



Vocation Promotion Guide

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General Secretariat
for Vocations and Youth

Vocation Promotion Guide



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Introduction

1. Offering One's Life to Christ

Saint Augustine, from the beginning of his monastic experience, invited other brothers to join him in the same way of life. From his encounter with Christ, a fire burned in his heart that always set other hearts on fire in the same desire for God; They became other torches that shared with him the paths and adventures of the Christian and monastic vocation. In this sense, that episode in the life of the saint is very significant when, amid the enchantment of monastic life in Tagaste (Africa) in the year 386, he went to the city of Hippo to win a friend to the monastery: *I came to this city to see a friend, whom I thought I could win for God, coming to be with us in the monastery* (Saint Augustine, *Sermon 355, 2*).

The saint of Hippo wrote: *I exhort others with all the eagerness that I can to embrace this purpose, and I have brothers in the Lord who by my ministry have decided to do so* (Saint Augustine, *Epistle 157, 4, 39, to Hilary*). And there is a short paragraph from one of his sermons that should lead us to rethink the pastoral care of promotion of vocations from the fruitfulness proper to every Christian life. Saint Augustine writes: *Do we dare to call ourselves mothers of Christ? [...] They have been children, they are also mothers, bringing Christ to as many as you can; so that, just as they were children at birth, they may be mothers of Christ by giving birth to others* (Saint Augustine, *Sermon 72 A, 8*). As vocation promoters, we are invited to share Augustine's dream of also being a channel - fathers and mothers - for new vocations in the Church of Christ.

2. Sowing with Patience

Vocation promotion, as a pastoral activity that it is, has made an amazing journey from the Second Vatican Council to the present day, in the XXI century. It can be said that the transformation of the vocation promotion ministry went through the combined efforts of search, discernment and enlightenment to arrive at its realization regarding its own role and mission in the Church. This journey reveals a profound change in mentality for vocation

ministry, a conversion of heart, a true act of faith, love and hope. In summary, it could be said that it has gone from a vocational ministry of *miraculous fishing* to a vocational ministry of *patient sowing*. Recently, at the Synod of Bishops on *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment* (2018), the entire Church did consider the approach of vocational accompaniment.

Vocation ministry is the organized action of the Church, which is aimed at helping people to gradually become aware of the vocation and mission they have received from God. In this sense, the pastoral care of vocation promotion is the action of the Church in favor of “all vocations”, so that the same Church may be built according to the fullness of Christ and according to the variety of charisms that the Holy Spirit inspires in it. Therefore, being the mother Church of vocations, vocation promotion, as a pastoral action, helps to give birth to the marvelous mystery in which each human and Christian vocation is realized. Thus, the Church accompanies each Christian so that, fully initiated in the faith, he may discover and live his specific vocation.

3. Youth Ministry and Vocation Ministry

All pastoral work is oriented, by its very nature, to vocational discernment, insofar as its ultimate objective is to help the believer discover the concrete path to carry out the life project to which God calls him. For this reason, Pope Francis has said that vocational service must be seen as the soul of all evangelization and of all pastoral care of the Church and, therefore, vocation ministry cannot be reduced to activities closed in on themselves (Pope Francis, Message to the participants in the International Congress: “Vocational Pastoral and Consecrated Life” 2017).

Saint John Paul II affirmed that youth reach their true richness when it is lived mainly as a time of vocational reflection (cf. John Paul II, Message for the XXXII World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1994). For this reason, youth ministry must consider over and over again, with great creativity, how to help young people to recognize and embrace that life project that leads them to true happiness. Every young person should come to experience a real encounter with Christ, which opens him to the full meaning of his life and fills his heart with joy. Likewise, youth ministry must accompany the journey of young people so that they discover that authentic joy is experienced when they discover themselves giving their own lives.

For its part, vocation ministry must collaborate side by side with youth ministry to guide young people to see their lives with the gaze of God the Father, who loves them and dreams of them happy. Youth ministry and vocation ministry, in the manner of a symphony for two voices, must render a delicate and patient service so that young people discover what is the voca-

tion that the Lord has reserved for them, so that the dream of God the Father is in them a reality. In the same way, the vocation ministry must propose the way of discipleship that leads the young person to embrace, with all the strength of his heart, that path that Christ reveals to him in order to live the fullness of love.

4. A renewed plan of vocation ministry

The pastoral care for the promotion of vocations today has to do, first of all, with the task of creating and spreading a “vocational culture” (**plowing**). Secondly, vocation promotion has much to do with going out and sowing a living and affective encounter with Christ, to awaken and arouse vocations in the Church and for the Church (**sowing**). And, thirdly, the mission of animating vocations includes the pastoral action of welcoming and accompanying the very personal journey of young disciples with a view to discernment and vocational decision (**nurturing**). These are the three pastoral actions that give rise to the three parts of this Plan of vocation promotion.

On the other hand, at the 2018 Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational discernment, he used a methodology that is taken up in this Plan for vocation promotion; There they spoke of three pedagogical actions: *recognize, interpret and choose*. This methodology is used as follows. With the verb “to recognize” the part of the analysis of the reality about our world, our Church and young people is integrated. To which are added some data typical of the current situation of the Order. And starting from the verb “interpret”, the basic theoretical framework of the theology of the Christian vocation and of specific vocations will be presented.

The verb “choose” encompasses, on the one hand, the radical change that the missionary disciple experiences from the living encounter with Christ and his Word and, on the other, the concrete consequences that this friendship relationship has for the path of Christian life. In this *Promotion Guide* the verbs to leave and to serve are also added, which are not part of the methodology of the synod on young people. With the verb “go out” is intended to indicate the process of becoming fully a person beyond oneself, in Christ. And starting from the verb “to serve”, on the one hand, that essential aspect that strongly configures the meaning of the Christian vocation and specific vocations is pointed out, and, on the other hand, the concrete tasks of the whole community in the pastoral care for vocations are pointed out.

Likewise, with the intention of giving this *Promotion Guide* an Augustinian-Recollect character, the *path of Augustinian interiority* will be taken as a common thread. In this case, the process of Augustinian interiority is used as Saint Augustine refers to it in his work *On True Religion*. It is about the ex-

pression “Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward person dwells truth and if you find yourself limited, transcend yourself” (*Vera Relig* XXXIX, 72.). The different elements of this expression will be those that allow to propose the pastoral care of promotion of vocations as a journey to the center of life, to the depths of the heart; to the heart of man, but also to that of God.

Finally, it should be noted that, in the *Aparecida Document*, on the occasion of the V Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Aparecida in 2007, the stages of the missionary discipleship was discussed in these terms: encounter with Christ, conversion of the heart, discipleship, communion and mission. This is included in our *Guide* and is proposed as a proven path for vocational discernment. And at each stage of the discipleship journey, they are accompanied by the vocational verbs proposed by the pedagogy of the document *New vocations for a new Europe* (1997): accompaniment, education, formation and discernment. In this way, our itinerary remains like this: accompanying conversion, educating the missionary disciple, forming for communion and discerning the mission.



First Step

plow

FIRST STEP

Plow

"He who has ears, let ji"
(Mt 13,9)

In the synoptic Gospels the beautiful parable of the sower is recorded (Mt 13, 1-23; cf. Mk 4,1-12; Lk 8,4-10). There is a detail in this parable that may go unnoticed, and that is when Jesus says: *whoever has ears should listen* (Mt 13,9). At the beginning, the parable highlights the action of the sower and the condition of the land where the seed is thrown in order, at the end, to make it clear that the fruits are gathered on good soil. It could be objected to Jesus why he scatters the seed where the ground is not in a condition to bear good fruit. Wouldn't it be better to first prepare the ground and then sow the seed?

Precisely what is wonderful about the evangelical parable is that, to become fertile ground, it is essential to prepare the ground. Although the synoptic gospels manifest the superabundance of God in Jesus who wastes the grain, at bottom it is a direct provocation to the listeners so that they review the type of terrain that each one is and ask themselves about the fruitfulness of their Christian life. Most likely, whoever listens to the parable with attention and interest, will discover that in their land or heart there is a pending work to be done to get to bear fruit as Jesus wants. Here is the key to plowing in this parable, *whoever has ears to listen*.

Jesus gives us in his Word the promise of new life, but for it to be a reality it also depends on the attitude with which that word is received, *what is sown in fertile soil is the one who listens to the word and understands it. That one bears fruit: one hundred or sixty or thirty* (Mt 13:23). There is thus a very close relationship between preparing the soil of one's own heart and listening to and understanding the Word, so that it bears fruits of new life. Therefore, the meaning of the verb "plow" or "prepare the heart" has a lot to do with creating the conditions that make it possible to attend to and listen to God. In this *Vocation Promotion Guide*, "plowing" is assimilated with the effort to create a "vocational culture".

What is the vocational culture? Starting in the eighties of the last century, there has been talk of creating a "vocational culture". Saint John Paul II, on the threshold of the 21st century, saw the importance of recovering

some roots of the Gospel that were being neglected and that are essential to live the Christian vocation. He called them “background vocational attitudes.” Among others, he proposed the following: the experience of gratitude, openness to the transcendent, availability, confidence in oneself and in others, affection, understanding, forgiveness, responsibility, the ability to dream, amazement and generosity (cf. John Paul II, *Message of the XXX World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2 -1992-*).

At the Synod of Bishops on young people, the “culture of vocations” was discussed. It was said that understanding human existence in vocational terms leads to highlighting some elements that are very important for the growth of every person. The urgency of uprooting the idea that the person is determined by destiny or by chance, and the belief that the vocation is a private matter that must be managed on their own, was noted. Both visions leave the young man confined to a destiny “without vocation.” Hence, it is important to create the conditions so that in all Christian communities, from the baptismal awareness of its members, a true vocational culture and a constant commitment to prayer for vocations may develop (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on the Young, 80*).

Pope Francis, following the *Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*, reminded the whole Church and young people of the importance of having roots. However, he insisted that the roots are not anchors that tie us to other times and prevent us from incarnating ourselves in the current world to give birth to something new. They are, on the contrary, a point of roots that allows us to develop and respond to new challenges. In this sense, remember that it is useless for us to sit and long for past times; we have to accept our culture with realism and love and fill it with the Gospel (Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, n. 200).

