



The harvest is rich

Module III
for Vocational Animation Teams



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recollects



The Harvest is Plentiful

MODULE III

VOCATION PROMOTION TEAMS



Introduction

I wish to thank all the lay people and religious who dedicate their lives or part of their time to vocation animation, to the difficult work of ploughing the soil and sowing, as seeds, questions, reflections and life testimonies that challenge the hearts of young people. I am grateful for the effort you are making to create among us that **vocational culture**, which means living life as a response to God's call, discovering our specific mission in the Church. Thank you for acting as *awakeners* in this somnolent world, inhabited by too many lethargic people who go through life without asking questions and are content to survive. I encourage you to **live in vocational key** the whole reality that surrounds us, especially the pastoral work we do, that is, to act in such a way that every expression of pastoral work manifests in a clear and unequivocal way a project, a gift of God made to the person and arouses in him or her the will to respond and make a personal commitment.

Pope Francis says: *"We need brothers and sisters who are experts in the ways of God, to be able to do what Jesus did with the disciples of Emmaus: to accompany them on the journey of life and in the moment of disorientation and to rekindle in them faith and hope through the Word and the Eucharist (cf. Luke 24:13-35). This is the delicate and committed task of an accompanier..."* (Plenary of the Institutes of Religious Life. 28.01.2017).

With this third module of the collection ***The Harvest is Plenty*** we intend to help in the formation, accompaniment and animation of the vocation teams of the Order that are functioning in many of our communities and ministries. We wish to continue insisting and deepening in the biblical, anthropological, theological and pastoral formation of both the laity and the religious, because placing the charism in the hands of the laity, as Pope Francis asks of us Augustinian Recollects, means taking their formation seriously, for we all have to give reason for our faith and our hope, and we should all have the opportunity to count on tools like these guides, which help us and facilitate the work that has been entrusted to us.

To those who have accepted the challenge of being vocation animators, I would like to remind you of what Pope Benedict XVI said and Pope Francis repeats in *Evangelii Gaudium* when speaking of evangelization, but which we can very well apply to vocation work: *the Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction, just as Christ attracts us all with the power of his love, which culminated in the sacrifice of the Cross*. Vocation is a gift from God, but it arises in the hearts of people through human mediation, especially of those brothers and sisters who live their faith with joy and enthusiasm, of those who make of their lives a generous dedication and place themselves at the service of the Gospel and the needs of the Church.

The formative materials that we offer you are very valuable and necessary, but what is absolutely essential to encourage vocation ministry is vibrating with our own vocation and loving that which we are, to the point of being willing to give our lives. There is no

better way to attract and convince without much need for many explanations, theories and arguments. Only those who are in love can awaken love, only those who live their vocation with joy and passion can enthuse, only those who feel that God makes you happy and gives meaning to your life can genuinely proclaim the Gospel.

May this guide help you to discover, to know and to love more the living God who continues to reach out daily to people along the paths of life and continues to seduce hearts with the power of his love.

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BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Jesus' response to the call of the Father

Goal

As agents of vocation ministry, to view accompaniment and discernment starting from the person of Jesus Christ. As a man, he too experienced the divine call and he exercised genuine discernment. Hence, his response to the Father's call shines a bright light on the path of every missionary disciple in seeking the divine will.

Developing the topic

Luke 2:41-52

"His parents went to Jerusalem every year to the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up as usual to the feast, and when they returned, after some days had passed, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, his parents not knowing it. But believing that he was in the caravan, they journeyed a day's journey, and sought for him among their relatives and acquaintances; but when they found him not, they returned to Jerusalem in search of him.

And it came to pass at the end of three days, that they found him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers.

When they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I were in anguish and were looking for you". And he said to them, "And why were you looking for me? did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand the answer he gave them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and lived subject to them.

His mother carefully kept all these things in her heart. Jesus progressed in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man".

We might think that Jesus, being the Son of God, did not need a particular calling to fulfill his mission in the world. However, as St. Paul says in the Letter to the Philippians: *"Christ, though he was divine, did not claim to be equal with God, but emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6-8).*

The solidarity of the Son of God with human beings is also indicated in the Letter to the Hebrews in this way: *"The High Priest we have - Jesus Christ - is not insensitive to our weakness, since, like us, he has been tested in every way except sin" (Hebrews 4:15).* Therefore, Jesus, the one consecrated to the Father, also experienced God's call; he too became aware by discerning his vocation.

As we try to deepen our understanding of Jesus' call, we now turn to an episode in Luke's Gospel known as the scene of the "*Child Jesus lost in the temple*" (Luke 2:41-52). The biblical passage can be divided into three parts.

Part One:

The scene presents Jesus going up to Jerusalem with his parents for the feast of the Passover, a practice of those Jews who stand out for their fidelity to the Covenant. Jesus' parents are among them. In fact, St. Luke's Gospel had already said earlier: "*When the day came for his purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem - the parents of Jesus - to present him to the Lord as the law of the Lord commands: every firstborn male child shall be consecrated to the Lord; moreover they offered the sacrifice which the law of the Lord commands: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons*" (Luke 2:22-35). In this text it is clear that the parents of Jesus represent the people of God ascending to Jerusalem.

The text also points out that Jesus went with his parents to Jerusalem when he was 12 years old. This is an important detail, because according to the tradition of the people, at age 13 the Jewish children pass from childhood to adulthood with the celebration of the *bar-mitzvah*, which means son of the law or of the commandments.

Thus, the age of 12 alludes to the immediate time of preparation for making the definitive decision to accept God's law and give oneself to his service. In fact, at age 13 the great majority of the young Israelites took up their father's trade, which they learned from a very young age. Others, however, followed a teacher (rabbi), to prepare themselves thoroughly for the Jewish religious life. We are therefore looking at a key moment of discernment, which represents a passage of maturity in the life of the devout Jew.

St. Luke helps us to understand how Jesus reached a certain maturity in the Jewish religion, helped by his parents and through the fulfillment of the traditions of the People of Israel. At this point, it can be said that God's call makes use of mediations, such as our family and the religious context in which we grow up.

This crucial passage of maturity is stated in the expression "*he stayed in Jerusalem*" (v. 43). We are told that his parents returned to Galilee, but Jesus did not. The boy makes his first decision: not to go with his parents, not to go with tradition, simply for the sake of going. Jesus does something new and his parents gradually understand. It took Mary and Joseph three days to find Jesus and to realize his internal motivation: "*Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business?*"

Part Two:

Jesus is among the teachers of the law, who are the guardians of the wisdom of the people of the Covenant. The biblical text presents Jesus in dialogue with the teachers

of the law. In the Old Testament we read: *"Wisdom praises herself in the midst of her people"* (Sirach 24:1). Well, Jesus, as Wisdom of God, is in the midst of the teachers and the people of God; and they are "amazed".

Verses 46 to 50 present Jesus' dialogue with his parents, three days after their separation. Mary and Joseph find Jesus precisely in the temple, alluding to the encounter between God, present in his sanctuary, and the people of Israel who are looking for him.

When his parents find him after a long anguish, Jesus' reaction may seem disconcerting, almost like an act of insolence: *"Why were you looking for me, did you not know that I must be about my father's business?"* It could be said that here the gospel anticipates the discomfort that the Jews have vis-à-vis Jesus, for he does not seem to follow the traditions.

Luke seems to show that, just as his parents do not grasp Jesus' motive, neither will most people understand the novelty that he brings from God. In fact, something similar appears in the scene of the wedding at Cana, as narrated in John's Gospel (cf. John 2:3-4).

With Jesus' questions to his parents: *"Why were you looking for me, did you not know that I must be about my Father's business,"* he is also seen as coming to understand the meaning of his vocation. Thus, to be about the Father's business is to be ready to do his will, as is also made clear in John's Gospel: *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work"* (John 4:34).

In verse 50 it is pointed out that his parents do not understand the words of Jesus. Now, it is they – and the people as well – who fail to understand the signs of Jesus' presence. In this key moment, Jesus gradually opens himself to the awareness of the Father's call. This takes place in the temple, the place of God's presence. Thus, it can be said that there where the people can find God, there also Jesus outlines his vocational option for the Kingdom.

Jesus claims to fulfill the will of the Father, even though the teachers do not understand him; even though the people themselves do not understand him. Sometimes it is not easy for parents to understand their children's vocational decisions. However, it is everyone's responsibility to discern well and to help the new generations do the same. And it is very important to grasp the signs of God's presence and action, through which he shows us what he wants from us.

Part Three:

Finally, verses 51 and 52 express the outcome of this beautiful vocational story. There Jesus appears subject to his parents; he returns with them to the town of Nazareth. In verse 52 it is affirmed: *"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor in the sight of God and man"*. This brief text reminds us of the prophet Samuel, of whom it is said: *"Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him"* (1 Samuel 3:19). In fact, Samuel also received the vocational call in the temple. But, unlike Samuel, Jesus does not stay in the temple, but goes to the villages to announce the Good News of the Father's love.

For reflection

This biblical passage narrates how Mary and Joseph lose Jesus in Jerusalem, the city where he would be killed. He gets lost during a Passover feast. On a Passover Jesus would complete his mission. Jesus is found by his parents three days later. The Crucified One would rise on the third day. The adolescent Jesus goes up from Galilee to Jerusalem with his parents. Jesus would go to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. Jesus returns with his parents to Galilee. The Risen One would summon his disciples to Galilee, where it all began.

In several passages of St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus is shown announcing his passion to the disciples (9:22; 9:44; 18:31), but they do not understand it (cf. Luke 9:45; 18:34), nor do his parents (nor the people). Neither his parents (nor the people) understood the newness that was fermenting in the person of Jesus. He will ask them: "*Why did you seek me?*", as he would ask the women who went to the tomb: "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" (Luke 24:5).

In the face of these events, Jesus declares that his *raison-d'être* is to fulfill the will of the Father. In fact, Jesus ends his mission by saying: "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*" (Luke 23:46). At the age of 12, Jesus made the radical choice to fulfill the Father's will and to manifest his faithful and loyal love for mankind.

Hence, the way in which Jesus responded to the Father's call teaches us that, although it may seem that we are the ones who seek Jesus, in reality it is he who goes out to meet us. In the search for our own vocation, it is we who go astray. Jesus was not lost. It was the people of Israel who were lost, who had wandered away from the Father's business. The vocation of the Son is to find us and draw us back to his love.

St. Augustine

"See then, brethren, that he did not say, '*It is expedient that I should be about my Father's business,*' that we might understand that he was saying something like, 'You are not my fathers.' But they were fathers in time; God was from eternity. They were fathers of the Son of man, the Father was Father of his Word and Wisdom, he was Father of his Power, by whom he made all things. If all things are created by that Power which *reaches from one boundary to another with strength and gently disposes all things*, by the Son were formed even those to whom he himself, as the Son of man, was to be subject" (St. Augustine, *Sermon 51, 20*).

Magisterium of the Church

"Vocation is, therefore, a mystery that man accepts and lives in the most intimate part of his being. Gift and grace, it depends on the sovereign freedom of divine power and, in its full reality, escapes our understanding. We do not have to demand explanations from the Giver of all good things-"*Why have you done this to me*" (cf. *Romans 9:20*)-since

the One who calls is also “the One who is” (cf. *Exodus* 3:14). On the other hand, the vocation of each one is fused, to a certain extent, with his own being: it can be said that vocation and person become one and the same thing.

This means that God’s creative initiative involves a particular act of love for those who are called, not only to salvation, but also to the ministry of salvation. Therefore, from eternity, since we began to exist in the designs of the Creator and he willed us to be creatures, he also willed us to be called, predisposing in us the gifts and conditions for a personal, conscious and timely response to the call of Christ or of the Church. God who loves us, who is Love, is also ‘the One who calls’ (cf. *Romans* 9:11)” (John Paul II, *Meeting with seminarians in Porto Alegre*, July 5, 1980).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. What does meditating on Jesus’ vocation lead you to think regarding your own vocation?
2. To what do you feel God is calling you?

MARY, MODEL OF EVERY CHRISTIAN VOCATION

Goal

To know the call of the Virgin Mary and her response in the Gospel account of the Annunciation (*Luke 1:26-38*) as the horizon in which every Christian vocation is realized.

Developing the Topic

1. The vocation of Mary of Nazareth (*Luke 1:26-38*)

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; the virgin's name was Mary.

And entering, he said to her:

"Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you."

She was disturbed by these words, and pondered what the greeting meant.

The angel said to him:

"Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God; you will conceive in the womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary answered the angel:

"How shall this be, since I know not a male?"

The angel answered him:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore he who is to be born will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Behold, Elizabeth also, your kinswoman, has conceived a son in her old age, and this is already the sixth month of her who was called barren, for nothing is impossible with God."

Maria said:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

And the angel left her and went away.

2. Commentary on the text

St. Luke the Evangelist tries to narrate an uncommon origin for the main character of his work, Jesus. But he does not stop at the fictitious and extraordinary. He inserts

the Incarnation event in the simplest and most common elements of a people's life, relying on their culture, their beliefs, customs and expectations. In fact, the greatest and most extraordinary thing in the history of humanity occurs in the most ordinary and commonplace part of the life of a believing woman; that is how the God of Jesus Christ habitually intervenes in human events. Mary's vocation occurs in the course of a time, a place, a cultural tradition and a very personal way of living the faith of a whole nation.

