

- (1) **This document was produced by the participants at a workshop on Vocation Ministry who gathered in Rome at the invitation of the General Superior in view of the upcoming General Chapter.¹ Its central insight can be summarized as follows: *the rarity of religious vocations and the difficulty we have accompanying them are, for our Congregation, a major challenge to which an urgent response is required, no longer by good intentions but by deeds. We want to confront this crisis situation serenely and see it as a call to conversion, to a more faithful living out of the charism that we have received.***
- (2) The question of vocation ministry is hardly a new one for us. Today, though, it has become particularly urgent because countries in the West—and soon in Latin America—are suffering from a “lack” of religious and priestly vocations; Africa and Madagascar, for their part, are discovering difficulties linked to the discerning of vocations.
- (3) Concern for vocations, in the Congregation, is once again a pressing question, but now we are convinced that it is no longer a time for impressive documents or recommendations without concrete follow-up, but a time to translate what has been decided into concrete actions.² We are passing through a genuine and deep crisis, which makes us fragile. It is our desire to live this trail in a lucid and serene manner, confident of the Father’s love for “our little Congregation”.
- (4) God is still calling young people to the Assumption. That is both a fact as well as a conviction. The small number of novices, especially in some regions, should not make us forget that the ideal of life proposed by our *Rule* corresponds, in good part, to what many young people are today and to what they are looking for³. The real challenge for us today, both in the North and in the South—despite the discouragement and the apathy that might affect us—is to have enough imagination and daring to call young people, in a new way, to follow Christ as religious and as priests.
- (5) ***The renewal to which we are called presupposes, if we want it to bear fruit, that each religious and each community agree to a certain kind of conversion because young people challenge our***

¹ The participants at the workshop included the following: Sébastien BANGANDU MWANZA (Congo), Richard BRUNELLE (Tanzania), Flavio BUSTOS CASTILLO (Mexico), Jorge CASTRO (Chile), Jean-Claude ERHART (Madagascar), Luc FRITZ (France), Dennis GALLAGHER, (United States), Marco Aurélio F. GONÇALVEZ (Brazil), Christophe HUSSON (France), Richard LAMOUREUX (Rome), Guy LEROY (Belgium), Marcel POIRIER (Rome), Martin NACE (Argentina), Celeste PIANEZZE (Romania), Ricky MONTAÑEZ (Philippines), Juan-Antonio SANCHEZ (Spain), Luis Fernando VARGAS MORA (Colombia).

² We do not need to publish a new document on vocation ministry. The texts already exist (see the list of Congregation documents in *Appendix 1*). The Chapter of 1999 made some excellent recommendations. Have we put them into practice? If that is not the case, then why have they not been taken into account? Would it not be appropriate for those in positions of responsibility in the Congregation to help us put them into practice?

³ See *Appendix 3 : Opportunities for vocation ministry today.*

convictions and unsettle our ways of living. They bear certain gifts that invite us to conversion. We must know how to receive these gifts, without allowing ourselves to be paralyzed by the contradictions that young people also present. The Assumption has its own gifts that also invite young people to conversion. We need to learn how to present these in words and ways of acting that both respect and challenge today's youth.

- (6) To engage young people, we need to love them, to speak their language, that is, for us Assumptionists to live our religious life in a way that the vocation can be discovered and received by those with whom we come into contact. It is not a question of distorting our religious life, but of living it even more faithfully. That requires necessarily *a way of conversion.*

N.B. The modest response that we are proposing to the question of vocation ministry has been inspired in good part by the challenges and opportunities that we listed in the documents found in Appendices 2 and 3.

