

FOSTERING NEW VOCATIONS

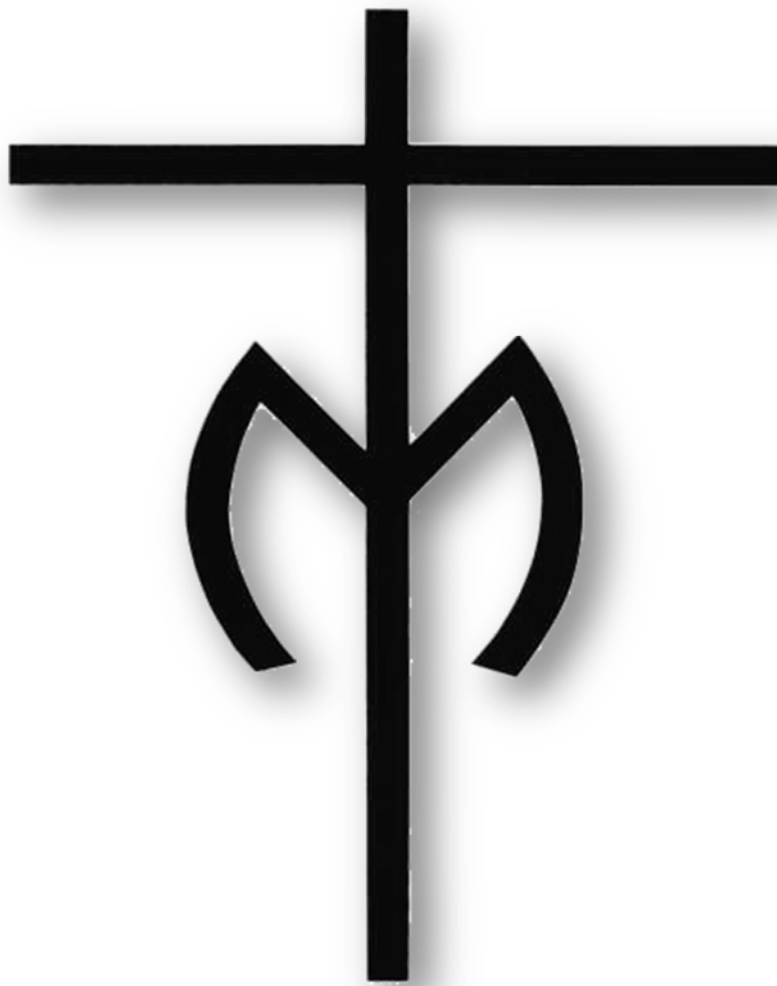


CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI MARIANISTI

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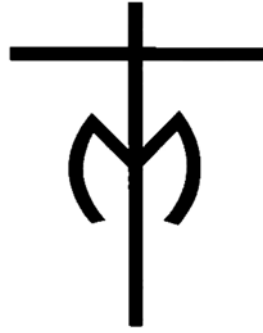
2016

FOSTERING NEW VOCATIONS
A REFLECTION PAPER ON VOCATION MINISTRY
AND INITIAL DISCERNMENT
IN THE SOCIETY OF MARY



SOCIETY OF MARY
(MARIANISTS)

May 11, 2016



PRESENTATION

Dear brothers,

A new document on vocations? Why?

First of all, it is obvious that, today, the “challenge” of vocations is on everyone’s lips, sometimes, even using the expression, albeit very inappropriately, “the vocation problem.” Characterized by a lack of vocations on the one hand, and on the other, by a superabundance of candidates needing an often complex discernment of their motivations, vocation ministry is a demanding task. Conscious of the current difficulties, but also of the importance of this topic for the future of our Congregation, the last General Chapter mandated:

The Assistant General for Religious Life will coordinate among the Units a process for reflecting upon and improving the methods and pedagogy used to promote and discern Marianist vocations (To Enliven the Fire that Enkindles Other Fires, 22.a.4).

In responding at the same time to both that challenge and that mandate, this document has been formulated with the intention of offering some paths for reflection and action. Such a task is made more complex by the very great diversity that characterizes our presence throughout the world. So, these reflections can be taken up and discussed in each setting, only by taking account of specific local conditions in order to tackle particular aspects that seem more urgent in each individual context.

In the Units which already have a rich vocation ministry, this text can serve for reviewing and improving their praxis, when it is appropriate; among those who have less, or even very little, experience in the matter, may this document serve as a stimulus to set up, with creativity and enthusiasm, a true vocation ministry that can be described in a plan, according to the mandate of the General Chapter (16.d). The text proposed here can also serve to enlighten our co-workers about what we want to say and do when we talk about vocation ministry, so that it will be easier to work together on it.

Vocation ministry is a sign of faith in God’s activity and a proof of the hope we maintain that he will always continue to offer to our family and to our Congregation the vocations we need. May that faith and that hope not be lacking in anyone among us! As we enter our third century, we can “look to the past with gratitude ... live the present with passion

... [and] embrace the future with hope.”¹ In particular, let us show it through the enthusiasm and intelligence with which each brother, each community and each Unit devote themselves to that difficult, but enriching task. As our *Rule* puts it:

Our Marianist Charism cannot continue without the attraction and development of new religious vocations. Our efforts in this domain witness to our belief that God is inviting men to our Society and that we can assist them in discerning that call (RL 5.7).

To facilitate a better appropriation of the text, the boxes included propose, on the one hand, the essential themes of each part (“Proposal”), and, on the other, a few questions for reflection or a review of experience (“Let’s think about it”). At the end of the document, for expanding or deepening what precedes, some fundamental texts are provided. A first series refers to the Magisterium of the Church, to our *Rule* and to our General Chapters. A second group offers a short synthesis of the ideas of our Founder regarding vocation ministry, followed by a list of texts that illustrate it. It is up to the reader to decide how this last section might be useful and how one may complement it with other references adapted to one’s particular situation of life and work.

This new text was officially approved by the General Council at its meeting of May 11, 2016, in view of being promulgated and used throughout the entire Society of Mary. It is up to each Unit, therefore, to determine how to distribute it and to those in charge of vocation ministry, together with their teams, to make it a reference point for reflection and action. They will need to involve all the communities and all the brothers, each one having an active role to play in this domain. They must also think about the most effective way to include other members of the Marianist Family, as well as our lay co-workers in this reflection.

If these pages have finally been written, it is thanks to the reflection undertaken with many among you over these last years, and it is also the fruit of many exchanges on this topic in the General Council, very often beginning with the actual situation we have observed in our Units. May these pages now be an encouragement to our common commitment, with faith, intelligence and enthusiasm, so that the Society of Mary might accomplish the ardent desire of our Founder in being “a man who does not die.”²

Rome, May 31, 2016

Fr. André Fétis, SM
Assistant General for Religious Life

¹ *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, November 21, 2014, §§I.1-3.

² Chaminade, W. J., “Answer to the Objections...,” Vol. I, Doc. 154, 23.

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Guide for Formation in the Society of Mary, 1997

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International Meeting of Marianists in Charge of Vocations (June 30 – July 6, 1999)

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FOSTERING NEW VOCATIONS³

A REFLECTION PAPER ON VOCATION MINISTRY AND INITIAL DISCERNMENT IN THE SOCIETY OF MARY

I) DEFINING THE FRAMEWORK

PROPOSAL:

Starting from an understanding of life as vocation, and of vocation as a call from God orienting the entire existence of those whom he addresses, define the meaning that we want to give to vocation ministry. Look at the influence, whether positive or not, that is exercised by the context within which it will be developed, and strengthen our own faith convictions.

1. VOCATION MINISTRY: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

What is meant when the expression "vocation ministry" is used? The expression is used in many different ways, so that a reflection on this term is a necessary preliminary step. It is especially appropriate to think about what is meant when speaking of "vocation."

1.1. Vocation as a personal life project

Modern times have accustomed us to placing human subjectivity at the center. Often, then, vocation is considered to be a personal project and personal decision. That view would tend to favor a vocation ministry based upon attraction, proselytism, and a kind of marketing, convinced that one must encourage a youth to look at this option. Thus, our product must "be sold" in such a way as to convince him that our religious life is something he needs. The image that we present, as religious, is therefore essential. The personal happiness and personal achievement of the candidate are the fundamental criteria and, at the time of discerning his aptitude for the religious life, his talents or competencies become influential criteria. Indeed, our religious life must be attractive, but we need to think about the elements which should be at the root of that attractiveness. Remember that what has just been described is sometimes influencing the way we, ourselves, view a religious vocation. It is a concept of vocation which also filters into the processes of formation.

1.2. Vocation is a call from God

A vocation is not a personal project, even if it does radically orient the life of the person called. Bringing it to birth depends not upon us, but upon God. Our role is to help each one to understand it and to respond to it.

Vocation ministry is, therefore, centered upon the experience of one's encounter with God, upon coming to understand God's call. As such, it works at developing the capacities for listening and response. Without losing sight of their importance, the human qualities of the

³ RL 6.7.

candidate become secondary matters in relation to God's own criteria, always marked by love and freedom.⁴

God's call is addressed to a person for his own good and for that of others, inseparably. Vocation cannot be separated from its communitarian and missionary dimensions. To respond positively to the call received is to commit oneself to a path towards giving one's life in the service of others and of God, against any form of self-centeredness.

1.3. Vocation ministry

Because a vocation comes from God's call, vocation ministry consists in helping each person to identify it and to respond to it. Such ministry also consists in making known the Marianist religious life, as a possible form of that call, and of the corresponding response. Finally, it encourages prayer, so that God might continue to call, but also so that those addressed, as well as the members of the Congregation, might accept their own responsibilities that flow from the exercise of this ministry.

The components of this ministry will be discussed later.

Increasing vocations is not the primary objective of our activity, which consists in making Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, known, loved and served. Yet, it is, nevertheless, one important aspect of this work. It is a natural fruit of all our activity and so we are called to welcome and care for these vocations, so that they might come to maturity. These fruits, these vocations, are signs of God's grace and vitality offered as a result of missionary generosity, and it is thanks to them that our activity will be able to last and to develop. A right and healthy relationship between missionary activity and vocation ministry helps in carrying out both the one and the other. This can, therefore, be a topic worthy of our reflection.

2. A SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Ministry in general, and especially that of vocations, depends upon the context where it is carried out. It is integrated into that context, and finds its support or its challenges there. It strengthens or confronts that context, bringing about – thanks to the Gospel and under the influence of the Holy Spirit – a transformation of that context. For that reason, the study and the understanding of the context are necessary prerequisites to the Church's activity, and especially to the pastoral care of vocations.

2.1. The human, cultural and social context

In general:

What are its characteristics; the strong points and the weak ones; the specific challenges? What kind of human existence flows from it? What anthropological view underlies it? How is this terrain favorable or unfavorable for welcoming the Gospel and Christian life, religious life?