Precisely, the task of the pastoral care of promotion of vocations has much to do with recognizing and knowing in depth the reality of our culture, and loving it with its possibilities and risks, with its joys and pains, with its riches and limits, with her successes and her mistakes (cf. Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 200), and fill her with the joy of the Gospel. Therefore, the best service that the promotion of vocations can render to Christian communities is to teach them to embrace the cultures in which the Church is present and to make the Gospel possible in them. In this sense, vocation promotion is a transversal dimension of evangelization.

Evangelization and vocation are two inseparable elements of the missionary disciple’s itinerary. Moreover, the criterion of authenticity of a good evangelization is the ability to arouse vocations and mature projects of Christian life, until they make disciples, missionaries, witnesses and apostles

of the Gospel. There is today, perhaps as in no other time, the challenge of making ecclesial ministry truly vocational, promoting a “vocational culture”; that is, a way of conceiving and facing life as a gift received freely from God for a project or mission, according to your love plan.

Creating, therefore, the “culture of vocations” is the first task of animating vocations. On the horizon of patient sowing, typical of this *Vocation Promotion Guide*, it has been framed, as a pastoral action, from the verb “plow”. The farmer’s work starts from the arduous effort of preparing the land for sowing. In the case of the promotion of vocations, the action of plowing comprises a pastoral intervention that seeks to prepare the interior land of the human being, that is, the heart. Without this humble help that makes it possible to open the heart from the inside, it is difficult to set the conditions that allow us to listen to the One who has in his heart a dream of a good life for each of his children.

By way of self-examination, it can be recognized that the “vocational culture” is becoming a reality in Christian communities, when the following signs are noticed:

- - when vocation promotion ceases to be an exclusive pastoral activity to promote religious or priestly life;
- - when missionary disciples live joyfully and in a stable way their specific vocation in the Christian community;
- - when it is found that the laity are involved in vocation promotion, mainly through the vocational teams;
- - when Christian communities evoke the theme of vocations as a permanent pastoral action;
- - when youth groups and movements live processes that lead to projects of Christian life.

1

Recognize

The verb “to recognize” is the first verb used in the methodology of the Synod on young people, and it encompasses the content of the first part of the Final Document. The Synodal Assembly, based on the passage of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35), concentrates, first of all, on the expression, He walked with them (Lk 24:15). Starting with this biblical verse, the Synod participants sought to shed light on what they recognized about the reality of young people, the context in which they are inserted, their joys and hopes, especially their strengths and challenges. In the first part of this *Vocation Promotion Guide* the same exercise is carried out.

For his part, Saint Augustine explains the process of interiority as the help that God himself gives to the human being to turn towards himself, to undertake the journey to the depths of the heart (cf. *Confessions* IX, 1,1). Without the help of God the human being remains confined in dispersion, superficiality, banality. Hence, *you do not want to go outside yourself*, it is the brightness of God’s mercy that dispels blindness, and that heals the myopic, cold and reduced gaze that we sometimes have on reality. Thus, when approaching the reality of the world, the Church, the Order and the young, we are invited to have an attentive, delicate, profound and, above all, kind look.

If the vocation ministry wants to have its feet on the ground, the one who encourages vocations cannot ignore the context, but neither should they try to rationalize all the elements that influence the vocational decision, since it is always immersed in mystery. Thus, without pretending to exhaust an approximation to the reality of the world, of the Church, of the Order and of the young, some relevant and descriptive notes are proposed. And more than a simple exercise in analyzing reality, for which there are more adequate instruments, it is about fostering a look of faith - a kind look - about it.

1.1. A look at the reality of the world

a) Globalization, plural world and secularism

Some scientific disciplines, such as philosophy or sociology, provide information worth taking into account when seeking in-depth knowledge about reality. To these disciplines we owe key concepts such as “globalization”, “plu-

ral world” and “secularism”, which define very accentuated characteristics of our lifestyle in society. Thus, to speak of globalization is to verify that currently, due to the hyper-connectivity that digital communication makes possible, the same mobility of the population, the use of common languages, etc., all humanity lives in a kind of “global village”; everyone interacting with everyone, sharing with everyone, and exchanging ideas, information, knowledge, etc.

However, the same Synod of Bishops on *Young people, faith and vocational discernment* pointed out that, together with this globalized world, a diverse and plural world coexists. In the experience of the Synod, the bishops found that, despite a context of increasing globalization, there are many relevant differences between contexts and cultures, even within the same country. And, referring to the youth, they indicated that there is a plurality of youthful worlds; so much so that, in some countries, instead of speaking of young people, it is rather to use the term “youth” in the plural (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n.10).

Secularism as a concept of analysis of reality shows, especially in the field of ideas, politics and economics, the complete autonomy of temporal realities with respect to religion. Deep down, secularism as a current of thought has incited, with an infinity of strategies, to expel God from the public sphere and confine him to the space of private consciousness. For many believers this current of thought is being a real tragedy, but for others, a real field of opportunity for evangelization. Possibly the process of secularization adds negatively to religious receptivity, but it is also true that the beauty of the gift of faith and the personal conviction of accepting it or not is clarified.

b) Constant change

At the end of the nineties of the twentieth century, there was much talk of a “time of great changes”, rapid and dizzying, that hardly gave time to assimilate them and understand their consequences in everyday life. However, at the beginning of the present century, we stopped talking about a time of change, to talk about something more profound and radical, about a “change of time”; something unprecedented in the consciousness of the history of mankind, mainly due to advances in science, technology and the digital age. Now, some sociologists speak of both a change of era and constant changes even within this new era. In this sense, it becomes a real challenge for the Church and for the agents of vocation promotion to understand these implications both for pastoral praxis and for accompaniment.

c) The difference is wealth

Beyond joining an ideological claim on women, the Church, in general, and Christian communities in particular, are taking giant steps to recognize, integrate and empower women, missionary disciples. The female genius is finding more and more channels of expression and influence in the decisions of Christian communities. At the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*, it was recalled that in the task of evangelization and, therefore, in the service of animating vocations, the differences between man and man should not be forgotten. woman with her peculiar gifts, her specific sensitivity and her experience of Christ and the world (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 13).

d) Migrations

At the Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*, migration was discussed and it was pointed out that migrants are a paradigm of our time (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 25). Migration represents a structural phenomenon throughout the world and not just a transitory emergency. In fact, migration can take place within the same country or between different countries for the most varied circumstances. However, the migratory phenomenon is indeed a worrying reality for the Church in those parts of the world where it is triggered by war, poverty, exile or natural disasters, and exposes people, including children and young people, to the abuse, trafficking, violence and exploitation.

This world reality will open up new challenges and challenges for the ministry of promotion of vocations. Many, perhaps, may view this phenomenon with suspicion and suspicion, but there is no doubt that it will be a field of new opportunities, which will require openness of mind and heart and, fundamentally, capacity for discernment and vocational accompaniment. As was indicated in the Synod of young people, migrants are for Christian communities and for the societies to which they arrive, an opportunity for enrichment and integral human development. In this sense, every initiative of welcoming and welcoming will be very important (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 27).

e) The religious search

In many parts of the world, especially those of ancient Christian tradition, despite the winds against religious practices, new manifestations of religious search are sprouting up. This religious search is strongly motivated by the thirst for meaning for one's life, a deep longing for inner peace, a desire for connection with nature, etc. As this interest in the world of religion is enlivened

ned, many people, among whom the young prevail, begin a search through the most diverse paths of spirituality. The Christian communities must see in this thirst for the absolute an enormous potential to lead the new generations to encounter Christ and make the vocational proposal to them (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, 49).

1.2. A look at the Church

a) The family

The Church is the family of families, the home of all the missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a great concern in the Church to accompany Christian families and to support them in the realization of their vocation and mission as house churches. Two synods held in 2016 and 2017 shed much light on the experience of Christian love in the family. For his part, Pope Francis wrote the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the joy of love, to underline that the family, as the domestic church that it is, has the task of living the joy of the Gospel in daily life. Parents are asked to be open to the vocational and missionary dimension of Christian life, and to instill it in their children as well.

For its part, the Synod of Young People stressed that families play a fundamental role in the Christian education of children and an irreplaceable support in guiding important decisions in life. However, he also noted that families do not always educate their children to look to the future in a vocational logic. Sometimes the search for social prestige or personal success, the ambition of the parents or the tendency to condition the choices of the children, invade the space of discernment and condition their decisions. In this sense, they spoke of the need to help families to more clearly assume a conception of life as a vocation and to accompany children to open themselves to the divine call (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 72).

b) The parishes

The Parish, although it continues to be the first and main way of being and living the Church, the Synod on young people pointed out several voices how it struggles to be a relevant place for young people and how it is necessary to rethink its missionary dimension. The scarce importance of the parish in urban spaces, the lack of dynamism of its proposals, together with the spatio-temporal changes in the styles of life in society, require a profound renewal of it. It is even pointed out that, although it is true that there are several attempts at innovation in this regard, often the river of youth life flows

on the margins of the parish community, hardly reaching it (cf. *Concluding document of the Synod on young people*, n.18).

c) Initiation into the Christian life

With regard to Christian initiation, there is no doubt that the two privileged and irreplaceable areas in this task are the Family and the Parish; in some cases so is the School. The Synod's proposal on young people is that families do not totally delegate to the Parish the catechetical journey of their children. In this sense, instruction in the faith in the Parish must be accompanied and supported by a concrete and expressive style of Christian family life. Therefore, the Parish needs the family so that the children experience the daily realism of the faith. And the family needs the Parish to achieve in children and young people a more organic presentation and understanding of the Christian faith, to introduce them to community life and open them to broad horizons of life in Christ (cf. *Concluding document of the Synod on Young People*, 128).

d) The prophetic role of the Church

"The Church, mystery of communion, is made up of ordained ministers, religious and secular, in her we are all called to holiness of life and we have the responsibility and mission to make the Lord present. We Augustinian Recollects are Church; we feel with the Church and we are at her service. Our communities, united with the Pope and their respective bishops, want to manifest the communion of the same Church. We cannot ignore that scandals, infidelity, sins and apathy of pastors and consecrated persons have a special impact on the life of faith of the People of God"(Prot. GC 187/2018).

The Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment* was courageous to air a reality that is also present in the Church: "*There have been different types of abuses carried out by some bishops, priests, religious and laity*" (*Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n.29). Forgiveness is asked for participating in this evil, but above all the Church stands on the side of the weakest part, the victims, among whom there are also many young people. And it assumes, as it had never done before, a determined commitment to the adoption of strict measures for the prevention of any type of abuse of power (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, nos. 28-31). With regard to the service of the promotion of vocations, neither strength, nor resources, nor training should be saved to create safe environments where the vocation awakening is lived and the specific vocational decision is accompanied with respect.

e) Bureaucratic administrative management

It is already a constant in many areas of reflection on the figure of the pastor, something like a claim on the part of the Christian people and, in a special way, on the part of young people, regarding the quality time they have for the service of the accompaniment. In a special way, at the Synod on Young People, it was said that the burden of administrative tasks absorbs in an excessive way and, at times, suffocates the energies of many pastors. This is one of the reasons that make it difficult to meet young people and to accompany them. And in fact, to make the priority of pastoral and spiritual commitments more evident, the Synod insisted on the need to rethink the concrete ways of exercising the ministry of accompaniment (cf. Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People, n. 17).

1.3. Within the Order

a) Creators of communion

As a result of the General Chapter of 2016, in the Order of the Augustinian Recollects a Project of Life and Mission was designed where the main objective was: *to become creators of communion*. This inspirational factor is expected to generate a new impulse for communion within religious communities, and a greater commitment to the evangelizing mission that the Church has entrusted to the Order in the different countries where it is present. In Pope Francis' Address to the participants in the 550 General Chapter of the Augustinian Recollects (October 20, 2016), in addition to inviting them to be creators of communion, he encouraged them to be witnesses of living and open communities.

In a world lacerated by power struggles, division, envy and jealousy, a community where fraternal life is lived with joy is a luminous sign of the Gospel. For the promotion of vocations it will be very important to share the lifestyle that we live in the communities with those who long for havens of encounter, friendship and love. In this sense, the proposal of Saint Augustine - *the first thing for which they have come together in the community is so that they have a single soul and a single heart in God* - (Rule 1,2), is the offer of Christian life that we make to those who knock on our doors because they consider living their faith with other brothers.

b) Master of interiority

One of the characteristic notes of Augustinian spirituality is interiority. Broadly speaking, interiority is the process by which a person escaping from dispersion, collects himself in himself and makes a journey to the depths of

the heart, where God dwells. There, in the heart, the person meets Christ and, from the encounter with Christ, comes out of himself to spread the love with which he feels deeply loved. The Augustinian Recollects have experienced this path and we try to nurture it as a way of life. Furthermore, we accompany the journey of those Christians who feel called to discover the truth of their lives in Christ, from this passionate journey to the center of life: the heart inhabited by God.

c) Availability for evangelization

Another peculiarity of the members of the Augustinian Recollect Family is their availability, which is reflected in the oral tradition with the expression “we go where the Church needs us”. In fact, the presence of Augustinian Recollect communities in twenty-one countries is the best letter of introduction for a religious family that is willing to go where the local churches ask for our presence and commitment in evangelization. In the same way, the variety of ministries and concrete services that are provided in the Church - *ad gentes* missions, parishes, schools, social works, Centers of spirituality, etc. - are a living expression of this availability and vitality.

d) Prophets of the Kingdom

Saint Augustine, when presenting the mission proper to the kind of monastic life that he cultivated, said: *We are servants of the Church of the Lord, and we owe ourselves mainly to the weakest members, whatever our condition among its members of the body (De op. monach. 29,37)*. From this point of view, mission acquires its full meaning in the face of the concrete faces of poverty and suffering in which Christ is present and asks us for charity and to exercise mercy (Mt 25, 31-46). When the charisms proper to the various forms of consecrated life lose their prophetic capacity, they disappear as they are no longer significant to the world. It is, therefore, a matter of loving the poor with God’s love, of loving God in the poor, of loving them from their own poverty with God’s wealth.

e) Commitment to education

The Order of the Augustinian Recollects is making a decisive choice and a great commitment for children, adolescents and young people, through the different educational centers, ranging from pre-school, basic, professional, to university education. Education is one of the apostolates in which the Order invests more and more people and resources, as it is currently presented as one of the best evangelizing platforms. In addition, an Augustinian pedagogy of its own has been developed and shared among the different

educational centers, which educates the mind and the heart in values, and accompanies the path of vocational maturation, inspired by Saint Augustine.

1.4. Among the young people

a) Being young today

Today there are different sociological, psychological and anthropological analyzes of young people, carried out by very competent people. However, any detailed analysis of the reality of youth falls short when it comes to approaching the specific young people we meet along the way and who go to our churches, schools, youth groups, etc. In the effort to create a “vocational culture”, it should be said that more than theoretical knowledge about youth, one must learn to deal with young people. What makes the difference between “knowing about young people” and “knowing about young people” is the quality time that is used to listen to them and share with them.

At the Synod on youth it was commented that the younger generations are carriers of an approach to reality with specific traits. Among the most evident specific features of the culture of young people, the following stood out: the preference given to the image in relation to other communicative languages, the importance of sensations and emotions as a way of approaching reality, and the priority of concretion and operability with respect to theoretical analysis. Friendship and peer group membership, cultivated through social networks, are of great importance to them. Young people are generally open to diversity, which makes them attentive to issues of peace, inclusion and dialogue between cultures and religions. (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 45).

b) Many youth

Pope Francis in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit*, Christ Lives, pointed out that the characteristics of today's youth can certainly be identified, but above all he highlighted a special observation of the Synod: the beauty of the universal Church being reflected in the face of the young, whose idiosyncrasies are conditioned by their culture, time and location. The worlds of today's 'youth' are so many that in some countries one tends to speak of 'young people' in the plural (cf. Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, nn. 68-70). This is an element that requires real consideration in the task of the pastoral care of vocation promotion leading to the renewal of the methods of vocational accompaniment.

c) 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 young* (Benedict XVI, *Message for the XLVII World Communications Day*, 2013). In this sense, we already speak of our time as the digital age. It is no longer just about “using” communication tools, but about living in a widely digitized culture that has a very profound impact on the notion of time and space, on the perception of oneself, others and the world. In the way of communicating, learning, obtaining information, entering into relationship with others. (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 21).

The Synod on young people pointed out that the digital age represents endless opportunities, among others: it represents an extraordinary opportunity for dialogue, encounter and exchange between 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 territory of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, deception; it can generate dependencies, isolation, loss of contact with concrete reality and superficial relationships. Furthermore, it is fostering new forms of violence such as cyber-bullying and is also being a channel for the dissemination of pornography, which favors sexual exploitation (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, nos. 22-24).

d) Body and affectivity

Sexuality is a vital energy that runs through every human being from top to bottom. It is an engine that pushes him beyond himself and forces him to establish ties with others and with the world. The characteristic way of the human being to live sexuality is called affectivity. Affectivity is, then, the human way of living the sexual capacity creatively and orienting it towards love. The raw material of affectivity is both the needs and desires, as well as the way in which these two find a way of solving. And the body is the area par excellence of expression of affectivity; for this reason tenderness is so important.

The new generations recognize the body and sexuality as an essential element in their lives, and consider that, on the path of their identity development, they are essential for living friendship and love (cf. *Concluding document of the Synod on Young People*, n 37). In fact, the vocational response deeply demands the capacity to love. However, the lifestyle of today’s society exposes the new generations, in many cases, to negative experiences in the field of sexuality - abuse, promiscuity, sex tourism, pornography, etc.

Such negative experiences can damage the serene and mature growth and development of the person's affectivity and capacity to love. In this sense, the accompaniment for vocational discernment has the task of proposing with serenity, from a comprehensive and positive understanding of sexuality and affectivity, the ability to live these realities as areas of expression of love in specific vocations. And in case of real and serious difficulties that compromise discernment, it is convenient to recommend therapeutic help while the process remains open.

e) Art, music and sports

What Saint John Paul II pointed out, referring to seeking those basic vocational attitudes that make a vocational response possible (cf. John Paul II, *Message of the XXX 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 sports. Thus, it recognizes and values the importance that young people give to artistic expression in all its forms. It is also pointed out that music represents the real environment in which young people are constantly immersed, as well as a culture and a language capable of stirring up their emotions and shaping their own identity. And in sport some values are put into play that give significance to human life, such as effort, sacrifice, self-denial, teamwork, respect, chivalry, loyalty, honesty, etc. (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 47).

Interpret

The verb “interpret” was the second verb used in the methodology of the Synod on young people. The Synodal Assembly, based once again on the passage of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35), assumed the expression *their eyes were opened* (Lk 24,31), to offer from that illumination, some interpretations on the meaning of the human and Christian life of the missionary disciples. Along the same lines, this *Guide for the pastoral care of vocations* offers a basic theoretical framework about the theology of vocation, in which the meaning of human life, of Christian life and of specific vocations in the Church can be interpreted. .

For Saint Augustine, the process of interiority has much to do with the personal path of returning to one’s own heart and entering the interior. The second part of the Augustinian expression - “enter into your interior” - will allow us the next moment of this *Promotion Guide*. Entering the interior helps the person to have a wide horizon from which to interpret the meaning of his life, because there is the Truth. The measure of this horizon is not a human, limited, ideological and partial measure; the measure of this new horizon is the width, the length, the height and the immense and wonderful depth of the humanity of Christ. Only Christ illuminates the whole meaning of human and Christian life (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 22).

2.1. Vocation

The term “vocation” has many meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Perhaps the most common, outside of Christian environments, is when it is used to designate a form of fulfillment of the person, especially in the professional field. For Christians it has many meanings. Thus, for example, the Christian vocation is spoken of as that condition of life shared by all the baptized. The term also applies to different forms of Christian life or “specific vocations.” There is even talk of “vocation” to designate the intervention of God that calls for something specific. In all cases it is well used. Hence, it is convenient to educate the People of God to understand the richness of nuances that the word contains.

2.2. The fundamental vocation to life

The first word that God spoke about the human being was a call: live! - *“And God said: let us make man in our image and likeness”* (Gn 1,26). The existence of each person is the fruit of the Father’s creative love, of his efficient will, of his creative word. The creative act of the Father has the dynamics of an invitation, of a call to life. Man comes to life because he is loved, thought and wanted by a good Will that has preferred him to non-existence, that has loved him before he was, known before forming him in the womb, consecrated before he came out to the light (cf. Jer 1, 5; Is 49, 1–5; Gal 1, 15). Vocation, therefore, is what explains, at the root, the mystery of human life, and it is itself a mystery of predilection and absolute gratuitousness. [...] Life is the masterpiece of God’s creative love and is in itself a call to love (cf. *New vocations for a new Europe*, n.16).

