

**THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(1/2)**

Paul Foisy

2. What connection do you see between your daily work with young people and your faith?

I am conscious that my work with young people is more than a profession and more than a way of earning my living. As St John Baptist de La Salle says, it is a ministry and a “mission” that has been entrusted to me. If I work with young people, it is because I have responded to a call I received, and I try to live in a spirit of faith and of service. By accepting to help young people grow in the faith, I respond first of all to my vocation as a baptised person. I always believe I am a co-creator with the Father, and that the charism I have received helps me to further a little God’s plan to gather mankind together in his love.

I cannot do my work without faith. I believe that every young person I meet has Christ living in him. My work consists in helping young people to recognise this presence in themselves. I thank God for the young people he entrusts to me. After 20 years at the centre, I still feel challenged by these young people, invigorated and revitalised. I ask the Lord to be with me in this mission and to help me grow in my faith.

At home, the fact that I help young people grow in the faith is considered important. I want my married life to be part of God’s plan. We try constantly, even if it is not easy, to have a home whose source of life and love is the Lord. We have 3 daughters, aged 18, 16 and 13 respectively. They accept as a matter of course the heritage of faith that my wife and I try to transmit to them. The eldest is involved in the activities of La Relève. The 16 year old worked as a catechist this year, helping youngsters to prepare for the sacrament of confirmation. The youngest daughter seems to give special importance to her relationship with her Lord. She loves to be involved in the pastoral activities organised at school.

In Québec society, “earning my living” as a pastoral worker, especially with adolescents, is considered to be an unusual occupation. Such an attitude is not very

affirming. I am often asked about the usefulness of my work: “What do you produce?” In a technological world, which strives after productivity and efficiency, my work seems to be an anachronism. Often I have to put myself in the hands of my Lord, abandon myself to his care and remember that what is essential is to do his will. Sometimes my faith wavers. When I am tired, I become filled with doubts, I no longer see the road ahead, and I wonder what the point is of what I do. But when I have young people around me, I burn once again with enthusiasm, I feel I am a child again, my heart beats faster and my faith comes alive! They want to be happy, they want to be useful, they want their lives to have meaning. And I am happy to show them a path which leads to life, to happiness, to the Love whom they need so much!

Finally, more and more, I do my work with young people for the same aims as the Brothers: **“The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young”** (Rule, art. 3).

At the Villa des Jeunes, we try to show young people the different faces of the Lord. We try to help them live their lives in the light of the Gospel, and we do not hesitate to offer them the Word of God. We try to show them how the first Christians lived. We do this because we believe that God really speaks to each of them personally. We are convinced that the heritage of faith helps to make a person happier, and we devote much effort to make this happiness known to young people.

However, I am very much aware that I cannot do this work properly unless the Spirit of Jesus lives in me. For De La Salle, the Christian educator is a man of prayer, who speaks to his Lord with great confidence: “Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him” (MR 4,1). And so I try to nourish this relationship with my Lord, and to deepen it in my life, as I have explained above.

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3. How did your profession become a “ministry?”

As I said earlier, I consider my profession to be a “ministry”, that is, a mission, a mandate that I have received to help young people discover and recognise the different faces of the Lord in their lives.

As a baptised person, I chose as a priority to be “of service” to my Lord, and I wondered how I could render this service. By becoming a teacher and a pastoral worker, I realised that this choice was a response to the call I had received.

And so, ever since I began my work as an educator in the faith, I have considered my profession as a “ministry”. I try to look upon my work as “one of the most

important and most necessary services in the Church” (MR 7,1). With time, I have discovered the riches and importance of the mission I have accepted to pursue. I have come to realise how right the following words are: “In the exercise of the ministry of the Word of God, the person of the minister has an important place. By his life, his conduct, his professional competence, his human qualities and the way he relates to people, the Brother is called to give witness to the reality of the transformation proclaimed in the Gospel which he teaches” (Declaration 38,4).

Elsewhere, we read, that to the Brothers is confided the incomparable task of contributing to the growth of the seed implanted in the child at baptism; and that catechesis, therefore, is the most important part of their ministry. “This catechesis should be lively, centred on the person of the student, in touch with life as it is, based on Scripture and the liturgy, attentivre to the teaching of the Church. Catechesis is above all a form of witness. It springs from the depth of a community of faith, that brings together Christians within whose hearts dwells the Holy Spirit, the teacher of all truth” (Cf. Rule 15a). Even if these words are addressed to the Brothers, I have no difficulty in applying them to myself. They represent for me a complete life programme. The “ministry” I have accepted to exercise is a great challenge. Not only do I have “to touch the hearts of young people”, but I have also to offer my own and allow myself to be transformed by the Spirit, so that through me, he can make “the seed of faith implanted in the heart of the child grow”.

For De La Salle, the educator is an ambassador, a minister who makes his will correspond to God’s plan.

“You are the ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ” (MR 3,2). An ambassador is a representative, an envoy. I try, therefore, in my everyday life, to make present the One who gives meaning to my life, and to help young people to recognise Him in their hearts. For

me, making Jesus present means embodying the attitudes of Jesus, that is, showing concern for the individual by being welcoming, by listening, and by offering the Good News to young persons trying to discover meaning in their lives.

The minister is a man or woman responsible for a certain function, a certain mission. It is someone acting in the name of someone else. The word “minister” implies service, but it indicates also different functions in the Church, different “missions”, different “services”, such as, the ministry of the altar, the ministry of the apostolate, the ministry of the Word, and so on. The Theological Vocabulary helps us to understand that these ministries, these “services” must be exercised under the influence of the Spirit (Rm 12,7), and as a mandate received from God (1 P 4,11).

This is the spirit in which I try to do my educational work, that is, as a “mandate received from God” and under the influence of the Spirit. To express this conviction in more concrete terms, a few years ago I asked the Diocesan services to give a “pastoral mandate” to the members of the Villa des Jeunes pastoral team. This request received a positive welcome. Recently, the Villa des Jeunes pastoral team asked Brother Maurice Lapointe, the Visitor of French-speaking Canada, for a “spiritual mandate” so that a link can be established between our work as educators in the faith and the mission of the Brothers.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the organising committee of this gathering for an opportunity to reflect on my mission of educating young people in the faith, and to share these few thoughts with you. This experience has already borne fruit in my personal life, and I am very happy about this. I thank you for the confidence you have had in me, and I hope I have fulfilled my mission to your satisfaction. •

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