In time. The text begins by saying that *"in the sixth month God sent the angel Gabriel"* (Luke 1:26). In the sixth month of what? Of the conception of Elizabeth, Mary's relative. The hours and days pass, and it is there that the God of life decides to act with his saving presence. The evangelist himself had said a little earlier that this happened *"in the time of King Herod"* (Luke 1:5). A vocation never happens apart from historical events, no matter how trivial and insipid they may seem. It is faith that allows us enough perspective to read the marvelous and surprising action of God in the ordinary life of each person.

In a place. The Evangelist Luke says that *"the angel Gabriel was sent to a city of Galilee, called Nazareth"* (Luke 1:26). Geography offers the soil in which life's meaning takes root; there where one loves, works, shares and builds a life project. We are talking about Nazareth, a small village on the outskirts of Galilee. God does not usually intervene in the centers of political, economic and religious power; he intervenes where the harshness of life leaves an opening for trust in God and the hope of his salvation. The center of God's action is the periphery, among the poor, the simple and humble of his people.

In fact, Jesus was born under Emperor Augustus (63 B.C. to 14 A.D.; cf. *Luke 2:1*), in Bethlehem, land of Judah, where the family had come to be registered for the census. His city of origin was Nazareth of Galilee, a small village that received its name from "nazer", which means *"the Messianic seed"*, a place repopulated more or less in the middle of the second century B.C. by a colony of Messianic Jews who had come from Judea thanks to the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus's aim to re-Judaize that Galilean land which was pagan then. The insignificance of the place, located in a semi-pagan region, gave it a bad reputation among the pure Israelites. That is why Nathanael, *"a true Israelite, in whom there is no falsehood"*, asks: *Can anything good come from Nazareth?* The reasons for the repopulation explain the messianic fervor that animated the small community (*anawim*), and the Davidic descent of Jesus' family.

In a culture. The angel's announcement reached *"a maiden betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the family of David; the virgin's name was Mary"* (Luke 1:27). Time and space are accompanied by the anthropological setting, that is, the condition of human life in a family, with a very particular culture, values, traditions and customs. God's call embraces life's entirety: personal history, one's own references of meaning and significance, different experiences, freedom, values, projects, dreams. Mary is this woman in whom God's action is focused for the good of a whole people, the people of Israel.

In the faith of a people. Therefore, Mary was a believing Jew, deeply immersed in the faith of her people, familiar with the Word and ever eager to understand God's plans, so she could put them into practice. The biblical text states that the angel said to her: "You will conceive and bear a son, whom you shall call Jesus. He will be great, and will bear the name of the Son of the Most High; the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, that he may reign over the house of Jacob forever, and that his kingdom may have no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

3. Mary's vocational process¹

Mary is the icon of the divine call and the response to it, a woman who listens. This is how the scene of the Annunciation, which the Evangelist Luke presents in a typical biblical story of vocation, makes us understand it: appearance of the angel, reaction of the recipient, announcement, human objection and offer of a sign.

1.1. The appearance of the angel. The appearance of the angel to Mary occurs in a town of Galilee called Nazareth (cf. *Luke* 1:26), a small village in a rather despised region. This intervention of God indicates how the center shifts from a stone temple in an important city to a sanctuary of flesh – the heart of a poor maiden – in an insignificant village, in ordinary circumstances. This novel way of divine action makes us realize that salvation begins with those whom people despise, amidst what seems crude and small. Why? Because it is a clear sign of the absolute gratuitousness of the divine initiative as opposed to those who believe they have earned salvation through their merits, such as being good or fulfilling the law. In short, it is a sign of the primacy of humility in the paths that lead to God.

2. The recipient's reaction. What is Mary's reaction? "When she heard this, she was puzzled and wondered what kind of greeting it was" (*Luke* 1:29). Faced with such an experience of God's presence, Mary does not fully understand what is happening. Bewilderment is an important element in God's call, because it makes us feel small and unworthy in the face of something tremendous and marvelous. And the question arises: Why me? And we try to convince God that there are others better equipped for his plans than us. But the Word of God pierces the believing heart and pricks it with loving tenderness, awaiting a courageous response. Mary teaches us to trust God fully, especially in moments of darkness and confusion, when our faith is called to grow and mature (cf. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 60).

3. The announcement of the angel. The third element is the angel's announcement, which begins with the invitation "do not be afraid," addressed to Mary (cf. *Luke* 1:30). Mary is told: "You have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive a son... He will be great, he will be called the Son of the Most High" (*Luke* 1:30, 32). In Mary, God's absolutely surprising and unspeakable initiative is fulfilled. The God who reveals himself to Mary and in Mary is not merely the answer to the hopes of the human heart, but, above all, the surprise that transcends all our expectations. And just by being that, moving to a higher and unsuspected level of God's gratuitousness, he also comes to present himself as the fulfillment of human desire and hope.

¹ Cf. Bruno FORTE, *Siguiéndote a Ti, luz de la vida*, Ed. Sígueme, Salamanca 2004, pp. 53-58.

4. The objection of the addressee. What happens in Mary? She says: *"How can this be possible...? I do not know man"* (Luke 1:34). Mary does not ask for a guarantee or a sign. She inquires the mystery of God not because she doubts or demands a sign, but so as to be shown the path that, in faithful obedience, she must and wants to follow. Our Lady expresses this availability and trust with the phrase *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to what you have said"* (Luke 1:38). Mary is so free of herself that she can totally trust in God.

5. She receives a sign. The last element of the narrative is the sign: the birth of a child. This child is Jesus, who is not only filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:1), but also conceived by the Holy Spirit, and will be called the Son of the Most High (cf. Luke 1:32). In him is fulfilled the new beginning, the new covenant. Mary responded to God's plan with the free assent of faith. In her shines forth the primacy of divine grace, the free and gratuitous initiative of eternal love, to which corresponds the free offering of the young maiden, who places herself in the hands of God's unfathomable designs.

The trait of Mary that emerges predominantly in the Annunciation scene is hence her faith, which expresses her free, docile and fruitful consent to grace. Her whole existence is a journey of gracious freedom, a continuous surrender in the hands of the living God, an itinerary in which she allows herself to be led by God, in obedience to his Word. Mary is all for God, all of God, open to the coming of the Kingdom that God wants to happen among men. Mary is truly the believing Virgin, the Woman of listening, the soil where the Word of God lands, the reverberating silence.

In this sense, Mary is also a witness to the faith that consists in positively welcoming the love of God, allowing herself to be acted upon and shaped by it. The response to the divine call is the opposite of an action wherein one behaves as the sole master of oneself. The response to the call is the opposite of planning projects and wanting to carry them out with one's own strength. Vocation consists in receiving existence from above, from an Other, namely, from God. Thus, Mary's greatness lies in the faith with which she accepts and trusts in God.

6. For reflection

In this story there are two protagonists, Mary and the Word. The first protagonist is "the Word," God himself who speaks through the angel Gabriel. He speaks not in the "center" where everything is already said and settled, where there is no room for the Word. The Word of God is creative, transforms, gives security and, without violating the freedom of the believer, invites to a joyful adherence and acceptance of God's will. The Word finds in Mary the doors open when it is pronounced. "Mary", the second protagonist, is the symbol of that part of humanity that, despite historical situations of marginalization, rejection and abandonment by the socio-religious officialdom, trusts, hopes and is open to God's action.

The Word of life is incarnated in Mary's womb by the "yes" that best sums up trust in the history of mankind. The fruitfulness of vocation has to do with the obedience of faith to God's plans. Vocation is the free response of the human being to embrace the unconditional project of God's love. Mary is a teacher in this. When we consider the very

personal vocation that the Lord gives to each one of us, the question arises: How does the Word of God make my heart fruitful so that I can engender the Christ that I give to others? How open is my heart to God's happening in history, in my history?

St. Augustine

"What greater gift could God have given us? Having a Son, he made him the son of man so that the sons of men might also become the sons of God" (St. Augustine, *Sermon 185,3*).

"Mary undoubtedly did the will of the Father; therefore it is more for Mary to be a disciple of Christ than to have been the mother of Christ. It is more blessed for her to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been his mother. That is why Mary was blessed, because before giving birth she bore the Master in her womb. See if what I say is not true. As the Lord walked with the crowds that followed him, performing divine miracles, a woman cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you! But lest happiness be sought in the flesh, what did the Lord say? But blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it (Lk 11:27-28)" (St. Augustine, *Sermon 72/A,7*).

Magisterium of the Church

"The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is manifested in a special way precisely in the filial surrender to the Mother of God, which began with the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. In the filial giving of oneself to Mary, the Christian, like the Apostle John, "takes the Mother of Christ among his own" and introduces her into the whole space of his interior life, that is, into his human and Christian "I": "He took her into his home" (*Redemptoris Mater 45*).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. Mary responded to the Lord's call; how does the yes of Mary, Mother of Jesus, inspire your response to the Lord's call?
2. How do we bring the figure of Mary closer to the new generations so that she may be the model of the answer to every vocation?

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

Goal

To know the reality of the young people: their own styles, strengths, dreams and challenges, etc., in order to offer them a program of accompaniment and vocational discernment according to their reality.

Developing the Topic

1. Being young today: a reflection based on the Synod of Bishops (2018).

Several sociological, psychological and anthropological analyses of young people carried out by very competent people are available today. However, any detailed analysis of the reality of youth falls short as we approach concrete young people we meet along the way and who come to our churches, schools, youth groups, etc. In the effort to create a “vocational culture”, it must be said that more than theoretical knowledge about the youth, we need to learn how to deal with young people. What makes the difference between “knowing about the young” and “knowing the young” is the quality time spent listening to them and sharing life, faith, hopes and frustrations, dreams and aspirations.

At the Synod on the Youth, it was commented that the younger generations bear specific traits in approaching reality. Highlighted among the most evident traits were: the preference given to images over other communicative languages, the importance of feelings and emotions as a way of approaching reality, and the priority given to concreteness and operability over theoretical analysis. Relationships of friendship and belonging to like-minded groups, cultivated through social networks, are of great importance to them. Young people are generally open to diversity, which makes them attentive to the issues of peace, inclusion and dialogue between cultures and religions (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth*, n. 45).

2. Many youths

Pope Francis, in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit*, “*Christ lives*”, noted that the characteristics of today’s young people can certainly be enumerated, but above all he highlighted a special finding of the Synod: the beauty of the universal Church reflected in the faces of young people. Thus, the reality of the context and the peculiarity of the historical moment of the place and of each Christian community make the young different and diverse in each place and time. Hence, since there are many worlds of the young, rather than speaking of “youth” we speak of “youths” (cf. Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, nn. 68-70). This requires much attention on the part of vocation ministry so that the methods of vocational accompaniment may be updated.

3. Digital environment

Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that *the digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but an important part of the daily reality of many people, especially the youngest* (Benedict XVI, *Message for the 47th World Communications Day, 2011*). In this sense, we already speak of our era as the digital age. It is no longer just a matter of “using” communication tools, but of living in a largely digitalized culture that has a profound impact on the notion of time and space, on the perception of oneself, of others and of the world, on the way of communicating, learning, obtaining information and entering into relationships with others (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth*, n. 21).

The Synod on Youth pointed out that the digital age represents endless opportunities, among others: it represents an extraordinary opportunity for dialogue, encounter and exchange among people as well as access to information and knowledge; it can become a channel for participation in public life and evangelization. However, the digital environment is also a zone of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, deception; it can generate dependencies, isolation, loss of contact with concrete reality and superficial relationships. Moreover, it is fostering new forms of violence such as cyber-bullying and is also becoming a channel for the dissemination of pornography, which foments sexual exploitation (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth*, nn. 22-24).

4. Body and affectivity

The new generations recognize that the body and sexuality are of essential importance in their lives, considering them fundamental for living friendship and love as they mature in their identity. (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Youth*, n. 37). In fact, the vocational response deeply involves the capacity to love. However, the lifestyle of today’s society frequently exposes the new generations to negative experiences in the field of sexuality - abuse, promiscuity, sex tourism, pornography, etc.

Such negative experiences can affect the person’s serene and mature growth and development in affectivity and their capacity to love. In this sense, accompaniment for vocational discernment has to calmly promote, from an integral and positive understanding of sexuality and affectivity, the ability to live these realities as spheres of expression of love in specific vocations. And where real and serious difficulties compromise discernment, it is advisable to recommend therapeutic help while keeping the process open.

5. Art, music and sports

What St. John Paul II indicated, regarding acquiring the basic vocational attitudes that make a vocational response possible (cf. John Paul II, *Message for the 30th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2-1992*), the Synod sees fulfilled in three important areas in the lives of young people: art, music and sport. It thus recognizes and values the importance that young people give to artistic expression in all its forms. Music is also presented as the concrete environment in which young people are constantly immersed; so are a culture and language capable of stirring their emotions and shaping their own

identity. And in sport, certain values are brought into play that give depth to human life, such as effort, sacrifice, selflessness, teamwork, respect, chivalry, loyalty, honesty, etc. (cf. *Synod on Youth*, n. 47).