At the beginning of human life nothing happens by fate, nor contingency, nor chance but rather all is willed by a God who thinks and loves us. And because God thinks of us and loves us, we exist. And it is his love that keeps us in existence, since in him we live, and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). The very existence of each person refers us to a sense that goes beyond itself. Life has a sacred value and finds its full meaning when it is understood as a gift from God. And because it is a gift, it also carries the responsibility of using the gift in something worthy and beautiful. In this sense, the vocation always refers to an experience that positively engages the whole person and puts himself challenged before God and his love.

Life is a gift from God, and being one, it must enter into the dynamics proper to the gift of God: what is freely received must be freely given (cf. Mt 10: 7-15). Only when human life is understood as a gift, which is deeply appreciated - *“thank you, Lord, for this life”*, only then does life come into play to be shared with others in an act of self-offering. This is the fundamental meaning of life that, possibly, tends to be forgotten or hidden in our current culture. Vocational promotion helps to regain the certainty of faith that the *person becomes himself and fully responsible for his life when he becomes capable of giving it in favor of others* (Brotherhood of diocesan worker priests, *Supplement for the basic pastoral course in the diocese of Querétaro*, 2019, p.47).

The pastoral care for the promotion of vocations presents the logic of the gift of God in Jesus Christ, who gave his life so that we might have life in him and have it in abundance (Jn 10:10). *You already know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, with the baptism that John preached. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power: he went about doing good and healing those possessed by the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses to everything he did in Judea and Jerusalem. They*

killed him by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him up on the third day [...], all those who believe in him, and in his name receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 11,37-40,43).

2.3. The common vocation

The second word that God spoke about the human being was another call: live with others!: *“And God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said: be fruitful”* (Gen 1: 27-28). From its origin, the human being is called to meet others and with God. In this regard, there is a beautiful text from the Second Vatican Council: *The highest reason for human dignity consists of man’s vocation to his union with God. From his very birth, man is invited to dialogue with God. He exists purely and simply for the love of God, who created him, and for the love of God, who preserves him. And one can only say that he lives in the fullness of truth when he freely recognizes that love and entrusts himself entirely to his Creator (Gaudium et spes, n. 19).*

In the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the mystery of a God who is family, relationships of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was made known to humanity. The vocation to an encounter with God, in Christ, is revealed to us as a call to an encounter and relationship with three Persons. Thus, through baptism, Christians enter into the dynamics of the Trinitarian relationships and into a dialogue of love with a God who is Love (1 Jn 4,8), and who has loved us first. In this sense, the Christian vocation is a gift of grace that is given to be lived in the context of the baptismal faith. This is the common and fundamental vocation of all Christians. Specific vocations are already a development of baptismal grace. Hence, if the baptismal vocation is not lived, it will be difficult to understand the meaning and value of specific vocations.

The fundamental aspect of the baptismal vocation is the awareness that being a Christian is being a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the promotion of specific vocations cannot be separated from the promotion of the Christian life. On the contrary, it will be the impulse of the Christian life that will help to mature and choose one of the forms of Christian life or specific vocation. And the Christian vocation is essentially following Jesus Christ. This entails, on the one hand, a living and personal love for Christ and, on the other, a deep desire to be witnesses of his mercy and love in the world. Thus, only Christ the Lord manifests to the heart of the believer the specific path by which he invites them to follow and choose it.

2.4. Specific vocations

The vocation to life and to be a person unfolds its best possibilities in the call to be fully a person in Christ, through baptism; and the specific vocation is the development of baptismal grace, a way of traveling that path that leads each Christian to live the fullness of love. The following description of specific vocation can help to better understand the essential aspects that define it. *The vocation is a mysterious event in which the human being, in dialogue with God, acquires the consciousness of a historically situated mission and commits himself to a concrete response* (Brotherhood of diocesan working priests, *Supplement for the basic course of vocational ministry in the Diocese de Querétaro*, 2019, p. 14).

Four levels of understanding of vocation can be described: human, Christian, specific and institutional level. First, the human level: *only Christ 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 destined you to go and bear abundant and lasting fruit* (Jn 15:16). Third, the level of the specific vocation that defines and characterizes the Christian life concretely: lay vocation, consecrated religious vocation, and vocation of ordained ministers. And finally, the institutional level, which refers to the fact that specific Christian vocations belong to a specific institution: a Presbytery, a religious Order or Congregation, a Family, etc.

The specific vocations that are discussed at the third level are presented below: lay vocation, vocation to consecrated religious life and vocation to ordained ministry.

a) Lay vocation

According to what was indicated by the Second Vatican Council, it is up to the laity to live the secular life fully, both in each of the activities and professions and in the ordinary conditions of family and social life with which their reality is woven. It is there where they are called by God to fulfill a mission, guided by the spirit of the Beatitudes, so that, like leaven, they contribute from within to the transformation of the world, so that they reflect Christ to others; shining, above all, with the testimony of their lives of faith, hope and charity. It is up to the laity to illuminate and organize all temporal affairs to which they are closely linked, in such a way that they are carried out in accord with the spirit of Jesus Christ and are developed and are for 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 his justice* (Mt 6,33) in the realization of their Christian condition, and seek to organize all matters of social life according to the

spirit of the Gospel. The laity, whose vocation places them at the heart of the world and in carrying out the most varied tasks, must exercise a unique 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 rather that of putting into practice all the possibilities contained in the Gospel within social life. The field of their activity is politics, social, economy, culture, science, art, the media, education, etc. (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 70).

In the Order of Augustinian Recollects, several specific areas of growth have been institutionalized for lay life, which offer help in the realization of the secular vocation. These lay circles draw on their discipleship itinerary from the sources of Augustinian spirituality and the Recollect tradition, and are the Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternities (FSAR), the Augustinian Recollect Youth Movement (JAR), and the Association of Christian Mothers of Saint Monica (mothers who make a commitment to pray above all for the faith of their children and husbands, in the style of Saint Monica). Lay vocation also entails accepting God's call to become missionary disciples in the style of Saint Augustine.

Some examples of lay Christian ways of life:

- Marriage-widowhood.
- Family-motherhood-fatherhood.
- Singleness.
- Professional (education, health, politics, economy, culture, etc.).
- Consecrated Virginity (consecrated lay virgins).
- Mission "ad gentes" (missions where the Church is not yet fully established).
- Community life (base communities, secular fraternities, etc.).
- Etc.

b) 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 is a common vocation for all the disciples of Jesus Christ that opens us, in turn, to mission. Thus, in Christ, each 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 king because he gives way with his life to the reign of God's love in the world; and he is a priest because he celebrates and participates in the sacramental signs that make his own sanctification possible and by which God is given glory. This priesthood is known as the common priesthood of the faithful. And it differs from the ministerial priesthood in

that it forms part, by a particular call, of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Bishops have, by a gift of grace, the fullness of the priesthood of Christ and are associated with the ministry of the apostles. Throughout the history of the Church, bishops are the successors of the first disciples whom Jesus closely linked to his life and mission, also known as the group of Twelve. The priests - from the Greek "elders" -, united with the bishop, exercise the priesthood of Christ; this is their mission. Through the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, both bishops and priests live the pastoral charity proper to Christ, the Good Shepherd, who reflected the Father's mercy with his words and signs. And deacons, whether permanent or oriented to the ministerial priesthood, manifest the charity of Christ who did not come 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, Pastor and Servant of the Church. The mission of the ordained minister is to practice pastoral charity, typical of one who accompanies the People of God in the style of Christ, the Good Shepherd. And they feed the People of God above all through the preaching of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and the promotion of the service of charity. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders they receive the power of the Spirit to be witnesses to the world, of the mysteries of faith and servants of the human and ecclesial community.

Some examples of Christian life forms of ordained ministry:

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

c) Vocation to consecrated religious life

The Second Vatican Council gave a letter of citizenship to consecrated life in the Church, taking for granted that this *state of life whose essence lies in the profession of the evangelical counsels, although it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless belongs to an indisputable way, to her life and to her holiness* (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 44). Consecrated life is situated in the wake of the life and holiness of the Church; it is a Christian way of life to live the fullness of love for the good of the whole Body of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 43). In this sense, the vocation to consecrated life consists of a

response of love, from the human capacity, to the love with which a disciple of Jesus Christ has felt immensely loved.

Religious life, as one more form of Christian life, finds its inspiration and its foundation in Christ, the consecrated One of the Father. And in a special way, it can be said that consecrated life has found in the text of the Beatitudes the sense of its vocation and mission. And the call to consecrated life safeguards this radicality: that the love of God is worth everything, including life itself and everything beautiful and wonderful in it. Therefore, regardless of what the religious do, because they certainly perform many important tasks in the Church and in the world, their fundamental mission is to be a sign of exclusive belongingness to God.

Consecrated life has sprung up in the Church as a gift of the Holy Spirit, like a prism that radiates the unique light of Christ with different colors and shades. As a Christian life, its purpose is to follow Jesus Christ according to the footprints that marked his footsteps in history and that are recorded in the Gospels. And his horizon of life is to live the fullness of love in the daily encounter with the Lord. Cultivate, according to his own charism, a fraternal life in community or life in solitude, but always serving the people of God either with prayer, either with works of charity, or with 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 own life to God, to allow the Lord to have exclusive control of his heart. And this self-giving is expressed through the profession of evangelical counsels. What is an evangelical counsel? It is a value that is proposed in the gospel and is worth living because Christ himself lived it. The evangelical counsels are obedience, poverty and chastity. A religious, therefore, refers with his life something of Christ obedient to the Father, something of Christ poor in spirit and something of Christ who has the passion of his heart in God, his Father, and in the humanity he loves, even giving his life for her.

Some examples of Christian life forms of consecrated religious:

- Community life (several living in the same house).
- Hermitic life (alone).
- Contemplative life (cloistered monks and nuns).
- Active-apostolic life.
- Mixed life (combines contemplation and apostolate).
- Professionalism (in the field of education, health, communications, etc.).
- Etc.

d) Harmony of specific vocations

Each of the specific Christian vocations has its own purpose and ways of following Christ. And each vocation includes a journey 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. *It is beautiful to understand the Church as a vocational harmony, in which everyone has something important to contribute and in which some ministries are not opposed to others, but rather are integrated into a single People of God and complement each other towards the construction of such people* (Brotherhood of diocesan worker priests, *Subsidy for the basic course of vocational ministry in the diocese of Querétaro*, 2019, p.72).