The situation of youth:

Are there certain characteristics proper to the world of youth? Do these particular elements come from the differences between generations or do they indicate the germination of new aspects to be developed later? Etc. ...

An attentive and rather detailed analysis of this context at these two levels needs to be constantly renewed, in order to adapt the proposal to the current situation, given its inherent strengths and weaknesses.

2.2. The spiritual, Christian and ecclesial situation

⁴ Think, for example, about God's choice of David: 1 Sm 16:1-13, or of the Apostles.

What is the surrounding spiritual context: its richness, fervor, trends, strengths, poverties..., including with regard to other religions and Christian denominations? What is going on in Christian life and Church life? These points of support or weakness make their mark upon Christians who may be candidates.

2.3. Marianist religious life here and now

Vocation ministry is set up in reference to a concrete context of Marianist religious life. From there, it must draw the inspiration for its action. While taking account of its potential and real possibility for growth, we are calling persons to Marianist religious life as it actually exists today (persons, places, apostolic activities, . . .) and not to such as we, or the candidates, might wish it to be.

Nevertheless, since religious life also involves a supernatural dimension, our discernment of the situation is also enlightened by a faith perspective.

3. PRIOR CONVICTIONS

Vocation ministry rests upon a certain number of fundamental convictions: God calls today; "Every life is vocation"; the Marianist Charism is a gift for the entire Church. Yet, it can also be affected by the absence of such convictions, or by ambivalent motivations: fear of dying; lust for power, etc.

To strengthen our convictions, purify and clarify our motivations, and to nourish those that are legitimate, is the task of every Marianist with the help of the person in charge of vocations in the Unit. By attending to these convictions and motivations, our ministry will also gain strength. This is not a point to be neglected.

A good understanding of the nature of vocation ministry, an accurate knowledge of the context and of good motivations help to define what can promote Marianist religious vocations. That is what we will discuss next.

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT

What understanding of vocation underlies our ministry at the level of the Unit and of the communities? Would understanding it, above all, as a call received from God, require us to modify certain elements of that ministry? How can we describe the context within which we develop it? Upon what convictions can we or should we rely?

II) FIRST FIELD OF ACTION: STRENGTHENING THE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE VOCATIONS POSSIBLE

PROPOSAL :

To allow for each individual to experience a personal encounter with Christ, we unify our ministry according to an overall plan, nourished by the Marianist Charism, bringing together all the energies of the religious and the laity.

What are the conditions which encourage one's acceptance of a vocation and its taking root? In being attentive to those conditions, and in strengthening those that favor it, we can lay the foundations necessary for vocation ministry. Without these foundations, that ministry risks remaining unproductive.

Situations vary from one country to the next, and each community must always act in a way that is adapted and realistic. So, it is very necessary to observe the context. The characteristics and the particular needs of children and youth must occupy a special place in that reflection and that activity.

1. ON THE HUMAN PLANE

The supernatural life is supported by the human situation: the development of the latter is therefore necessary for the former. As we have already indicated, individuals are inserted within **a context** which strongly influences them, and with which it is necessary to be well-acquainted. Some areas include:

- The social situation: social stability; tensions or violence; poverty, wealth; unity, divisions; openness, clannishness/tribalism; --
- The family, the natural ambiance for growth of the personality: stability, unity; strengths and weaknesses, ...
- Dominant virtues or weaknesses: courage/timidity; frankness/duplicity; generosity/self-centeredness; altruism/individualism, ...
- The quality of intellectual, professional training, ...

To these collective tendencies are added the personal characteristics of each individual in these various areas. It is important that our activity take account of these facts, of their strong and weak points and that, starting from there, it have **a goal**: What is to be done first and foremost, here and now?

To that end, we must allow ourselves to be guided by **a Christian anthropology**. The Christian vocation is, naturally, integrated within that anthropology, which contains both elements that are uniquely Christian, as well as many elements that are shared with other faiths. The infinite value of the person, God's creature, and his openness to both interiority and the transcendent, are two fundamental axes of that anthropology. These must, therefore, be at the center of all our concerns about this topic. It is good, also, that there be a dialog between this Christian anthropology and the anthropology that exists within the local culture in order to evaluate strengths and weaknesses. Enlightened by the gospel parables of the sower, we have to give a lot of care to **the soil** which receives God's action and the specific call to the baptized life.⁵

What is our activity at this level? Does it respond to the actual needs? Should we innovate? Is our analysis of the current situation accurate? And our understanding of human nature (anthropology)?

2. ON THE CHRISTIAN PLANE

The analysis of the context lets us understand the surrounding Christian environment, with its strong and weak points, its elements that encourage or discourage evangelization and the Christian experience. This also allows us to see how the Church, or we ourselves, respond to those situations.

One central element, nevertheless, serves to relativize a bit these first givens: the encounter with Christ. "I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but

⁵ Article 8 of the *Guide to Formation in the Society of Mary* defines some important qualities for the growth of a religious vocation.

According to the context of each locality, certain qualities can take on a particular importance: honesty in an environment of corruption; stability in a changing milieu; etc.....

the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁶ Upon that element depend all the others: without that personal encounter, or if it is too superficial, the house will be built upon sand and run the risk of collapse (cf. Mt 7:24-27). Facilitating or deepening the encounter of each one with Christ should be at the heart of our activity. Verifying the solidity of what we are proposing is fundamental: How can vocation ministry even be thought of, if we don't make the Master of the harvest known?

Which ministry? What are our proposals for supporting for that encounter, within our given context, following the three traditional and fundamental axes of evangelization: proclamation, celebration, service? How can we balance these three dimensions?⁷ Are they assured in a satisfactory manner? Do our activities bear the expected fruits?

Some typical characteristics that guide this Marianist pastoral work which we undertake:

- The place of Mary, whom we want to make known, loved and served, and who is our privileged path towards Christ.
- The importance of the communitarian dimension of faith: evangelization through and in view of the community.
- Evangelization by attraction (multiplying Christians).
- Dialogue among culture, faith and justice (illustrated by the Three Offices: faith, culture, economy).

A common pastoral plan at the Unit level is a great help in setting the missionary priorities according to which we want to act. It translates our missionary charism into reality. It is our way of laboring at the harvest, to which we wish to welcome new workers.

That common plan can be applied and adapted at the level of each community and of each work, so that all the brothers are engaged in putting it into practice. If such is the case, the *raison d'être* of the religious life appears more clearly, and it is easier to call others to it. Lay persons also can join their energies to ours and collaborate in the same mission, reflecting a diversity of vocations.

3. EDUCATION, YOUTH MINISTRY, AND VOCATION MINISTRY

All this reflection has put into greater relief the deep bonds that link humanistic and religious education to vocation ministry, at the heart of which they are naturally integrated. A serious vocation ministry, therefore, one which does not want to limit itself to mere recruitment, cannot exist without a solid plan for humanistic and religious education, especially at the level of youth. In turn, vocational ministry enriches that plan with the educational appropriateness of its reflections. Without it, the plan would lose its cutting edge. Far from being in competition, the two aspects support each other and enrich each other, as we shall see later, while continuing our reflections. As the group of European religious in charge of vocations stated in 1997: “The Pastoral work for vocations is the vocation of pastoral work.”⁸

⁶ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 7, citing Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas est* (December 25, 2005), 1.

⁷ A proclamation without celebration or service never takes root; a celebration without proclamation or service risks staying on the level of feelings; service without proclamation or celebration transforms the Church into an NGO.

⁸ PONTIFICAL WORK FOR ECCLESIASTICAL VOCATIONS: NEW VOCATIONS FOR A NEW EUROPE (In Verbo tuo...), Rome: 1997, 26b:
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia//congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_06011998_new-vocations_en.html

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT:

Where is our ministry in this regard? Is it guided by an overall plan? Is it really Marianist? Does it allow for real evangelization and an effective encounter with Christ? Given that purpose, where does it stand with proclamation, celebration, service? How is it presented to the local Christian community?

III) SECOND FIELD OF ACTION: MAKING THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE MARIANIST RELIGIOUS LIFE KNOWN

PROPOSAL:

Lead each one to think of his life as a response to a series of calls that orient him towards the fulfillment of his vocation. Make the particular elements of the Marianist religious life understood as a possible form of that call and of his response.

The religious life, and the Marianist life in particular, is often very little understood or quite misunderstood. Making it known and understood, and eliminating any misunderstandings, is an indispensable task of vocation ministry. It is also indispensable in order to permit everyone to understand and to welcome this gift of God to the world and to the Church.

For that task, here are some possible strategies, theoretical and practical, based upon testimony and experience. They are meant to be adapted and complemented according to the context in each Zone, Unit, community or work.

1. EVERY LIFE IS A VOCATION

This conviction helps us to introduce reflection about vocation as an integral part of pastoral care and as a service rendered to each individual, including non-Christians.

Human life may be presented as a succession of responses to calls that can be momentary (and generally reversible), more stable and demanding, or even definitive. Each person is called to prepare or to support his definitive choices by his every day choices or by those choices more long-term in nature.

Specifically, the Christian life is a response to the call received from God, recognized and accepted in baptism. The other decisions which guide one's life flow from that same call, such as it reveals itself all along the stages of one's existence.

For those who do not share our faith, the understanding of life as vocation means recognizing that the fundamental choices of a life can't be made uniquely in terms of oneself, but that every life carries a dimension of call and response. Thus, by listening to others and to the calls of the world, each one is encouraged to go out of himself and beyond his own comfort zone, to enter into the dimension of self-gift.

Listening, welcoming calls, discerning them, and the implementation that follows from them, concern everyone, each according to his level of listening and response. We want to accompany each person in this process, in order to encourage good listening and responses in harmony

with one's own personal vocation. We are also called to be the ear which helps to hear and the voice which echoes the consequence of that listening.

Now we must consider how to respond to the more personal call that God addresses the candidate.

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT:

How can that vocational dimension be introduced into our pastoral care, both with non-Christians and with Christians? How can we encourage attitudes of listening and of acceptance of the calls?

2. THERE IS A DIVERSITY OF VOCATIONS

The Church, a gathering of those whom God has called to it, is a Body where the vocations are varied and arranged harmoniously by the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Cor 12:1-30) who raises them up for the good of all. Those in charge of the community authenticate the calls of God and watch over the harmony of the Body.

Vocation ministry must, in the first place, present the variety of vocations, clear up any misunderstandings about them, and stress their complementarity in the Church. Variety does not cause confusion but, on the contrary, stresses what is special to each one of them. Each person can thus be happy with his own vocation while respecting those of others.

3. PRESENTING THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious are the primary persons responsible for an accurate understanding of what is specific to the religious vocation, by Christians in particular, but also in society at large.