6. Young People in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The years 2020 and 2021 were marked by the COVID-19 crisis. Undoubtedly, it is a crisis in which we are still immersed because of the far-reaching consequences in several areas of human life: economy, health, unemployment, violence... Certainly the world, the society and especially our young people, before, during and after COVID-19 are no longer the same.

Before the pandemic, life was lived in a certain way: free and expressive relationships, emotions in the open, nearness, presence. When the coronavirus arrived, the world stopped, countries closed their borders, families did not leave their homes, governments imposed a long quarantine and established the guidelines and protocols to prevent and fight the virus.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, there is now a kind of general uncertainty. We don't know what will happen. But we can't just sit back and do nothing. It's important to get life back on track. Maybe some things need to be restored, but others need to be started from scratch.

Pope Francis, in the foreword to Walter Kasper's book *"God in the Pandemic"* describes this reality very aptly: *"The coronavirus crisis has taken us all by surprise, like a storm that suddenly hits, suddenly changing our personal, family, work and public life worldwide. Many have had to mourn the death of family members and dear friends. Many people have fallen into financial difficulties, others have lost their jobs. In many countries it was no longer possible to celebrate the Eucharist in public together, even on Easter, the greatest feast of Christianity, to draw strength and consolation from the sacraments"* (Walter Kasper, *God in the Pandemic*, 2020, p. 10).

This event, which changed the world and society, also affected young people. They could no longer go out to the disco, to school, to meet with friends, to the cinema, to the square, to share with family members on weekends, etc. What could be endured calmly for 40 days, in reality became a martyrdom and an ordeal for the young people: they could no longer see each other, hug, touch, listen to each other, etc. The consequences: depression, anxiety, demoralization, apathy, sadness, anguish, obsessive and negative thoughts were symptoms and illnesses that became more pronounced in the young.

7. Characteristics that have become more marked in the young post-Covid19

Crisis of faith. The weakening of faith was one of the first symptoms that hit young people. Many of them expressed doubts about their faith to youth leaders and accompanying adults in virtual meetings. Absenteeism also prevailed in the few face-to-face liturgical celebrations during and after the pandemic. These signs point to the fact that we are really facing a crisis of faith, manifested by the lack of its practice, especially in moments of personal, ecclesial, liturgical and sacramental prayer, thus preventing

the young from strengthening their encounter with Jesus in a meaningful experience of faith and Christian life. Hence, it will be very important to establish among young people spaces for sincere, heart-felt dialogue, and to bring them closer to a personal re-encounter with Christ through creative and meaningful life celebrations.

Disinterest and fatigue. The crisis of faith that many young people are going through only points to a broader crisis, which has many other manifestations, such as disinterest, low performance, a dark view of life and a lack of energy. Faced with the pandemic, many looked to digital spaces as a means to rekindle their faith. Over time, however, it was noticed that many lost their initial interest. Even the activities they themselves initiated ended up losing their appeal. The lack of motivation and enthusiasm, disillusionment, disenchantment, lack of fervor, etc. can still be perceived.

Lack of responsibility and commitment. A third difficulty detected among the young people is the lack of co-responsibility and commitment in the Christian life. This was already a marked characteristic of many young people. However, the pandemic situation is seen to have aggravated this reality even more. The absenteeism of young people from group or community meetings is becoming a cause for concern. These are unjustified absences, avoidance of any kind of responsibility and pastoral commitment, a general lack of interest.

St. Augustine

“I sought what to love by loving to love, and I hated security and the path without dangers, because I hungered within me for inner nourishment, for yourself, O my God [...]. To love and to be loved was the sweetest thing for me” (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 3,1,1).

Magisterium of the Church

“If we walk together, young and old, we can be well rooted in the present, and from here we can look to the past and the future: to look to the past, to learn from history and to heal the wounds that sometimes condition us; to look to the future, to nourish enthusiasm, to make dreams germinate, to awaken prophecies, to make hopes blossom. In this way, united, we can learn from one another, warm our hearts, inspire our minds with the light of the Gospel and give new strength to our hands” (Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 199).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. What venues for meeting, listening and accompanying young people take place in your Christian community?
2. Does your community make a preferential option for young people?

LIFE PROJECT²

Goal

To know and handle the “Life Project” as a useful tool for vocational accompaniment and discernment.

Developing the Topic

1. Definition of life project

Project. It is the decision to profile a model for the future. It involves, in addition to this model, the practical means to achieve it. There are various ways of formulating the project, but the most important thing is that it involves the whole reality of the person. What defines the project is this encompassing character of reality.

Personal project. The action of projecting refers to a person. Here it is most important to take into account all that the person is and, specifically, the dimensions of his or her personality. A personal project for young people must include the various dimensions: personal, community, intellectual, service, spiritual; it must provide deadlines for its drafting and revision; it must help the young person to project precisely by “projecting”; it must have a counselor with whom the youth reports on the project and receives feedback; it must provide a venue for group sharing. We are not necessarily talking about a Christian project.

Spiritual life project. It is about a Christian life project. Spirituality does not consist in a set of religious practices, but in living according to spiritual and, in our case, Christian principles. This spiritual project encompasses the whole person, as does the personal project. It therefore includes the dimensions of the personality. But it has a peculiar characteristic: it puts at center revealed values and the experience of God, so that, while pointing out a model for the person’s future, it does so in the light of the Word and in the dynamic of spiritual discernment. In the spiritual project, what’s fundamental is not what the person wants to achieve, but what God wants. Hence, openness to the transcendent dimension is basic. The recourse to a counselor acquires the value of mediation of openness to the will of God.

Vocational project. It includes the features of the spiritual life project, but has as reference a specific moment of the vocational process and the objective values of the specific vocation. It helps the person take the appropriate steps and ready the necessary means to respond to the call.

² This material was shared by diocesan priest Fr. Rubén Barrón at the meeting of OAR vocation promoters in Cuernavaca, Morelos (Mexico), in 2017.

2. Attitudes that encourage project development

At first glance, it is clear that preparing the project requires certain attitudes on the part of the counselor and on the part of the candidate. The counselor enables the project to be measured up and seen objectively; but he will have to learn to moderate his interventions as the candidate matures.

The attitudes that both need to be brought into play to facilitate the project are as follows:

Attitudes of the counselor	Candidate's attitudes
<p>Welcoming, paying attention</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I accept the candidate as a person of unconditional value, over and above their behavior, their appearance or their way of thinking. 2. I have time and patience for the candidate. I respect their pace of thought and dialogue. In this way I show them my deep acceptance. 3. I focus on them, so that I hear not only their words, but everything they communicate non-verbally and what they cannot yet communicate. 4. I remember their process and let them know that I have it in mind. If they need me to summarize, I do so simply, giving an overview of what they have communicated. 5. If I have observed something worthy of being communicated, I use this information to give a fraternal admonition. They know they are loved and accepted in the correction. 	<p>Desire for change</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowing that they are accepted and loved as they are, they increase their basic self-confidence and their possibilities for change. 2. They feel comfortable to the point that they can express their feelings and thoughts as they see fit, with no need to twist them to gain the counselor's appreciation. 3. The attention, respect and welcome offered to them by the counselor elicits in them a desire for life. They want to be better and to grow because they recognize that they are trusted. 4. Receiving feedback on one's process fosters the desire to change, because one can see the big picture, which allows for more ownership of the situation. 5. The admonitions they receive reveal concrete paths for their personal development.
<p>Facilitating self-exploration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I allow them to be the protagonist of their own process, so that they can freely choose the topics to be discussed. 2. I avoid imposing my schemas or reminding them of what is pending. Before intervening, I give them opportunity to face these issues on their own. 3. I provide them with the outline of what the accompaniment includes, allowing them to prepare the topics for sharing. 	<p>Courage before oneself</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They take the initiative to face the difficult issues that belong to the dark side of their personality. 2. They recall the commitments set in the previous interview or in the group accompaniment, such that they suggest to review them. 3. They choose and prepare the topics in advance. They do not come to the interview improvising. In each topic they sufficiently touch on the essential points.

<p>Holding the person accountable</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Waits for the candidate to realize their own responsibility for the problem. 2. If they are not able to see some parts of the problem, the counselor makes them visible without imposing himself. 	<p>Adapt the situation to oneself</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They take their share of responsibility without needing to blame others. 2. They accept the offer of another perspective because it enriches their view of the problem.
<p>Encourage commitment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The counselor truly trusts in the candidate's ability to decide and to change. The former makes the latter feel this confidence. 2. He allows the candidate to develop the action plan. 3. He values the young person's capabilities, recognizes that he/she has sufficient resources to grow. 	<p>Getting started in a commitment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They freely make their decisions, while considering the opinion of the counselor. 2. They take personal responsibility in choosing the means to foster their growth. 3. They put their resources and abilities to work in the vocational process.

3. Content of the vocational project

The fundamental content of the project is the candidate's life. It is about opening one's life to the will of God according to the Gospel principle: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk. 3:35). This will take place at various levels and with increasing specificity. But what must always be achieved each time is a step forward in openness and availability to God's plan.

The project refers to the person as a whole. Therefore, it should consider as much as possible all the dimensions of the personality. Here's a brief description of each dimension:

Spiritual dimension. It is like the vertical axis of the Christian person. It gives height to the spiritual life. Above all, it pays attention to the way of relating to God and to the image of God the believer has. It is about *continually purifying this image of God*. It refers to the whole exercise of prayer and listening to the Word and to the dynamic process of participation in the sacraments. Of particular need is insisting on the quality and depth of vocational prayer, which is the heart of personal prayer wherein the candidate places the self before God and manifests readiness to carry out his plan.

The **human** dimension is the horizontal axis or the basic foundation of the vocational and formative process. Very often the vocational project fails on account of this human base. Everything that is done to broaden this base gives security to the person and his/her process. It can be divided, for practical purposes, into two main parts:

Human-personal dimension. Everything that involves the person of the candidate: physical constitution and health; emotional setup and the development of one's

personality; self-image; the ability to relate with others and to love oneself; dealing with conflict and problems as they mature; their experience of affectivity and sexuality; their capacity to reclaim their own history and give it unity; their social and economic condition; their moral values and the formation of their conscience; the honesty and transparency with which they live the accompaniment.

Human-community dimension. This refers to the relationship with others: the manner of involvement in the family setting; the attitude towards the poor and downtrodden; the capacity for social commitment; civic-mindedness and dealing with others; availability for community service; openness to one's Christian group or community; participation in common projects and availability for teamwork; the cultivation of the social virtues so characteristic of Christian life.

Apostolic dimension. It refers to the value that the person gives to the apostolate in his/her life of faith, that is, whether they reduce it to merely performing pastoral tasks or it becomes an important dimension of their personality; the attitudes with which they participate in the apostolate and the "Church sense" that they cultivate; the apostolic dimension that they give to family and social relationships.

Intellectual dimension. This refers to academic training. In the case of middle and high school students, it is essential that their dedication to their studies and even their grades be included in the project. In basic formation it is a dimension that is rarely evaluated and monitored; in permanent formation it is sometimes unfortunately forgotten.

Project dimension. It can be considered a sixth dimension. It refers to the person's commitment to the project. It is useful to evaluate the extent to which the person is committed to personal growth and how he or she is learning to develop the project in an increasingly practical and effective way. This dimension is about seeking and finding, which is so often emphasized in the spiritual life. It is not enough to choose a formulary and fill it in; one must experience real and visible progress.

4. Project formulation

The project can be formulated in writing, although it can also be done verbally. Writing it is advisable because this provides continuity to the process and helps to detect growth points.

The project aims to involve the whole, but if the person is immature, he/she will likely gravitate towards one dimension and will be more biased. A project that encompasses the whole person and the process presupposes a certain level of formation and personal maturity. Most important is not the mere filling in of a formula but the moving towards integral formation.

The deadlines for drafting and review should be short enough so that the present meaning of the project is not lost. The more immature the candidate is, the shorter the deadline should be, so that he/she will be forced to revise the project continuously.

5. The life project in vocation ministry

In vocation ministry, changes come swiftly. Hence, it is advisable to keep the project very short, so that it can be evaluated quickly and enriched with the new elements that the young person is coming to understand.

First stage. It is appropriate at this stage to set the big picture of the project, so that the candidate gets that integral character that involves all the dimensions of the personal. At the same time it is an occasion for serious vocational catechesis, through which the youth understands what is happening to him/her and accepts the vocation with its normative character.

Second stage. The candidate begins to consider the option for a specific vocation and the entrance into a house of formation. The central point of the project are the attitudes that already recommend the youth for that specific vocation. If they want to be a religious, for example, they must somehow already be living as a religious in their own family.