The Ways of Conversion

- (7) Conversion can follow three paths that are not on the same level : it can take place at the level of the community, of the mission, or of the personal faith of the religious.
- (8) *A COMMUNITY that wants to be more engaged in vocation ministry should be particularly attentive to:*
- (9) - favoring hospitality
- especially the welcome shown to young people, without in any way diluting the demands of religious life;
 - in an atmosphere of confidence, a spirit of openness, confident regarding the future;
 - with a rhythm of life that actually allows the brothers to spend time and meet with young people.
- (10) - living in a simple and sober manner
- in our houses, in a way of living (our recreation, our clothing, ...);
 - in struggling against a consumer mentality;
 - by witnessing in this way to the One for whom we have come together.
- (11) - caring for prayer
- beauty attracts. It makes it possible to lead a community and its guests to a deeper prayer;
 - and especially the Eucharist, at the heart of the common life.
- (12) - encouraging conversation and dialogue in community
- in freedom and in frankness, regarding the central issues (our commitment to following Christ, our experience of God, our living of the vows, our human relations, our apostolic plans, our moments of joy and of suffering);
 - in respect and trust, so that brothers will not fear being vulnerable in their relations with each other;
 - by a daily and weekly program that foresees time for dialogue (Gospel-sharing, "obedience", i.e. brief communication regarding the day's events, community meetings, review of life, the local chapter) ;
 - by a fraternal attentiveness and caring for each other that lead to deeper communion and nourishes the desire to be together;

- by loving each day in joy. This is an essential part of the spiritual combat to overcome egoism and isolation.

(13) A MISSION that especially encourages the realization of an Assumptionist vocation ministry,

- by making it possible to be genuinely present to young people;
- by taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the media. They are a means of evangelization and a way of making our life better known.
- by encouraging certain of our present commitments (Bayard, schools, etc.), but in a way that shows them to be clearly and authentically missionary;
- by being effectively present among the poor.

(14) In addition, it should exhibit the following characteristics:

- it should be motivating and stir enthusiasm;
- it should witness to a certain Gospel radicality;
- it should respond to a precise and real need, related to the “great causes”;
- it should have more of a community than an individual dimension;
- it should be done in collaboration with the other religious and lay people in the Assumption family.

(15) A FAITH that is contagious, that speaks to young people as well as to the less young, that is clearly a gift from God, that is worth asking for. It is characterized by the fact that it

- witnesses to joy;
- knows how to give thanks, how to live in a spirit of gratitude;
- is humble, is attentive to the truth, regardless of its source;
- places its confidence in God’s power despite the difficulties;
- touches by its power every aspect of a person’s life;
- calls others to a more evangelical life;
- is received from Christ as a sign of mercy;
- is inventive, attentive to the signs of the Spirit.

Actions in Support of Vocation Ministry

(16) We have identified a certain number of means that could help vocation ministry. We entrust them to the Capitulants for their consideration and decision.

(17) At the level of the local community: that each community take seriously the call to conversion that is required for vocation ministry. We would ask each community to take one concrete decision in view of conversion, a gesture that would give concrete expression to certain “ways of conversion” mentioned above.

(18) At the level of the Provincial community:

- That each Province and each community within the Province review regularly its work in the area of vocations: what is being done? What is not being done? What are the results? This type of review is done in the context of conversion. It is important to make proposals for the short term (a period of three years) and to review them constantly.
- That each Province prepare “interactive” materials (using different media) to present the Assumption to young people in vocational discernment.
- That the Provinces give the religious enough time to get to know young people and to accompany them in their discernment.

- That the Provinces support apostolic initiatives that make it possible to work with young people over an extended period (especially adolescents and young university students), taking advantage of those places where we are already in contact with young people. We need to go where we can find those young Catholics who are ready to commit themselves to a process of vocational discernment.
- That Provinces involve lay people in their vocation ministry.
- That Provinces encourage communities to invite young people to visit and foresee communities that will make this kind of hospitality their particular mission.

(19) *At the level of the Congregation:*

- That the Congregation establish an international secretariat for vocation ministry ;
- That the Congregation draft a kind of Ratio for vocation ministry;
- That the Congregation organize an international volunteer program, at the level of the Assumption family;
- That the Congregation intensify its efforts to create international communities, especially to strengthen those Provinces that have few vocations.

(20) In everything that we do, it is important to speak a language that young people understand.

Appendix 1: *Congregation Documents*

N.B. The only documents included are those drafted since the 1987 General Chapter.