The religious life is not a theory, but a praxis, the best presentation of which is that which allows one to experience how it is lived by direct contact with its brotherliness, life, apostolate, prayer, ... So that the specific elements of the religious life appear more clearly, it is good to contrast it with other vocations by having persons representing the variety of states of life participate in the presentation. These persons can stress what the religious life means when considered from their own identity.

4. PRESENTING THE MARIANIST RELIGIOUS LIFE

Everything we have said applies also to the Marianist religious life. The Marianist Charism offers a specific path for living the life of a baptized person. It is based upon several characteristics (the imitation of Christ and service to the mission in the alliance with Mary, the importance of community, faith, ...).

- It is embodied in a diversity of vocations: laity, consecrated seculars, lay or priestly religious.
- Each vocation is fully understood in relation to the others and "in view of the good of all" (1 Cor 12:7).

The Marianist Family offers us the opportunity to present simultaneously what is specific to the baptismal life lived according to the Marianist Charism, and the variety of vocations that embody it, each with its own corresponding elements. Thus, collaboration with the other branches is very beneficial for each one of them.

Mixed composition is one of the fundamental distinguishing marks of the masculine Marianist religious life. “There is only one Marianist vocation” (RL 12) which is embodied in two specific paths: the lay consecrated life (brother) or the sacerdotal life (priest), with equal rights and duties (RL 12), at the service of one unique communitarian mission where the two paths are involved, in a complementary way, in preferred types of activities (Cf. RL 13). During his first contacts, a candidate is called to discover, essentially through direct contact with the religious and with our communities, the richness of this “characteristic trait” which constitutes “a treasure for the entire Church.” It is, therefore, above all, through observation and a lived experience, that he will enter little by little into that mentality. It is also at this point that he will have to accept that an effective discernment of his personal orientation (towards consecrated lay life or towards priesthood) cannot be done rapidly, but rather carried out much later, at the time of asking for perpetual vows. The accent in this first stage is placed upon the discovery of the oneness of the Marianist vocation and of the diversity of ways of embodying it. The candidate’s reaction to this particular element and to the specific method of discernment offer one important criterion for evaluating his suitability for the Marianist life. As the General Chapter of 2012 puts it: “Is he open to guidance and formation from formators and superiors in the choice and development of his vocation (either as a lay religious or religious priest), who will ultimately have to authorize his personal orientation toward lay religious life or religious priesthood?”⁹

The specifics of the Marianist Charism and religious life are better understood in comparison with other charisms. A part of vocation ministry, therefore, can be carried out in collaboration with other religious congregations. It might also be worthwhile to observe the diversity of the bonds which link each one to his spiritual family in order to highlight how determining for our identity is the specific bond which we maintain with the Marianist Family.

LET’S THINK ABOUT IT:

When and how can we present the variety of vocations, the religious vocation and the Marianist religious vocation? What can we propose, beyond the necessary theory, for sharing something of the lived experience? How can we be the ear that helps someone listen to the calls and then be the voice which echoes those calls?

5. A HEALTHY BALANCE

A well-situated vocation ministry surely enables its practice without reticence and without excesses. It can, therefore, prove opportune for all our pastoral work. If we take the time to think carefully about it, we can profit from the advantages and avoid the dangers, freeing ourselves both from inhibitive fears as well as from the perils of excess.

What we don’t want is to construct a ministry which would be exclusively concerned with Marianist vocations. That would be, certainly, a con that could easily turn into manipulation, contrary to the interest of the persons.

On the contrary, we are happy that vocation ministry offers an opportunity to consider all ministry in its vocational dimension, each person being invited to consider his life as a response to the calls he receives and, more deeply, to the central call of his life which he can consider as being his vocation. It is, therefore, an opportunity that we are offering to each person to better

⁹ *To Enliven the Fire...*, 22.a.3.

orient his life with freedom and responsibility, understanding that a human life is always an experience of call and response.

Human mediations play a great role in that process of coming to awareness of one's call. We must not disdain the intermediate forms of the call which invite each one to respond to one's conscience, to the needs of the world and of human dignity, to the call to a morally higher life. For Christians, the matter in question is to learn to discover the God's call, present at the heart of every human life, whether it manifests itself directly or through mediations. Still further, beyond discovering the call, one must also discover Him who is the Caller.

That understanding of "life as vocation" seems to be applicable to everyone and offers a corrective alternative to a self-centered concept of life. The European meeting on vocations in 1998 synthesized it in a beautiful formula: "The vocation of all pastoral ministry is vocation ministry."

IV) THIRD FIELD OF ACTION: PRAYING, CALLING, ACCOMPANYING AND DISCERNING

PROPOSAL:

Carry out our vocational activity along four axes: praying, calling, accompanying and discerning.

Four principal areas await our action. Let us consider them, one by one:

1. PRAYING

Prayer is an important element of vocation ministry. It responds to the express wish of Christ: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38).

An evangelical prayer. Prayer is a sign of hope for God's action and man's capacity to respond. It cannot simply be an activity inspired by anxiety about tomorrow's uncertainties. Rather, it is a time to let God transform us in order to know how to call us according to his wish and in his way, so that his Kingdom might come and his will be done. It can't be just a way of dumping on God what is our responsibility. On the contrary, prayer commits the person who pronounces it to carry out his own part so that what he asks for might be possible.

Alone or in a group. Prayer can be individual or collective. It can also be associated with specific actions (fasting, pilgrimage, ...). The offering of difficulties and sufferings has a particular value and it is important to express our gratitude and our encouragement to our elderly or sick brothers for their collaboration with us. We can also invite others to pray with us, thus sharing with them our conviction that God continues to call. Lay persons are often very available for that. There are some beautiful initiatives among us or around us (cf. the Invisible Monasteries, *En-redate*, ...).

Tools. It is good to be able to use some tools to support prayer: a well prepared common prayer, intentions, an electronic bulletin, a Facebook page, Regular contacts encourage further engagement.

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT:

What are we doing, or what could we do, to support and encourage an evangelical prayer for vocations, among the brothers, in the Marianist Family, with other Christians?

2. CALLING

If the Christian life is a response to a call from God, then we are touching upon a constitutive factor of our identity. Pastoral care helps each one respond to that call in his own life, with these characteristics:

2.1 From one call to another

The demands of daily life prepare one's response to the more defining calls of one's life, those which commit to the long term. Each choice is part of a response given, little by little, according to one's surroundings, enlightened by conscience and by God. Human life is an on-going series of choices, the more important ones building upon the more ad hoc ones, or eliciting them. Helping one to become aware of his daily choices and their consequences, then moving gradually towards more definitive choices, is a part of vocation ministry. Forming the will and the moral conscience are two means for helping in that task.

Some methods that can help:

- Leading a reflection about the importance of choices in life.
- Offering activities that encourage commitment and fidelity, generosity, a sense of service, courage, openness to others, ...
 - Charitable or service activities
 - Christian commitments: groups, movements
- Times for listening and encountering God ... celebrations, prayer times, sharing about the Word of God, ...

Invite youth to choose and then take on responsibilities, at the level of their capacities, and in all possible areas. Dialogue preceding choice, discussion of motivations – above all service to others or to God, more than personal fulfillment, – review of praxis, are all means for leading reflection about motivations for life and commitment.

Taking on responsibility in religious areas helps to perceive the irreplaceable role each person has in helping others to know and follow God, in response to the missionary call of Christ addressed to all his disciples. Accompaniment for that responsibility is important.

2.2 Witnessing and not proselytism

“It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction,” as Pope Francis reminds us, citing Benedict XVI.¹⁰ How do we live our own vocation, personally and as a community? Is it really religious life that we are living? Are our lives and our mission conformed to the spirit of our foundation? Is the presence of God manifest in the midst of us? Are we visible and accessible as individual religious and as a community? What is our relationship with those around us? Do we bear witness to joy? Each brother has a role to play, each life is the witness of the gift received through God's call. The brothers can attest to the joy of a long fidelity, in contrast to today's tendencies of avoiding long commitments.

We know, nevertheless, that many aspects of our life provoke questions in those who observe us because of:

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter ... to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of the Consecrated Life*, II.1.

- The manifest presence of Christ and Mary,
- A life-style marked by chastity, poverty and obedience,
- Our fraternal life,
- The carrying out of the mission wherever He tells us to go, especially among the young and the poor,
- Our mission with and at the heart of a diverse spiritual family.

These, too, form a part of our witnessing.

2.3 The call to total consecration

The religious community having assumed this responsibility for witnessing, and with frequent evaluation of this commitment, *de facto* serves as an invitation for certain individuals to consider for themselves directly the question of God's plan for their lives. That can be done on an individual basis, when the circumstances so lend themselves, or it can also be done in a more collective form during specific times for discovery of the religious life and of discernment:

- Times of contact with religious life, with sharing,
- Meetings with the community: meals, prayers, open house, visits, stays, "come and see" experiences...
- Times of reflection and discernment,
-

2.4 Target audience:

Whom shall we call?

With every life being a vocation, everyone is a possible target audience for this pastoral attention, under one form or another. The challenge would be to find a form adapted to each person and to each situation.

When the question arises regarding a call to a more specific vocation, and to that of the religious life, the circle is necessarily more restricted. Nevertheless, it would be useful for us to ponder whether or not we sometimes "sin" by default: do we put too many limits on God's grace? Does our selection rest more upon human considerations than upon spiritual ones? Surveys show that the number of young persons who have considered religious life at some moment or other is higher than we might believe. Doesn't God sometimes choose those whom we haven't even thought about? Has he not come to call sinners, and not the righteous? Has he not sometimes called even unbelievers or members of other religions? Would we have invited the 12 apostles, or Saul of Tarsus, to a vocational discernment? Shouldn't we offer more widely to young people some additional steps towards commitment and discernment?

Sometimes, we can also sin (and fish!) by excess. We are ready to welcome everyone with very little exigency or discernment. Being a good boy with good qualities (intelligence, kindness, dedication, efficiency, culture, ...) is not a guarantee of vocation. To accept into the religious life someone who is not made for it, is an injustice against that person, who will never be happy, and against the Congregation that will be weakened in such a case.

Our ministry must permit each person to respond to his own vocation, allowing all those whom God calls to the religious life to hear that call and to respond to it. In other words, we search only for those truly called by God; "neither more," by discerning their vocations with rigor; "nor less," by avoiding putting limits on the grace of God.

2.5 A preferred terrain: the places where the Society of Mary and the Marianist Family are present.

What has been said up to now easily shows the advantage of prioritizing the approach to those who are already closest to us and have the most possibilities of being well acquainted with our Marianist identity: charism, spirit, life, apostolate. When this contact with the religious happens, then an immediate knowledge of Marianist religious life is added. Contact with another branch also offers many possibilities. This is the most natural and normal way for making who we are and what we do understood and appreciated. A very large proportion of those who have become religious in the course of our two centuries of existence have had such an experience. That seems to say that God himself willingly uses this path for leading a young person to discover his vocation.