6. Project outline

It will help to present an outline for crafting the project. The following is a general template, to be adapted to the different vocational situations. For formation in religious life, the spiritual part can be subdivided into the spiritual dimension and the charism dimension:

Dimensions	Analysis of reality	My priority in this dimension.	Goal	Means and resources
Spiritual	A way to report as objectively as possible what my real situation is in this dimension.	Conclusion or diagnosis reached after the analysis. It is about detecting the crucial point, what is most urgent.	Define the goal I want to achieve in the future. I can formulate it in the present tense, as if it were already achieved, to visualize the result.	Material and spiritual means, especially the human resources I will need to make effective progress in this dimension.
Human Personal				

Human Community				
Pastoral				
Intellectual				
From the project				
My priority: Establish a very specific challenge that is the most urgent or priority at the moment. My project is unified around this challenge.				
Review period: it is the period of time of validity of the project. At the end of the period I have to rework it. Some of the challenges will remain, but others will change. It is important that the candidate can verify in the review that there has been, even if minimal, objective growth.				

St. Augustine

“See that we are walkers. You ask me: what does it mean to walk? I sum it up in a few words: to go forward, to progress. Go forward, my brothers; always examine yourselves without deceit, without flattery, without vainglory. [...] Always dislike what you are in order to become what you are not yet. If you are satisfied with yourself, you have already stopped. If you say: “that’s enough”, you are lost. Keep always growing, always walking, always advancing; do not stop on the way, do not turn back, do not deviate. He who does not go forward stops; he who returns to the things he has already left behind goes backward; he who turns away from the faith goes astray” (St. Augustine, *Sermon 169,XIII,18*).

Magisterium of the Church

“Youth, a phase of personality development, is marked by dreams that take shape, by relationships that acquire more and more consistency and balance, by attempts and experimentations, by choices that gradually build a life project. In this period of life, young people are called to project themselves forward without cutting off their roots, to build autonomy, but not alone” (Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 137).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. Why is a “vocational” life project important?
2. What steps do you think should be taken so that the communities can accompany young people using the life project as instrument?

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

FORMS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Goal

To present the different forms of Christian life within the Church by which a missionary disciple can respond to the Lord's call.

Developing the topic

1. Specific vocations

The call to life and to be a person, on the one hand, allows us to give thanks for our existence and for the gift of Christian life; on the other hand, it commits us to the search for the meaning of life and the realization of the Gospel values in our own existence. The specific vocation is the growth of baptismal grace, a way of walking that path that leads every Christian to live the fullness of love. The following description of specific vocation can help to better understand the essential aspects that define it. *Vocation is a mysterious event in which the human being, dialoguing with God, acquires the awareness of a historically situated mission and commits himself/herself to a concrete response* (Brotherhood of Diocesan Priests, *Supplement to the basic course of vocational ministry in the Diocese of Querétaro*, 2019, p. 14).

Four levels of understanding vocation can be described: human, Christian, specific and institutional. First, the human level: *Christ alone shows man what man is and reveals to him the greatness of his vocation* (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Second, the Christian level: *You did not choose me, it was I who chose you, and I have appointed you to go forth and bear fruit that will abound and last* (Jn 15:16). Third, the level of the specific vocation that defines and characterizes the Christian life concretely: lay vocation, consecrated religious vocation and the vocation of ordained ministers. And finally, the institutional level, which refers to the fact that specific Christian vocations belong to a concrete institution: priesthood, a religious Order or Congregation, a family, etc.

The following is a broad outline of the specific vocations discussed at the third level: lay vocation, vocation to the consecrated religious life and vocation to the ordained ministry.

2. Lay vocation

According to the Second Vatican Council, it behooves the laity to live secular life to the full in each of their activities and professions as well as in the ordinary conditions of family and social life with which their reality is woven. It is there that they are called by God to fulfill a mission, guided by the spirit of the beatitudes, so that, like leaven, they may contribute from within to the transformation of the world, so that they may

show Christ to others; shining, above all, with the witness of their life of faith, hope and charity. It is the responsibility of the laity to enlighten and organize all temporal affairs with which they are closely connected, so that these may be carried out according to the spirit of Jesus Christ and may progress and redound to the glory of the Creator and the good of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31).

The vocation of the laity is, therefore, to be missionary disciples who *seek the Kingdom of God and its justice* (Mt 6:33) in the realization of their Christian condition, and strive to organize all the affairs of social life according to the spirit of the Gospel. The laity, whose vocation places them at the heart of the world and in the accomplishment of the most varied tasks, must exercise a singular form of evangelization. Their primary and immediate task is not the institutionalization and development of the ecclesial community - that is the specific task of pastors - but that of putting into practice all the possibilities contained in the Gospel within social life. The field of their activity is political, social, economic, cultural, scientific, artistic, media, educational, etc. (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 70).

The Order of Augustinian Recollects has institutionalized various possibilities of specific growth for the lay life, which offer help in the realization of the secular vocation. In the journey of discipleship, these lay environments - the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternities (SARF), the Augustinian Recollect Youth Movement (RAY), and the Association of Christian Mothers of St. Monica (mothers who commit to praying especially for their children and husbands, in the style of St. Monica) – drink from the wells of Augustinian spirituality and the Recollect tradition. Joining these venues of growth in the lay vocation also entails accepting the call of God to be missionary disciples in the style of St. Augustine and the Augustinian Recollection.

Some examples of forms of lay Christian life:

- Marriage-widowhood.
- Family-maternity-fatherhood.
- Single.
- Professionalism (education, health, politics, economy, culture, etc.).
- Consecrated virginity (consecrated lay virgins).
- Mission "*ad gentes*" (missions where the Church is not yet implanted).
- Community life (basic communities, secular fraternities, etc.).

3. Vocation to ordained ministry

Every baptized person receives the gift, through the sacrament of water and the Spirit, of being a child of God the Father in the Son. There exists a common call for all disciples of Jesus Christ that opens us, in turn, to mission. Thus, in Christ, every baptized person is a prophet, a king and a priest. He is a prophet because he announces the

presence of the living God who guides history; he is a king because he allows God's love for the world to reign in his life; and he is a priest because he celebrates and participates in the sacramental signs that make possible his own sanctification through which God is glorified. This priesthood is known as the common priesthood of the faithful, and it differs from the ministerial priesthood in that the latter derives through a specific call from the sacrament of Orders.

Bishops possess, by a gift of grace, the fullness of Christ's priesthood and are associated with the ministry of the apostles. Through the history of the Church, the bishops are successors to the first disciples whom Jesus linked closely to his life and mission, also known as the group of the Twelve. The presbyters - from the Greek meaning "elders" - united with the bishop, exercise the priesthood of Christ; that is their mission. By the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, both bishops and priests live the pastoral charity proper to Christ, the Good Shepherd, who showed with his words and signs the mercy of the Father. And deacons, whether they are permanent or oriented to the ministerial priesthood, manifest the charity of Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for others (cf. Mt 20:28).

The ordained ministry in any of the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders - bishops, priests or deacons - is configured with Christ, Head, Shepherd and Servant of the Church. The mission of the ordained minister is to practice pastoral charity, proper to one who accompanies the People of God in the manner of Christ, the Good Shepherd. And they nourish the People of God above all through the preaching of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and the animation of the service of charity. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders they receive the power of the Spirit to be witnesses before the world to the mysteries of the faith and servants of the human and ecclesial community.

Some examples of Christian forms of ordained ministry:

- Celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.
- Marriage-widowhood-fatherhood and ordained ministry.
- Professional (communications, education, etc.).
- Teamwork (secular clergy).
- Common life (priestly fraternities).
- Mission "ad gentes" (missions where the Church is not yet implanted).

4. *Vocation to consecrated life*

The Second Vatican Council acknowledged the rightful place of consecrated in the Church by clearly affirming that *the state whose essence lies in the profession of the evangelical counsels, even if it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless belongs in an indisputable way to her life and holiness (Lumen Gentium, n. 44)*. Consecrated life belongs to the life and holiness of the Church; it is

a form of Christian life for living the fullness of love for the good of the whole Body of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 43). In this sense, the vocation to the consecrated life consists in a loving response, from the human capacity, to the love with which a disciple of Jesus Christ has felt himself/herself immensely loved.

Religious life, as another form of Christian life, finds its inspiration and foundation in Christ, the consecrated of the Father. In a special way, it can be said that consecrated life has found in the Beatitudes the framework for understanding its own vocation and mission. The call to consecrated life affirms this radicality: that the love of God is worth everything, including one's own life and all that is beautiful and marvelous in it. Hence, over and above what religious do – and they certainly carry out many important tasks in the Church and in the world – their fundamental mission is to be a sign of belonging exclusively to God.

Consecrated life arose in the Church as a gift of the Holy Spirit, like a prism that radiates the one light of Christ in different colors and shades. As a way of Christian living, its purpose is to follow Jesus's footsteps as recorded in history and in the Gospels. Its vital framework is to live the fullness of love in the daily encounter with the Lord. Consecrated life cultivates, depending on its specific charism, a fraternal life in community or a life in solitude, but always serving the people of God through prayer, works of charity and works of mercy. Like all Christian life, its goal is holiness.

A specific element of religious life is that the person makes a gift of his or her own life to God, in order to allow the Lord to have exclusive control of his or her heart. And this gift of self is expressed through the profession of the *evangelical counsels*. What is an evangelical counsel? It is a value that is proposed in the Gospel and is worthy of being lived because Christ himself made it an important part of his historical lifestyle. The evangelical counsels are obedience, poverty and chastity. A religious, therefore, reflects with his/her life something of Christ, obedient to the Father; something of Christ, poor in spirit, and something of Christ, who has God his Father and the humanity that he loves as the passion of his heart, to the point of giving his life for it.

Some examples of forms of Christian life of consecrated religious:

- Community life (several consecrated persons living in the same house).
- Eremitical life (in solitude).
- Contemplative life (monks and cloistered nuns).
- Active-apostolic life (religious dedicated to the apostolate).
- Mixed life (combining contemplation and apostolate).
- Professional (in the field of education, health, communications, etc.).

5. Harmony of specific vocations

Each of the specific Christian vocations has its own task and purpose as a way of following Christ. And each vocation comprises a manner in which baptismal grace is deepened and developed. An important element of the “vocational culture” is to make the People of God understand that all Christian vocations have the same dignity and that, therefore, there must be complementarity among them.

St. Augustine

“We are the holy Church. And she is a virgin and gives birth. She imitates Mary. If you notice, she gives birth to Christ. Therefore, if she gives birth to the members of Christ, she is very like Mary” (St. Augustine, *Sermon 213,7,7*).

Magisterium of the Church

“In the first millennium “walking together”, that is, practicing synodality, was the habitual way of proceeding of the Church understood as “a people gathered together in virtue of the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. To those who divided the ecclesial body, the Fathers of the Church opposed the communion of the Churches spread throughout the world, which St. Augustine described as “*concordissima fidei conspiratio*”, that is, as the agreement in faith of all the baptized” (*Preparatory Documents for the Synod on Synodality 2021*, 11).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. Are you fulfilling God’s plan for you in the vocation in which you live?
2. Do you feel welcomed in the Church based on your specific vocation?
3. Do you give witness to the beauty of your specific Christian vocation?

VOCATION IS FOR MISSION

Goal

To discover that God's call always entails mission: we are sent to witness to and proclaim the joy of the Gospel from our own vocation.

Developing the topic

The capacity to think formally enables human beings to separate what in fact goes together, as a tool for considering things more deeply. This process of rational thought is a fairly frequent practice in the Western tradition, thanks mainly to the Greek and Roman cultures, as well as to the development of philosophical thought.

Now, analytical thinking has many advantages; it is in fact the basis of discernment. However, there is a risk of delving so deeply into very specific areas of human knowledge that one comes to know so much about a minuscule aspect of a concrete reality at the cost of losing sight of the big picture.

That last observation arises from the diversity of approaches to the concepts of vocation and mission that obtain at present. The terms "vocation" and "mission" have been analyzed from the most diverse fields of human knowledge, such as psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, history of cultures and theology. Hence, one of the current challenges is to bring back to unity so much knowledge around the concept of vocation and mission.

Christianity has always maintained, one way or another, the original unity in the worldview of being, thinking, feeling, deciding and doing. Thus, in any narration of personal vocation in the Bible, the elements that constitute and define vocation and mission appear very well combined. Vocation, in this sense, is born from the awareness of an intervention on the part of God for a concrete purpose: to carry out a task, a mission. From the free response of the one called, the integral meaning of their life and destiny in being and acting is re-situated.

An example from the Old Testament can help us understand more clearly the inseparable link between vocation and mission. In the book of *Genesis*, beginning in the twelfth chapter, God's intervention in the history of the salvation of the people of Israel opens the way for Abraham: "*The Lord said to Abraham, 'Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great people, I will bless you, I will make your name famous, and it will be a blessing'*" (Gen 12:1-2).

God breaks into Abraham's life, calls him and this call gets him moving. The call includes the promise of being the father of a great people as well as receiving as blessing what, through him, will reach all the races of the earth. Vocation and mission go hand in

hand: *"Go forth from your land to the land that I will show you, and in your name shall all the families of the world be blessed"* (Gen 12:3).

In the vocation narratives in the New Testament, practically the same thing happens. The clearest example is the call of the twelve apostles in the Gospel of Mark: *"Jesus went up the mountain and called those whom he wanted, and they went with him. He appointed twelve [whom he called apostles] to live with him and to send them out to preach with power to cast out demons"* (Mk 3:13-15). In all the vocation narratives, the synoptic Gospels reveal Jesus' intention to associate some people more closely with the proclamation of the Kingdom, in order to bring about with them the signs that make it already present.

