



A SYNOD ABOUT VOCATIONS

Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

PRESENTATION

The XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place in Rome from October 3-28, 2018. The theme of the Synod was: Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. This theme has preoccupied the Society of Mary and the Marianist Family for years. Without a doubt, the entire Church is also concerned about this theme of vocations.

The recent General Chapter of the Society of Mary, # 50, stated:

The Assistant General for Religious life will investigate how to help the Units, and particularly their vocation ministers, make use of the reflection and propositions of the Synod on "Youth, faith and vocational discernment" (October 2018). It may include, when convenient, an adaptation of the Unit Plan for vocation ministry.

As a first step in approaching the document of the Synod, we want to take advantage of this official bulletin to share and reflect on some of the suggested themes. This reflection will help us revise, reinforce and reorient our pastoral work in the area of youth and vocations.

The Synod discussed many themes of importance. We will begin this current paper centered on two themes:

- Youth Ministry
- World Youth Day.

Fr. Pablo Rambaud SM



IN THIS ISSUE:

Presentation	1
Youth Ministry	2-6
WYD Panama	7-10



YOUTH MINISTRY

From the beginning of the synodal process, it became very clear that youth ministry needs a vocational slant. In this way, the two essential characteristics of a pastoral approach to young generations emerge: it is "for youth", because it is aimed at those in the singular and un-repeatable stage in life which is youth; it is "vocational", because youth is the privileged season for life choices and for responding to God's call. The "vocationality" of youth ministry should not be understood in an exclusive sense, but an intensive sense. God calls at every age in life – from the mother's womb to old age – but youth is the privileged moment for listening, for availability and for accepting God's will.

Synod Final Document, # 140

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Our General Chapter (# 59a) also insisted on the importance of taking great interest in this ministry:

59 a. Regarding the accompaniment of young people:

- 1. establish action plans for youth according to the socio-cultural and religious contexts, independent of their convictions or beliefs, so that we may be able to stay in contact with them, listen to their needs, and offer them ways for spiritual growth;*
- 2. generate pastoral actions with youth that help them grow in faith and live it in community;*
- 3. generate the necessary conditions (spaces, times for meetings, etc.) which permit the creation of these faith communities;*
- 4. promote group dynamics in which the youth become involved and responsible for missionary and pastoral activities, thus including them as co-leaders, guiding other youth.*

For a long time, The Society of Mary has been aware of the importance of this pastoral aspect of our educational works. We have dedicated much time and effort to this need. However, we usually center our efforts on our students while they are with us in our schools. Generally, this means that we are working with young people who are 16-18 years old.

The Church, by means of the Synod, as well as our General Chapter are calling us to broaden this vision. They are asking us to look at the young people who are no longer in high school. This is certainly not a completely new attitude. In many places where we are located, there are already indications of pastoral activities that deal with this age group. Now, however, the invitation is for us to do this in a more systematic and institutional manner.

The General Chapter talked about establishing a plan of action that would generate pastoral activities that would bring about the creation of communities of faith. We should create these pastoral activities in such a way that the young people themselves would be active participants in the process. The document from the Synod insists on the importance of allowing the young people to assume responsibility for their participation in the life of the Church (nn. 52-57).

We will now outline some of the initiatives that already exist in the pastoral work with youth (18-28 years of age) in the context of Europe. The first, which has been in existence for a number of years, forms part of the common activities of the CEM (European Marianist Conference). The second is more recent. The Province of Spain is promoting this latter experience.



Youth Ministry in the CEM

Several years ago, the CEM agreed that youth ministry, beginning at the age of 18, would be one of the common mission works of the Zone. At their meeting during May of 2018 in Sion, Switzerland, the CEM established the guidelines for this ministry. Even before this meeting, this group had initiated several activities and common efforts. They decided on a series of five objectives:

- To propose life in community as means of living one's Christian faith.
- To present the principles of Marianist spirituality and to reinforce, through formation, the meaning they bring.
- To provide service experiences that fosters the cultivation of solidarity and concern for the most needy and disadvantaged.
- To propose methods of personal and community prayer that helps the encounter with God.
- To guide and offer a personalized accompaniment to the participants in the important moments of their life, through discernment and the search of God.