Our works, and the places we habitually frequent with visibility, are those which allow us to work at the conditions favoring the possibility of sowing and the growth of a Marianist vocation (See above, Chapter II). It is also there that we will be most at ease in making the Marianist religious life known (See above, Chapter III). That, too, corresponds to Pope Francis' invitation to call more by attraction than by proselytism. Since it is possible to profit from length of time and repetition, these places offer the possibility of a slow implantation of the call and a development of the response to it.

It is always surprising when we see that the vocation ministry of many Units largely ignores this preferred terrain: our apostolic works and the places where there is an effective presence of one of the branches of the Marianist Family. It is not a rare occurrence to see that no type of vocation ministry is being carried out in our own works. All the plans of the vocation ministry of each Unit should list as a priority what will be done in these works and in these places. We should recall what our *Rule of Life* says about the choice of works: "We choose, by preference, those works which form apostles, stimulate religious vocations, and benefit by our community action and our mixed composition" (RL 73).

2.6 Vocation ministry beyond our own works or places where the Marianist Family is present.

This activity is not to be excluded, above all because God calls without setting boundaries or limits. Yet, it needs to be undertaken with the awareness of the drawback of not benefiting from the advantages described above (Cf. 2.5) and with an intentional effort, therefore, to compensate for this drawback. The recruitment of candidates who are not near to us can make it more difficult to come to a good understanding of the nature of the religious life and of the Marianist religious life. Our mixed composition is at risk to suffer, if the only solid previous reference point is that of the diocesan clergy, their life-style and mission, as admirable as they might be.

Accompanying candidates who have not had any previous contact with our works, our communities, or with the Marianist Family, and whose acquaintance with the religious life is sometimes too superficial, requires the development of a specific path that will give them sufficient understanding of these previously missing elements (for example, by more prolonged contacts with our communities or our works, live-in visits, contact with other, non-Marianist, religious communities, for those who live far from our establishments, etc.).

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT:

How can we convey the call? How should we do it, and not do it, in our works and beyond our works? What are the means and occasions to make each life be perceived as a life

called to give a response? How can we show our religious life as understandable and desirable? What concrete projects can we carry out and with whom? What kind of collaboration can be envisaged with the other branches of the Marianist Family?

3. ACCOMPANYING

He who receives God's call must learn to welcome it and respond to it. The primary means for helping him is to accompany him. The well-known example of the vocation of the young Samuel (1 Sm 3) shows how important it is that he who believes he has received the call from God find at his side a wise person to enlighten him along that road. That is true at the beginning, but also throughout life: accompaniment helps one to remain attentive and faithful.

The external listening by the person accompanying helps the traveler to:

- clarify what he perceives by talking it out;
- recognize, through his intermediary, that a vocation is never a uniquely personal matter, but that it is delimited under the eye of and with the approval of the Church,
- accept, through this dialogue and this common listening, the personal challenges that arise from that call (conversions, maturations, decisions, commitments, ...)

Various types of accompaniment are possible:

- In daily life, through attention to God's working in their hearts: signs of interest or curiosity, profound questioning, aspirations to generosity, etc. That attention allows the identification of those who may be interested in a more profound reflection.
- With those who have manifested interest (spontaneously or at our asking), through personal and periodic dialogue or through times of collective reflection.
- A progressive discernment for those who have become aware within themselves of a possible call from God. This will be the topic of the following section.

Setting up appropriate occasions:

- An "open door" policy: as practiced by Father Chaminade at the time of the Sodality in Bordeaux ("One must always be at home, the door open to all comers, completely at the disposal of each one as though having nothing else to do" (*The Chaminade Legacy* I.154 [22])).
- Informal meetings, activities of groups, sports teams and other teams..., associations or movements, camps, workplaces, The time devoted to this type of activity is extremely important from an educational and vocational perspective.
- A welcoming community: this collective link completes and facilitates individual accompaniment. It combines informal occasions and specific times, shorter or longer, of the "come and see" meetings. The misunderstanding of our actual living is one of the obstacles for vocation ministry.
- Sharing of missionary activities in which youth are invited to take on increasing responsibilities.

Retreats

- Because God is one who calls, retreats are important moments for this ministry.

As we already mentioned in the previous section, the accompaniment of candidates without previous prolonged contact with us requires particular attention. It is, therefore, appropriate to implement specific proposals of accompaniment of these candidates. A vocation which has not had time to become solidly rooted before undertaking the trajectory of formation can be lastingly weakened.

4. DISCERNING

There is another way of helping someone to accept and understand God's call. Discernment is exercised both by the person called and by the one accompanying him, in dialogue. The one accompanying contributes to it in order to help the candidate, but also as a service to the Congregation.

Jesus himself played this role, reacting in different ways, posing demands that were accepted or not (Lk 9:57-59; Mt 19:16-22), proposing a new life-orientation (Mt 5:18-19) or calling to his following those who had manifested the desire or had not (Jn 1:38-39, 42; Mt 9:9; Jn 1:43).

Discernment is based in part on external criteria: attitudes, sociability, coherence, stability, transparency, sense of responsibility, etc. It is good, therefore, to be acquainted with the aspirant in real life situations. Certain contexts are very revealing of the personality: team sports, manual teamwork, group living (as member or animator), contact with the sick and the poor, etc. Within that framework, the candidate can better know himself and be known. So it may be necessary to set up these occasions in order to facilitate the discernment.

Discernment is also based upon an inner listening to God and a reflection about the events in one's life. The candidate needs to be encouraged in his life of prayer, in listening to the Word of God, in the frequent partaking of the sacraments and his involvement in a stable Christian community, especially in a parish. The dialogue with the person accompanying him assists his acceptance and understanding regarding what is going on in his life.

It is desirable that each Unit establish a discernment protocol that emphasizes the important points to be given attention by the person who does the accompanying.

The discernment of a candidate's vocation seeks the **answers to three questions**: Is there a vocation to a life consecrated to God? Is there a vocation to the religious life? Is there a vocation to the Marianist religious life? These three questions have a logical order because a negative response to the first determines the other two. It is important to be attentive to the real fundamental Christian life of a candidate, to his relationship with Christ, with Mary, and his attendance at Church. But they are also simultaneous because the signs of the call to the religious life and to the Marianist religious life can reveal themselves all along the way, or the contrary.

This stage is described more precisely in the *Guide for Formation in the Society of Mary*, nos. 56-67 (purpose, signs, contents, means, activities, persons responsible, guide lines). Nos. 68-71 also present some criteria for admission to the Prenovitiate and thus allow for a good connection between the two teams in charge and between the two stages, initial discernment and pre-novitiate, which is essential for the success of the one as well as of the other. Everyone is, therefore, invited to review that document for the task of accompaniment and of personal discernment.

Since the call does not come from within the candidate himself, but from the challenge he receives from God, it is not rare that all kinds of resistances to the call show up, be it in the form of a total “No!” or of all sorts of compromises. It is important to be aware of this in order to know how to discern in those resistances the signs of whether a vocation is absent or not. The stories of calls related in the Bible frequently mention such difficulties; they can help the person accompanying to refine his discernment on this point. For that reason, an important part of vocation ministry and personal accompaniment consists in facilitating the freedom of the candidate’s response in the face of external or internal obstacles that show up for him. The obstacles described by our Founder with regard to the virtues of purification in his *Method of Virtues*, and his proposals for responding to them, can offer some important elements for accompanying such difficulties.

LET’S THINK ABOUT IT:

What are our competencies for accompanying and discerning vocations?

How is formation to be done and by whom?

Does our Unit have clear criteria for orientation and accompaniment?

What connection is to be established with the other levels of formation, especially with that of the Prenoventiate?

V) THE AGENTS

PROPOSAL:

Involve the greatest number of persons possible in this ministry, according to a common vision and seeing to a judicious distribution of each one’s contribution.

The agents of this ministry are varied and contribute in different ways. This diversity is a strength, but it presupposes good coordination and a common vision. Here we describe, very rapidly, the possible actors in this ministry. It would be very useful for each Unit, and each locale, to reflect upon the way of arranging that distribution of responsibilities so that the greatest number of persons might be associated with, and interested in, that activity, and that each one might have his appropriate place in it.

1. EVERYONE

Potentially all are concerned with vocation ministry: all should share contact with it, and appreciate its plan, its implementations and its results. All can deepen their own experience of life as response to a call and encourage that attitude among others. All can improve the human and religious context so that it becomes more open to certain humanistic values and to the presence of God. All can honor a vocation of consecration to God and encourage those who show a desire for it. Certain of these attitudes can be developed by every person of good will, even beyond his own faith options, or even by members of other religions who accept that collaboration with sincerity.

2. THOSE WHO COLLABORATE WITH US FOR THE MISSION

That collaboration gives them a competence and a particular interest in working with us at this task. Curiously, it is an area in which we rarely ask for their cooperation. People say that many persons want a strengthening of the presence of the religious, but almost all think that vocational activity is an area reserved only to the professed religious. Correcting their ideas and engaging them to work at it with us would be great progress.

3. THE MARIANIST FAMILY

It is no longer possible today to engage in a vocation ministry that is not, in part at least, thought out with the Marianist Family. It is in that context that our own vocation becomes understandable and original: we are religious Marianists at the heart of a Family in which the bonds that unite us are designed differently from those of other spiritual families. It is a part of our identity that we cannot hide without deforming who we are. The growth of each of the branches is the best guarantee of the dynamism of the other branches.

We are together responsible for that task and for all that promotes it, with one another and for one another. We need to think about that and to find common activities, presenting each vocation within the Marianist Family as four different paths, but united in responding to our primary call in baptism.

4. THE RELIGIOUS

Every brother should, with no exceptions, work at it. Our *Rule of Life* makes it a duty for us to profit from all occasions in order to spread our Charism (RL 5.4), especially in favoring the development of the other branches (RL 5.6; 1.1 – 1.3), but also in forming new religious vocations (RL 73; 5.7; 5.23). Everyone, therefore, must be impregnated with the vision of the pastoral and vocational ministry of their Unit and associate themselves with it, according to their capacities.

The witness of the community, its religious and missionary fervor, its openness and receptiveness, and its joy, are the primary elements of vocation ministry. That common witness relies upon each brother. That is how vocation ministry can be done by attraction and not by proselytism. It is the manifest presence of God at the heart of its life and of its activity that, more than anything else, makes a community attractive, whatever be its median age,¹¹ Also important is the capacity to unite, in one same fraternal life, a diversity of ages, of temperaments, of nations or of cultures. We need not seek to meet worldly criteria that praise only youth, power and the commodities of life. In following its Master, the religious life takes a completely different route.