Part II

SOW

SECOND STEP

Sow

"The sower went out to sow"
(Mt 13,3)

The parable of the sower shows, once again, the meaning of the following pastoral action aimed at awakening vocations. In the context of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, we have a Jesus going out and approaching the seashore (Mt 13,1). The sea is not only a geographical place, but also a symbol of human life itself. In this sense, the "seashore" is an image that expresses Jesus' own proximity to his people. There, on the seashore, are the people who live, relate, build their dreams ... So many people gather around Jesus because he gets fully involved in the life of the people, he commits to their reality - he gets into a boat that is in the sea (Mt 13,2) - and speaks to his heart: *The sower went out to sow* (Mt 13,3). The people stayed by the seashore, attentive to what Jesus would tell them in parables.

Jesus is the sower, the divine farmer, who spreads the beauty of new life in the furrows of human history. In that rather arid and hard geographical place for sowing, Jesus proposes good news that fills the hearts of his listeners with joy. It tells of a harvest where the fruits will be abundant, even up to one hundredfold. The seed that Jesus sows is a different seed, with an unsuspected germinal force, that in good soil - prepared and willing hearts - becomes wonderfully fruitful.

The V Conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council, in Aparecida - Brazil, spoke repeatedly of a *kerygmatic evangelization*, which always starts from the encounter with Christ; of the sowing, of the living encounter with Christ and his Word. *Those who will be his disciples are already looking for him (cf. Jn 1,38), but it is the Lord who calls them: follow me (Mk 1,14; Mt 9,9). The deepest meaning of the search must be discovered, and the encounter with Christ that gives rise to Christian initiation must be fostered. This meeting must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, the announcement of the kerygma and the missionary action of the community. The kerygma is not only a stage, but the common thread of a process that culminates in the maturity of the disciple of Jesus Christ (Aparecida, n. 278).*

There is no longer the slightest doubt that the patient sowing of the encounter with Christ is the very heart of vocation promotion. The task of the vocation promoter must resemble the initiative of the Master, who generously sows the seeds of the Kingdom in the human heart. In this regard,

Pope Saint Paul VI addressed the Christian communities in these terms, that *no one, through our fault, ignores what they should know to guide their own life in a different and better sense* (cf. Paul VI, *Message for the XV World Day of Prayer for Vocations 1979*). In this sense, one of the main objectives of vocation promotion is to propose in all communities the means for an authentic vocational awakening. How to achieve this goal? Through the proclamation of the *vocational kerygma*.

What is the vocational kerygma? The concrete content of the vocational kerygma can be summarized as follows: *“Your life is not the result of chance or error, it is created by God out of love. So you can be sure that you are unconditionally and definitely loved. This original love bears a mark in your existence, according to the model of Christ. Your life has an objective meaning that you need to gradually discover. It is a gift that is not exhausted in yourself, because it is ordered toward others. Developing that gift is your task. When you assume this design and this direction, your freedom acquires a new meaning, absolutely original”* (Emilio Lavaniegos González and Rubén Barrón Porcayo, *El Kerigma vocacional. Materials for a first announcement of the vocation*, Mexico, 2009).

The vocational kerygma seeks, therefore, to sow the encounter with Christ. In this sense, Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est* –God is love–, pointed out in this regard that *“one does not begin to be a Christian by an ethical decision or a great idea, but by encountering an event, with a Person, who gives a new horizon to life and, with it, a decisive orientation”* (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 1). The fundamental thing is, then, to meet Christ and *“love him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength”* (Dt 6,5).

Furthermore, in addition to sowing the encounter with Christ, the pastoral care of the promotion of vocations announces to everyone and always that, in Christ, every human being has a mission in this world. Thus, vocation sowing also focuses on the joyful and generous effort to proclaim, in the most concrete and understandable way possible, that we all have a mission to fulfill on this earth. In this sense, Pope Francis addressed young people with these words: *“I remind you that the mission is not just a part of my life, or an ornament that I can take off; it is not an appendix or another moment of existence. It is something that I cannot tear from my being if I do not want to destroy myself. I am a mission on this earth, and for that I am in this world”* (Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 254).

Making the choice

The third verb used in the methodology of the Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational discernment* is “choose.” The synod fathers, based on the text of the Gospel of Luke –*they left without delay*– (Lk 24,33), spoke of the radical change that took place in the lives of the disciples of Emmaus, once they met the Risen One. The encounter with Christ originates in the life of the missionary disciple a change of direction that has to do, above all, with the return to the community, with carrying joy in the heart while walking and communicating faith. From this perspective, with the verb “to choose” the synod fathers describe the conversion and change of life of the missionary disciple; that 180° turn that fully commits you to life.

What happened with the pilgrims of Emmaus is presented in Luke’s Gospel as a spiritual experience oriented to set aflame the missionary life of Christian disciples of all times and, especially, to illuminate the path of young people. It is, therefore, a matter of making the same discipleship experience possible in them: *“from listening to the Word pass to the joy of an encounter with Christ that fills the heart, that gives meaning to existence and infuses new energy. The faces light up and the journey regains its vigor: it is the light and strength of the vocational response that becomes a mission to the community and the whole world. Without delay and without fear, the disciples choose to go back in their footsteps to reach out to the brothers and to witness his encounter with the risen Jesus”* (Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People, n. 114).

For Saint Augustine, the process of interiority also has to do with the personal journey of discovering in one’s own heart a presence that tells the whole truth about one’s life: *“deep within dwells the truth”*. The third part of the Augustinian expression –*deep within dwells the truth*– explains the meaning of the next moment of this Promotion of Vocations Guide. For Augustinian spirituality, getting to discover the truth in one’s own heart does not only consist in finding philosophical answers about the meaning of life, but in meeting a Person, with Christ, with Truth.

Thus, only when the presence of Christ in the heart is discovered and he bathes it with his light, can the Christian lifestyle be truly embraced as a path of happiness. From this point of view, it is fundamental to carry out, as a

specific pastoral activity, vocational sowing, that is, to help to notice the presence of Christ in the heart. Therefore, the mission of the vocation promoter has much to do with investing time, resources and, above all, a constant and tenacious presence, so that an encounter with Christ and with his Word is possible there, in the depths of the human heart. .

3.1. The vocational kerygma

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit*, *Christ lives*, by Pope Francis, offers a short and complete presentation of the *Christian kerygma* for young people (cf. Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, nos. 111-133). Therefore, there is no need to repeat what is suggested there. However, this *Promotion Guide* contains some essential elements of the announcement on the Christian faith for all Christians and, in particular, for young people. These core realities of the Christian faith are: we announce a God who is Love and who loves each human being in a very personal way; We proclaim that Christ, out of love, gave himself to the end to save us and that he lives and wants us full of life; We proclaim that the life of God is received as a gift by the Holy Spirit, since He is Lord and giver of life.

These three great truths, which should never be silenced and that all missionary disciples need to hear, have profound and direct consequences to enable a vocational awakening. Every vocation is, in essence, an encounter and a dialogue between Jesus the Lord who calls and someone who listens to him and responds to him at a specific time and place in his personal, ecclesial and social history. It is always the Lord who calls: “Follow me” (cf. Mk 1, 14; Mt 9, 9). And vocation promotion is an authentic mediation service whose objective is to update and prolong that decisive encounter with Christ. Your work should focus on helping others see how the Lord goes through their lives, chooses them, and calls them to leave everything to follow him.

3.2. For a vocational awakening

The announcement of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith is called “vocational sowing” because it is about depositing a seed –the vocational kerygma– in the good soil of the human heart. Such a seed, although it may seem like a simple and simple truth, contains within itself an enormous germ of new life, which represents a true “awakening” of the vocational meaning of life. This announcement of the vocational kerygma is a priority and preferred reality because, as an expression of the evangelical kerygma, it is “*the absolute priority in the transmission of the faith*” and “*must occupy the center of evangelizing activity and of every attempt at ecclesial renewal*” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n.110 and 164).

Now, what is meant, specifically, when we speak of a “vocational awakening”? It is about helping, through the proclamation of the vocational kerygma, to notice the presence of God and to teach to grasp the newness that the encounter with Christ brings to one’s life. And how is this vocational awakening accompanied in the growth of faith? From the outset, it should be borne in mind that in today’s culture there can be - and in fact there are - some obstacles that prevent or hinder a vocational awakening, such as: a superficial lifestyle, accentuated narcissism, excessive external noise and inner, a conformist mentality, an exacerbated search for immediate gratification, etc. This *Vocation Promotion Guide* assumes two great strategies to overcome such obstacles in the face of vocation awakening.

3.3. Teach to warn

Everything begins with the awareness of being in front of a Presence, that is, by the ability to notice that God is present in all reality and, especially, inside the human being, and wants to meet him and start a dialogue of love. Part of the job of vocation promotion is to help one regain a minimum ability to contact oneself, reflect, and focus on considering the important things in life. Therefore, teaching how to notice things with some depth is a basic strategy to abandon the immediate and demanding claim of the thousand concerns that fill the day distracting the attention from what really matters.

The pedagogy of the promotion of vocations is recovering more and more the importance of initiation into the mystery of God, also known as *mystagogy*. The itinerary of the disciple of Christ starts from the human experience of amazement that moves the whole person, makes him acquire self-awareness, provoking in him fascination, vertigo and admiration. Only then does life stop being obvious and become wonderful; the ordinary takes on a more luminous hue. Thus, the experience of wonder allows us to constantly look at things in a different way. In the Christian spiritual experience, nothing awakens so much fascination as experiencing in the heart that “*it is not we who loved him first, but that God loved us first*” (1 Jn 4,9-10).

3.4. Educate for silence and listening

In order to understand the Lord’s call, it is essential to be silent and listen, in faith, to the voice of God. The same vocational experience of Saint Augustine has its origin in the ability to silence oneself and listen to God: *you called and cried out, and you broke my deafness* (*Confessions*, 10,27,38). The Vocation Promotion Service provides two essential resources to silence exterior and interior noises, and thus promote interior silence. On the one hand, it offers space and places for silence and solitude as a key to encounter with God,

and, on the other, it presents tools in order to mark the journey to the depths of one's own heart. For this purpose, the exercise of *lectio divina* constitutes a privileged methodology for the encounter with God and for living as a hearing disciple of the Word.



