depth, solidarity, humility, the attitude of service of the promoters and of the groups they represent are vocation claims of unquestionable provocative value when they are well oriented. Unfortunately, their opposites, besides being destructive, are also very contagious;
- the poor, let us not forget, are an eloquent loudspeaker of the Lord’s call. When the habit of making the poor present in the unfolding of vocation ministry is established, they become a privileged mediation of the Lord’s call because they broaden the horizon of life and awaken compassion, that acute sensitivity capable of provoking the most generous and committed responses.

8- Yes to encountering young people, no to discarding them

Pastoral work for vocations should not be insensitive to young people and their circumstances. There are two challenges to which it must give a prompt and clear response: to reduce the distance of Christian communities from many young people and to overcome the difficulties that prevent it from communicating with them (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 105).

We can reverse the situation with three steps that make explicit a pastoral attitude of approach and missionary empathy:

- Go out to meet them. It is indispensable to do it as an absolute priority and with a permanent disposition to bring the love of Jesus and his message, which can be realized in any place;
- To empathize with them. To do this, we must approach them, “with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 125);
- To accompany them in their decisions. Our pastoral care will be insufficient if we do not help them “to be capable of truly free and responsible decisions” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 171).

We close our section, recalling some words from the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, *Young People, Faith and Vocation Discernment*, n. 62:

“The first condition for vocation discernment in the Spirit is an authentic experience of faith in the dead and risen Christ, remembering that this light “does not dispel all our darkness, but, like a lamp, it guides our steps in the night, and this is enough to walk by” (FRANCIS, *Lumen fidei*, 57). In Christian communities we sometimes run the risk of proposing, beyond intentions, an ethical and therapeutic theism, which responds to the human being’s need for security and consolation, instead of a living encounter with God in the light of the Gospel and with the power of the Spirit. If it is true that life is reborn only through life, it is clear that young people need to find Christian communities truly rooted in friendship with Christ, who leads us to the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit”.

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



- 1- How to accompany the “vocation awakening” in the growth of faith, of the young people of our time?
- 2- In what way can the spirituality of vocation be combined with vocation discernment, proper to those who begin a journey of following Christ?
- 3- At the moment of elaborating a plan of vocation promotion, according to what you have worked in this section, which are the elements that you consider fundamental to facilitate a structured vocation work?

THE CHURCH, MOTHER OF VOCATIONS

Objective

To recognize that there is no authentic vocation promotion that does not have the Church as a point of reference, especially as mother of vocations: she is par excellence a mystery of vocation and mission.

Development of the theme

1. The vocation dimension of Christian life

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message to the II Latin American Continental Congress on Vocations, recalled this same idea: "The Church, in the most intimate part of her being, has a vocation dimension, already implicit in her etymological meaning: 'assembly called together' by God. The Christian life also participates in this same vocation dimension that characterizes the Church. In the soul of every Christian there resounds ever anew that "follow me" of Jesus to the apostles, which changed their lives forever (cf. Mt 4:19)"¹³.

2. The ecclesial dimension of every vocation

On the 53rd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis affirmed that "the Church is the house of mercy and the 'soil' where vocations germinate, grow and bear fruit (...). The merciful action of the Lord forgives our sins and opens us to the new life that becomes concrete in the call to discipleship and mission. Every vocation in the Church has its origin in the compassionate gaze of Jesus. Conversion and vocation are like the two sides of a single coin and mutually imply each other throughout the life of the missionary disciple"¹⁴.

For a Catholic there is no vocation apart from the community. The Christian is not fully realized if it is not in relationship with others, especially in relationship with his brothers and sisters in faith. Moreover, vocation discernment has an irreplaceable element, beyond the forms, which is that of the mediation of the community.

Pope Francis also recalled this: "God's call is realized through community mediation. God calls us to belong to the Church and, after maturing in her bosom, grants us a specific vocation. The vocation journey is made alongside other brothers and sisters whom the Lord gives us: it is a con-vocation. The ecclesial dynamism of vocation is an antidote to the poison of indifference and individualism. It establishes that communion in which indifference has been overcome by love, because it requires us to go out of ourselves, placing our life at the service of God's plan and assuming the historical situation of his holy People".