Although in the Gospels the disciples are invited to share the vocation and mission of the Master, it is at the end, after the resurrection, that the call to mission becomes very explicit and evident: *"Go into all the world proclaiming the Good News to all mankind. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will seize snakes; if they drink poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will be healed"* (Mk 16:15-18).

The missionary cause is the first cause of the Church; she exists to evangelize, to bring the message of God's love to hearts, to bring about a living encounter with Christ. And in turn, mission renews the Church, helps her to mature in her faith, to grow in her Christian identity. Mission brings to the baptized new strength and new enthusiasm in the following of Christ; mission awakens a passion for God and a passion for his people. A Christian should never forget that Christ is the missionary of the Father, the Church is missionary of Jesus Christ, and the disciple is sent with the power of the Spirit to give birth to the whole Christ in the world.

The Synod on young people takes up the original unity proper to the Christian vision of vocation and mission. *"Young Catholics are not merely recipients of pastoral actions, but living members of the one baptized ecclesial body in which the Spirit of the Lord lives and acts. They contribute to enriching what the Church is, and not only what she does. They are its present and not only its future. Young people are protagonists in many ecclesial activities, in which they generously offer their service, in particular in the animation of catechesis and liturgy, in the care of the little ones, in voluntary service to the poor. Even movements, associations and religious congregations offer young people opportunities for commitment and co-responsibility"*.

Vocation and mission, finally, are perfectly combined from the fundamental call to holiness. There exists a unique and universal call to holiness common to all vocations which, at bottom, is the realization of that call to the joy of love that resounds in every heart. God wants us to be saints. And we Christians are entrusted with the task of awakening the world through the witness of a holy life. If, on the one hand, we Christians cry out for an authentic, luminous, transparent and joyful Church, on the other hand, this can only be achieved through our own holiness of life. The Church will be renewed only

through spiritual ardor and apostolic vigor. The balm of holiness will heal the wounds of humanity.

St. Augustine

“Dare we call ourselves mothers of Christ? You have been children, be mothers too. Bring those you can, so that, just as you were sons when you were born, helping others to be born, you may be mothers of Christ” (St. Augustine, *Sermon 72, A,28*).

Magisterium

“In various contexts there are groups of young people who are very active in the evangelization of their peers thanks to a clear witness of life, an accessible language and the ability to establish authentic bonds of friendship. This apostolate enables us to bring the Gospel to people who would hardly be reached by common youth ministry, and helps us to attain the same faith as those who commit themselves to it. It should therefore be appreciated, supported, wisely accompanied and integrated into the life of communities” (*Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, 56*).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. Am I aware of my mission in the Church from my particular vocation?
2. How can we be missionary disciples in our world and our Church?
3. How do I help the new generations understand that “we” are a mission in this world?

PASTORAL COUNSELING CONSIDERATIONS

VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION

Goal

To deepen in the basic nature of Christian vocation, and to learn some pedagogical tools so as to be able to guide in discerning specific vocations.

Developing the topic

1. Fundamental contents for vocational guidance

1. Who am I?

A being:

- Called to life.
- Called to encounter and dialogue with God.
- Called to love God, neighbor, creation and myself.

2. Why am I a Christian?

- Because Christ Jesus loved me and he alone is worthy of faith.
- Because of the community of the baptized who have professed the same faith throughout history (Church), and have initiated me into the Christian life.
- Because I have a personal history of relationship with God.

3. What does God want from me? In order to understand it, I need to:

- Listen to his Word.
- Listen to my own heart.
- Listen to life and its events.

4. What Christian life options do I have?

- Committed laity (in marriage, missionary, volunteer...).
- Ministerial priesthood (sacrament of priestly ordination).
- Consecrated religious.

5. Committed laity based on the Augustinian charism? How?

- Member of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity.
- Youth Movement: "Recollect Augustinian Youth".
- Saint Monica Christian Mothers.

6. What is Augustinian Recollect religious life?

- Augustinian Recollect religious and/or priests.
- Augustinian Recollect nuns of contemplative life.
- Augustinian Recollect Missionary Sisters.
- And other members of the Augustinian Recollect family

7. Can I be a consecrated religious and/or a priest?

Mark 3:13:

- God chooses whom he wills.
- To be with him.
- To send them to announce the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To expel the presence of evil from the heart of the human being.

8. And why Augustinian Recollect?

- Because of St. Augustine.
- Because of the Order of St. Augustine.
- Because the Augustinian Recollect movement.
- Because of the experience of community life at the service of the Church.

9. How can I begin to seek God's will in my life?

- By counting on a companion.
- By experiencing the Augustinian Recollect way of life by going to a community.
- By working with the materials offered to me as tools for vocational discernment.

10. What do I have to do?

- Take time for personal and community dialogue with God.
- Work with responsibility in the process of accompaniment.
- Be involved in the life of the Christian community to which I belong.

2. *Prejudices about vocation*

When someone considers the Christian vocation and the specific or particular vocation, he or she often faces prejudices learned or heard within his or her closest circle, even within the Church. Here are some prejudices, misconceptions or myths about vocation.

Vocation is something for *privileged people (intelligent, good, multi-talented, etc.)*. There are those who think so and, what is worse, there are those who believe it and embark on a vocational path thinking that they are “special”. Normally, the idea is more associated with priestly or religious vocations, with lay vocations considered to be of lower rank or second class. That is a lie: each and every particular vocation is a worthy and beautiful way of walking a path that leads to the fullness of love, to holiness.

I am not worthy of “that vocation”. In Christianity, we can say that no one is ever worthy of anything; everything is a gift, an undeserved gift. God does not call those who are supposedly more worthy of one vocation or another. God chooses and calls whom He wills for a plan that only He knows and that He will reveal little by little if we truly open ourselves to His action in our hearts.

In relation to vocation, I will not be able succeed, I will not be capable. No one is, by themselves, capable of assuming, living and growing in a specific vocation. Every Christian vocation is only possible in the One who inspires, animates and accompanies it. It may be scary to consider all the implications, consequences and demands involved in an option for life in Christ at the moment. But it is precisely a matter of trusting that God will give us the capacity to respond to what he asks of us at every moment of life. He is the one who sustains our yes.

If others have failed in their vocation, the same thing can happen to me. Certainly we all know of “good Christians” who failed in their choice of life in Christ. In a particular vocation many things happen that you cannot foresee, like life itself. This is not the important thing. What is fundamental is how we nurture confidence in our choices. If one wants to justify fear, comfort, inconsistency or mediocrity, any excuse is good. But if there is a strong desire to grow, to assume and to face, even if it seems demanding, the person commits himself/herself and takes responsibility for what they construct with their freedom.

Why choose a vocation if I can live the best of each option without committing myself to anything in particular? Life is much more than having pleasant experiences, enjoying freedom and never being tied to anything. With this mindset, indeed, why make a choice at all? What is at stake, however, is love that is lived, that nourishes, that permeates the heart. And for love to be truly real and concrete, it requires relationship, time, understanding and other-orientedness. The question is, then, of the type of love we choose to live. And the specific vocation will be the one that enables us to keep and recreate this love.

What is vocation for: self-fulfillment or self-transcendence? This is by no means a matter of little importance. Most people, even Christians, think of vocation as a personal

decision for self-realization. It is, until it ceases to be; it is precisely the failures, the difficulties, the routine, the insurmountable limits of the relationship that shatter this idea of vocation. The Christian vocation and the different options of Christian life are either regulated by the personal relationship with God, who inspires them, or they end up being human projects unable to give more of themselves. Therefore, specific vocations are a call to go out of oneself and from oneself to encounter the other and the Other; vocation is about transcending.

For many, vocation is an escape, something like an easy “way out” of facing life and its problems. The ambiguous witnessing of Christians in living out their specific vocation can discredit particular vocations. Where does the ambiguity come from? Sometimes from conscious motivations that radically betray the spirit in which each vocation should be lived, such as the simple need for the approval of others. Also, from unconscious motivations that gradually arise due to the problems and experiences of living one’s own vocation. Hence, it is important to make a journey of open, sincere and authentic discernment, in order to freely make mature all project of life in Christ.

Vocation gives some people access to the possibility of self-promotion. Consciously or unconsciously, it may happen that there are people who choose a life option because it allows them to move up the ladder of prestige and social recognition. Of course, this can happen and, in fact, it does happen. No Christian called to a specific vocation is mature enough to understand, not in theory but as an experience, that the call he/she has received has to do with serving, giving oneself, wearing oneself out, dying to oneself. Only those who live their vocation in a Christian way can understand these things and sustain their choice.

Vocation is nothing more than a life project; in practice, being a Christian does not change anything. It is true that a life option without Christ has its own value and can be lived as a vocation. But I completely disagree that following Christ in a life option does not change anything. It is possible that for many Christians a specific vocation is only a cultural formality without repercussions beyond the cultural standards in which one lives out one’s own option. However, for those who have matured a life option in Christ and wish to live it as an expression of a response to a call, as a way of seeking God’s will in their lives, it has very important practical consequences.

The specific vocation is an option because I had no other choice. No one makes a good option in Christ if he does not have at least two real and possible, valid and good, alternatives from which to choose. And no one makes a good option in Christ if what he renounces does not hurt; were that the case, probably it is because he does not understand the value of what he chooses. Gospel-wise, it makes sense. It is about one who finds a treasure and sells all that he/she has in order to buy the field where the treasure lies (Mt 13:44-46).

That vocation thing, all it does is make your life more complicated. Certainly, the search for one’s vocation and mission in this world carries with it some complications. However, the question is not whether finding our vocation and living it out complicates our life, which perhaps it does, but why we want to complicate our life or why not. Hence,

the response to God's interior call obliges us to dialogue with the deepest longings of the heart. It is there, in the depths of the heart, where we find the necessary inspiration to risk our life and the concrete way to do it. Therefore, the demands of one's vocation are either assumed freely and consciously, or they correspond more to the need for recognition and approval. Sooner or later, one needs to make a discernment.

Vocation is for cowardly, timid people, who yield to God what they are not capable of doing by themselves. There are childish and irresponsible ways of assuming a specific vocation, such as those decisions that are born out of fear of freedom. It can happen, and in fact it does happen, that some people take on a specific vocation as an easy way out of guilt and anguish in the face of insecurity. The Christian vocation in general and in particular should not be understood as self-sacrifice pleasing to God. Rather, God wants us to take up our own history, wounds and fears, and invest them freely in something we feel satisfied with.

Considering a vocation is breaking the natural course through which each one channels his/her life in the way they think best. Each one settles the meaning of life the best way they can. And certainly the human being is capable, through innate intelligence, to undertake a project of free and responsible life. In this sense, the Christian vocation and the particular vocation in Christ do not bypass the natural channels in which the human vocation is also fulfilled. Nevertheless, when freedom's beauty and attraction are embraced, God's intervention in the life of a person always enables and enhances his/her best. Rarely is there a contradiction between what a person wants and what he or she understands, in faith, that God is asking of him or her. And in case of contradiction, it is because God far exceeds the goodness and possibilities of one's own plans.

Vocation is a choice that deprives you of the best of life. There are those who consider that the Christian vocation is a constant restriction to the best in life. For them, the Christian vocation and the specific vocation really emasculate the drives, instincts and desires that are part of human nature. However, what kind of life is that when a person reduces existence to merely satisfying one's needs? If satiety be possible, what is its real result? Often, in atrophy, weariness, emptiness and loneliness. The Christian vocation and the particular vocation incorporate the area of needs and desires, but it orders them from other points of reference and invites fulfilling them from a different logic, that of gift.

Some vocations are more important than others. This is one of the worst prejudices in understanding particular vocations. When some vocations are given a higher value than others, they are deformed from the original source from which they sprang as paths to service, dedication and availability. The abuse of power in some particular vocations stems from considering itself as special, a kind of rare super-elite, to be cared for and overprotected. In the light of the Gospel, one can never defend the superiority of anyone over everyone else. On the contrary, the Gospel confers a particular dignity on each type of vocation and equally values all as ways to live the fullness of love.

Vocation is fulfilling God's expectations. This prejudice about vocation feeds on a childish relationship of dependence on God. From this point of view, God is a kind of

“super daddy” who must be won over by fulfilling his expectations and waiting for his approval. Such a view has nothing to do with fulfilling God’s will. Fulfilling God’s will entails sufficient autonomy to make the person the master of his or her own life and, out of free love, to give it to a project greater than the limits of his or her own desires. God’s approval is not a healthy concept in vocational discernment; at least it does not suffice for a free and conscious choice.

Vocation contradicts the deepest identity of the person. Although in the Church the profound value and evangelical meaning of each vocation is preserved, throughout history some merely accidental elements have been added to particular vocations. Thus, in certain contexts, a model of a specific vocation is presented, outside of which its inspiration would be betrayed. In this sense, certain expressions of the Christian vocation and specific vocations are a child of their time and culture. In these cases, it can be said that the vocation does contradict the profound truth of the person, for “the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27). Each person should find in his or her vocation enough space to be himself or herself and to accept the challenge to be the best of himself or herself.