European young-adult group in Santiago de Compostela (July 2017)

The concrete activities flowing from these objectives are:

a. One important activity in summer:

- Camino de Santiago, work camp (service and solidarity), experiences of prayer in Lourdes, in Taizé...
- Ten days.
- We have to find the right date (current proposals: end of July – beginning of August).
- It must be conciliated with national summer activities in order to not overlap activities.

b. Activities during the year:

- Internal proposals in each country.
- The European meeting of Taizé at the end of December.



Taizé gathering in Riga (December 2017). First on the left, Francisco Calancha SM, coordinator of CEM Youth Pastoral.

Since then several concrete activities have taken place: A walk to Santiago took place in Spain during the month of July 2017; they held a solidarity camp at Condofuri, Italy in the month of July, 2018; for the current year they have organized a pilgrimage to various Marianist sites of interest (Agen, Bordeaux) during the month of July, 2019.



European young-adult group in Condofuri (July 2018)

Experience of Community Life for Young People

In the following section, I want to talk about the experience of community life during which we lived with some young people during the months of October and November. This was an experience of grace for those who lived it. However, we must say that the trigger for this experience was a painful reality: the Mare de Déu formation community was empty for the first time in thirty years.

I remember that Wolph and I spoke at a community meeting when they notified us about the closing of this house and where we were going. Our first thought was that the idea of this type of community life with young people was not ridiculous.

After this, the time came for surveying the young people. We proposed the idea to some young people to see how it sounded to them. It seemed to go over well. In the month of August, I sent a proposal to the Provincial Council. They studied the proposal, suggested a few ideas and then told us to go forward. I told the whole story to the community of El Pilar in Valencia. All new things generate a mixture of enthusiasm and fear. I felt some of those fears myself, but they gradually dissipated.

We decided to present the proposal to some of the young people who were involved in the pastoral ministry of the school. These young people were no longer students, but some were monitors, others were members of fraternities etc.. I invited some of these young people to dinner at “El Quinto” (Mare de Déu) and told them about our ideas. A week later some of them returned, along with some other young people who had not been at the first meeting. We had these original sessions to “dream,” starting with the basic plan that I offered to them. That plan involved a faith community, a community of life and a community of mission.

On September 30th, five young men arrived. We began this adventure with a small retreat that culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist. During this retreat, they signed an agreement to live in community. The agreement stated the following:

“We are committed to building a community which is not just the sum of several individuals. This allows for the action of grace to enhance our human nature, building on our weaknesses.

We decided to call this community Aliyá, which in Hebrew means “rise”, “ascent”, and it is also the term used to express the way to the Promised Land.

In order to fulfill this commitment we want to take the opportunity to look for moments of community life. We want to live this life as a gift of joy. We are aware that we are here because we want to be here. We would also like to be able to transmit this experience to others. We would like to avoid focusing on ourselves, but rather open our arms to the Lord and to the community.

Finally, we are committed to being part of the community life, this community of faith and this community of mission, according to the agreements we have made.”

Two months later, we ended the experience with another retreat. During the retreat, we had a faithful reading of our history. We gave thanks to God for his eternal mercy.

Will we repeat this event? This is our intention. God will speak to us. Why not have this experience in another place as well? You can read our testimonials. Each person has covered the experience from his own perspective, attempting to include what has been most significant for him.

Paco Sales, SM

There were three main reasons why I decided to try this experience. First, I wished to strengthen and improve my faith. Second, I wanted to improve my personal life. Third, I wanted to live a unique experience that I had never encountered before. Faith is essential for a Christian. This experience did not restore my faith. Rather, I believe that it give my faith a deeper and more mature meaning. This maturity is in accordance with the values of the Church. I am not afraid to say that I have strengthened and matured my faith. Personally, this small but remarkable improvement in my life now, will also serve me well in the future. Finally, as for the experience itself, what can I say? This experience has ended. It was brief but intensive. I have learned something from every one of my companions. I respect and value them very much as persons. I realize that living an experience of faith in a community like this has made me want to be a better Christian. Now it all depends on me. .

Carlos

The group who lived in the Marianist community, with Paco Sales (3rd on the left)

For me this experience has meant a change in my life. In the past, I have felt the presence of God from time to time. Now I have the ability to identify, recognize and love this presence in a



a much more intense way in my day-to-day life. I am a person who has the ability to listen to the call to live my faith in a much different way. This way involves a life in community with people whom I admire very much. I have identified both the form and the activities with which I want to live my faith as well as my personal relationships. For me now, the key is to have the insight to know how to bring these values into my life in an appropriate way. I hope that I can achieve this goal.