Part III

nurture

THIRD STEP

Nurture

“A man who sowed a field”

(Mk 4,26)

¿What corresponds to the vocation promoter in the task of promoting vocations, that is, to the human sower? A text from the Gospel of Saint Mark gives us the best answer: *“Jesus told them: the Kingdom of God is like a man who sowed a field; at night he lies down, during the day he gets up, and the seed germinates and grows without him knowing how. The earth itself produces fruit: first the stem, then the ear, and then the grain in the ear. As soon as the grain ripens, he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come”* (Mk 4,26-29). The promotion of vocation needs to be continually nurtured believing that from the first steps of vocation plowing and sowing a dynamic and paradoxical process is generated that will make it bear many fruits only attributable to God and not to the efficiency and effectiveness of human endeavor.

Vocational accompaniment follows the logic of the Gospel: the sown seed grows progressively in silence, in a barely perceptible way, beyond human successes and failures, since it is God himself who makes it grow. Of course, this consideration does not discredit human participation, since it has an important role both in preparing the land and in the action of depositing the seed in the ground. But there comes a time when the next step is to contemplate the growth of the with gratitude and admiration. And finally, it's time to gather the harvest. Thus, the vocational companion is similar to the intervention of the human farmer: he generates the vocational culture, sows, nurtures the vocations and delivers the fruits to God.

The third part of this Promotion of Vocations Guide focuses on the importance of accompaniment for discernment and vocational decision. Vocational accompaniment consists of the human and spiritual help that an older brother in faith and discipleship of Christ gives to another brother who walks the path of vocational search, recognition and decision. It is a specific time of mutual commitment between the companion and the accompanied, until the unavoidable certainty that the Lord is calling him for something very concrete. It is about accompanying the discipleship itinerary that leads the believer to mature in the path that God presents him to live the fullness of love.

How to perform this accompaniment? Returning again and again to Jesus, because their way of accompanying creates a style of accompaniment that does not go out of fashion: *Jesus himself approached and walked with them* (Lk 24:15). Today too Jesus, the risen Christ, wants to work, in his own way, together with each young person, open to their expectations, even if they are disappointed, and their hopes, even if they are inadequate. Therefore, yesterday, today and forever, Jesus, through his Church, walks, listens and enthuses the hearts of young people as he makes the journey with them (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 5).

In the *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, it was pointed out that young people themselves have asked for the figure of the companion to be recovered (n. 99). The accompaniment service is an urgent mission, which requires all the availability and generosity of those who carry it out. In this sense, accompaniment requires that the Spirit of the Lord be made available to travel the path that those accompanied by them. A good companion puts into play the qualities and abilities that he recognizes in the companion and then has the courage to step aside with humility and let the companion walk the path he chose (cf. *Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 101).

The same concluding Document of the Synod on young people presented the profile of the companion that young people need and demand for this moment in history: *a good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. When necessary he also knows how to offer a word of fraternal correction.* (*Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People*, n. 102).

In the same way, with realism and beauty, the conclusions of the Synod point out that it is necessary for a companion to be a free person, who *will respect the outcome of their journey, supporting them with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Spirit produces in those who open their hearts to him, without seeking to impose his own will and his own preferences. Equally he will be capable of placing himself at their service, not taking centre stage or adopting possessive and manipulative attitudes that create dependence rather than freedom in others. This profound respect will also be the best guarantee against any risk of domination or abuse of any kind* (*Concluding Document of the Synod on the young*, 102).

According to the Synod on Young People, the accompanier will need to cultivate his own spiritual life, nourishing the relationship that links him to the One who assigned this mission to him. At the same time he needs to

feel the support of the ecclesial community to which he belongs. It is important that he receive a specific formation for this particular ministry and that he can benefit in his turn from accompaniment and supervision. And finally, the ability to work as a team and live the spirituality of communion is fundamental for accompaniment (cf. Concluding Document of the Synod on Young People, n. 103). The requirements to be a companion, therefore, are demanding and not everyone is in a position to provide a good accompaniment; it is important to prepare to accompany.

Augustinian decalogue for vocational accompaniment:

1. *It is born from a heart to heart encounter*, that is, encounter with Jesus Christ, with my being, with my own limitations and vulnerability; connecting my vital center with the accompanied.
2. *It starts with the commitment of the accompanier who has previously traveled the path and now invites the other to travel along*. The orography is recognized because the accompanier has already been in it. Certainly, the accompanier has not traveled all the existing paths, nor the possible ways of living the vocation discernment, but has reached goals and, for this reason, knows how to guide towards them.
3. *The accompanier tunes in with the vital moment of search and encounter of the accompanied*. From the deepest desires of his heart, the accompanier comes to represent “meaning of life for the other.” Special attention is paid to the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the person accompanied, which places them at a specific moment in their journey of faith.
4. *The accompanier becomes aware towards where the deep desire of the person accompanied is leading*. The companion walks the path of the companion from the uncertainty and sublimity of their own desires that, sometimes, excite, but also sometimes frustrate. The companion recognizes the presence or absence of God in these wishes.
5. *The accompanier helps to make the qualitative leap (conversion) that the accompanied person seeks and needs*. In this sense, orientation towards the qualitative leap that is sensed that the accompanied needs and God asks of them.
6. *The accompaniment is given in the relationship of friendship*, and it shows a pilgrim who walks with another pilgrim, like Jesus Christ himself.
7. *The accompanier is with the person accompanied from humility and happiness*. This path must be marked by the attitude of humility: “first, humility, second, humility, third, humility; and as many times as

you ask me, I will answer you the same" (Saint Augustine, Letter 118, 22; cf. Confessions X, 43,68).

8. *The accompanier proposes the Word of God as the intense light that shines the lines of the path.* The process of vocational maturation and decision must therefore be traversed by the biblical meaning of life.
9. *The accompanier loves the person accompanied in Christ.* Yes, he loves him! Love that translates into care and attention, concern for the person and his happiness.
10. *The accompanier pedagogically leads the accompanied to the experience of living in community, to feeling like a living stone in the Church of Christ.*

Getting out

Continuing with the methodology of verbs assumed by this Vocation Promotion Guide, the next verb is “to leave”. The Christian life has an essential dimension of departure. A Christian is, in himself, a pilgrim who marches towards a destination of happiness in God. Christ himself gives us an example of this. He is the one sent by the Father, who comes out of himself. Without abandoning his divine condition, he becomes a man, one like us, blood of our blood. Christ passed through this world doing good and healing the sick; He went everywhere, making the Kingdom of God present. Christ is therefore the way because he himself went out to cross the crossroads of human life and made of himself a gift so that in him others could experience his unconditional love.

The promotion of vocations, because it is an ecclesial pastoral activity, goes along with the steps of the Church that goes forth to evangelize. Where the light of the Gospel reaches and the joy of faith is experienced, there the vocation ministry carries out its vocation and mission along the journey of faith, until the new disciples live life in Christ. The verb *to leave*, then, is intended to indicate the process of becoming fully a person beyond oneself, that is, to be in Christ. And through vocational accompaniment, the outlines of the new project of being a person in Christ are designed, based on the response to the vocation. Therefore, the process that goes from the moment when the inalienable intuition proper to a divine call is perceived in the human heart, until it is freely specified in a Christian life option.

The process of Augustinian interiority also sheds light on this part of the *Promotion of Vocations Guide*. The journey that Saint Augustine proposes to get out of the dispersion and return to the heart, fundamentally comprises an act of the believing conscience: “*and if you discover yourself limited...*”. In the recognition by man of *his being a creature of God*, he rediscovers his best possibility; it is not a dependency that limits, but a relationship that promotes it. In this sense, humility is key to recognize that human beings are “humus”, earth, and that they are limited by this reality. Therefore, the fact of discovering himself limited forces the believer to leave himself and to travel the path that Christ proposes to him to become fully himself beyond himself.

Here is a vocational path for the outgoing missionary disciple:

4.1. Accompany the conversion of the heart

Vocational accompaniment is the transversal axis that runs through the entire process of vocational search, discernment and decision. In this sense, accompaniment is one of the most delicate tasks of the vocation promoter: it is up to him to awaken and help to discern the different specific vocation options in the Church. Accompaniment creates a relationship of trust and a shared journey; a Christian style that has to do with sharing the “bread of the road.” And precisely this bread is related to the Christian spiritual experience of the transformation of the heart, so that it has room for new life in Christ. Therefore, the first step is to accompany the conversion of the heart.

The Aparecida Document, when speaking of the religious experience, indicates the following: *“In our Church we must offer all our faithful a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, a deep and intense religious experience, a kerygmatic announcement and the personal testimony of the evangelizers, that leads to a personal conversion and an integral change of life”* (Aparecida, n. 226). Therefore, it is proposed to open, through accompaniment, an authentic process of conversion of the heart from the encounter with Christ and his invitation to follow him. Personal conversion awakens in the disciple the ability to submit everything to the service of the establishment of the Kingdom of life, beginning with his own being (cf. Aparecida, n. 366).

In the same Aparecida Conference, conversion was discussed in these terms: *“It is the initial response of those who have listened to the Lord with admiration, believe in him through the action of his Spirit, decide to be his friend and go after him, changing his way of thinking and living, accepting the cross of Christ, aware that dying to sin is reaching life”* (Aparecida, n. 278). Now, accompanying the conversion *“requires leaving one’s own pre-made schemes, finding them where they are, adapting to their times and rhythms; It also means taking them seriously in their difficulty in deciphering the reality in which they live and in transforming an announcement received into gestures and words, in the daily effort to construct their own history and in the more or less conscious search for meaning for their lives”* (Preparatory Document for the Synod on Young People, Part II).

4.2. Accompany the disciple’s education

Educate comes from the Latin *e-ducere*, and means “to take out, extract, make something that is inside out”. With regard to vocational accompaniment, it is a true exercise of helping to give birth to the inner truth, what the student carries in his heart. A key moment of the accompaniment is to offer

tools for the young disciple to know himself: his weaknesses and qualities, deep fears and desires, needs and desires, etc. Through the personal effort to bring out the truth that each one has inscribed in his being, a deep freedom is fostered for the vocational response. In this sense, the vocational education process is very similar to the germination process of a seed, since it displays the strength that it carries within to begin to manifest the originality of its being.

In the Aparecida Document, the discipleship dimension of the Christian life is widely discussed. Discipleship is indicated as a key aspect of the Christian journey: *“The person constantly matures in the knowledge, love and following of Jesus the teacher, deepens the mystery of his person, his example and his teaching. For this step, permanent catechesis and sacramental life are of fundamental importance, which strengthen the initial conversion and allow the missionary disciples to persevere in the Christian life and in the mission in the midst of the world that challenges them”* (Aparecida, n. 278). In the example and doctrine of the Master, the disciple finds reasons to live and serve, he decides to be a friend of Christ and to go after him, educating his way of thinking and living, and joyfully accepting the cross of Christ.

