



ARE WE VISIBLE?

Youth have the faith, but why do they shun religious life?

That is the question that the French Catholic weekly *La Vie*, in its issue of January 26, 2016, shares with us (<http://www.viereligieuse.fr/Les-jeunes-ont-la-foi-mais-pourquoi-boudent-ils-la-vie-religieuse-La-Vie-26-01>). At the root of this question is a study done at the same time that shows a slight uptick of religious conviction and practice among the 18-24 year olds who are 13% more likely to believe in God and 3% more likely to engage in the regular practice of religion than the national average. That same survey shows that 15% of them have already thought about the religious life. And yet vocations remain excessively rare. The author of the article comments:



"Is this spiritual and religious recovery being translated into more vocations? That does not seem to be at all the case for the consecrated vocation (male and female apostolic religious, cloistered nuns). ... There seems to be a gap, therefore, between the religious aspirations of youth and their commitment to the consecrated life. At the French National Service for the Evangelization of Youth, there is an "anxiety about a permanent commitment" but above all, a gap between the reality of the life of consecrated persons and the image which the young have of it. 77% of them see the religious life as a flight from the world. What is involved is: "the image of monks and nuns transmitted by the media," comments Father Jean-Pierre Longeat, President of the Con-

ference of Male and Female Religious of France.

According to him, "the religious life is shown only from the angle of prayer." But that is far from the case: many religious live also live their vocation in a mission or a work that opens them up to the world: doctors, nurses, teachers . . . still others market their products to the general public. Faced with this gap between reality and image, communities are going digital with their young recruits in order to stream videos demonstrating their lives. In his Apostolic Letter of November 21, 2014, addressed to all those in the consecrated life, Pope Francis exhorted them to wake up the world, to be prophets, something totally contrary to a life apart from society."

On other continents where vocations are less rare, or are even numerous, one can see the same ignorance about what our religious life, which is perceived as mysterious, inaccessible and, it seems, difficult to understand. It seems that that may be one of the reasons for the attraction to the priesthood which offers a much more visible and well known image.

Isn't it time for us to make ourselves known for who we really are: religious who have made a missionary covenant with Mary, dedicated both to prayer and to the apostolate of presence or of action, as well as to a life in common? Is it not time to open up our communities as a matter of course so that youth and the adults might be able to make a judgment about the reality of our life on other bases than what appears in the cinema or in videos?

Should we not seize the occasion of the bicentenary of our foundations to invite the people around us, young and not-so-young, to discover our life, our house, our activity? The curiosity is there, let's respond to it and bring home the call that God addresses to those he has chosen.



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Next issue:
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Send me news and photos of your activities, texts, ... **Thank you!**

(genrelsm@smcuria.it)

PROVINCIAL DIRECTOR OF VOCATION MINISTRY

Experiences and convictions at the end of five years of responsibility

Rogelio Núñez, SM



Rogelio Núñez, Assistant Provincial of the Province of Spain, has graciously shared with us the fruits of his experience and of the great work he has accomplished over the past five years at the service of the Vocation Ministry of his Province. But, you may ask, when the fruits seem so uncertain, is it really worth all the effort? Let's hope that what you read here will convince you that we can all commit ourselves like this, and even that we must do so and want to do so!

INTRODUCTION

I am finishing a period of service of five years in charge of the province's vocation ministry. One of the new elements provoked by the birth of the new Marianist Province of Spain has been the restructuring of the Provincial Council to allow for a more rapid and effective response to the needs of the Province. Hence the Provincial Council and specifically the Assistant Provincial took on the ultimate responsibility for the coordination and leadership of this strategic dimension of our life and mission. My principal task has been to bring all the members of the Province to feel called to and to make their own this mission, starting from a provincial plan of Vocation Ministry in which the objectives, means, and actors are well defined and agreed upon.

The mission assigned to the provincial councilor responsible for vocation ministry is something complicated to explain and much harder to carry out. For many brothers, I embody the desires, hopes, and fears of our institution. At the same time, the uncomfortable awareness that our mechanistic culture provokes weighs upon us: the logic that effective actions should produce effective results. Thus, if we do not have vocations, there is something we are not doing, or if we are doing it, we are doing it badly. For most of us, our expectations in the area of vocation ministry lead to misunderstandings, since the objectives are mixed up with desires and the results with numbers: How many pre-novices? How many novices?

marianista



¿por qué no?