3. Vocation is born, grows and is sustained by the Church

From these last statements, Pope Francis derived three aspects of the Christian vocation:

1. *Vocation is born in the Church.* From the birth of a vocation, an adequate "sense" of Church is necessary. No one is called exclusively to a region, nor to a group or ecclesial

13 II CONTINENTAL LATIN AMERICAN VOCATION CONGRESS (2001), MESSAGE FROM THE HOLY FATHER.

14 POPE FRANCIS, MESSAGE OF THE LIII WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS (NOVEMBER 29, 2015).

movement, but to the service of the Church and the world. A clear sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesiality, its capacity to integrate itself harmoniously into the life of the holy and faithful People of God for the good of all. Responding to God's call, the young person sees how the ecclesial horizon broadens, can consider the different charisms and vocations and thus reach a more objective discernment. The community thus becomes the home and family in which the vocation is born. The candidate gratefully contemplates this community mediation as an indispensable element for his future. He learns to know and love other brothers and sisters who walk different paths; and these bonds strengthen communion in all.

2. *Vocation grows in the Church.* During the formation process, candidates for different vocations need to get to know the ecclesial community better, overcoming the limited perceptions we all have at the beginning. For example: communicating the Gospel message with a good catechist; experiencing the evangelization of the peripheries with a religious community; discovering and appreciating the treasure of contemplation by sharing the cloistered life; getting to know the mission ad gentes better through contact with missionaries; deepening the experience of pastoral ministry in the parish and in the diocese with diocesan priests. For those already in formation, the Christian community always remains the fundamental educational environment, to which they are grateful.
3. *The vocation is supported by the Church.* After the definitive commitment, the vocation journey in the Church does not end; it continues in availability for service, perseverance and ongoing formation. He who has consecrated his life to the Lord is ready to serve the Church wherever she needs him. The mission of Paul and Barnabas is an example of this ecclesial availability. Sent by the Holy Spirit from the community of Antioch on a mission (Acts 13:1-4), they returned to the community and shared what the Lord had accomplished through them (Acts 14:27). The missionaries are accompanied and supported by the Christian community, which continues to be for them a vital reference point, like the visible homeland that gives security to those who are on pilgrimage towards eternal life.

Among the pastoral agents, priests are of special importance. Through their ministry they make present the word of Jesus who declared: I am the door of the sheep... I am the good shepherd (Jn 10:7,11). The pastoral care of vocations is a fundamental part of their pastoral ministry. Priests accompany those who are in search of their own vocation and those who have already given their lives to the service of God and the community in a specific vocation.

On the other hand, all the faithful are called to become aware of the ecclesial dynamism of vocation, so that communities of faith may become, after the example of the Virgin Mary, a motherly womb that welcomes the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35-38). The Church's motherhood is expressed through her persevering prayer for vocations, her educational activity and the accompaniment she offers to those who perceive God's call. It also does so through the careful selection of candidates for the ordained ministry and the consecrated life. Finally, she is the mother of vocations by continually supporting those who have consecrated their lives to the service of others.

We can conclude our theme with a text of St. Augustine full of love and devotion for the Mother Church. This was the way in which the Church was recognized with great affection by the Christians of North Africa in Augustine's time. In fact, the Hippoanese, even being aware of the limitations of the Church at the time of this pilgrimage, did not fail to recognize her as mother and teacher of Christians:

“Mother Catholic Church! True mother of Christians, you not only teach that the purest and most chaste worship that we must give to God is the possession of our most blessed life, but by your sublime teachings you make love and charity for others your own in such a way that in you we find the most powerful and effective remedy for the various evils which, because of sins, afflict our souls. You innocently train the children; you forcibly train the young; you gently care for the elderly. Thou ordainest all according to the laws of the purest and most sincere love...” (*From the Customs of the Catholic Church 1,30,62*)

Questions for reflection and group dialogue



1. Are you aware of the ecclesial dimension of your own vocation?
2. How would you make your environment more appreciative of the motherhood of the Church, that is, that every vocation is born, grows and is sustained by the Church?

THE VOCATION KERYGMA¹⁵

Objective

To deepen the concept of vocation kerygma as a fundamental element in vocation ministry. Every vocation is, in essence, an encounter and a dialogue between Jesus, the Lord, who calls and someone who listens and responds to him at a specific time and place in his personal and social history.