Vocation is aligning oneself to a standard adopted by society, but which places the person in a role that, in the long run, alienates him or her. Vocation is always much more than a simple role or the exercise of a profession. The particular vocation should have the potential to affect and organize each and every aspect of human and Christian life, otherwise it is not a vocation at all. And most importantly, the particular vocation, as a style of life in Christ, is a journey that deals with a process of constant growth and maturation in all directions of life. Vocation alienates when it does not assume this dynamism and this goal of constant renewal.

Vocation is a simple frustrated and sublimated feeling, which makes life bearable. There are those who affirm that the Christian vocation and the specific vocation is an easy refuge for sublimation of frustrated feelings, which makes life more bearable. Sublimation, even as an unconscious recourse, is valuable for organizing human life. But growing in a life project in Christ obliges, sooner or later, to *rethink* the meaning of life and to reset the motivations that define and move it. When a vocation is lived conscientiously, it always has a therapeutic dimension, which helps to recognize and heal one’s deep inner self.

Vocation is just another way of producing values in the world. For every human being who comes into this world it is important, sooner or later, to transcend. There are many ways to transcend in life. Vocation is one of them. However, fruitfulness does not ultimately define the meaning of one’s vocation. True, vocation is to give life, to produce value in the world, to commit oneself to a better world. But, above all, vocation is to receive life, to welcome the mystery of what we are and of the Mystery that dwells in us and, above all, to be a channel of the Life that flows through us.

3. Some descriptions of the Christian vocation

- “Vocation consists in building a lifelong dream of happiness in Christ.”

- "Vocation is the marvelous unfolding of the Christian life."
- "To respond to one's vocation is to draw out the deep truth contained in one's own heart."
- "Vocation is God's dream kept, like a promise, in the heart of every child of his."
- "Blessed are those who respond to the call, for their names will be written in the heart of the Father."
- "Vocation is to live the personal call to holiness."
- "To live one's vocation is to make a pilgrimage from love towards the possession of happiness that never ends: the beatitude of the saints."
- "Vocation is a way of loving from the experience of having discovered oneself deeply loved by God".
- "Vocation is passion for God, passion for humanity."
- "Vocation is following Jesus, the Master, along the paths of love and joy."

4. The concept of vocation

1. Personal realization <input type="checkbox"/>	2. Altruistic option <input type="checkbox"/>	3. A way of life <input type="checkbox"/>	4. Something sacred or a privilege <input type="checkbox"/>	5. Event of encounter with God <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>What am I capable of or what do I like to do?</i>	<i>What moves me?</i>	<i>What am I willing to commit my whole life to?</i>	<i>How do I make my life special?</i>	<i>Why me, Lord?</i>
It allows for the maximum development of personal skills and abilities.	It leads people to dedicate their lives to the service of others for a noble cause.	It allows the person to choose an option that organizes, commits and encompasses his or her entire life.	It brings the person in frequent contact with the sacred and with a reality that promotes it.	It allows the person to undertake the journey of a disciple of Christ, according to the Gospel (<i>Mk 3:13</i>).
It is about self-realization, that is, giving oneself the opportunity to live in fullness from one's own capabilities.	It is about being a good person and serving others through a profession.	It is about freely assuming a way of life that encompasses all that the person is, dreams and desires.	It is about surrendering oneself to the things of the sacred because the person feels "specially" chosen for that.	It consists in living life from a personal relationship with Christ; he shows us the way to an authentic vocation: <i>Mt 5:1-10</i> .
It allows the person to concentrate on developing his or her capabilities, in the effort to achieve his or her goals.	It allows the person to grow in generosity and solidarity with those who need it most.	It helps the person to live in a stable way the option that gives meaning to his/her life.	The person experiences his or her link to the sacred as a privilege and considers that he or she has been chosen for something special.	The person understands himself /herself as a called consciousness: <i>Here I am, Lord!</i>

The person makes a stable professional choice or occupation, usually with an economic purpose.	The person is professionally trained to serve the most disadvantaged in some field where help is needed.	Marriage, singleness, motherhood or fatherhood, etc.	The person is trained for things related to worship, celebrations, etc., through study and practice.	The person tries to live his or her baptized condition to the fullest: from faith, hope and love.
Vocational guidance consists in helping evaluate the various possibilities in the choice of a profession based on one's own abilities.	The orientation will consist of helping to know the deep inspiration, noble feelings and good wishes of the person.	The person is guided to discern which life option is best for him/her according to his/her preferences and tastes.	The person is guided to grow in the awareness of what it means to have been chosen to live with the sacred.	The person is helped to discover what the Master is asking at each moment of life; to "discern".
Its limitation is that this way of understanding vocation is insufficient in organizing the entirety of the person's life.	Its limitation is that there will always be something to do for others, but there is not always enough motivation to sustain the option.	Its limitation is that the life choices can fail, leaving the person out in the cold.	Its limitation is that it is an elitist understanding of vocation, since it defines itself in a privileged way with respect to other forms of life or vocations.	Its limitation is that it entails a radical demand beyond human strength; it is a gift. The person is guided by the Gospel and gives himself/ herself to others.
A soccer player, an actor, an architect, an engineer, a professor...	A doctor, a volunteer, a psychologist...	Spouse, mother or father of a family, single...	Those who serve in religion as a mode of self-promotion.	Lay people, priests and consecrated persons...

St. Augustine

"Clearly you answer, but not everyone hears clearly. Everyone consults you about what they want, but not everyone always hears what they want. A good friend of yours is he who is not so much concerned to hear from you what he wants as to want what he hears from you" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 10:26, 37).

Magisterium of the Church

"Today, the habit of discernment has become particularly necessary. For life today offers enormous possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents them as if they were all valid and good. [Without the wisdom of discernment we can easily become puppets at the mercy of the trends of the moment]" (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, n. 167).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. Are we guiding the new generations to choices in living Christianity that match the beauty of the Gospel?
2. Which of the prejudices that you have heard have prevented you from considering a particular following of Christ?
3. What for you would be an evangelical concept of Christian vocation?

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS³

Goal

To recall general outlines of the recent history of vocation ministry in the Church through the messages of the Popes on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations (WDPV).

Developing the topic

1. Historical background

The World Day of Prayer for Vocations (WDPV) is usually celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, known as “Good Shepherd Sunday”, since the liturgy of the Eucharist proposes that day Chapter 10 of the Gospel of St. John. Every year, in the days leading up to the celebration of WYD, the Pope issues a message on a theme.

How did the idea of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations come about? The remote origin is found in the command of Jesus: “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (cf. *Matthew* 9:38; *Luke* 10:2). The next source was in two apostles of vocations: Hannibal M. de Francia, founder of the *Rogationists*, and in Spain, Fr. Manuel Domingo y Sol, founder of the *Brotherhood of Diocesan Priests*. St. John Paul II praised the former as an “authentic precursor and zealous master of modern vocation ministry”; the latter he called “the holy apostle of vocations”.

Under the impulse of recent Popes and the particular zeal of the “apostles of vocations”, various initiatives and activities have arisen in the Church with the ultimate goal of praying in community for vocations.

It was in 1951 when the magazine *Rogate Ergo* called for the creation of a “day for vocations”. A year later, the same suggestion was made in the magazine *Ecclesia*, by the priest Jorge Sans Vila. When Pope Pius XII instituted the Pontifical Work for Priestly Vocations with the motu proprio “*Cum nobis*” (4 Nov 1941), he tasked it with promoting prayer for vocations. In the encyclical *Menti nostrae* (23 Sept 1950), he again insisted on the subject.

A few years later, Pope John XXIII dealt with the subject in his encyclical *Sacerdotii nostri primordia* (1 Aug 1959). The Pontiff, prompted by various private initiatives and the two petitions in the magazines *Rogate Ergo* and *Ecclesia*, established for Italy the “national day for ecclesiastical vocations” in 1961. On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, speaking to the participants of the International Congress on Vocations (26 May 1961), John XXIII insisted in a special way on the need to pray for vocations.

³ Cf. VITO MAGNO, *Jornada Mundial de Oración por las Vocaciones*, In: *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Sígueme, 2005.

Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic letter *Summi Dei Verbum* (4 November 1963) affirmed that the first duty of all Christians towards priestly vocations is that of prayer, according to the Lord's plan: "*Messis quidem multa...*".

The argument for prayer for vocations was taken from the context of the documents of Vatican II, especially the decree *Optatam Totius* 2, which insists on the need to "*pray insistently*" for vocations. The following texts are also important: *Christus Dominus* 15; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 11; *Ad Gentes* 29, 36, 38, 39, 40; *Lumen Gentium* 4, 12, 20; *Perfectae Caritatis* 1.

The action of the popes was often prepared for and then zealously supported in many Church events. Paul VI communicated the institution of WDPV to the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia on 23 January 1964 and to the Catholic episcopate on 2 February 1964. The Pope's first message for the celebration of the day, which was set for 12 April 1964, was broadcast on Vatican Radio on the afternoon of Saturday, 11 April.

The Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities of Studies had asked the Pope to institute a "*World Day for Vocations*". Pope Paul VI personally changed the name and suggested that it be called "*World Day of Prayer for Vocations*". Of the annual messages for WDPV, the first was one of the shortest and ended with a prayer that many people and communities from all over the world made their own. The pontifical initiative immediately set in motion a series of organizations capable of involving the entire ecclesial community. The Pope's teaching was joined by that of many bishops who issued pastoral letters on the subject.

The secretariats or diocesan centers of vocation ministry animated the event by making massive use of information organs. It cannot be excluded that in the years immediately following the institution of WDPV, both the progress of vocation ministry and the already evident crisis of priestly and religious vocations in the whole Church contributed to the promotion of prayer initiatives and the appropriate celebration of the day.

2. Theme for each World Day of Prayer for Vocations

1964: Radio message: what the World Day of Prayer for Vocations is.

1965: Vocation ministry in the ecclesial mission.

1966: Responsibility of all to promote vocations.

1967: Universal call and consecrated vocations.

1968: Need for vocations and the freedom to choose.

1969: The initiation of young people in the vocational journey.

1970: Facing the crisis of consecrated vocations.

1971: Call to young people: consecrate your life to something great.

1972: Lay vocation and priestly vocations.

- 1973: Profound sense of God's call.
- 1974: Invite the young directly and clearly.
- 1975: Requirements of the call to consecration.
- 1976: Profound link between vocation and evangelization.
- 1977: Vocation implies faith, love and sacrifice.
- 1978: Prayer, the heart of vocational life.
- 1979: Praying, calling and answering.
- 1980: To evangelize is to announce the truth about vocations.
- 1981: The responsibility of all in vocation ministry.
- 1982: Vocation is a call to life.
- 1983: Vocation is a gift from God.
- 1984: The different agents in vocation ministry.
- 1985: Youth and vocation ministry.
- 1986: The parish community and vocations.
- 1987: Parents and their vocational task.
- 1988: Mary, model of vocational prayer.
- 1989: The Catholic school and vocation ministry.
- 1990: Spiritual soundness of consecrated vocations.
- 1991: Catechesis and vocation ministry.
- 1992: Consecrated life.
- 1993: Vocation and evangelization.
- 1994: Family and vocation.
- 1995: Youth and vocation ministry.
- 1996: Vocations are born from the Christian community.
- 1997: Biblical Vocational Catechesis: Vocation History.
- 1998: Vocations, the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 1999: God the Father who calls to filial life.
- 2000: The Eucharist, source of every vocation.
- 2001: Life as a call.

- 2002: Vocation, the path to holiness.
- 2003: The call to humble service.
- 2004: Spirituality and prayer in today's culture.
- 2005: Put out into the deep to follow Jesus.
- 2006: Vocation in the mystery of the Church.
- 2007: Vocation at the service of Church communion.
- 2008: Vocations at the service of the Church in mission.
- 2009: Trust in God's initiative and the human response.
- 2010: Witnessing encourages vocations.
- 2011: Your diocesan Church, source of vocations.
- 2012: Vocations are a gift of God's love.
- 2013: Vocations, a sign of hope founded on faith.
- 2014: Vocations, witnesses of truth.
- 2015: Exodus, a fundamental experience of vocation.
- 2016: The Church, Mother of vocations.
- 2017: Driven by the Spirit for mission.
- 2018: Listening, discerning, living the Lord's call.
- 2019: The courage to bet on God's promise.
- 2020: The words of vocation.
- 2021: St. Joseph: the dream of vocation.
- 2022: Called to build the human family.

St. Augustine

"What other occupation have you but to praise him whom you love, and to seek others who will do it with you" (St. Augustine, Commentaries on Psalms 72:34)?" (St. Augustine, Commentaries on Psalms 72:34).

Magisterium of the Church

"Synodality, walking together, is a fundamental vocation for the Church, and only in this horizon is it possible to discover and value the different vocations, charisms and

ministries. At the same time, we know that the Church exists to evangelize, going out of herself and spreading the seed of the Gospel in history. Therefore, such a mission is possible precisely by making cooperation possible in all pastoral areas and, even more so, by involving all the Lord's disciples. Indeed, "by virtue of the Baptism received, every member of the People of God has become a missionary disciple (cf. Mt 28:19).