Alejandro

When Paco suggested we live in community, we had many serious doubts about his idea. However, like all enriching experiences, these questions arising from ignorance, dissipated. There was room now only for satisfaction. I am grateful for the gifts that these two months gave to me. There were times when our schedule was totally full and other days were ordinary and routine. There were days that involved much concentration and days when things were slow. Despite these difficulties, I had strength in my faith, security in my hope and perseverance in love. These three allowed me to live this life in community. Without a doubt, there is one word that summarizes my stay in community – joy.

Daniel

In this dynamic stage of life that is youth, we received an experience that strengthened our faith enormously. Aware of this fact, we also realize the true effect Jesus has on our hearts – both for the present and for the future. In turn, we have built up a background that impels us to live faith, prayer and liturgy in new way. This new way is certainly stronger and more mature than the past. I could say that we have been able to build ourselves on solid rock. We have built a solid foundation for our immediate future as Christians. For many reasons, I believe that it is increasingly difficult for young people to cultivate their faith today. Perhaps, there are times when many of us distance ourselves from God. However, the person who has felt the touch of Jesus in their heart and the person who has experienced true love will always be able to appreciate it and search for it. Personally, I believe that what I have shared in this small Marianist community has awakened me. I am now aware of how I want to consecrate my life to Jesus. This has already brought forth the fruit of concrete actions. Today, I know that I want Jesus to move into my life.

Fernando

For me, rather than a leap of faith, the experience of community has meant a face-to-face encounter with myself, with God and with my faith. This encounter has taken place in a space and time where I can give these areas priority. Normally, I find it difficult to fulfill this priority in my daily life. The experience has also allowed me to find the silence in which God speaks. I knew what was happening. I knew how I wanted to live, just as my colleagues were aware of what was happening. This environment generated an experience that was profound, rewarding and fruitful. Personally, this environment allowed me to live my faith with greater docility. I was able to avoid strictly rational questions and behavior. In the past, these strictly rational questions have always prevented me from moving forward. I was now able to move from the heart.

Pablo

WORLD YOUTH DAY

In several previous issues of VocSM, we have written about World Youth Day. Without a doubt, this is an event that has grown stronger over the years. World Youth Day has attained great pastoral importance in the Church. For this reason, the document from the Synod that we have been discussing, dedicates a section to this event:



22-27 de enero

During the Synod, there was frequent reference to World Youth Day and the many related events that take place on a continental, national and diocesan level, together with those organized by associations, movements, religious congregations and other ecclesial entities. These moments of encounter and sharing are widely appreciated, because they offer the possibility of journeying together as if on pilgrimage, of experiencing fraternity with all, of sharing the faith joyfully and growing closer to the Church. For many young people these moments have been an experience of transformation, in which they have experienced the beauty of the Lord's face and have made important life choices. The best fruits of these experiences are gathered in daily life. It therefore becomes important to plan and to experience these gatherings as significant stages of a broader virtuous process.

Synod Final Document, # 142



Some Marianist religious from Meribah Province and collaborators, during the WYD in Panama

This year, because of location or dates, there were no Marianist representatives from many countries. Young people from Chili and Peru participated. Above all, a large group from the Province of Meribah attended World Youth Day. We have asked some of the young people from Perú and the United States to share their experience with us:



Group of participants from Peru



Group of participants from Chile

The youth group from María Reina Parish (Lima; Peru)

A Month ago, five young people from the youth ministry of our parish traveled to Panama to participate in World Youth Day. We were representatives of the lay Marianist communities and the team of catechists from the confirmation program of our parish.

World Youth Day was a great step that we took as young people of faith. At first, we were anxious about what was waiting for us. We were afraid that they would lodge us in different locations. Fortunately, from the 100 possibilities for lodging, we met Juana and Nando. This couple taught us that those called to World Youth Day were all people who maintain a youthful spirit. This spirit was cheerful and full of energy. These were people capable of forgetting themselves in order to be of service to others.

There was a very profound connection. Everyone manifested a spirit of fraternity. Without fear or shame we laughed, sang, danced and prayed together. Seeing this spirit everyday encouraged us to get up early the next day. We went out with a smile to continue enjoying the experience.