Development of the theme

1. What to sow? The vocation kerygma

Every vocation is, in essence, an encounter and a dialogue between Jesus the Lord who calls and someone who listens to him and responds to him, in successive moments and concrete places in his history. Some of those called are found by chance, others were already looking for him (cf. Jn 1:38), but it is always the Lord who calls: "Follow me" (Mk 1:14; Mt 9:9). The New Testament accounts of vocation, in continuity with those of the Old Testament, show the succession between election and call: after choosing someone (with his gaze), the Lord calls him (with his word) to be with him and to collaborate in the mission.

Vocation promotion is an authentic ministry of mediation that aims to actualize and prolong this singular and decisive encounter with Christ. It is aware that people do not know what they are looking for, but what they find. Hence, his work focuses above all on helping others to see how the Lord passes through their lives, chooses them and calls them to leave everything to follow him. He carries out this service through specific and complex actions. The most central is the vocation proposal. It is nothing other than a very direct and sharp personal interpellation, without being a threat: "The Lord is passing by and he is calling you". This is nothing other than the announcement of good news.

We call such an announcement, with an expression taken from the parables of the Gospel, vocation sowing because it is done by depositing a seed - the vocation kerygma - in the good soil of everyone's heart. Such a seed, although it is the smallest of all seeds, contains an "alarm clock" that warns about the vocation meaning of life. This announcement of the vocation kerygma is an expression of the evangelical kerygma, "the absolute priority" (Evangeliu Gaudium, 110) which "must occupy the center of evangelizing activity and of every attempt at ecclesial renewal" (ibid., 164). The sowing of the vocation kerygma is complete when it includes the explicit proposal contained in it. Sowing and proposal constitute a unity. Both move to conversion of life and also awaken the vocation.

The Constitutions of the Order of Augustinian Recollects underline the importance of this kerygmatic vocation announcement: "The vocation call must always begin with a catechesis of announcement that leads to the experience of God, and underlines the beauty of the following of Christ with an explicit proposal: "Come and see" (Jn 1:46), in imitation of the Master. In this way, each one will be able to appropriate the words of St. Augustine: "I exhort others as much as I can to embrace this proposal, and I have brothers in the Lord who, through my ministry, have decided to do so" (Ep. 157:4,39)" (Cons., n. 156b).

15 Cfr. MARTOS, J. C., Salir y sembrar. *Dos tareas vocacionales prioritarias y urgentes*, Madrid 2017, 36-42.

2. The content of the vocation kerygma

Let us remember that all this is done through contagion and not indoctrination; through witness and not only information; through interpellation and not expressive ambiguities. The proclamation and reception of the Gospel of vocation can be described and understood from the assumptions of the transmission of faith. How could we describe the content of this piercing proclamation? Let us look at some points that could help us:

- *It is the proclamation of a Presence:* it is not a doctrinal, generic proclamation, without punch or bite. It is, above all, “the explicit proclamation that Jesus is Lord” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 110). It strives to make others aware, in a credible and convincing way, of the presence of Someone who loves them and therefore calls them;
- *The kerygma has a core:* Its message focuses on “God’s saving love prior to moral and religious obligation” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 165). It leads to the discovery of the most central truth of the Gospel: one can only “win life by giving it away” (II Latin American Continental Congress, Concluding Document, n. 76);
- *The kerygma is epiphanic:* it reveals what is most fundamental and central to human identity. Life is a “gift received which, by nature, tends to become a given good” (New Vocations for a New Europe, 16). This grammar of existence shows that love is the meaning of life. One cannot be happy without loving. And, against all romantic or emotional reductionism, to love, to give oneself, entails pain and death to one’s own ego, without which it is impossible to open oneself to the “you”;
- *The kerygma is a first announcement:* It is called “first”, not because it is at the beginning and then it is forgotten or replaced by other messages that surpass it. It is qualitatively the first because it is the “principal proclamation which must always be heard again in various ways and which must always be proclaimed again in one way or another” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 164). To silence this proclamation is tantamount to preventing the dynamism of vocation from being set in motion;
- *The kerygma is valid for everyone:* It is a proclamation addressed to everyone, especially the young. It is appropriate even for those who are far from the faith or who have lost the meaning of their lives, because it “responds to the yearning for the infinite that is in every human heart” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 165);
- *The kerygma is always good news:* it is news full of life and meaning. When it is properly proclaimed, an important good is done to those who hear it, regardless of whether it is accepted or not;
- *The kerygma introduces into a mystagogical path:* This proclamation offers a pedagogy that leads people, step by step, to the full assimilation of the mystery of God;
- *The kerygma is a convincing message:* It connects easily with different ways of thinking and feeling. It communicates itself, fully and without rhetoric, through “an idea, a feeling and an image” (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 157). It has an anthropological basis common to all. But it does not renounce speaking explicitly and clearly of Jesus the Lord, because there is nothing more solid, more profound, more certain, more dense and wiser than this proclamation.