In all that, the Congregation must bear witness, through the life of its members, that it is capable of offering a framework which genuinely allows for listening to God and for responding to his call and that, as Father Chaminade himself put it, the Society of Mary is capable not only of raising “each of its members to religious perfection”¹² and of presenting “the spectacle of a people of saints,”¹³ but also of making our life serve the humanistic and spiritual good of the greatest number.¹⁴

5. THE VOCATIONS COMMITTEE OF THE UNIT

This is the driving element of vocation ministry. As its primary responsibility, it works out the plan, the program and the activities. It makes them known to the brothers and to all who are associated with this ministry. It provides dynamism and coordination of the activities that it carries out itself or delegates to others. It works at integrating the greatest number of persons possible in this ministry and sees to an appropriate distribution of tasks among them. Optimally it does not include only young brothers and it seeks to collaborate with the other branches. It relies upon local delegates, or sometimes it is these delegates who make up the committee.

6. THE UNIT DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS

He is named by the Unit Superior. The length of his mandate and his responsibilities must be clearly established. It is desirable that changes of responsibilities be infrequent in order to assure a certain stability in this ministry.

¹¹ Cf. RL 34-38; 59; *To Enlighten the Fire...*, 31.d: “The witness of a long life of joyful fidelity is an attractive dimension to our vocational ministry.”

¹² Constitutions of the Society of Mary [1839], art. 1.

¹³ Chaminade, William Joseph, *Letters* no. 388 to Pierre Bienvenu Noailles, February 15, 1826.

¹⁴ This is what Father Chaminade intended to express in the goal of laboring “in the world at the salvation of souls” (Constitutions [1839], art. 1.

By virtue of his responsibility, he needs to have a good understanding of the nature of vocation, of the specifically Marianist religious vocation, and of the formation pedagogy of the Congregation. Fundamental concepts about personal accompaniment are very useful for him.

He coordinates the Vocations Committee of the Unit and supervises all the vocational activities in accord with the vocation ministry plan of the Unit. He is also attentive to the choice and formation of those who have to accompany the candidates. He stays in regular contact with the brother in charge of the Prenovitiato and he works in close collaboration with the Unit Assistant for Religious Life, who guides him in his work and sees to his formation.

He presents a report of the activities of the past year and plans/budgets for future activities, at least once a year, to the Unit Council and to the Unit Chapter. He draws upon their guidelines. He is in contact with inter-congregational organizations or with the national offices of vocation ministry and, if necessary, he represents the Congregation at those. Thanks to these contacts he facilitates the collaboration of his own Unit with these various groups, with the dioceses and with other congregations.

He is in contact with the leaders of the other Marianist branches, or with their person in charge of vocations, if they have one, in order to facilitate joint projects in vocation ministry. If one exists, he is a member of the vocation ministry council of the local Marianist Family.

He must have a personal acquaintance with all the candidates who are actually committed to a process of reflection with the Congregation. He is the one who presents to the Unit Council the candidates for the Prenovitiato by submitting a dossier that helps them to be clear in making their decision. His committee and he himself express clearly their opinion.

It is important that the vocation director be freed of other responsibilities in proportion to his task.

7. THE UNIT COUNCIL AND THE CHAPTER

The Council stays in constant dialogue with the vocation director since it is essential that there be a substantial unity of views between them. This dialogue goes especially through the Unit Assistant for Religious Life, who supervises his activities and keeps the Council informed about them. The Unit Superior names the vocation director of his Unit.

It is desirable that a report on vocation activities be submitted to each Chapter, if possible in the presence of the vocation director. The Chapter can give guidelines for the work of the director and of the vocations committee and encourage the collaboration of all the brothers of the Unit.

8. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTES AND WITH OTHER MARIANIST UNITS

Vocation ministry is an area of **collaboration among religious institutes**. It is possible to work together to make the religious life known, to promote its place in the Church and in society, for certain stages of discernment, for stressing the variety of charisms, for offering certain spiritual or apostolic experiences to candidates, for the formation of the agents of vocation ministry. It is useless to do alone what we can do better with many. This collaboration can give birth to initiatives at the local level or under a national coordination.

The international dimension is very present in today's culture, especially among youth. The international character of our Congregation constitutes a significant part of our identity and should play an increasing role in our vocation ministry. Many ways of collaborating are possible for implementing together certain stages of the ministry, for offering certain experiences of life or of discernment. Collaboration can begin to be implemented among neighboring Units and be extended to an entire Zone. Each Zone should have an exchange at

least annually on this topic for encouragement in this work, for learning about others' initiatives and for organizing certain joint projects. Some among them can take part in projects placed under the responsibility of the Zone, when it looks like that level can provide the best development for them. Certain meetings like the *World Youth Day* offer good possibilities for collaboration.

Certain Units no longer have enough dynamism to consistently maintain youth and vocation ministries, so this collaboration with others could give them a breath of fresh air. When one Unit can no longer accept or accompany candidates, it can continue a vocation ministry at the heart of a broader structure which would accept or accompany candidates. In this case, it would then be necessary to draw up the vocational and formational itinerary. A candidate can be invited to enter Marianist life in another Unit, according to an agreement established beforehand. No religious and no community, therefore, can feel themselves useless for vocation ministry.

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT:

Who is effectively committed to vocation ministry and how can we enlarge the group of those who work at it? What responsibility is to be confided to each individual in order to have the whole work harmoniously? Are those assigned to accompany the candidates in need of further formation?

VI) AN ACTIVITY THAT IS EVER NEW

Working for vocations means coming face to face with God's infinite creativity, with his capacity for renewal and innovation at the heart of the charism which he himself has raised up. Vocation ministry can never be a simple repetition or a work of preserving past securities. Neither does it ever tire of coming back to a task that is ever new, because of Him who is its source. Even if his faith and his hope can be put to the test by the difficulty of his job, one who is active in this ministry can never become disillusioned or sad because he is at the service of the God of life. Even when candidates are lacking, this ministry bears its fruits in allowing everyone to develop the awareness that God calls each individual, inviting them to listen and to respond to him with fidelity.

As Pope Francis put it in his evangelical exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (nos. 11-12):

Christ is the "eternal Gospel" (Rev 14:6); he "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is forever young and a constant source of newness. . . . With this newness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always "new."

Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord's work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. . . . [T]he

primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

1. TEXTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM ON VOCATION MINISTRY

VATICAN COUNCIL II

Perfectae Caritatis, Decree on the adaptation and renewal of Religious Life, 1965.

24. Priests and Christian educators should make serious efforts to foster religious vocations, thereby increasing the strength of the Church, corresponding to its needs. These candidates should be suitably and carefully chosen. In ordinary preaching, the life of the evangelical counsels and the religious state should be treated more frequently. Parents, too, should nurture and protect religious vocations in their children by instilling Christian virtue in their hearts.

Religious communities have the right to make themselves known in order to foster vocations and seek candidates. In doing this, however, they should observe the norms laid down by the Holy See and the local Ordinary. Religious should remember there is no better way than their own example to commend their institutes and gain candidates for the religious life.

Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964: 11; 32; 44.

11. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

32. Diversity of vocations and a common call to sanctity. "If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God. (*cf. 2 Pet 1:1*) And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need. Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. These in their turn should enthusiastically lend their joint assistance to their pastors and teachers. Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit". (*cf. 1 Cor 12:11*)

44. Nature and importance of the religious state in the Church.

POPES

ST. JOHN PAUL II

- *Vita Consecrata, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World, 1996*
 - 31: *Relationships between the different states of Christian life*
 - 32: *The special value of the consecrated life*
 - 64: *Fresh efforts in the promotion of vocations*
 - 105-107; 109: A call to pastors, to youth, to families, to consecrated persons.
- General Audience –October 19, 1994: "Prayer Is the Answer to the Vocation Shortage"
- Messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations,
 - 2001: "Life as a vocation" (September 14, 2000).
 - 2004: "Prayer for vocations" (November 23, 2003)

POPE FRANCIS

Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 2014.

II.1. We can apply to the consecrated life the words of Benedict XVI which I cited in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction" (No. 14). The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy! Similarly, the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.

Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 2013.

- 105-106: Youth ministry; make youth the protagonists of evangelization.
- 107: vocations and community fervor; motivations of candidates.
- 109: "Challenges exist to be overcome!"

Amoris laetitia, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on love in the family, 2016.

- Marriage as vocation (72; 88; 211), in the service of the vocation of the children (85).
- The family, place of transmission of the faith, of learning a missionary attitude (287, 289).
289. "Children who grow up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves."

Messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations,

- 2014: Vocations, Witness to the Truth.
- 2015: Exodus, a fundamental experience of vocation.

"At the root of every Christian vocation we find this basic movement, which is part of the experience of faith. Belief means transcending ourselves, leaving behind our comfort and the inflexibility of our ego in order to center our life in Jesus Christ. It means leaving, like

Abraham, our native place and going forward with trust, knowing that God will show us the way to a new land. (...) All of this is profoundly rooted in love. The Christian vocation is first and foremost a call to love, a love which attracts us and draws us out of ourselves, “decentering” us and triggering “an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God” (Deus Caritas Est, 6).”

- 2016: The Church, Mother of Vocations.

To the General Chapter of the Salesians, March 31, 2014:

The vocational dimension here is fundamental. Sometimes a vocation to the consecrated life is confused with a choice of volunteer work, and this distorted view is not good for Institutes. Next year — 2015 — which has been dedicated to the consecrated life, will be a favorable occasion to present its beauty to young people. Partial visions should always be avoided so as not to arouse vocational responses that are frail and based on weak motives. Apostolic vocations are ordinarily the result of good youth ministry. Caring for vocations requires specific attention: first prayer, then activities, personalized programs, courage in making the proposal, guidance and family involvement. The vocational geography has changed and is changing, and consequently more demanding formation, guidance and discernment is needed.

Other messages:

- Mass with the bishops, priests, religious, Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2013: "Call by God".
- Prayer vigil with the youth of the World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2013: "The Lord needs you! Today too, he is calling each of you to follow him in his Church and to be missionaries."
- Meeting with WYD volunteers, July 28, 2013: "God calls you to make definitive choices".
- Dialogue with the religious participating in the Jubilee of the Consecrated Life (dialogue): 1st February 1, 2016 : discernment; hope; prayer.
- Audience to young consecrated persons, September 17, 2015: Dangers of “the culture of the provisional.”

CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Potissimum institutioni – Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, 1990.

- “Young candidates to Religious Life and Vocation Promotion” (86-89).

Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor – Fraternal Life in Community, 1994.

- 28. (...) Such a testimony of joy is a powerful attraction to religious life, a source of new vocations and an encouragement to perseverance. It is very important to cultivate such joy within a religious community: overwork can destroy it, excessive zeal for certain causes can lead some to forget it, constant self-analysis of one's individual identity and one's own future can cloud it.