It was particularly exciting for us as Marianists to hear about Mary as the person who had an effect on God. She was the woman who said yes because she loved. In the words of the Pope: "Without wanting it or looking for it, she became the woman who most influenced history." Since we were members of the Marianist Lay Communities, it was important that we hear about living in community. These words reminded us that faith is not lived alone. Rather, faith is lived with the family, with friends, at work, at school, at universities and in the neighborhood.

During World Youth Day, all of us left our daily responsibilities at home or at the university in order to stop and listen to Pope Francis. He spoke about the love story that Jesus gave us. We learned how we could keep alive the dream for which Jesus gave his life: "love one another."

All of the young people in Panama shared this feeling. In the words of Pope Francis: "We invite you to share it with others. Live a love that does not marginalize or shut out others. Live a love that does not humiliate or subjugate. The love of the Lord is a daily love, discreet and respectful. It is a love of freedom, a freedom that heals and uplifts. This love of the Lord that knows more about rising up than falling down. This love knows more about reconciliation than forbidding. This love gives new opportunities rather than condemning. It is the silent love of the hand outstretched in service. It the love of surrender rather than boasting."

Thank you.



Students of Chaminade HS and Kellenberg Memorial (Meribah – EEUU)



My experience in Panama was life changing. I used it as an opportunity to explore another nation's culture and its strong ties to the faith that we share in common, namely, Catholicism. Some of my most memorable experiences came not from the time at the beach or in the pool, but in times of Adoration and reflection. In a society where young people are being scrutinized for their faith, I remember distinctly the joy I had knowing that I was surrounded by hundreds of thousands of young Catholics in Eucharistic Adoration. The atmosphere of hope and joy for the next generation of Catholics that I experienced in Panama made me excited to know that I will be at the forefront of this next generation, living my life as a disciple of Jesus.

Jack

The aspect of World Youth Day that I found most powerful was the palpable excitement of everyone there. Every pilgrim was excited to be Catholic and united as one Church, gathered to celebrate our faith in a truly unique and thrilling way. The fact that so many pilgrims would

travel so far and to a completely unknown country truly speaks to the power of World Youth Day.

Embarking upon this pilgrimage through the Society of Mary only amplified my experiences as the heightened sense of community made me feel proud and excited not only to be a member of the Church, but to also be a member of the global Marianist community.

Through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, I felt that I was brought closer to Christ and was able to connect with countless other likeminded pilgrims whom I would have never met had it not been for World Youth Day.

Aidan



When we first arrived at the Opening Ceremonies in Panama for World Youth Day, I was shocked by the sheer number of people who had come together. As we celebrated the Opening Mass and the Stations of the Cross with pilgrims from all over the world, I was lucky enough to experience the genuine joy and depth with which many of the pilgrims carried out their faith. Another experience that truly highlighted the spirit of togetherness and devotion that permeated the trip occurred when all the pilgrims came together to sing the Salve Regina, reminding me of how our membership in the Church truly unifies and strengthens us. After having these experiences, I know that I will take my time at World Youth Day with me as I try to emulate that same commitment to God and community in my daily life.

Lauren



The entire trip was a series of one high point after another, but the pinnacle for me was the Opening Mass, said by the Archbishop of Panama, Monsignor José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta. As we gathered together in a park along the Cinta Costera, the area was packed with pilgrims from many different countries. We arrived early at the site, so we were able to walk around and meet Catholics from around the globe.



There was a great feeling of unity that I had never experienced before this. In one sense, we had little in common: our languages and customs, our national flags and even our popular songs differed. On the other hand, we had our youth; our enthusiasm; and, most importantly, our faith in common, and that made all the difference in the world. I experienced an incredible feeling of solidarity as I interacted with young Catholics from all over the world. We traded souvenirs and symbols from our native countries; we laughed and we sang; and, despite the language barriers, we found a way to communicate with one another on a fairly deep level. Once the Archbishop began the Mass, it was equally moving, as we all prayed together, transcending the language barrier once more. The evening was capped off by a beautiful homily from the Archbishop and then some dancing on the way back to the hotel, once again, with fellow Catholics from around the world. At the end of it all, I remember saying to Bro. Steve, one of our chaperones, "Best day of my life ever." It was an experience that I will never forget!

Chris