Every baptized person, whatever his or her function in the Church and the degree of enlightenment of his or her faith, is an agent of evangelization" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). It is necessary to beware of the mentality that separates priests from the laity, considering the former as protagonists and the latter as executors, and to carry out the Christian mission as one People of God, laity and pastors together. The whole Church is an evangelizing community" (Pope Francis, Message for the 59th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2022).

Questions for personal and community reflection



1. How is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations celebrated in your Christian community?
2. Prayer is the main pastoral action in vocation ministry. How does your Christian community engage in prayer for vocations?

THE AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS

Goal

To understand that the Augustinian Recollects are a group of Catholic faithful who, inspired by Augustinian doctrine and spirituality, follow Jesus and whose distinctive features are community, interiority and apostolate.

Developing the topic

Origin and spread

The Augustinian Recollects look to Saint Augustine (354-430) as their spiritual father and were born by decision of a Chapter that the Augustinians of the Province of Castile celebrated in Toledo in December 1588. An atmosphere of reform had arisen in the Augustinian Order, promoted by the Council of Trent.

The Chapter of Toledo took this desire up for a more recollected life, with more dedication to prayer, greater emphasis on the common life and greater austerity, and decreed that monasteries be founded for those who freely wished to live in this way.

The first convent assigned for men was the one in Talavera de la Reina (Toledo), and the one for women was created in Madrid by Saint Alonso de Orozco. In 1605 there were already 17 convents scattered throughout Spain.

Another renewal of Augustinian Recollection sprouted in Colombia. In 1604 the first Recollects in Latin America began their journey around the Colombian hermitage of La Candelaria.

Missionary horizon and strong storms

In 1606 the Augustinian Recollects arrived in the Philippines, which became practically the sole missionary horizon until the islands' independence in 1898, and where the Augustinian Recollection has written many of its glorious missionary deeds.

If the War of Independence against the French in 1808 was a hard blow to religious life in general, the disentailment laws of Mendizábal in 1835 dealt a mortal blow to religious life in Spain.

The Augustinian Recollects lost 29 of the 30 convents they had in Spain. Only the one in Monteagudo (Navarra) remained, which the government left in the hands of the Order because it prepared religious and priests for the missions in the Philippines, which was a priority interest for the royal crown.

The danger of extinction of the Augustinian Recollects in Spain was serious. But political changes eased the difficulties and a new house of formation was acquired in Marcilla (Navarra), and another one later in San Millán de la Cogolla (La Rioja), always with an eye on the Philippines, where practically all the religious were being sent.

Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, hundreds of Recollects evangelized the Philippines and gave their lives there, most of them without ever returning to Spain.

Expansion in Latin America

The Philippine Revolution of 1898 was another crucial test for the survival of the Augustinian Recollects. Most of them had to leave the archipelago; a good number perished. Some survived.

These developments made it necessary to look for new missionary territories, which they found in Latin America: Brazil, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia; in this last country a group of Recollects had been living since the 17th century, but they experienced many difficulties caused in part by the political powers.

In spite of everything, the Recollection remained standing and there was no lack of providential men - Fray Enrique Pérez, Monsignor Toribio Minguella, St. Ezekiel Moreno... - who had a special drive to keep the charism alive and convert the Augustinian Recollects into an autonomous religious Order, with juridical independence from the Augustinians, on whom, in practice, the Recollection never depended since its birth.

The Augustinian Recollects as a religious order

Pope St. Pius X granted this autonomy through the brief "Religiosas Familias" in 1912. Since then, the Order of Augustinian Recollects has been reorganized in all levels and the number of religious and ministries served throughout the twentieth century increased, reaching 1,500 members in the 1970s. Today, the Order is made up of about a thousand religious, with an uneven presence in 20 countries.

The Augustinian Recollect Family

The Augustinian Recollects are characterized by certain traits: interior life (prayer, liturgy of the hours...), missionary spirit – they go where the Church needs them –, the importance of common life, simplicity and the search for Truth.

Parallel to the history of the Augustinian Recollects, a very rich history has developed in the Order of Augustinian Recollect Nuns of contemplative life, who have monasteries mainly in Spain and Mexico, but in recent decades have founded convents in the United States, Philippines, Brazil, Kenya, Colombia and Costa Rica. The total number of Augustinian Recollect contemplative nuns is around 500.

The Augustinian Discalced Augustinian Nuns of St. John of Ribera are closely linked to the Augustinian Recollects by their spirituality.

Born in the shadow or under the influence of Augustinian Recollect spirituality are the Congregation of the Augustinian Recollect Sisters, the Augustinian Recollect Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, the Augustinian Recollect Missionary Sisters and the Augustinian Recollect Sisters of the Sick.

But the Augustinian Recollect Family is not only made up of religious men and women, but also of lay people who live their Christian life animated by the Augustinian

Recollect spirituality: the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternity, the Augustinian Recollect Youth -RAY- and the Christian Mothers of Saint Monica.

Saints and holy women of the Augustinian Recollect Family

St. Augustine

Augustine of Hippo was born in Tagaste (Numidia, present Algeria) on 13 November 354, the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother (St. Monica).

After studying the Greek and Latin classics in Madaura, he went around 370 to the university in Carthage, where he showed a clear intellectual calling. He devoted himself to teaching at Tagaste and Carthage. From there he went to Rome where he held the chair of rhetoric. Seeking promotion, he applied for and obtained a chair in Milan.

Augustine's religious journey traversed different beliefs moved by his continuous restlessness, which led him to situations of anxiety and experimentation. The reading of the Bible, the advice of his mother and the sermons of Milan bishop Ambrose, led him to a paradigmatic path of conversion in 386. This path has been a model for men and women through the ages.

He was baptized on Easter Vigil night (24-25 April 387) by Bishop Ambrose himself.

Faced with the needs of the Church, he was ordained a priest in Hippo in 391 and in 395 he became the bishop of that see. However, he always sought to live the faith in community, a subject of which he was a specialist in theory and practice. In fact, he was the founder of numerous communities and his influence continues to this day in the wider Augustinian Family.

His sermons, letters, and books such as *The City of God*, among many other works, have gone down in the history of Catholic literature and spirituality. Some of them are still on the bestseller lists, such as *The Confessions*, where he narrates his conversion journey.

He died in Hippo on 28 August 430, after having founded monasteries, preached the word of God with ardor and left many works that are a source for current thought and science.

Saint Monica

Monica was born in Tagaste (today Algerian territory) in the year 332. As was the custom at the time, her parents arranged her marriage to Patricius, a hard-working but ill-tempered man, a gambler, lacking in religious belief and zeal.

For 30 years Monica lived a life she had not aspired for. They had three children. The two youngest were her joy and comfort, but the eldest, Augustine, caused her much anguish due to his erratic life.

Those were times of much institutional, social and family violence, with physical punishments usually meted out, but although Patricius's ill-temper was known, Monica

never suffered bodily harm. She explained the reason to her friends: when Patricius was angry, she tried to calm down with good humor, reasoning that it takes two to quarrel.

Patricius criticized Monica's much praying and her generosity to the poor, but he did not oppose her dedication to those good works. Monica prayed and in 371 was rewarded with the conversion of both her husband and her mother-in-law to the Catholic faith.

A year after being baptized, Patricius died. Now, Monica directed all her efforts towards Augustine, her eldest son.

After much prayer, advice, conversations and, above all, much affection, Monica influenced Augustine until his definitive conversion and baptism. After his baptism, she became sick, which led to her death in 387, at the age of 55. But she died happy to have achieved the happiness of her son.

Thousands of mothers and wives have since then commended themselves to St. Monica. The Christian Mothers of St. Monica is an association in the Augustinian Recollect Family that brings together mothers who desire to pray especially for their children and support each other.

St. Alypius and St. Possidius

Within the group of friends who were part of St. Augustine's life, we find Alypius and Possidius, whom tradition has considered the two most qualified representatives of the Augustinian heritage. These two men, contemporaries and coming from the same place in Roman Africa, are united by a common friend: Augustine.

Both shared important moments with him as brothers in community in the monastery and subsequently as bishops of Tagaste and Calama, respectively. Both would be the Hippo bishop's hands in his most difficult and engaging works. All three would participate in important councils and would herald the defense of the Catholic faith.

The relationship between Augustine and Alypius began when the latter was very young, as he was one of his students at Tagaste. Augustine had a profound admiration for the young student, due to his fondness for books and reading. In addition, his great personality and purity of spirit amazed anyone who knew him, as did his love and defense of justice to the ultimate consequences.

Augustine dedicated a section of Book 9 of *The Confessions* to Alypius, referring to him as "*brother of my heart*" (cf. *Conf.* 9,4,7). With him, Augustine also shared the restlessness and the search for the faith, which led to their baptism on the night of 24/25 April 387. Although the episcopal assignment separated them physically, their friendship never waned in the least.

Alypius will always be Augustine's faithful friend, "*his soul mate, brother, confidant; his refuge and rest in the great battles. Alypius is, together with Monica, the person who made Augustine a Saint Augustine*" (cf. Sanchez C. Antonio, *Alipio el Amigo, Posidio el discípulo*. Nuestros santos agustinianos/10, Marcilla (Navarra), Spain, 1991, p. 43).

Possidius was the first biographer of St. Augustine. His account, after having lived with him for about forty years, is vivid and realistic. The relationship between the two saints apparently dates back to the time of the foundation of the first monastery of Hippo, where Possidius lived until the year 400, when he was also made bishop.

The greatest testimony of friendship, and above all of trust between the two, is found in a letter Augustine addressed to an Italian bishop, referring to Possidius thus: *"In Possidius you will find not a little of me"* (cf. Ep. 101:1). Augustine is for him a mentor who teaches, accompanies and defends him, and he is also a father.

For his part, Possidius, being of humble origin, always showed himself to be a faithful, tenacious, simple, noble friend, who in everything admired and respected his master. He himself, speaking of Augustine, wrote at the end of his work: *"For forty years I was united to him by a cordial and sweet friendship"* (*Life of St. Augustine*, 31).

The life of these two men doubtlessly embodies the value that friendship held for Augustine. On the basis of this friendship they would together build a project that still lives to our day: common life, fraternity, unity of souls and hearts of many in God. For this reason, the Order declared Alypius and Possidius the patrons of the Augustinian Recollect Youth (RAY) Movement in the year 2021 .

Saint Nicholas of Tolentino

Nicholas was born in Sant'Angelo in Pontano (Italy) around 1245. He joined the Augustinians in his hometown as a student and novice at a young age.

Ordained priest around 1273, he was assigned to Tolentino, where he spent thirty years of his life.

He was not renowned for his writings or his knowledge. But he did stand out, already in the society of his time, for his preaching, his pastoral dedication as a confessor and his attention to the most needy.

The spirit of charity led him to visit the poorest neighborhoods, to visit the most seriously ill and to attend to both material and spiritual misery.

Contemplation and apostolate, dialogue with God and sensitivity to human problems converged in him. Austere and mystical, he found happiness in the common life from a deep love for St. Augustine and a fervent following of his Rule.

He died on 10 September 1305 with a great reputation for holiness.

Through Nicholas, God performed numerous miracles during his lifetime and after his death. He is considered the intercessor of the souls in purgatory and, throughout history, his devotees sought protection against plague, fires and stuttering.

Nicholas has been for the Augustinian Family the saint who knew how to live the charismatic fidelity and put the Augustinian teachings into practice. For this reason he was proclaimed the patron of the oldest Province of the Augustinian Recollection (Province of St. Nicholas of Tolentino).

Iconography usually depicts him with a star on his chest on account of a vision he had of his life and holiness.

He also often appears with a partridge on a plate, to recall a miracle in which he made fly a partridge that was offered to him roasted. It represents his penitent life.

St. Rita of Cascia

Rita was born under the name of Margherita Lotti, in Roccaporena (province of Perugia, in the Italian Umbria), very close to Cascia, on 22 May 1380 or 1381.

At the age of 16 her parents had her wed to Fernando Manzini, with whom she had two children. Her spiritual life influenced her husband's conversion.

The circumstances of her time gave rise to conflicts that ended in the assassination of her husband. Despite the difficulties and the fact that the thirst for vengeance was common in that society through the notorious *vendetta* law, she forgave her husband's murderers and became a true promoter of peace and forgiveness.

However, hatred did find a place in the hearts of her sons, who were ready to avenge their father's death with more violence. Rita then humbly told God that she would rather see her boys dead than stained with murderous blood. Both became ill and died young.

Widowed and childless, she entered the Augustinian monastery of St. Mary Magdalene of Cascia; there, for 40 years she served God and the community in fidelity, dedication and generosity, after adopting the name Rita at her profession.

Devotion to St. Rita, model wife, mother, widow and religious, has been deeply felt by the people of God in all five continents.

Her holiness was born of a relationship based on Christ that made her live in wonder her daily life in exceptional circumstances.

The fame of her intercession before God has earned her the title of advocate of the impossible, as well as one of the Augustinian saints with the greatest devotional following. This is attested to by the large number of temples dedicated to her.