PONTIFICAL WORK FOR ECCLESIASTICAL VOCATIONS [CONGREGATIONS FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES, FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE]

In verbo tuo – New vocations for a new Europe, Final Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life in Europe, 1998.¹⁵

2. CURRENT MARIANIST DOCUMENTS

Rule of Life of the Society of Mary

In particular, articles:

- 73: preference for works which stimulate religious vocations.
- 5.7: our efforts to perpetuate the charism.
- 5.23: strengthening the Christian life among young Churches.
- 6.7: responsibility of each religious and of each community.
- 6.8: objectives of vocation ministry in each Unit.
- 6.9: necessary components of that ministry.

Guide to Formation in the Society of Mary, 1997

In particular:

- Introduction (1-5).
- I. Marianist formation in general (6-55).
- II. Stages of formation – 1. First discernment (56-71).

General Chapters

- 1986, *Vision and Journey*, "VI – Vocations to the Society of Mary", nos. 102-115.
- 1996, *Partners in Hope*, "Vocation Ministry and Formation", nos. 59-67.
- 2001, *Sent by the Spirit*, "IV.1 – Vocations and Formation", nos. 38-41.
- 2012, *To Enliven the Fire that Enkindles Other Fires*,
 - 16.d: "a robust plan for vocation ministry in each Unit".
 - 22-a. 1 to 4: Vocation ministry and Mixed Composition.
 - 31.d: with our older Brothers.

Fr. David Fleming – Circular #5, 12 September 1999: *Marianist Religious Vocations Today*.

International Meeting of Marianists in Charge of Vocations (June 30 – July 6, 1999)

- "Revive the gift of God in order to share it."

Marianist Family: texts on collaboration for vocation ministry.

¹⁵http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_06011998_new-vocations_en.html

3. WRITINGS OF FATHER CHAMINADE

Our Founder attached great importance to the new members of the Congregation. He offers in his writings a great number of counsels to help in discernment. Here is a synthesis accompanied by some of the most remarkable quotes.

***The numbers** indicate the number of the letter and then, if necessary, the number of the paragraph; **in bold**, they refer to quotations placed at the end of this synthesis.*

GENERAL COUNCILS on admission (216). It is important to begin well, with the first members solid and fervent (**1289.3**).

TESTING VOCATIONS:

- By “long tests and follow-ups” (**728.4**) and a “rigorous examination” (69; **76; 1184**), having respect for the planned process (**1262.3.5-6**). That avoids disastrous mistakes (**86**).
- Danger of too rapid admissions (**108; 1262.3**), but also of an exaggerated waiting period (1255).
- The ideal is to live with the candidates so as to know them well (**1224.2**).
- Test vocations to the priesthood (698).
- Respect the orientation of a vocation, without forcing one into other directions (1232).

DISCERNING:

- If there are some major indications of vocations (**76; 304; 728.3**);
- If the vocation is really inspired by God (632; 698; **716; 1049; 1206; 1274.11**), by a true faith in Jesus Christ (**728.3**). A taste for religious life or a personal desire are not sufficient (6989; 871); the interior dispositions, not external appearances, must be examined (**728.2**);
- Piety and natural qualities – don’t be content with mediocre virtue **291** – supported by faith (757; **1022**).
- The desire to let go of one’s own will in order to follow God (**728.7&9**), to convert in order to live the vows (**923**);
- Trust in Mary (**923**);
- Apostolic zeal (**923**).
- Obstacles: worldliness (698); excessive attachment to family (728; 1266).
- For a candidate preparing for the priesthood, examine his theology, “not only what he might have learned, but his judgment, his intelligence and his facility for learning” (618).
- The examination of candidates, three examples: the novitiate of Alsace at Ebersmunster (**728; S 1194d**); Sainte-Anne in Bordeaux (**1274**); the Third Order of Auch of the Daughters of Mary (**1262; 1289**).

PRAYING:

The harvest is great; PRAY THE LORD OF THE HARVEST to send workers: **1209; 1274.14; 1275**). A new implantation needs vocations from the local area (**1224**).

THE NUMBER:

- Let it not affect the fervor of the Institute (**51**).
- Seek solidity more than numbers (**87**); and the unity of the members among themselves, and with Jesus (**1289.7**).
- Don't fear to send someone away; with decisiveness (**185**; 1184), but gently (**216**).
- Welcome good candidates without worrying about the lack of financial means on their part (**236; 716**; 794; **1274.12-13**) or on the part of the Congregation (901; 950); have trust in Providence (950).
- The religious and civil authorities can encourage recruitment (399);
- But also the candidates themselves (445).

HELPING THE CANDIDATES:

- To recognize the signs of a divine call (**716**);
- To respond actively to God's call (757; 950);
- To overcome weaknesses (921), and temptations (1005;1188); thanks to their openness which allows them to discern how to act (**728.11**; 1028);
- To understand the benefits received by them and by their families through a healthy detachment (1277).
- To motivate them in the service of Christ and Mary (**728.4**) in the religious life (927; 1190).
- To be always welcoming and loving towards them (962).
- An austere and poor formation encourages perseverance (950).

COUNSELS TO THE CANDIDATES:

- In view of discerning (147).
- To decide for the religious life with courage and firmness (164; 179).
- In a correct relationship with parents: respect (395), and freedom (944).
- Let oneself be guided: (307; 319); the Congregation accompanies them (388).
- Struggle against temptations to leave (384); love Mary more (445). Make decisions according to faith and not according to nature (384).

FIDELITY OF THE RELIGIOUS TO THE COMMITMENTS OF THEIR VOCATION:

- Renew one's fervor (1187); the good that the Institute will do depends upon that vigilant attitude – seeking to be “living examples of the Rule” – and upon the union of the members (**1289.7**). “The faithful soul can accomplish everything” (**1289.6**).
- It is not right to dispense for trivial reasons from commitments made (890).
- Repent of one's infidelities (1298). With the departure of certain men, the Lord purifies the SM of its infidelities (796; 1001).

ANTHOLOGY

LETTERS

51. – August 30, 1814 – To Mlle de Trenquelléon.

(...) Be faithful, my dear Child, to your calling. Work at increasing the family of Mary, but take care, while swelling its number, not to neglect nourishing the piety of the older members and having them grow in virtue and in fervor.

76. – November 10, 1816 – To Mother de Trenquelléon.

(...) These should be the only [candidates] to be accepted, and even these only in case they give evident signs of a vocation and have a real aptitude for the education suitable for them.

86. – February 26, 1817 – To Mother de Trenquelléon.

Probation.

(...) Constancy and a real vocation must be assured on the part of the candidates and their health must be strong enough to meet the requirements of the Rule. (...) The time of probation and its apparent severity will keep the convent from making harmful mistakes and the candidates themselves from believing to be a vocation what at times is nothing more than a masking of their infirmities from the rest of the world. (...)

87. – March 6, 1817 – To Mother Teresa, Agen.

(...) it is less a question of attracting a great number than of admitting only solid vocations.

108. – November 4, 1818 – To Mother de Trenquelléon

May God be blessed at the departure of Sister Marguerite! On looking over all that happened, including her too hasty admission, you will gain experience. Sister Marguerite could have become a good subject. She showed several indications of a real vocation to the religious state. But she should have been tested a long time, outside of the community and before her admission, etc.

185. – December 20, 1821 – To Mother Saint Vincent, Agen.

¹ You are right in fearing to see subjects enter if it will be difficult to dismiss them once it is recognized that they have no vocation, or, which is about the same thing, once it is assured that they are not good material for the Institute. (...) I want firmness in dismissing and quite an amount of facility in granting permission to enter when subjects show good will and otherwise seem to have the required good qualities. (...) The novice mistress speaks from her too good heart rather than from her judgment.

² (...) Now, why keep such sick ones? Your convent is not a hospital for incurables. In case we have been mistaken or deceived, as in the present case, let us take the measures dictated by charity and prudence before any dismissal. That is all right, but we must also seriously take care to get rid of such subjects. ...

216. – November 12, 1822 – To Mother de Trenquelléon.

Concerning Sister Presentation, (...) she ought to ask to withdraw. There are to be no reproaches, no grumbling, no punishing, except when subjects are to be kept. But once it has

been decided that someone is to be sent away, only mildness, persuasion, and honesty are to be used.

236. – May 21, 1823 – To Br. David Monier.

[Trust in Providence], I refuse no subject who presents himself, however poor he may be, if he happens to have appreciable signs of a vocation, etc., etc.

291. – March 21, 1824 – To Mother Louise de Gonzague, Novice Mistress, Agen.

(...) It is the excellence of their piety and their more than ordinary natural qualities which must be for us the signs of their vocation, but it is evident that with such indications they would not remain postulants for any length of time. If we content ourselves with mediocre virtue, these girls will always be a problem, always capricious, with little strength to repress the sallies of their nature that have never been subdued by education, etc.

698. – August 11, 1833 – To Fr. Chevaux.

If Brother Le Boulanger is still at St. Remy when this letter comes, tell him that he is taking a bad approach to knowing his state of life. It is not a matter of his likes or tastes that is the sign or mark of a vocation. He must rise higher. Let him meditate seriously on the great truths of religion, and, in the light of these truths, let him see which state will best assure his salvation. Let him also examine the state he would wish to have embraced, and in which he would have wanted to live, when the hour of death arrives, or when he will have to appear before the dreadful tribunal of the sovereign Judge, etc.

716. – December 4, 1833 – Circular to the entire Society.

It is not proper for us to receive any subjects who are not sent by the Lord of this harvest. It is for this reason that I shall soon send instructions to all the Heads of our establishments, so that they may the more easily distinguish the signs of a divine vocation. But you, my dear children, should redouble your zeal for the maintenance and increase of the work which the Lord has inspired in us and to which we have entirely devoted ourselves. You will be able to find, among your numerous pupils, very good subjects whom God would call, but who, like Samuel, do not yet know the voice of the Lord. The Society is still too handicapped to receive them gratuitously as postulants or novices. Nevertheless, if you would find someone who would make up by extraordinary qualities for what they lack in economic terms, we would accept them, confiding ourselves to Divine Providence.

728. – March 11, 1834 – To Fr. Chevaux.

[A fundamental text about Father Chaminade's ideas on discernment of vocations, the postulate and the novitiate. In the first part ("Opinions") there is a long development on the novitiate which is practically entirely omitted here; of the second part, "Notes on the Novitiate," only the first of the 14 points has been kept. This text can also be found in Marianist Direction II, 37-63. It was also taken up again in great part in the Constitutions of 1839, beginning with article 307: cf. The Chaminade Legacy VII.28.]