The vocational experience of every disciple of Christ is a progressive journey of interior discernment and maturation of faith, which leads to discovering the joy of love and life in fullness in surrendering and participating in the proclamation of the Good News (cf. *Preparatory Document for the Synod on Young People*, part III). In this sense, the disciple matures in the knowledge, love and following of Jesus Master, through a process of vocational discernment and strong moments of silence, contemplation and dialogue with the Lord. Likewise, it should be borne in mind that the vocation of the missionary disciple rests on the deep truth of the person. For this reason, through accompaniment, self-knowledge is facilitated, so that the “vocation” deepens the mystery of his person in light of the person of Christ.

4.3. Accompany formation for the community

The vocation promoter in the exercise of the task of accompaniment proposes to those who walk a prototype of being a man, that of Christ. Undoubtedly the person of Jesus Christ is always present on the horizon of the vocation of the one who is called. Now, in this stage of the process it acquires a particular importance, since it is the moment in which a form, a way of being and of living is proposed to the person called, in which he recognizes his identity, the truth of his life, the measure of the love with which he is loved. Christ is, at the same time, the Maker and the form. The accompanier is a mediation of God’s action, helping the disciple to recognize this call and to

allow himself to be transformed by it.

The Aparecida Document also indicated the importance of the community as a key formative agent in the itinerary of the missionary disciple: *“There can be no Christian life except in community: in families, parishes, communities of consecrated life, communities grassroots, other small communities and movements. Like the first Christians, who met in community, the disciple participates in the life of the Church and in the encounter with the brothers, living the love of Christ in a fraternal life of solidarity. He is also accompanied and encouraged by the community and its pastors to mature in the life of the Spirit”* (Aparecida, n. 278). Thus, the Christian community is par excellence the vocational community; it favors the vocation awakening of its members and accompanies them until they find the meaning of their lives in Christ.

The greatest difficulty in the service of vocation promotion today lies not so much in the understanding of the theology of vocation, as in the openness to the new modality of pastoral praxis and in the little involvement of the entire Christian community in the promotion of vocations. True, there are still some direct managers of the service of vocation promotion. However, it must be clear that the promotion of vocations is the business and task of the entire community; it is the Church, the community of the called, the mother of all vocations. Bearing in mind, then, that every Christian community, whatever it may be, is a vocational community, the accompaniment cannot be lacking in offering “open-door community experiences” that help vocational discernment.

4.4. Accompany the discernment of the mission

The vocational process accompanies the itinerary of the missionary disciple so that he is ready to accept the divine call and can give a free response. The decisive element in this process is the action of the Holy Spirit in the believing heart. For this reason, vocational discernment essentially consists of attentive listening to the Holy Spirit, who is the one who guides the life of every believer and shows him the concrete path by which God wants to lead him. Vocational discernment listens and understands the “silent and powerful” voice of God in the intricacies of life, to relativize the human conditions that weaken the perception of that voice, and to accompany and sustain the growth of the response to the call.

The Aparecida Conference gave great importance to the mission as the natural outcome of the discipleship path; every disciple is such inasmuch as he is a missionary. *“The disciple, as he knows and loves his Lord, experiences the need to share with others his joy of being sent, to go into the world to announce Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make love and service a reality in the person of the*

most needy, in a word, to build the Kingdom of God. The mission is inseparable from discipleship, which is why it should not be understood as a post-formation stage, although it is carried out in various ways according to one's own vocation and the moment of human and Christian maturation in which the person finds himself" (Aparecida, n.278).

Good discernment feeds on familiarity with the Master and his Word. In this regard, the *Lectio divina* constitutes a privileged method for refining vocational discernment. In fact, in an increasingly noisy society, which proposes a superabundance of stimuli, a fundamental objective of vocational promotion is to offer opportunities to savor the value of silence and contemplation and to train in the rereading of one's own experiences, and in listening to one's conscience (cf. *Preparatory Document for the Synod on Young People*, part II). The Spirit speaks and acts through the events of life, but the events themselves are mute or ambiguous, since different interpretations can be given. Getting a clear view of the meaning of a decision requires the art of discernment.

Serve

The vocation always arises from the generous heart of God and springs up in the good land of the faithful people and in the experience of fraternal love. No vocation is born by itself, nor does it live for itself, but it is always a call to service in a concrete mission; If the person called does not give himself generously in the way of loving and serving his own vocation, his life is sterile. Therefore, the response to the call of God in a specific vocation is a fruit that comes to maturity in the well cultivated field of love that is done in service, in the context of the life of the Church. For this reason, it is important to be deeply involved in community service, so that the calls awaken their best energies in the giving of their own lives (cf. Pope Francis, *Message for the LI World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 2014) .

The process of Augustinian interiority culminates in the best of the person, but beyond himself, in the ability to transcend in God. The invitation of Saint Augustine “*transcend yourself*” gives us a rather illuminating interpretation key in this last part of this *Promotion of Vocations Guide*. The life condition of the missionary disciple, in the style of the Master himself, leads him to “wash his feet”, that is, to put himself at the service of his brothers in the many ways in which he can serve according to the lifestyle of the specific vocations. And there is no doubt that the best way to transcend the Christian life is by serving others, especially those in whom Christ wants to be served, in the poor, the excluded and the suffering of this world.

Vocational pedagogy accompanies the path of the disciple until he understands and practices service. From this point of view, learning to serve is learning to respond to the vocation of missionary disciple, whatever may be the specific call in the Christian life be. In this *Guide* the service of vocation promotion is presented from two points of view. The first is related to the evangelical spirituality about service. And the second refers to a proposal for the organization and coordination of the service of promotion of vocations in the Christian community. And although the entire Christian community is a vocational community, it is important to distinguish specific ministries so that the pastoral care of vocations promotion is coordinated in the best possible way.

5.1. Service as a necessary attitude to answer the call

The missionary disciple, in the style of the Master, understands that the meaning of his vocation is service out of love. At the very heart of the Gospel according to Saint John we are left with this great teaching: *“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² And during supper, ... rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel... When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13: 1-5.12-15).*

Jesus opens the minds and hearts of his disciples so that they would understand through the gesture of washing the feet that the meaning of Christian life is service out of love until giving one’s own life. The washing of the feet always refers to the cross, to the giving of one’s life for love. The disciples are invited to imitate this gesture, giving themselves to a loving service to the extreme; to give my life for others. Within the process of vocational accompaniment and discernment, the proposal of experiences of authentic Christian service cannot be lacking, which help to mature one’s vocational option. The response to the call, beyond being an exercise in analysis and reflection, must carefully consider that it is, above all, a path of service to others, especially the poorest and most suffering in this world.

5.2. Service provided by the Order in vocation promotion

Vocation ministry in the Order of the Augustinian Recollects cannot respond to a mere need for survival, but is a requirement of the same charismatic fruitfulness. *The pastoral care of vocations is born from the mystery of the Church and is at her service. The Church itself is a vocation, and a generator and educator of vocations, for which reason all its members have the grace and responsibility to promote the diversity of ecclesial vocations. Communities should be open to possible vocations and pay careful attention to the signs of vocation, to lead each one along the path that the Lord has indicated for them. All religious consider themselves committed to fostering and cultivating vocations” (Constitutions, n. 156).*

The invitation of our Constitutions is to convert each community into a vocational community: *Pay particular attention to this vocation ministry those*

who are in charge of parishes, those dedicated to education, those responsible for pastoral movements, especially youth, and those who work in the field of missions (Cf. Constitutions, n. 157). The most effective and proportionate way that arises for vocation promotion is insistent prayer to the Lord, and an exemplary individual and community life. In fact, the witness of joy is the most direct invitation to embrace the Augustinian Recollect life (Cf. Constitutions, nos. 158-159).

Vocations, beyond the simple number, are a precious gift that God gives to religious families. This immense grace is an expression of the love he has for the Augustinian Recollect Family and a confirmation that the charism is still in force as an inspiration of the Spirit to be live and proclaim, in today's world, the Gospel of Jesus. Such a blessing, moreover, commits us to a profound spiritual renewal so that, from the Gospel, we carry out a vocational promotion that manifests the beauty of following Jesus in the Order of Augustinian Recollects. This task is accomplished primarily through joyful witnessing of one's own experience of having encountered Christ, the Lord.

a) General objective of Augustinian Recollect vocational promotion

Announce Christ and evangelize believers by caring for the birth, discernment and accompaniment of new vocations, especially vocations to the Augustinian Recollect religious life, in the ministries that the Church has entrusted to us (cf. *New Vocations for a new Europe*, n.25).

b) Specific objectives

- Foster awareness that each religious and each community should feel responsible for vocational work, being signs of a radically evangelical existence, convinced that vocational effectiveness depends on their insistent prayer and, being open to welcome possible vocations, accompany them and direct them along the path that the Lord is pointing out.
- Encourage religious to present the Augustinian Recollect way of life and offer personalized accompaniment in the various stages of the process of Christian maturation in the faith of the missionary disciple.
- Urge all vocations pastoral agents to work as a team, so that vocation promotion develops as a group throughout the Church.
- Integrate the pastoral of vocations into the pastoral of the whole, paying special attention to youth ministry (JAR), educational ministry and family ministry.
- Increase in the Augustinian Recollect communities the participation and formation of the laity as agents of vocation ministry, especially

among the members of the Secular Fraternity and the leaders of the Augustinian Recollect Youth. In fact, the appreciation and place of the laity in vocation promotion is a sign of the times that, in part, is becoming increasingly fruitful (cf. *New vocations for a new Europe*, n. 13).

3. Vocational agents

♦ God

God is the one who gives rise to vocations, who carries them out, and who brings them to perfection; He is the first to call. Today he continues to call and encourages us in the task of animating vocations.

♦ The person called

After God, who is the one who calls, the one who is called is next in the order of importance. The task of animating vocations should never replace personal responsibility before listening to and responding to those who experience the call in their hearts. While the vocation promoter accompanies the person called in his discernment process, he must ask the Holy Spirit for clarity to know how to involve him thoroughly in the realization of his own vocation.

♦ The vocational community

A Christian community proves its vigor and maturity in the flowering of the new vocations that manage to develop in it. Where there are communities of living faith, of shared hope, open to the action of the Spirit, sensitized by the word of God, the sacraments and apostolic commitment, vocations arise and are a sure way for an authentic vocational apostolate.

