

VOCATIONAL APOSTOLATE

The vocational Apostolate is both a priority and disturbing factor in our District Plan. We are conscious of the difficulties of having too sanguine hopes and being convinced that "it is the Lord who does the calling". The clamor of so much work and the lack of relief, and the steadily rising median age of the Brothers are things which both urge us on and disquiet us.

The vocational apostolate seems to be the duty of individuals, even being an integrated area in the general pastoral activity of each school in which each Brother should be involved.

Because every vocational work implies:

— A call to define, revise, and question ourselves and our authenticity.

— It is to discover how we are and to feel humility and courage for how little our life is convincing.

— It is to feel ourselves summoned to account for the most noble ideals of our vocation, for the genuine charm for which we have been instituted.

— It is to return to the roots of the experience of God in poverty, availability, and unconditional self-surrender.

— It is to constantly examine if Jesus occupies the center of our life, and of our Community.

— It is to determine if our life is very far from being the explicit Good News which our young people are waiting for.

There is only one way of completing this "theory": Do I INVITE others and PROPAGATE my way of life because I feel happy in it and because the ideal I am living is well worthwhile? Our Rules, art. 85 have an identical message as that of Pope John Paul II: the campaign for Vocations will be successful when:

- 1) The Brothers live as consecrated persons.
- 2) The Community becomes a brotherly home.
- 3) When we walk constantly toward a conversion of hearts and of total surrender to the most needy.

1. Can we talk about our vocation to today's youth?

It is credible to invite others only if we love the life we are living. A VOCATION is an experience of God, a determined form of keeping the faith, it is to take upon ourselves the salvific plan of Jesus, it is to give off signals while leaving the initiative to God, to walk in the light of the blessed, to have made a fundamental option for Jesus. If this is not the case, we cannot offer any "bargains". In order to understand something, one must live it; in order to love something, one must live it with ardent dreams and desires.

Yes, it is possible to talk to some young people. They listen with the greatest respect and interest; but an echo is found in very few of them. There are some who are interested in knowing, but they feel themselves weak, ha-

ressed, incapable of dedicating and committing themselves. A society which lives smugly, closed in upon itself, which seeks its own advantage and individualism cannot understand commitment and gratuitous service. Today's youth is devoid of ideas other than those of the superficial, consumer society defeaned by noise. He cannot hear the whisper of the call. Youths need more good example and opportunities for silence and prayer.

The Brother, in order to get himself across to his students, must present himself as a religious consecrated to God, and not simply as a Professor. He must be a witness who speaks and expresses the faith which encompasses him, the educator who transmits what he lives, and the animator who gets himself across to youth to help them discover the values which give meaning to life. This must be done because nobody can clearly propose a vocation which is in crisis.

Today our vocation as Brothers is being called into question by our older students, by many parents, by our very fellow teachers who know us well, when we do not radiate the Gospel, when they see the Brother content to remain simply a teacher, no matter how competent he may be, when he distances himself from the other Brothers and from his home community, when he gets himself all wrapped up in his solitary and smug life.

2. The subject of the entire vocational apostolate is the community

It is the duly established Community which assumes the responsibility of inviting others to live the joys of brotherhood and of the Good News. The mother of every vocation is the community; the team or animator-coordinator will simply be the "mid-wife". The living community which prays, which plans things together, is open and can be known from within is one which will be victorious.

There exists a fear that the inauthenticity, the "other hidden face" of the community will be discovered. Who in the Community is now living through the vocational anxiety? Who is praying fervently and is warmly open to candidates to the Brothers? What is the central interest, the prime objective, and greatest joy of the community?

3. The youth are afraid

Perhaps they do not meet anyone who "throws them into the water". They tell us "we live well", but this life does not attract them... To leave their family, their comfortable life, to immerse themselves in necessary ventures, to learn to give of themselves... that is a long dark road. It seems that the youth are afraid to begin flying. In reality, they have not discovered the most elemental human values. Whatever is undiscovered cannot provoke interest or allegiance.

One needs healthy "happenings", the joys of giving and of emptying one's self, of forgetting about one's self. The youth, Vatican II reminds us, will join those who are capable of giving them reasons for living and for hope.

The choice to follow a vocation goes contrary to natural tendencies, contrary to what is easy and egoistical. A total choice liberates, integrates, and matures. And, nevertheless, the young seem to indefinitely dilly dally in their reply and vocational commitment. A total choice, they think, will curtail their liberty and field of possibilities.

