

**PASTORAL MINISTRY
OF VOCATIONS**

Brother Manuel F. Magaz

For a period of nine years I served as coordinator for a youth volunteer program. Those involved in this program were preferably of university age over 20; but others were admitted as well as long as their experience responded to the purpose of the program. What follows is a brief summary of the nature and the running of this program.

Religious of the FERE (Spanish Federation of Religious Educators), who work in Equatorial Guinea, were the ones who set up the various places, objectives and activities of the programs. At the appropriate time they would communicate with the secretary of FERE, in Madrid, telling of their plans and the secretary would set out to look for, prepare and send volunteers. The process, which was rather complex, relied on the collaboration of the religious institutions corresponding to those who had a presence in the various programs. These religious institutions, then, were in direct contact with many volunteers; but many requests were taken care of and resolved by the FERE secretary. These are the ones I will deal with below.

The volunteers were well informed and they were aware of the commitment and sacrifice that their participation in the Equatorial Guinea programs would entail:

1. The programs take place during the summer vacation period when the volunteers could be enjoying a well-deserved break.
2. They take the risk to venture to a third-world country and they are under threat of tropical diseases.
3. They have to live in the jungle without light, water faucets and showers in tremendous heat, with mosquitoes and they undertake a diet without delicious food; in fact, most food is canned...
4. They know from past experiences that some volunteers succumb to malaria.
5. They must follow a preparation course before they leave for Equatorial Guinea.
6. Their work will be with people who are both uneducated and poor. Their work day will last 10 or more hours...
7. To top it all off, they must pay for their own round-trip airfare, which at current rates is about 170,000 Spanish pesetas (approximately \$1,000 USD). One of the volunteers was complaining about this fact: *"My worst problem this year is lack of money. I don't know if I'll be able to come up with that amount to pay for the trip. It took me a long time to save enough for the ticket last year. I've begun saving to go*

back there again but I'm afraid that it won't be enough...I'll just have to accept this" (José Pablo Hernández, Granada).

The coloring of the panorama, while varied, is not very festive. Nevertheless, the reactions of the young people contrast with the difficulties. This brings us to some general conclusions:

1. Applications increased year after year.
2. Every year the number of volunteers was greater than the places available. There was one summer where more than 170 applied.
3. From one period to the next, applications were received from throughout Spain.

In line with what was said above are the numerous personal interviews I conducted in my office when I asked the volunteers why they were offering to do this. Without discarding one adventurer or another, the majority provided reasons such as **commitment, solidarity, rejection** of the consumer society...more than a few put forward Gospel values as well.

I have preserved in my files 170 written communications from so many who briefly gave their curriculum vitae and the reasons for their application. It would be a shame of these were to be forgotten. I have limited myself to comment on just some of them, specifically the paragraph dealing with their reasons. It is possible that some may be repetitive; but this has the advantage of corroborating for us the same ideals from different places in Spain; also, each has its own particular nuance. I will group them in three sets.

1. Those whose motivation was **commitment, altruism, sharing with others**...The most illustrative of these would be the testimony of the applicant:

I am not asking to know exactly what I will have to do, since what I want is to serve others for a period of time; how I do this does not matter (Pilar Diez, aged 21, Valladolid).

I do not have a lot to offer professionally since I am just an assistant nurse...but the best things I have to offer are my hands and my heart which are ready for anything (María Dolores Sánchez, Murcia).

Perhaps you'll ask me what my motivations are, maybe you think that I am the naive type who wants to change the world's problems, a sort of Indiana Jones for our time; nothing could be further from reality. I am only trying to share experiences with others, especially by working for others (Alfredo Espada, Albacete).

This year I thought of leaving my country and "taking the plunge" in other lands for the same cause: helping my brothers and sisters in any way I can (Abel Diaz, aged 20, Pamplona).

We want to share everything with others, giving of ourselves and being of service to others (A group of young people from Granada).

2. These are the ones who place the emphasis on **dedication and service**...also mention is made of **those in need, the poor, the poorest among the poor**. Let's hear what they have to say:

I would like to devote the month of August to serving those in need in the Third World. I will pay for my trip...My preference is to work with children; but this would not be an obstacle for taking care of older people or the ill... (Esther García, Badalona).

I have always thought about working in the Third World with those most in need...I think that my personal fulfillment as a man lies in being dedicated to the poor; this would imply a type of human enrichment, being at the fringe of this consumer society which surrounds us (José Córdoba, aged 26, Nueva Cartagena).