[encuentro de jóvenes en busca de su vocación]

viceprovincial.sm@marianistas.org

del 28 al 30 de marzo en Isaías XI- Zarzalejo (Madrid)

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND DISCOVERED THROUGHOUT THESE YEARS:

When a religious undertakes this mission, he has to learn to live with the difficulty of knowing himself responsible for something that escapes his hands, his own abilities and hard work. Every vocation is born in the heart of God and is subject to the will and the freedom of each individual person. None of our personal or institutional activities in the field of vocation ministry, in spite of all we do, can be the ultimate cause of a vocation. But it is very true that the Lord relies upon our mediation to prepare the terrain for his call, to help awaken, accompany and discern vocations, which only He arouses in the heart of young persons. This is the meaning and orientation of the vocation ministry that I have tried to develop in my Province. From my experience, I have arrived at the following conclusions:

- Vocation ministry demands of all of us in the Province a more significant visibility and presence among youth. No one can feel called by God to a charism or life style that he doesn't know. Hence, if we want young persons who feel called to the Marianist religious life, we shall have to make sure that the largest number possible of them know, understand and appreciate our life. We should be concerned about the little, and ever littler, interaction of the Marianist religious with the boys and youth who pass through our pastoral programs. To a great degree, the future or the suicide of many religious institutions is decided in those moments, in the choices of materials distributed and in the dedication of the religious personnel and the manner of the presence of the communities in the apostolic works.

- The core of a vocation ministry that is called to be genuine among all or almost all the brothers of the Province is the cultivation and appreciation of one's own vocation. Each religious and each community is called to bear witness to the vocation to which we have been called. We need more narrative theology. There are very few brothers who talk about their vocation and our life with a sound enthusiasm. Fewer still are those who, in conversations with other persons, speak of their community as a gift instead of a punishment; of their missionary experience with vision and thanksgiving instead of fatigue, weariness, and complaint. There is no better vocational invitation than a happy religious.

- Vocation ministry relies upon a good overall pastoral ministry, and at the same time must offer the same: a depth of faith in its approaches, proposals, and methods so that it can light up a horizon of fulfillment for the person. Vocation ministry must not be closed in, isolated or marginal, but a transversal axis that goes deep into the overall pastoral ministry and, in addition, has its own specific and proper ministry.

- Vocation ministry requires formation and qualifying specialization in those engaged in it, especially in the areas of personal accompaniment and vocational discernment. We have the responsibility to accompany personally whoever experiences a call to the Marianist religious life in order to help him discern if the necessary signs are there for a genuine vocation. No candidate can be admitted to the Prenovitiate without having made that first discernment, but we do not have brothers in all our communities with the formation, the time for dedication to or the vision for adequately accompanying someone. That is why we are putting out a guide that is very simple and complete for helping those who are more unsure about accompanying others.



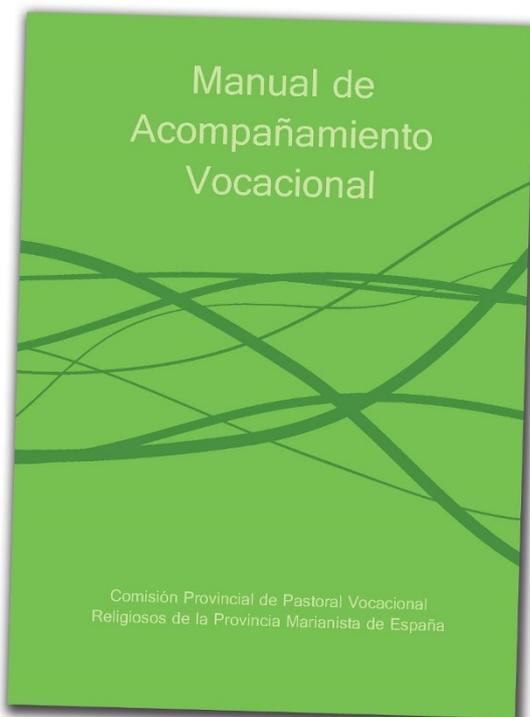
IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IN MY COUNTRY, MY GREATEST CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN:

- Rescuing the Vocational Culture.

We are all responsible for fostering a cultural context in which life is understood as vocation. We have the obligation to bear witness to the men and women of our time, but especially to children and adolescents in our pastoral programs, that the search for meaning and fulfillment of the human being goes through commitment to and choice of concrete life-long projects. The personal vocation, lived out as a call that pulls us out of our own interests and projects, is a source of happiness. Remembering in season and out of season that the plan of the Kingdom of God gives identity to all Christian vocations, including some of them that find their fulfillment in a special consecration in the Church.