Saint John of Sahagun

Born in Sahagun (Leon, Spain) in 1430, Juan González del Castrillo was the eldest of seven children of a wealthy couple. He did his early studies in the monastery of Saint Benedict of Sahagun, but it was the bishop of Burgos, Alfonso de Cartagena, who, after seeing his worth, looked after his education, took him to Burgos and appointed him secretary canon of the Burgos cathedral.

Moving to Salamanca for studies, he met the Augustinians, whereupon he decided to join the Order of St. Augustine.

The Salamanca of that time was a place of instability, with two noble families fighting for control of the city for forty years through a constant spate of killings and violence. The entire populace lived in terror.

Juan de Sahagun intervened and pacified the city, thus earning the perpetual veneration and love of its inhabitants. In fact, he was named patron saint of the city in 1868.

In Salamanca one can visit two streets whose names remind of two miracles attributed to the saint; in Pozo Amarillo Street, John saved a child from drowning in a well; and in Tentenecio Street, John stopped a raging bull that, after escaping, was causing havoc and panic in the city. The friar stood in its way and shouted to the animal: "Stop, you fool! He immediately tamed it and they were able to take it back to the pens.

John of Sahagun's death was possibly caused by poisoning by people who were irked by the reproaches he launched in his sermons.

The Church of Saint John of Sahagun in Sahagun is built on the site of the family home. Adjacent to it is the headquarters of the Brotherhood of Saint John of Sahagun. In the Cathedral of Burgos there is a chapel dedicated to the saint, and in Salamanca, very close to the Plaza Mayor, there is also a temple dedicated to the saint.

Saint Thomas of Villanova

Tomás García Martínez was born in late 1486. He spent his childhood and youth in Villanueva de los Infantes (Ciudad Real, Spain).

Scion of a well-to-do family, he studied Arts and Theology at the University of Alcalá de Henares. But his vocation led him to become an Augustinian in Salamanca in 1516. In 1518 he was ordained priest. He was prior, visitor general and prior provincial of Andalusia and Castile and professor, as well as counselor and confessor to Charles I. As provincial, he sent the first Augustinian missionaries to Mexico in 1533.

Despite such positions, his fame comes from his austerity and unquestionable love for the poor, especially orphans and the sick. Far from doleful and dependence of the poor, he was pioneering in the concept of charity and almsgiving; he attacked the root of poverty by using resources to provide for work and a profession. "Almsgiving is not only doling out, but drawing the needy out of poverty and freeing them from it where possible", he said.

Much to his dismay, his integrity and commitment as well as his reputation as an excellent manager and leader earned him in 1544 the appointment as archbishop of Valencia, a diocese that for a century had not had an efficient government and was suffering from administrative and pastoral chaos.

In Valencia, he organized a formation program for priests, a model social assistance program that gave tangible results in local society, a special school for converted Moors, and comprehensive care for orphans.

His sermons, preaching and biblical commentaries did not go unnoticed, even by the Emperor himself. He died of angina pectoris in 1555 and was canonized in 1658. Authors such as Francisco de Quevedo wrote about him, and he is the patron saint of universities and educational centers, of one of the Provinces of the Augustinian

Recollects and of cities in Spain and Colombia. His feast day is celebrated on October 10 and a petition has been sent to the Holy See for him to be granted the title of Doctor of the Church.

Saint Magdalene of Nagasaki

The daughter of noble and fervent Christians, Magdalene was born in 1611 near the Japanese city of Nagasaki. At a very young age, she saw her parents and siblings condemned to death and executed for being Catholic.

In 1624 she met the Augustinian Recollects Francisco de Jesus and Vicente de San Antonio. Attracted by their deep spirituality, she consecrated herself to God as a secular Augustinian Recollect.

From that time on, she wore the habit of a tertiary, and dedicated herself to prayer and spiritual reading. She catechized children and begged alms from Portuguese merchants in favor of the poor.

Emperor Iemitsu's persecution of the Christians became more and more systematic and cruel. In 1629, Magdalene took refuge with the two Recollects and several hundred Christians in the mountains. In November, the two missionaries were captured, and she remained in hiding, enduring the suffering and hardships with serene joy.

She encouraged everyone to stand firm and not to deny the faith, visited the sick, baptized newborns and had a comforting word for everyone.

To set an example to Christians terrified by torture, Magdalene defied the tyrants. In September 1634, she appeared before the judges with her tertiary habit and a small bundle of books to read in prison and pray.

Unbent by promises of an advantageous marriage if she recanted, she was subjected to the torture of the pit, hanging feet up, her head and chest pressed with boards inside a cavity.

She resisted 13 days until a heavy rain flooded the pit and the martyr drowned. Her ashes were scattered in the sea to prevent Christians from keeping her relics.

St. Magdalene of Nagasaki is the patroness of the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternities.

St. Ezekiel Moreno

Ezekiel Moreno y Diaz was born in Alfaro (La Rioja, Spain) on 9 April 1848. Heeding his vocation at an early age, he entered the seminaries of the Order of Augustinian Recollects following in the footsteps of his brother, and professed in 1864 as a religious of the Order.

After completing his studies, he was sent on mission to the Philippines, where he was ordained a priest in 1871. A renowned missionary, he soon became known for his dedication to the people of God and his continuous search for the good.

After returning to Spain for some time to be a formator of missionaries in Monteagudo (Navarra), he was called to the important mission of revitalizing the Order in Colombia.

His impeccable and dedicated performance earned him the appointment of Vicar Apostolic of Casanare after his episcopal ordination in 1894. He continued to serve the Church in the Diocese of Pasto.

Those were not easy times for the Church in Colombia, due to political divisions and the presence of powerful anticlerical forces in society. Despite several smear campaigns against him, the people of Pasto recognized his affection and his continued work for the underprivileged.

Sick with cancer, he returned to Spain, although little could be done for his health. He decided to retire to Monteagudo, where he had made his novitiate, had professed religious life and had formed new missionaries. On 19 August 1906, he died of the disease.

Ezekiel is exemplary as a religious, a priest, a bishop and, at the end of his life, a sick person. In 1992, John Paul II presented him as a model evangelizer and canonized him in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) during the 5th Centenary of the Evangelization of America and the meeting of the Latin American episcopate.

His life and his intercession have earned him the title of special protector of cancer patients, a disease he suffered with great strength of spirit.

1. Vocation and life according to the Augustinian Recollect Charism

In the following pages, we present some of the forms of life that share in the Augustinian Recollect charism: religious, cloistered nuns, religious of active life, Secular Fraternities, Recollect Augustinian Youth, Christian Mothers of St. Monica.....

Augustinian Recollect Friars

To be an Augustinian Recollect religious is to become part of a large family that is on a journey towards one and the same goal, which is always Christ.

We walk this path together, according to the way proposed by St. Augustine, one of the saints who most promoted community life; and we call ourselves Recollects because we are part of the tradition that seeks, since the 16th century, a more recollected and austere life, with a more communitarian way of life, and making silence and interiority the means to dialogue with God who dwells within us.

In our houses we form communities of brothers, as St. Augustine himself wanted, and together we desire to follow Christ, poor, chaste and obedient, as the Gospel tells us.

We are men of restless hearts who seek the truth and are at the service of the Church and humanity.

To be an Augustinian Recollect is to embrace a way of being, living and thinking that we call charism, which is summarized in the unconditional love of God, which unites hearts in the community life of the brothers and which we want to spread among all people in order to win them over and unite them to Christ in his Church.

As Augustinian Recollects we want to live with joy our vocation to follow Jesus every day, from a simple life, and thus sow the message of hope of Jesus Christ wherever we live and work.

Women Recollects

Contemplative nuns

To be an Augustinian Recollect nun is to live in community seeking and adoring God, loving Him without measure through contemplation, work for self-sustenance, and common life.

The Augustinian Recollect contemplative life is woven in daily life and is distinguished by a search for God in prayer, retreat, silence and austerity, and always in the manner of St. Augustine, in fraternal communion.

Recollect nuns want to respond faithfully to their contemplative vocation; in the image of the pilgrim Church, the nuns proclaim the life of heaven in the midst of humanity.

The love of God that is born of contemplation is always diffusive; thus, the more one participates in the knowledge and love of God, the more strength she will have to spread this genuine love of God in society, with continuous prayer for others.

Religious of active life

To be an Augustinian Recollect missionary, in a fraternal community and in continuous interiority, is to seek above all the glory of God, one's own sanctification and the extension of the Reign of God (justice, dignity, peace, equality, in short, love).

An Augustinian Recollect missionary, in order to respond to her vocation, tries to imitate the way of life of Jesus, in such a way that to everyone she aims to witness virginity, poverty and obedience. This witness is done through service to the Church and to humanity in multiple tasks: teaching, catechesis, development projects, attention to the most disinherited wherever they live, with whom she shares life and hope.

To be an Augustinian Recollect missionary means to live according to the spirit of St. Augustine and to be faithful to the spirit of the Augustinian Recollection by proclaiming Christ.

The Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternity

To be a member of the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternity means to live baptismal consecration fully, guided by the teachings of St. Augustine and the Augustinian Recollect charism, and thus embrace the spirit of the beatitudes.

Thus, these lay people commit themselves to serve the Church and humanity in their daily environment at home, at work or at leisure.

Each member of the Secular Fraternity wishes to shape his or her life according to Augustinian Recollect spirituality and its values, united in one soul and in one heart with many other people from all over the world and from different cultures, but with the same purpose and the same personal and communitarian journey to follow.

To this end, the member of the Secular Fraternity commits himself/herself to live a Rule of life according to the Gospel, Augustinian values and constant prayer.

To be a member of the Secular Fraternity is to fulfill the mandate of Jesus to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel, responding in an effective way to the call of the Father; and for this reason they are united to the whole Church in prayer, evangelization and the exercise of Christian charity.

The members of the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternity hold meetings for prayer and formation, and follow a life project that leads them to constant growth in joy, in the sharing of life and values, always in community of brothers and sisters.

Augustinian Recollect Youth (RAY)

The Augustinian Recollect Youth (RAY) is the Catholic youth movement promoted by the Augustinian Recollect Family. Its main objective is the living of the Augustinian Recollect charism as a means of personal and communitarian growth, as well as a concrete proposal of happiness and fullness of life.

Each adolescent and young Augustinian Recollect is offered an itinerary for an encounter with Jesus and with his/her brothers and sisters through friendship, accompaniment, the search for truth and service to others.

This movement of Augustinian and Recollect imprint offers avenues of friendship and community, which are very appropriate for the communication of the Christian experience.

It also fosters the search for truth and transcendent values; generates spaces of freedom and human progress; undertakes social action work in response to the most pressing needs of the place; and cultivates the interior life through prayer and attentive listening to the Word.

The Augustinian Recollect Youth are born under the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Consolation, and entrust their activities and their very life to her.

The RAY want to generate paths of hope in the new generations of Christians, so that they can prepare themselves for an adult life full of happiness and values that will help build their persons, their families and society as a whole.

Saint Monica Christian Mothers

The Saint Monica Christian Mothers form small communities of mothers, called “choirs”, whose main purpose is prayer to keep alive the faith of their own children and that of others.

This association lives from the spiritual fount of St. Augustine, through the Augustinian Recollect Family.

In the life of Augustine of Hippo there emerge the presence and influence of his mother, St. Monica, of fundamental importance in the whole vital process of her son [p. 9].

St. Augustine, in his writings, speaks of St. Monica with great veneration and tenderness, and delineates the spiritual face of his mother as that of a Christian woman with all its implications.

Monica is presented as a true model, for with her constant patience and prayer, and with the firmness of her faith, she obtained from God the conversion of her husband and her son Augustine, who wrote about her thus:

“All those who knew her found in her more than enough reasons to praise, honor and love you. She felt your presence in her heart by the testimony of the fruits of a holy conduct”.

Following this example, the St. Monica Christian Mothers’ Choirs today continue the fundamental commitment of daily prayer for their own children. The choirs, composed of seven mothers, ensure sincere, close and loving daily prayer each day of the week for the families of the seven mothers.

In addition, they have other meetings for prayer and fraternal sharing, dialogue and mutual support.

2. We are missionaries

As part of its evangelizing mission and its understanding of the world and humanity, the Augustinian Recollect Family promotes human rights, solidarity, social justice, equal opportunities, sustainable development, human ecology and the defense and promotion of the dignity of the person in all areas: education, health, housing, work...

All this is part of what the Catholic community has called for centuries “love of neighbor,” about which there is a direct and specific command from Jesus, the Lord: “Love one another, as I have loved you.

The Order of Augustinian Recollects has always promoted these values. What has changed throughout history have been the means and the forms, progressively adapted to the times.

Although we are a Catholic religious family, we are open to all kinds of people and institutions so as to achieve these common goals through common actions.

What has traditionally been called “missions” today encompasses a more complex spectrum. We are responding to the Church’s call for “new forms of poverty” that go beyond the lack of material resources. In the following pages we offer you information on some of these concrete projects.

We also offer you ways to show solidarity. Love of neighbor complements each person, makes us better, gives us happiness, helps us to grow in an integral way. On the opposite side are selfish attitudes, which sadden, impoverish and move us away from wholeness as human beings.



augustinian
recollects