Advice to a Master of Novices

¹ (...) If you have sometimes entered into the heart of our tender Mother, you have found there no other interests than those of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, her adorable Son, her firstborn, our elder Brother. The fact is, that the ardent love which Mary has for us is all relative to our

conformity with this her firstborn. Her ambition—if it is permissible to make use of this term with regard to the most holy among all creatures—is that all the children which her charity has engendered after him be so united to him that with him they all form but one Son, one same Jesus Christ.

² Animated with these sentiments, it will be very easy for you to know whom you are to admit, among those who present themselves to enter the Society. I beg of you, never to admit anyone in whom you do not recognize any sign of a divine vocation, any of the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is true that sometimes by a secret order of the mercy of God, several have first come to us with altogether human motives. We shall be happy when we know how to penetrate this secret of Providence and to make it known to others. But, in general, when the subjects present themselves to enter the Society, first raise your heart to God and lift it entirely to the Spirit of Jesus Christ and as another Samuel look at them and examine them, not only regarding exterior appearances, but much more particularly concerning interior dispositions: *Deus cor intuetur*.¹⁶

³ Yes, it is upon the heart that you must cast your eyes. If you do not see any operation of the Holy Spirit, by that very fact neither will you see any sign of vocation. Just as all the duties of religious life may be reduced to two: separation from the world and union with Jesus Christ, so are you to recognize in those who present themselves sentiments relative to these duties, such as, for example, fear and horror of the world, view of the incompatibility of the spirit of the world with the spirit of Christianity, the falsity of these maxims, etc. For those who might have participated less in the corruption of the world and who have not adopted its maxims, if their piety appears to be inspired by a real faith in Jesus Christ, if they manifest some devotion to the Blessed Virgin, you should see what part faith has in these sentiments. These signs may be more or less characteristic. In case of doubt, the subjects are to be received as postulants, if they have the other qualities required for admission.

⁴ The postulate may be more or less long, but, in general, it is not to be longer than the time required to determine the signs of vocation. With some you will concentrate more on the imminent dangers of the world, where a devastating plague reigns and the need to determine what proceeds from the world and what from a Christian spirit. With others you can often speak of the grandeur and the kindness of Jesus Christ and of his holy Mother, of the happiness of being called to their service, to procure their glory, etc.

⁵ When you believe that the signs of their vocation are sufficiently developed, when you have the moral assurance that they will persevere, draw up an account of all the motives that would lead you to recommend the admission of the subjects, as also of the fears you may still have, and send it to the Superior General.

⁶ Up to now, we have spoken only of novices, properly so called.

⁷ Upon entering into the usual tests, the novice is to bring a sincere desire to live in a total stripping of his mind and will. This is as a first step toward religious perfection, the total renunciation of oneself, not to want to judge again of anything according to one's own mind nor to want anything solely by personal choice. This is a maxim that easily convinces by its truth. Without this renunciation, in fact, the Spirit of God doesn't have prompt entrance. He wishes to occupy the souls of those he calls to his service, to fill their mind with his light, to supply what they lack and all that is unable to lead them. God takes his place within us only after an entire surrender of ourselves.

⁸ From this I shall draw two practical consequences:

⁹ First, in view of this maxim, during the novitiate all disposal of themselves is taken from the young men; and they are gradually accustomed to place themselves in the hands of God alone, as unable to live or to do anything but by his good pleasure. (...)

¹⁶ Allusion to the choice of David by Samuel, such as it is reported in 1Sm:16.

¹⁰ Second—In regard to studies, spiritual reading, the exercises and practices of piety, the novices must be very distrustful of their self-love, of their curiosity and of their self-will. (...)

¹¹ “However enlightened and however elevated we may be,” said Father Olier, “we must always expose our sentiments and submit them to the one who holds the place of God for us on earth. Such was the fidelity even of Jesus Christ, who submitted the lights and the movements of the Holy Spirit in himself to the direction of the most holy Virgin and St. Joseph, in whom God his Father resided, to have them approve the interior sentiments which he communicated to them. After Jesus Christ has given to his entire Church such an example of submission, who will be the man presumptive enough to dispense from submitting his judgment and his will to the wisdom and authority of his superiors!”¹⁷

Notes on the Novitiate

¹² 1. The first months after the arrival of the novices should be particularly used to develop in them a spirit of penance, a purification of the heart, meditation suitable to their capacity and to general or extraordinary confessions.

757. – September 3, 1834 – To Fr. Leo Meyer.

What you tell me about your young brother Benedict pleases me very much. Try hard to give him the foundation of a practical faith. I always greatly fear for a piety which, so to say, is only superficial and which has not for basis the pure motives of faith.

810. – December 12, 1835 – To Fr. Leo Meyer.

Be very careful not to introduce into the Novitiate any subject whose sentiments you are not sure of, for it is much better, if difficulties do exist, that they be resolved in the Postulate rather than in the Novitiate.

923. – date uncertain – To a novice in Courtefontaine.

I would have been very glad to know the more positive signs which have led to your admission to the Novitiate of the Society of Mary. I call more positive signs the desire to do penance, which is the ordinary fruit of an entire conversion; the desire to enter into the narrow way of the evangelical counsels, that is to say, to practice poverty, chastity, and obedience; and whether the Society of Mary is the kind of religious state to which you are called. I would have been very glad to see in you some signs of a true confidence in Mary, the Mother of Jesus and ours, and finally, some signs of a compassionate charity towards those who are still engaged in the way of the world, in order to withdraw them from it, and to preserve from it those who are not yet its slaves. This last sentiment is one of the principal signs of the vocation to the ecclesiastical state.

1022. – January 13, 1838 – To Fr. Leo Meyer, Courtefontaine.

Remain devoted to the novitiate! I hope to be able before the end of winter to hand over to you a fixed plan of spiritual direction. The basis of the plan is always the same: to form men who can be called men of faith, and by faith, come to a total abnegation of self. (...)

¹⁷ (...) This passage and the one following are drawn from the *Maxims Concerning the Seminaries*. (*Complete Work of Father Olier*, Migne, pp. 1142 and 1144).

1049. – May 26, 1838 – To Fr. Bardenet.

(...) I desire to have Father Perrodin only because I believe that I have found him possessed of a real vocation. I want no subjects other than those whom God wishes to send.

1098 – December 3, 1838 – To Mother Saint-Vincent

(...) Superiors must look upon themselves only as ministers of the Lord in regard to personnel, and His stewards in regard to matériel. (...)

The education of the postulants and novices is a very delicate affair. The making of a good religious Sister calls for a novicemistress who is completely dependent upon the operations of the Spirit of the Lord in her soul. The art of forming religious Sisters is an art altogether divine. Nevertheless, we must not be disconcerted, my dear child, by the experience of our miseries and incapacity. Let us always tend to the pure love of God and to the profound contempt of ourselves, and the Holy Spirit will enable us to work wonders.

It is a blessing of God, my dear child, that so many postulants are presenting themselves, provided they are of the right kind. However good they may seem to be, their formation will demand much work. Although they may have no fortune, you are not to worry about them as soon as it is clear and evident that God has sent them to you. Anyhow, and as much as possible, do not employ them before they are sufficiently formed, otherwise you have only half-religious and the Institute would degenerate very quickly. (...)

1184. – November 13, 1839 – To Fr. Chevaux.

(...) Study all your men well in their character, their habits, their natural tendencies, their religious vocation.

1206. – May 26, 1840 – To Fr. Perrodin.

It is, doubtless, you, my respected son, who attracted to the ceremony the two young priests, twin brothers [the Perillat brothers]. Mother Hyacinth thinks that they would willingly enter the Society of Mary, but that they would have many obstacles to overcome. It is up to you, my dear son, to look into the matter and see if they have a real vocation. However great the obstacles may be, if God is really calling them he will remove them sooner or later.

1209. – June 26, 1840 – To Fr. Perrodin

All that I have learned and all that you yourself tell me of the brothers Périllat, makes me thank God for having inspired them with the desire to enter the Society of Mary. But, my respectable son, you must not stop there, you must join me to say together the prayer which our Lord prescribed for His Apostles: *Rogate ergo Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam!* The good Lord is showing us an abundant harvest; we are altogether insufficient to gather it all in; and so, let us try to recruit good workmen, such as we can take for granted God wants to attach to his service, be it as priests or as laymen. (...)

1224. – October 17, 1840 – To Bro. Enderlin, Fribourg.

¹ (...) If establishments of the Society are desired, subjects from the country must be supplied. Now, how will they be trained if they are not first tried to verify their vocation, but then exposed to useless and vexing traveling expenses?

² (...) but what is still more annoying, is to have postulants to be examined without means of receiving them into the Community to follow them at closer range and to get to know them better. What do you expect me to say in regard to the three of whom you speak? To send them to Ebersmunster without having tested them sufficiently is imprudent, and on the other hand, it is hard to test them without having them under one's hand and eyes. . . . In the meantime, look

into the matter yourself, my dear son, and do the best you can. Examine the situation according to our Constitutions and in concert with the Reverend Pastor (...).

1262. – December 10, 1841 – To Mother Saint Vincent

My dear child,

¹ (...) Mother Léocadia submits two difficulties to you which, although distinct, really form but one, because at bottom they derive from the same source. Let us try to remove their cause and we shall no longer have reason to fear their bad effects.

² In the first place, Mother Léocadia places before you the limited ability of the subjects employed in the House of Help, the complaints made by the Commission concerning this matter, and the very meager resources which the Novitiate is actually offering to do justice to these complaints which are evidently well founded.

³ It seems to me, my dear child, that this evil which is only too real, comes 1. from the nonobservance of our holy Rules as regards the admission of subjects; 2. from the imprudence with which consent was given for the too rapid formation of the little establishments asked for. If, on the one hand, you showed yourself too easy about admission, and if, on the other, in subscribing too soon to the numerous requests that have been made, you put yourself to the point of exhaustion in the case of employing all the available good subjects, without bothering too much about how they would be advantageously replaced in the House of Help, for example, you must have questioned the cause of the drawbacks that are being pointed out to you today.

⁴ Now I see only one remedy for this evil, and this remedy will be effective, although slow. It must be forbidden to form any new establishment before having sufficiently provided for those already existing, by replacing in proportion as they are needed, those who do not offer all the desirable qualities with the good subjects which Providence will send. It is thus that, little by little, the House of Help will be re peopled with more suitable subjects. It is up to you and to Mother Léocadia to see to it that this is done.

⁵ Furthermore, it is necessary that the rules that control the admission of subjects be very exactly observed. Here is the order traced by the Constitutions. The subjects whom the august Mary calls into her privileged family are first examined by the Superioress of the Novitiate according to the prescribed method. If the result of the examination is favorable, the subject is presented to the Council, presided over by the local Superior. In the contrary case, she is not presented. The subject is definitely admitted only when, on the verbal examination drawn up by the Mistress of Novices, the Council, presided over by the local Superior, has pronounced on the fact of the aptitude of the religious vocation.