4. The vocational apostolate of each brother and of each community

Such an apostolate is born of an expression of Jesus, of the presence of God maintained in a life which encompasses all:

- * Our daily prayer and Eucharist in Community.
- * Our openness of spirit of each day accepting our students in the reflection and in our solicitude for their formation.
- * Our classes which are competent, pleasant, and motivating.
- * The diversified dialogue with all our students, and with special attention to those most in need.
- * The Catechism replete with warmth, and with saving and liberating meaning.
- * The initiatives of formation during leisure hours, doing what arouses creativity, and initiative, in liberty and joy.
- * The invitations to pray and live together, to savor silence and peace.
- * Dialogue with parents and friends, opening ties of affection and of acceptance to the Lasallian Family.

5. Only thus will the brother plow the furrows of vocations:

- * AROUSING, awakening Vocations, discovering the most profound joys in following God. Approaching the Gospel values by one's own witness and by one's own experiences in living its noble values.
- * MAKING PROPOSALS and explicit invitations to those youths whom we find properly disposed and qualified, to follow our life.
- * RECEIVING, and carefully CULTIVATING the process of growth of the seed of a vocation. Following with solicitude those uncertain and searching steps.
- * HELPING the vocation GROW with its needs, invitation, and commitment; with human inquiries, serious proposals of religious formation and evangelical reflection; working along with it in the "desert" and in prayer. Furthering ideals leading to the crystalization of such a definite ideal and form of life.
- * ORIENTATING the process towards a DECISION and option discerned by, and committed to, motives of faith and love. Inserting these same youths into Christian and religious groups and Communities.

6. The climate of our schools

All of our schools are training grounds of evangelization. The Lasallian ideal has to accept life as offerings in a fraternal relationship among the members who make up the educative community. Everything that goes on in a Christian school is pastoral and is repeated every day.

The healthy school climate must disintoxicate the youth from their vicious, secularized, and bourgeois atmosphere, develop a critical sense in them, and arouse their appetite for the values of the kingdom. The school ought to choose between the pastoral quality and the quantity of students and form them in an Educational Plan at every level. If the school does not define its Plan and its strategic lines of pastoral activity it is not possible for it to

expect results and continuity in the process of managing a relevant Christian community.

We must avoid the extremes of sacralizing the mass or of reducing the faith to its bare minimum; we have to opt for Christian values and attitudes which will be seconded by the teachers and accepted by the parents. Our competency and our future are in the offering of Christian values and not in technology nor even in the quality of our teaching.

Communities must project this life into Christian groups which arouse an inner dynamism within their students.

7. Offerings to youth from the district pastoral program

Every pastoral activity specifies some clear objectives and throughout succeeds in having them cover every step of the maturation of persons. For the most part, the schools can maintain these offerings:

- * Catechetical programs for First Communion and Confirmation.
- * Beginning vocational groups for those 12 and 13 years old.
- * Christian live-in groups for those fourteen years of age. Continue to form new groups to assure perseverance and deepening.
- * From fifteen years on, the offerings must be more intense.
 - Live-in groups, Youth Encounters, Youth Easter gatherings...
 - Summer Courses: a week of intense religious, biblical, Lasallian formation.
 - Workshop for university students.
 - Missionary experience in Guinea, provides vitality to Christian commitment in advanced groups.

8. District structures and perspectives

A permanent inter-district communication is in operation which provides information on pastoral activities and on vocational and formation processes.

This work presupposes a network of many Brothers.

We have to restructure many pastoral projects and define priority objectives and urgencies. We must designate more potential workers, more Brothers must work for vocations.

Perhaps we have to revise the same structures upon which the collegial organization, the persons on which the burden of responsibility is based, in order to achieve other results or to suppress all anxiety in face of the impossible.

Yet, at all times, it has to be the Community itself which brings the initiative from its internal dynamism, from the gracious generosity of the Brothers. This includes the idea that the Brothers themselves will begin new ways of living which are distinct, committed, more evangelical, and which are characterized by coherence and authenticity.

It is possible for our ideal to be reborn, to spread, and to multiply because God is with us, our ideal is worthwhile and the "prime material" is in our hands. Let us have hope. Let us look alive.

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