I am a 25-year old woman from Vitoria and this year I am a volunteer in a marginalized neighborhood in Málaga...It is interesting for me to experience anxiety and the will to be devoted to the cause of the poor (Blanca Eraña, Málaga).

I would like to take everything that is in my hands and devote my life for the people who are so much in need (Jaqueline Ortega, aged 20, Fuerteventura).

I want to go on mission and I am ready to do anything, whatever is needed most; helping those who are most in need (Lluís Carbó, aged 25, Navarra).

I am an EGB teacher and for humanitarian reasons of wanting to be useful for those in need, I want to travel to those Third World countries and teach children and adults to read and write (José Manuel Jiménez, San Sebastián).

The world of the needy make us anxious and we want to share something with them (María Jesús Matos, aged 20 and María Carmen Fernández, aged 27, San Jaun de Sahagún, León).

3. Finally, there are those who make direct reference to **mission** and the social and Gospel connotations which the word implies. Some are looking for a temporary experience while others are looking to this experience as a way towards a definitive commitment. Here is what they have to say:

I have a great missionary anxiety and I want a working experience in the Third World (María Luisa Martínez, EGB teacher, Córdoba).

I am excited about the work either in Bioko or in Mbini; I would like to work in the missions for some time (Olegario Ollero, aged 31, Zaragoza).

My desire to go on mission grows day by day; even though I cannot do it permanently, I would like to do it for two months at least (Sister Esperanza Abad, Miajadas, Cáceres).

I would like to share a part of my life, even though it would be only for a time, on the missions. I would like to live out the message of Jesus and love in a radical way...I would like to give my best...Finally, being more specific, I would like to spend time on the Missions (Alejandro Martínez, aged 20, Vitoria).

My greatest dream is to use that month in helping people in need: it does not matter to me where nor the conditions. I feel that I am a fairly strong person with a strong faith in God who helps me; therefore I want to share my fortune and help out a little bit. I would like to know what it takes to be a missionary (Tatania Díaz, aged 20, Santander).

The Missions have been something which have drawn my attention for some years (Emilia Pinto, Madrid).

During my entire life I have dreamed of being a missionary. I have requested this several times and have been turned down; therefore now that I have been offered the opportunity, even though I'll only be looking at the Missions, I consider it a piece of good fortune and a

precious grace from God (Juan Nicasio Martínez Pbro., Astorga).

My name is María Pilar Espinosa, I am 24 years old, I work and I would like to go to the Missions. They have attracted me since I was a little girl; but the basic reason for my not going has been a lack of information and knowledge as to which institutions or centers to turn for help in this. (Jaén).

I have always had the idea of the possibility of going to the Missions to help out the needy. I decided to get myself ready to go someday (María Francisca Meca, aged 26, university graduate, Granada).

The interviews above and other documents give me grounds for formulating some conclusions:

1. **There are many young people who, dissatisfied with the consumer society, are looking for ways for collaborating with and being in solidarity with persons in need.** I estimate that in the summer programs which I coordinated and which took place in Equatorial Guinea, more than 800 different young people participated from all over the country; quite a few of them repeated the experience two or three times. This sampling is valid in order to reach a conclusion.

2. **There is a lack of concrete information about organizations in which to channel the altruistic anxiety of young people.** A good number of them made this clear during the interviews and also in writing. They said that there was a lack of information. When because of the lack of places I had to suggest other similar programs to them, they looked at me and wanted me to give them another door to open.

3. **Young people are motivated by and make sacrifices for enterprises that do not interest a capitalist and materialist society: people of the Third World, the needy, the poorest of the poor...**

4. **Given the Christian and apostolic scheme of things, the Missions are preferred by young people** in spite of what they have to give up and the sacrifices required.

Final Conclusion

I am not experienced in the process of awakening, cultivating and animating vocations for the religious life. What I do sense is that the task is difficult and complex for those who are dedicated to this. All the same, judging from my experience of nine years with these young people, I might be so bold as to suggest:

1. **In the "forest" of youth today there is much holy "wood".**

2. **Current means of information must be available for religious vocations.**

3. **Young people are not motivated by well-being and greatness, but by sacrifice and dedication in favor of the marginalized and the poorest of the poor, that is to say, the chosen ones of Jesus.**

4. **The Missions, in spite of the self-sacrifice that they entail, constitute the preferential option of young people. •**