3. The vocation kerygma in the dynamics of search and growth

Pope Francis, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit* addressed to young people and to all the people of God, suggests two lines of action in pastoral work with young people that, undoubtedly, can be of help in vocation ministry. In there he points out the importance of the kerygma.

The two main lines of action are search and growth. Regarding the first, he indicates that “in this search, the language of proximity must be privileged, the language of disinterested, relational and existential love that touches the heart, touches life, awakens hope and desires. It is necessary to approach young people with the grammar of love, not with proselytism. The language that young people understand is that of those who give their lives, of those who are there for them and for them, and of those who, despite their limits and weaknesses, try to live their faith consistently. At the same time, we still have to seek with greater sensitivity how to incarnate the kerygma in the language spoken by today’s young people” (*Christus vivit*, 211).

With regard to growth he issues a warning. “In some places it happens that, after having provoked in young people an intense experience of God, an encounter with Jesus that touched their hearts, then they only offer them “formation” meetings where only doctrinal and moral questions are addressed: on the evils of today’s world, on the Church, on Social Doctrine, on chastity, on marriage, on birth control and on other topics. The result is that many young people become bored, lose the fire of the encounter with Christ and the joy of following him, many abandon the path and others become sad and negative. Let us calm the obsession with transmitting an accumulation of doctrinal content, and above all let us try to awaken and root the great experiences that sustain Christian life” (*ibid.*, 212).

In short, “any formative project, any path of growth for young people, must certainly include doctrinal and moral formation. It is equally important that it be centered on two great axes: one is the deepening of the kerygma, the foundational experience of the encounter with God through the dead and risen Christ. The other is growth in fraternal love, in community life, in service” (*ibid.*, 213).

These texts are of inestimable value. They point out two axes or challenges for youth ministry and vocation ministry: to always listen to and deepen the vocation kerygma and, at the same time, to connect it with community life and service to others. In short, it is the development of the vocation truth that is found in every human being and that is waiting to come to light, that is, to become a luminous reality that is of help to others.

Finally, let us close this reflection with one of the many examples of vocation kerygma that can be found in the aforementioned document. For example, when Pope Francis recalls and announces three truths to young people - God loves you, Christ is your savior, He lives - he says the following words in which those of Benedict XVI also resound:

“If you come to appreciate with your heart the beauty of this proclamation and let yourself be found by the Lord; if you let yourself be loved and saved by Him; if you enter into friendship with Him and begin to converse with the living Christ about the concrete things of your life, that will be the great experience, that will be the fundamental experience that will sustain your Christian life. That is also the experience that you will be able to communicate to other young people. For “one does not begin to be a Christian by an ethical decision or a great idea, but by an encounter with an event, with a Person, who gives a new horizon to life and, with it, a decisive orientation” (*Christus vivit* n. 129).

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



- 1- Who announced the vocation kerygma to you? How do you remember that moment?
- 2- How do you think the vocation ministry should announce it, in what moments, spaces, forms?

VOCATION ACCOMPANIMENT

Objective

To discover the meaning of vocation accompaniment and the importance it has in the life of young people who feel a specific call and wish to follow Christ in religious and priestly life.

Development of the theme

1. Accompanying: a requirement of vocation ministry

The II Latin American Continental Congress on Vocations highlighted the keys and the stages that an effective vocation pedagogy should offer: “the vocation pedagogy will facilitate the vocation culture to the extent that it follows a process, like the itinerary that the Document of Aparecida proposes for the missionary discipleship: encounter with Jesus Christ, conversion, discipleship, communion and mission, which in what is specifically vocation is made explicit in these stages:

- a. *Awakening* to the perception of the good seed of vocation, starting from the kerygma about God the Father who loves and calls in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Starting also from the great truth of the Gospel stories typically vocation: to gain life by giving it.
- b. *Discern* the signs of the call to listen to their voices and distinguish their paths, not professional but vocation.
- c. *Cultivate* the sense of life as gift and task, as call and mission, as discipleship and proclamation.
- d. *To accompany* in listening to the Voice of the Word that calls, in the encounter with his Face -Jesus Christ in the poor-, in living in his House that is ecclesial communion and formative vocation community, and in the journey of his Paths that are vocation projection through self-giving¹⁶.