⁶ (...) these subjects may not be presented to the Council by any other except by the Mistress of Novices, and after the previous examination of which she had to draw up a report. In following another method, it could happen that the subjects admitted do not always have the aptitude and the qualifications desired. I then engage you, my dear child, to inform Mother Léocadia exactly about the steps to be followed in the admission of the subjects, and I have no difficulty in answering that, henceforth, if she is faithful to it, there will be no further reason to sigh over the limited aptitude of the subjects admitted. (...)

⁷ Finally, what does His Excellency ask [the archbishop of d'Auch]? It is that the religious vocations be well verified, so that unsuited or even dangerous subjects not be admitted into the communities. This solicitude must justly preoccupy the bishops. Now, His Excellency finds all the desirable guarantees, first, in the exact observance of the rules regarding admission to the holy profession, and then in the decision of the Council presided over by the local Superior. (...)

1274. – September 4, 1843 – To Msgr Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux.

[Fr. Chaminade presents the conditions for admission to the Sainte Anne Novitiate in Chemin Saint-Genès in Bordeaux. Intended to form future teaching brothers, that novitiate combined both secular and religious training, as distinct from a modern novitiate.]

Your Excellency,

¹ I come to place at your feet the few notes which you have had the kindness to ask of me concerning the novitiate that we have started under your auspices, (...) on the Chemin de Saint-Genès, N° 62. (...)

² The Society of Mary is vowed especially to the work of primary instruction.

³ It has central Houses in which it trains teaching Brothers. It had one in Bordeaux on the Chemin du Tondu,¹⁸ but the Revolution of July forced us to suppress it. Thanks to your cares, and I dare say it, to your pressing solicitations, we have retaken it, on the Chemin Saint Genès, N°. 62, in a place Your Excellency knows under the name of Sainte Anne.

⁴ Our purpose is then to train, at the same time, in secular knowledge, and above all in the religious virtues, the young men whom Providence will send us, and who will join to a pronounced vocation the sincere will to follow it.

⁵ The novitiate lasts two years, devoted, as I have said, in part to study and in part to prayer.

⁶ The subjects, once they are sufficiently formed, present themselves before the ordinary examining Commissions to obtain the various certificates desired and needed, and are then sent three and three to the Communes, doubtless to teach human letters, but mainly to teach the faith and the Christian virtues.

⁷ (...) Our living conditions are as modest as possible. Faithful to the maxim of the great Apostle, provided we have the means of livelihood and wherewith to be covered according to our holy Rules, we are content.

⁸ Doubtless, you desire to know the general conditions under which we admit subjects to the novitiate.

⁹ It is necessary: 1. That they be apt for the work of teaching, and that they be at least fifteen years old, and never more than twenty-five, unless in case of a dispensation;

¹⁰ 2. That they already know the first elements of reading, writing, grammar, and arithmetic;

¹¹ 3. Especially that they really have a religious vocation and that they have led a good moral life;

¹² 4. That they have sufficient clothing and can pay the novitiate for board and maintenance, but only for two years. The minimum price is two hundred francs per year.

¹³ We grant a dispensation only when the subjects compensate for the lack of money, by more than ordinary physical and moral qualities.

¹⁴ There you have, Your Excellency, the conditions for admission to the novitiate. The work undertaken is surely in the most direct interests of the diocese and of religion. Our one great ambition is to do good to youth, for that is our great and good fortune here below. We are being called upon from all sides; we can say with the divine Master that the harvest is truly great, but that the laborers are few in number. May Your Excellency bless us and procure some for us, for then you will have a new claim on our love and on our respectful gratitude!

¹⁵ I have the honor of being, with a profound respect and boundless veneration, of Your Excellency, the very humble servant.

¹⁸ Saint Laurent.

1289. – January 2, 1844 – Circular to the Third Order of the Daughters of Mary.

¹ Religion smiles, my dear children, at the future of the Third Order. What good it is called upon to do, and how we must congratulate ourselves in God because of our holy vocation!

² Yes, my dear children, much good will be done by you and by those who will walk in your footsteps in the beautiful paths of the religious life in the general Institute of the Daughters of Mary. But let us not lose sight of the fact that the good which interests the salvation of souls in the highest degree, that this so very consoling future opening before us, depends upon us, upon our religious conduct, and upon our fidelity to our vocation.

³ Oh! my dear children, in this regard, great is our responsibility. Does it not frighten you? We are only at the beginning, we are opening the road. If we begin well, with perseverance, we shall, by the mercy of God, attain the ends of the foundation. However, if we begin badly, that is to say, if at the beginning we are not living examples of our holy Rules, if fervor, if regularity, if all the religious virtues of the Institute do not distinguish us, the blessings of Heaven will be reserved for others, and the consequences of this misfortune will be awful in the sight of God as in the sight of religion.

⁴ See then, my dear children, see then, I say to you with the Apostle, with what prudence and with what wisdom you are to walk in the holy paths of the religious life. The world and religion, heaven and earth have their eyes fixed upon you, whilst the enemy of all good, jealous of your work, because it is dear to the heart of the divine Mary, prowls about you as a roaring lion, seeking to devour you. The devil, my dear children, will do the impossible to turn you from the Lord. He will take each one of you at your weakest point, and he will do all he can, by all the means in his power, to sow cockle in the Community, to introduce disorders under specious pretexts, to breathe prejudice into hearts, to ruin fervor and regularity, and were it needed for all this to transform himself into an angel of light, he would not stand back or hesitate. Oh! if for this he could take hold of a single soul, of a single heart, he would flatter himself as arriving at his ends, and religion and the Institute in desolation would be shedding inconsolable tears.

⁵ See then, I repeat, my dear children, see then with what prudence you are to conduct yourselves in the difficult but consoling labors of your beautiful work. Spouses of Jesus Christ, you must remain intact in the midst of the world, uniting the practice of the active life with that of the contemplative life, you must give evidence in yourselves of the virtues and perfection of the cloister. Therein lies your duty, my dear children; it is great, it is difficult, but the faithful soul can do all in him who strengthens her.

⁶ Yes, the faithful soul can do all. It is the divine Master himself who is kind enough to assure us of it, and nothing resists the humble heart which the love of God and of neighbor inflames. Let us only be faithful, and we shall know how to baffle all the efforts of the devil and of the world.

⁷ *Now a first condition to be fulfilled in order to be faithful is union with Our Lord through charity.* In union there is strength. When two or three are united in the name of Jesus Christ, the good Master is there with them, and when he is with us, who shall be against us? In fact, how very strong we are, my dear children, when our Lord Jesus Christ is with us! Master, we are his servants and he watches over us and protects us. Father—he occupies Himself with us and provides for all our needs with a tender solicitude. Friend—he accompanies us everywhere, never leaving us and constantly warning us of possible dangers. Spouse—he unceasingly showers upon us his divine caresses and defends us against the seductions of the world. Savior—he calms and heals the wounds of our souls and frees us from the yoke of Satan. This divine Jesus is our all. It is he himself, it is his divine Spirit that prays in us, that continues in us, by the practice of his virtues, the renunciation and immolation that he practiced in his adorable person on the altar of the Cross. But we are not only strong when our Lord Jesus Christ is with us; we are happy, we have peace. Peace follows the steps of Jesus, it reigns there where he

reigns. Oh! how happy the Communities are that are with Jesus! You have peace, not that peace the world gives, but the peace of God which surpasses every idea of worldly joy.

CONSTITUTIONS of 1839 [Ecrits et Paroles VII.28]

CHAPTER II

ON THE RULES FOR THE ADMISSION OF SUBJECTS AND ON THEIR PROBATION

275. Not every person may be admitted into the Society. Among the incapacities that render a subject unfit for entering there are some that are absolute and others that are simple impediments from which the Superior General can dispense.

276. The absolute incapacities are the following: 1. absence of signs of a vocation, which constitutes the first probation (Art. 281); 2. bad health, incurable infirmities, a too hideous deformation; 3. feebleness of mind bordering on idiocy; 4. disgrace of the person himself or of his near relatives brought about by a court sentence; if the disgrace would exist only in public opinion, the Superior General would be consulted; 5. the recent state of a servant as an adult.

277. The incapacities from which the Superior General can dispense are: 1. being more than twenty-four years of age; 2. an infirmity that would not be too hideous nor too inconvenient; 3. having made a novitiate in another community; 4. having been married; 5. having been born of an illegitimate marriage or of a family affected with a hereditary disease; 6. having debts; 7. not being able to leave one's family (father, mother) [sic] brother, sister or children, without exposing it to absolute indigence; 8. not being able to pay even half of the board and lodging of the novitiate; 9. being a servant without yet being twenty years old.

278. The Superior dispenses in the preceding cases only inasmuch as the subject compensates for his incapacity by good qualities and, in the sixth and seventh cases, by assuring satisfaction to creditors or aid to his family.

279. The admission into the Society of Mary of subjects who are not included in the cases of incapacity enumerated above requires three probation periods: 1. the examination of the vocation; 2. the postulate; the novitiate.

§ 1. Examination of the Vocation.

280. The entire future of the Society depends upon the discernment with which it chooses its subjects. Great care is taken, therefore, in the examination of the vocation.

281. The subject who presents himself is examined by the superior of the place or by one of his delegates on the following points: 1. whether there is any one of the incapacities which render [him] unfit for the works of the Society or which require a dispensation; 2. whether he is attracted to the religious life only by natural sentiments; 3. whether he is well informed as to the duties that he imposes upon himself upon embracing the religious life; 4. whether he has felt some reason for giving himself to the Society of Mary rather than to any other Society.

282. The account of what he does with his life should be clear, complete and worthy of full confidence. He should prove by certificates what he cannot attest in another way.

283. If, after his examination, the subject is considered good and interesting, he is given a retreat of at least three days and never more than eight. This is the first probation, after which the postulate begins; it has for object to make known the religious state in general and the first book of the constitution of the Society, as well as to develop the supernatural motives that should lead to a final decision.

284. The subjects who are too young to undergo this first probation are dispensed from it.

285. Every head of a house may receive applications for admission and have the first probation gone through. If he cannot conveniently keep the subjects for a retreat, he contents

himself with questioning them on the points indicated above (Art. 282); he writes out an account of it and makes up for the rest by more or less repeated interviews.

286. When the superior who has had the subject undergo the first probation judges that he is good and interesting, he writes about it to the Superior General or to his assistants, sending him the account that he has drawn up. He waits for his answer before sending the subject where he will be designated.

See also :

§ 2. The Postulate (287-291) and § 3. The Novitiate (295-296; 307-314).
These paragraphs treat points to be examined and the motivations to