1989

“Éveiller et soutenir les vocations” – Fr. Claude Maréchal, 29 November 1989, special letter written after the Vocation Ministry session held at Les Essarts

1993

« Éveil de vocations » - Acts of the 1993 General Chapter (in *Documents Assomption*, n°18, 1993, p. 27)

1998

« Repères pour une pastorale d'éveil et d'accompagnement des vocations » - Fr. Claude Maréchal, 11 June 1998, Presentation made at the Vocation Ministry meeting for the Southern Hemisphere (in *Documents Assomption*, n°23, 1998, pp. 47-57)

Maréchal, Claude. “Pastoral para despertar y acompañar vocaciones” y “¿Qué es lo que atrae a los jóvenes que entran en la Vida religiosa?” Encuentro de promotores vocacionales Asuncionistas. (África, Madagascar, América Latina) Eugenopolis, Brasil. Julio 1998.

El perfil del acompañante vocacional. Encuentro de promotores de Pastoral Vocacional. Brasil. Julio 1998.

Criterios de discernimiento vocacional. Encuentro de promotores de Pastoral Vocacional. Brasil. Julio 1998.

1999

« Éveil des vocations » - Acts of the 1999 General Chapter

Appendix 2: *Challenges for vocation ministry today*

If vocation ministry is to bear fruit, it needs to meet a number of challenges. In particular, it is important,

1. that religious be **present to young people for a certain length of time**, by means of a project that could be educational, spiritual, cultural, even recreational... In a word that is complex and disjointed, it is important for religious to be present in those places and at those times when young people are making major choices and orienting their lives. That obliges us to be **effectively involved** in the world of young people and **truly available as formators**.

2. that religious life be presented as **relevant for the Church and for the world today**.

3. that we know how to **transmit our Christian faith** in a pluralist context.

4. that **our vocation ministry be flexible and energetic**, since young people do not constitute a homogeneous group. It is especially important to **insist on listening and welcoming**, at the personal and community levels. This means that vocation ministry has to be **the preoccupation of all the religious**.

5. that we be **patient**. Accompaniment is crucial, but takes time. We need to be ready to travel a long way to accompany young people in the discovering and the maturing of their faith. Young people thirst for freedom, but at the same time want a framework and a process for formation in which the goals are clear and structured.

6. that we offer young people a **warm, fraternal setting**, that accompanies and supports them. That necessitates a community that is sufficiently large (not one or two young people, but a group that includes more young and less young members).

7. that we provide **a clear definition of our identity and our mission**, visibility at all levels. This will allow young people to see who we are and what we are and to make proposals to them that are clear, concrete and demanding.

8. that we be **genuine witnesses**. We should say what we are and witness to what we say, from all points of view: our strengths as well as our weaknesses, our humanity, our desires, our sentiments, our ambitions, our successes. We should do this in the context of our Augustinian tradition which helps us integrate all of these dimensions into a healthy human and Christian life.

Appendix 3: *Opportunities for vocation ministry today*

The way young people are and act can be disconcerting, but looked at with a certain benevolence their notions and attitudes constitute genuine opportunities for our vocation ministry, i.e. places where our Assumption convictions correspond to the aspiration of many young people today. What follows is a list of the “opportunities” that we identified among young people that we know:

- they have few preconceived notions, ready to discover what we have to propose ;
- they are favorably disposed to the faith, especially when they meet it through personal contact;
- they thirst for meaning in their life; they are curious about everything that might help in this regard;
- they are looking for human and Christian formation, eager for discernment regarding their life’s orientation;
- they don’t want to be judged, but helped;
- they want to serve and show themselves to be very generous;
- they are pursuing an ideal; they want to be successful in life and are looking for meaning;
- they are engaged in a certain spiritual search;
- they want to “go further”, to transform the world;
- there is a certain resistance in them to the mentality of a consumer society;
- they have are socially aware, sensitive to what is just and unjust;
- they often like to express themselves through art; they have a particular liking for the visual

- they long for authenticity and are often attracted to what is demanding;
- they are tolerant; they hunger for freedom;
- they are lacking in stability in terms of their family, in terms of work;
- they are anxious about their future;
- they need to be accompanied; they desire security;
- they need to feel loved; they want to be listened to, to be understood;
- they want to be in relation with others, even if only online; they have a great desire to encounter others, to share with them;
- they can do many things at the same time (multi-tasking);
- they want community, they want to belong to a “tribe”;
- they are looking for peace.