As we can notice, accompaniment is placed at the end of the process. In other words, there will hardly be a true vocation process if we do not accompany the young people in their inner search in relation to the call of the Lord. After this fundamental guideline, let us see how we can define vocation accompaniment, especially distinguishing it first of all from other forms of accompaniment that exist in the Church.

2. Vocation accompaniment: the believer’s way of journeying today

The word accompaniment has become a key word in recent years in the pastoral ministry of the Church. And it is no longer a word that only evokes a specific field of vocation ministry; today spiritual accompaniment has re-emerged as a need that intends to invade all the spaces of ecclesial pastoral ministry. However, even when the word has acquired a new appreciation and a new boom in our daily vocabulary within the Church, there is still a long way to go, since the praxis of accompaniment is still unknown to many and relegated by many others.

Vocation accompaniment consists of the human and spiritual help that an older brother in

¹⁶ II Congreso Continental Latinoamericano de Vocaciones, Cartago, Costa Rica, January 31 – February 5, 2011, n. 76.

the faith and in the discipleship of Christ gives to another brother who is on the path of vocation search, recognition and decision. It is a specific time of mutual commitment between the one accompanying and the one being accompanied, until the unrenounceable certainty that the Lord is calling him for something very concrete is illuminated in the one being accompanied. It is a matter of accompanying the discipleship itinerary that leads the believer to mature on the path that God presents to him/her in order to live the fullness of love.

How to carry out this accompaniment? By returning again and again to Jesus, because his way of accompanying creates a style of accompaniment that never goes out of fashion: Jesus himself approached them and walked with them (Lk 24:15). Today too Jesus, the risen Christ, wants to work, in his own style, together with each young person, accepting their expectations, even if they are disappointed, and their hopes, even if they are inadequate. Therefore, yesterday, today and always, Jesus, through his Church, walks, listens and enthuses the hearts of young people as he makes the journey with them (cf. Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth, 5).

In the concluding document of the Synod on Youth, it was pointed out that young people themselves have asked that the figure of the accompanier be recovered. The service of accompaniment is a mission that cannot be postponed, which requires all the availability and generosity of those who carry it out. In this sense, accompaniment requires being available to the Spirit of the Lord to walk the path of those being accompanied. A good accompanier brings into play the qualities and abilities he or she recognizes in the person being accompanied and then has the courage to humbly step aside and let the person being accompanied walk the path he or she has chosen (cf. Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth, n. 101).

The same concluding document of the Synod on Youth presented the profile of the companion that young people need and demand for this moment in history: a good companion is a balanced person, who listens, who provides faith and prayer, who has measured himself against his own weaknesses and frailties. For this reason, he knows how to be welcoming to the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgences. When necessary, he can also offer the word of fraternal correction (Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth, 102).

In the same way, with realism and beauty, the conclusions of the Synod point out that it is necessary for an accompanier to be a free person, who respects the outcome of the journey of the one he accompanies, supporting him with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Holy Spirit produces in those who open their hearts, without trying to impose his opinion or his preferences. And further on, it is indicated that only from freedom will it be possible to be of service instead of trying to occupy the center of the scene and assuming possessive, manipulative or directive attitudes that originate dependence and hurt the freedom of those accompanied (Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth, 102).

According to the Synod on Youth, in order to become a good accompanier, it is necessary to carefully cultivate some important dimensions of Christian life, such as: to nurture a deep spiritual life that nourishes the relationship with the One who assigned this mission, to receive specific training to carry out this ministry, to allow oneself to be accompanied and to benefit from supervision. Finally, the ability to work in a team and to live the spirituality of communion is fundamental for accompaniment (cf. Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth, 103). The requirements to be an accompanier, therefore, are demanding and not everyone is in a position to provide good accompaniment; it is important to prepare oneself to accompany.