- The vocational orientation (not merely academic-professional) and personal life plan.

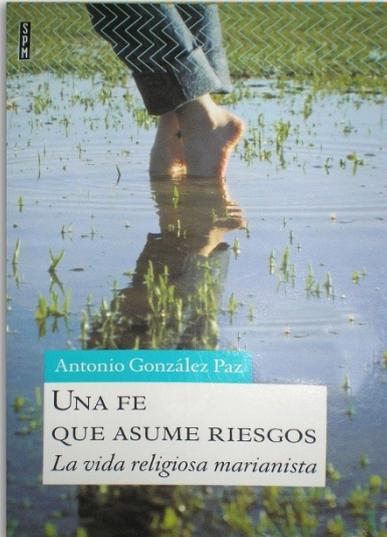
Today we succeed in offering very few youth any vocational formation or any concrete experience of vocational discernment. We are missing the opportunity of accompanying them in this crucial process in their lives and of letting them know in depth and quality the vocation to the Marianist religious life among all the other vocations. The challenge is to design a program that succeeds in offering to all our youth, at least to those in the final years of school and in the bosom of their families, the opportunity to plan out their personal life project and its meaning. Vocational accompaniment must educate in them the capacity of becoming conscious of the calls they are receiving and of being capable of making the decisions which will lead them into their fulfillment and happiness. To achieve that, the coordinated activity of teachers, counselors, and campus ministers is required. The members of the Marianist Family, who share our educational and pastoral mission, can be privileged actors in this regard, since they already know and appreciate our vocation and its importance within the Family.



SOME ADVICE:

- Presentation of Marianist Religious Life. Vocation ministry is normally a deferred gratification activity that lacks immediate results. Hence, due to lack of time or of interest, we put off explaining vocational suggestions to a final and poor way of doing it. In presenting the various vocations in the Church, we must put special interest into an adequate presentation of Marianist religious life. We must see to it that there are supporting materials available, that they be current, pedagogically and esthetically well designed, so that anyone, even if not a Marianist religious him/herself, nor even a member of the Marianist Family, can present our life as well as possible.

- **Take care of our presence on the internet.** An institution like ours, in the digital world in which we now live, must take care of its presence on the internet and the social networks. We have tried to do so at <http://www.sermarianista.org> But we must be very aware that the vast majority of online contacts, beyond our Marianist world, will demand a long correspondence and interviewing process to get to know, if we can, the intentions and dispositions of a person, and one discovers in many of them spurious motivations or severe psychiatric disorders. In spite of the need for vocations, we must be very vigilant in order to avoid allowing into the processes of formation toxic individuals or flawed vocations. Communications with those in charge of vocations in other congregations has been especially helpful to me in unmasking persons who are untruthful or potentially dangerous.



- **The harvest is ripening later and later, but we can't stop sowing early because of that.** The increase in the age of making the vital decisions that commit an adult life must not make us forget that there is much vocational work to be done at earlier ages. Childhood is the age for weaving dreams, adolescence and the teens is the age for growing passionate, and young adulthood (18 to 30 years) the age for making decisions. It is with this last age group that we need to increase our vocation ministry. It is in this latter period of life that they need both to be close to religious and to experience the hospitality of their communities, as experiences which help them to deepen in their searches and to reveal to them keys of meaningfulness. They need "powerful" experiences that help them to rethink, to take up and make concrete their fundamental options in the design of their lives, such as, for example: workshops, experiences of service and mission alongside religious, meetings for reflection and

prayer, powerful liturgical experiences, pilgrimages, etc.

- **Vocation meetings** are one means to help young persons find or confirm their vocation to the Marianist religious life. But that is not the only, nor the most important means, even though it is certainly an instrument for mobilizing the entire Province in an effort to discern and call. In spite of the low response, and of the fact of not being able to celebrate the meetings these last years due to lack of candidates, we cannot undervalue the work done and the results gained. Thanks be to God, the motivation to invite to the meetings brings us every year to propose to many young people the Marianist vocation, something which probably would not happen if the meeting did not exist. The best result of the convocation to these meetings is to see, year after year, how much the brothers and the communities devote themselves responsibly in mediating the vocational call to the youth around them. We must convince ourselves that there will be vocational response only if a personal and explicit call is first mediated by us. A call, small and respectful, to dare to accept the definite and loving call of God.