♦ The religious community

The Augustinian Recollect religious community, insofar as it lives unanimously and agrees with a single soul and a single heart (cf. *Saint Augustine, The Rule*, I, 1), is an agent of promotion of vocations wherever it is found. Only in it young people discover and experience our charism and can decide on a specific Christian life option. Understood in this way, vocation promotion becomes a renewing instrument of the local community itself.

It corresponds to each community:

- Pray for vocations, especially in the Eucharist, in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the monthly retreat.
- Prepare a local vocation promotion plan that will be included in the Community Life and Mission Project –PVM–, and will be evaluated periodically.
- Support the work of the vocational promoters or coordinators and the local counselor.
- Frequently propose in preaching, catechesis, kerygmatic retreats, etc., the vocation theme.
- Make known the life and thoughts of Saint Augustine, as well as the history and spirituality of the Order of Augustinian Recollects.
- Constitute the Secular Fraternity and the Augustinian Recollect Youth (JAR) into vocational agents and accompany them in that mission.
- Support and support the initiatives of the local Vocational Promotion Team.
- Involve the Parish Pastoral Councils, the Management Teams of the educational centers and houses of formation, in the promotion of vocations.

♦ **The major superior**

The Major Superior, with the support of his Council and the Secretariats, is most responsible for the task of animating and coordinating the pastoral care of vocations (cf. *Constitutions*, n., 159).

Corresponds to the major superior:

- Provide all the necessary means for the implementation of an adequate pastoral care for the promotion of vocations in every corresponding demarcation.
- Ensure stability of the vocational agents –religious and laity– and a consistent family and youth ministry in our ministries.
- Check that the Life and Mission Project of each local community –PVM– contains a local vocation promotion plan.
- Take advantage of the renewal visits to analyze the progress of vocation promotion in each community, and give as many recommendations as deemed appropriate so that all religious are involved in the work of vocation promotion.

♦ **The Secretariat for vocations and youth**

This Secretariat is the immediate responsible for plowing, sowing and nourishing the promotion of vocations, programming and coordinating the vocational initiatives in the various circumscriptions - provinces, vicariates and delegations.

It corresponds to the Secretariat for vocations and youth:

- Provide what is necessary so that the pastoral care of vocation promotion may favor the renewal of our Augustinian Recollect life, and all religious become active agents of promoting vocations.
- Put into practice both what is indicated in this Promotion Guide and in the Augustinian Recollect Vocational Itinerary –IVAR–, preparing a Vocation Promotion Plan for their own circumscription.
- Collaborate with each of the local communities in the elaboration and execution of their Plan of vocation promotion.
- Promote the creation and strengthening of vocational teams, integrating lay agents and people from the different branches of the Augustinian Recollect Family.
- Unify among the vocation promoters the criteria for the accompaniment and admission of possible candidates to our formation houses.
- Provide all the human and material resources necessary for a pastoral care of intense and broad vocation promotion.
- Prepare the necessary materials - liturgical scripts, subsidies for the vocational week, retreats, community meetings, prayers and vocation celebrations - so that the religious and the faithful of our ministries can celebrate, sensitize and be formed in everything related to vocation promotion.
- Prepare and organize meetings - such as an Augustinian week and / or a vocation week - in which the vocation in general and the specific vocations to the Augustinian Recollect life are presented.
- Work and ensure good coordination with the other Secretariats of the Order and with the diocesan organizations of vocation promotion.

♦ **The national vocation promoter or coordinator**

The mission of the vocation promoter or coordinator is to promote and coordinate vocation promotion initiatives (cf. Constitutions, n.,

160), lead the missionary disciples to a truly vocational approach, and make our Order and the different Augustinian Recollect vocations known.

Corresponds to the promoter or vocational coordinator:

- Discover the possible vocations to the Augustinian Recollect religious life.
- Accompany the personal processes of discernment, maturation and vocational decision of the possible candidates to the house of formation.
- Frequently visit our ministries, encouraging and training religious and local teams in vocational work.
- Collaborate with local counselors and establish frequent communication with them through regular meetings.
- Encourage the creation of vocational groups in our ministries and favor the specific formation of their members.
- Organize and take responsibility for coexistence and all kinds of vocational encounters.
- Relate and actively participate in the vocation ministry of the dioceses in which our ministries are located.

♦ **The local promoter**

The local promoter's task is to commit the religious and the members of the Christian community in a joint action to discover, sustain and develop the seeds of vocation, ensuring that everyone assumes his or her responsibilities in the pastoral care of vocation promotion (Cf. Constitutions, n .160).

It is the responsibility of the local promoter:

- Foster and keep an interest in vocations alive in his community.
- Together with his community and the vocation promotion team, develop and evaluate the annual local vocation promotion program.
- Make a clear and direct vocational proposals towards Augustinian Recollect life.
- Promote and organize the community vocation week and collaborate in diocesan and national vocation campaigns.
- In agreement with the vocation promoter or coordinator, accompany the candidates, having personal encounters with them, facilitating their participation in vocation gatherings and helping them to get progressively integrated into the life of the

- religious community.
- Promote the apostolate and the mission experience among those who express vocational concerns.
- Visit the families of those in “vocational” journey and those in formation in our formation houses.

♦ The local vocation promotion team

The spirituality of communion and shared mission with the laity is not a necessary luxury in local communities, but a sign of the vitality of the Church. The missionary disciple, whatever his place in the world and his vocation in the Church, must occupy the place that corresponds to him in terms of evangelization and, of course, in terms of promoting and encouraging vocations; also the lay ones. The Vocation Promotion Team is made up of Christians of the different specific vocations who, together with the national and local vocation promoter, organize and coordinate the promotion of vocations in the local community.

It corresponds to the local Vocation Promotion Team:

- Promote prayer among the faithful, to ask for vocations according to the mandate of Jesus (cf. Mt 9, 35-38).
- To promote in Christian communities the awakening to the Christian vocation and to specific vocations, as ways to love and serve in the mission that God entrusts.
- Accompany young people so that they discern their vocation through the means and actions suggested by the Augustinian Recollect Vocation Path –IVAR–.
- Encourage the culture of vocations through a climate of evangelization and permanent catechesis, in order to form a community mature in faith and in which vocations arise naturally.
- Integrate vocation promotion in all areas of pastoral work of the local community, adapting to the peculiarities of reality and the needs of the local Church, communities and individuals.
- Inform the faithful in general and, in particular, young people, about vocations in the Church and, especially, about vocations to the Augustinian Recollect life.
- Mediate between the call of God and the free response of the person, without fear of a possible rejection.

♦ **Vocation promotion on the Web and on Social Networks**

To consider a vocational promotion that takes into account the reality of our times, entails being more and more present in the media of social communication, like any other group that aims to offer something significant to society. It is about generating a vocational culture in the areas of life and relationships typical of social networks, which give rise to a life of relationship with God and with others and which, in turn, make possible the awakening to God's call.

Initiatives for vocation promotion on the web and social networks:

- Feed the institutional web pages - www.agustinosrecoletos.com and www.inquietar.com - with information on vocational activities, didactic content, reflections and prayers that facilitate vocational awakening.
- Present on the YouTube channel of the Order –Agustinos Recollects OAR– videos that challenge the vocational approach and the vocation to the Augustinian Recollect life.
- Generate audiovisual materials in the Order to feed both the institutional social networks and the personal networks of the vocation promoters, with content related to the vocation sowing.
- Create WhatsApp groups to maintain constant communication between vocational coordinators and promoters.
- To constantly refer young people in general to these areas of communication and, in particular, young people from the JAR groups, those who are in accompaniment and those who are inclined towards the vocation to Augustinian Recollect life.

Conclusions

In the year of consecrated life (2014), summoned by Pope Francis, he invited consecrated persons to look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope. The pastoral ministry of promotion of vocations lives with special intensity these challenges that Pope Francis poses to religious families, in his endeavor to enliven their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. In particular, this *Promotion of Vocations Guide* embraces the future with hope. He does so from the certainty of faith that it is the Lord who sows the good seed in the human heart. And it raises the service of vocation promotion from the conviction that vocation promoters are humble collaborators in the Lord's harvest; so much effort in patient sowing will give the fruits that the Lord wants and when he wants.

The great challenge for the pastoral care of promotion of vocations is precisely how to foment "vocational culture" in the Christian communities, until they constitute themselves into authentic *vocational communities*. This new path has been opened by the Church herself as a response to the signs of the times. It is to be hoped that the Christian communities where the Augustinian Recollects are present will also take firm steps in this direction. Therefore, the service that the Order performs in the promotion of vocations through this Promotion of Vocations Guide seeks to encourage Christian communities to become truly vocational communities.

Everything begins with the person's encounter with Christ. For this reason, the mission of the pastoral care of promotion of vocations consists, to a great extent, in being servants and facilitators of this living encounter with Christ; only in the encounter with the risen Christ do young people experience a hope stronger than any fear and doubt. Precisely from that meeting of the missionary disciple with Christ, everything acquires a new interpretation and an attitude of greater commitment to history emerges. Hence, this Plan concentrates its efforts on patiently sowing in the hearts of young people the encounter with Christ and his Word.

This *Promotion of Vocations Guide* places the risen Christ himself who accompanies the journey of the missionary disciples at the center of their being and work. It is precisely in the project of the Kingdom that Jesus discovers the young man, where he finds a precise purpose for his life, capable of enthusing his heart and prompting him to live with utopia. The adventure that the missionary disciple looks forward to is a matter between him and the Master who calls him. In fact, when a young man discovers his vocation

in Christ, he acquires interior strength and motivation to make courageous decisions and take on the future with hope.

The various communities of the Order of Augustinian Recollects are fortunate that among the faithful under their care there are those who feel the call and decide to consecrate themselves to the Lord. For this we thank the Lord and we remember and celebrate this blessing through the years. Now, at the present time, a great challenge opens up in the pastoral care of promotion of vocations for the Augustinian Recollects, and it has to do with a lot of faith discernment. On the one hand, a gentle look is needed at the life of the young people and their context, identifying their strengths and their struggles. And, on the other hand, check on the foundation of one's own spiritual life, in order to be able to accompany them along the right path in the way Jesus, the Master, did.

Approved by the Prior General and his Council, in the Session of October 20, 2020, Feast of Saint Magdalene of Nagasaki.



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