Moreover, all accompaniment, if it is Christian, is vocation. To accompany a brother in faith is to place oneself at the service of his vocation. To accompany vocationally is to be with, listen to and pray with those who say they feel called by the God of Jesus Christ to carry out a

mission. Then, it can be that the accompaniment is fundamentally centered in the discovery and discernment of a particular vocation, or simply, it is oriented to discover the way to live it in fullness. The pastoral ministry of the Church needs this service and the pastoral ministry of vocations is the most appropriate place to do it, especially if it is considered transversal to all pastoral action.

3. Augustinian Decalogue for vocation accompaniment

- 1) *It is done from heart to heart*, that is, from Jesus Christ, from my truth, from my own limitations and vulnerability; connecting from my vital center with the one being accompanied.
- 2) *It starts from the commitment* that the companion has previously traveled the road that invites the one being accompanied to travel. The orography is recognized because the companion has already been there. Certainly, the companion has not traveled all the existing paths, nor the possible ways to be lived, but he/she has reached goals and, for this reason, knows how to orient towards them.
- 3) *The companion is in tune with the vital moment* of search and encounter of the person being accompanied. From the deepest desires of his or her heart, the companion comes to represent “meaning of life for the other”. Special attention is given to the spiritual and psychological dynamisms of the person accompanied, which place him or her at a specific moment in his or her faith journey. Let us remember that St. Augustine knew how to take the wisdom of the ancients (cf. Terentius, *Heautontimorumenos*, 1,1,23), and say something that a good companion should never forget:

“I am a man, and nothing human is alien to me” (cf. ep. 155, 14; reply to Julian, 4, 83).

- 4) *The companion* perceives the direction of the deep desire of the person being accompanied. The companion follows the path of the person accompanied from the uncertainty and the sublimity of one’s own desires, which sometimes excite, but also sometimes frustrate. The companion recognizes the presence or absence of God in these desires.
- 5) *The companion helps to make the qualitative leap* (conversion) that the person accompanied seeks and needs. In this sense, orientation towards the qualitative leap that the accompanied person needs and that God asks of him/her.
- 6) *The accompaniment is given in the relationship of friendship*, and that shows a pilgrim who walks with another pilgrim, like Jesus Christ himself.
- 7) *The companion is with the person accompanied from humility* and happiness. That path, according to St. Augustine, has to be marked by the attitude of humility:

“First, humility, second humility, third humility; and as often as you ask me I will answer you the same” (ep. 118, 22; cf. Confessions X,43,68).

8) *The companion proposes the Word of God* as the intense light that illuminates the lines of the path. The process of maturation and vocation decision must therefore be traversed by the biblical meaning of life. In fact, for St. Augustine, the external word, that is, the one announced by the preacher, the companion or the catechist, is always an external means or instrument that only favors the interior word, the one proclaimed by the interior Master within the heart:

“Men can in a certain way bring things to memory by means of the signs that are words, but he who teaches is the only true teacher, the same incorruptible truth, the only interior teacher. He also became an exterior teacher to call us from the exterior to the interior, and taking the form of a servant, he deigned to appear humble to those who were lying down, so that, when he arose, his sublimity might be shown to them” (reply to the letter of Manes, 36, 41).

9) *The companion loves the person* accompanied in Christ. Yes, he loves him! Love that translates into care and attention, into concern for the person and his happiness.

10) *The companion pedagogically leads the person* accompanied to the experience of living in community, to feel like a living stone in the Church of Christ.

By way of conclusion to this theme, we underline the invitation of Pope Francis that we find in number 297 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*:

“It is necessary to arouse and accompany processes, not to impose journeys. And these are processes of persons who are always unique and free. For this reason it is difficult to draw up prescriptions, even when all the signs are positive, since “it is a matter of subjecting the positive factors themselves to careful discernment, so that they are not isolated from one another or in contrast with one another, absolutizing and opposing one another. The same can be said of the negative factors: they should not be rejected en bloc and without distinction, because in each of them there may be hidden some value, which is waiting to be discovered and brought back to its full truth”.

Questions for personal reflection and group dialogue



1. In what ways can the Christian community be accompanied in the process of discipleship and at the same time engage it in the accompaniment of young people?
2. According to what has been developed in the theme, what do you think is the role of the Vocation Promotion Team in the process of accompanying a young person with vocation restlessness?



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