
CANADA: a new culture of Vocations

Brother Jean Lemay, responsible for the Pastoral of Vocations in the Jean-Marie de la Mennais province, works, since four years, as collaborator in the Commission of Vocations of the diocese, Saint-Jean-Longueuil. He informs us of the convictions and the proposals of the team.

Introduction

The Third Continental Congress on vocations was held in Montreal in April 2002. More than 1 100 participants represented the Church in North America (bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, young people and not-so-young). They committed themselves to supporting the call for ecclesial vocations in the contemporary world. The pastoral plan derived from the Congress is entitled: *Conversion, Discernment, Mission: Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America.*

Several observers of the religious phenomenon have underscored factors likely to explain the "shortage" of vocations such as the decrease in the birth rate, the decrease in religious practice, indifference for the teaching profession, the secularization of numerous institutions of education, the loss of visibility of religious communities engaged in a common endeavour, socio-economic conditions which foster the quest for prestigious careers.

The Holy Spirit does not seem to get entangled in all these human reasonings since, in answer to our fervent prayers to obtain vocations, we witness the emergence of new communities which bring together young people, couples, families, deacons, priests. To name but a few: Famille Marie-Jeunesse, Services Myriam Beth'léhem, Chemin Neuf, Communauté des Béatitudes, Communauté de l'Emmanuel, Franciscains de l'Emmanuel, Fraternités Monastiques de Jérusalem, etc. Over the past thirty years, more than a score (20) of new communities have emerged in the Province of Quebec.

The Holy Spirit is not indifferent to the prayers of so-called "traditional" communities. Numerous persons associate themselves to the charism of our communities wherein they find nourishment in the



Brother Jean Lemay (first at the back in the row at right) participating at a junction of the session of Castelgandolfo.

spirituality of our founders and actualise and update the Mennaisian charism in their living environment, in their working environment and in their parishes. Several congregations benefit from the dynamic contribution of associates and we have yet to investigate all the avenues of their possible involvements in the shared mission.

Basically, a vocation is first and foremost a matter of being, of welcoming life as a pure gift from God. It is not a matter of doing something, of role-playing or of carrying out a function. One often hears the following : if a young person wishes to join us, what shall we give him to do? It is necessary to understand our own life as a personal answer to a call from God and from the Church to love, to holiness and to service.

A "culture of the call" takes root in Christian initiation. Discovering Jesus Christ and bonding with His person and His Gospel message constitute the preparatory first steps to welcoming any call. The answer to God's call is not instantaneous; it unfurls over time. One cannot be content with a first encounter with a person; commitment to accompanying that person through stages of growth is necessary.

Giving Rise to a Culture of Vocation

In the current context, conversion of our vocational approach is necessary. We may have to pass from a model of "recruitment" where we look actively for candidates who have the religious vocation to a model where the "discernment" and the "mission" have priority.

We have to give the priority to a vibrant pastoral presence with the youth; we have to invite young people to participate in diverse aspects of our life and of our mission. We shall thus become models and guides capable of helping young people to discern God's unique call in their life.

The dioceses which developed a strategy to give rise to a culture of vocation have given consideration to five priorities identified by the Congress: **to pray, to evangelise, to experience, to mentor and to invite.**

After having developed its pastoral plan to foster a culture of vocation in the Saint-Jean-Longueuil diocese, the Commission set up a number of projects offered to young people through its Youth Ministry.

For instance, the project "**In the footsteps of our spiritual masters**" offers pilgrimages to spiritual centres where contact with diverse spiritualities is made possible: a Carmelite monastery (spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila), l'Arche (spirituality of Jean Vanier), Saint-Benoît-du-Lac monastery (spirituality of St. Benedict), the Franciscains de l'Emmanuel (spirituality of St. Francis), the Fraternités Monastiques de Jérusalem (spirituality of God at the heart of the city).

Eucharistic celebrations organised for young adults between 18 and 30 allow them to be Good News to each other through sharing the Word, fraternising, witnessing and convivial celebrating. Others come together periodically for Taizé-inspired prayer meetings and involve themselves in the animation of eucharistic celebrations in parishes while still others involve themselves in service to the poorest of the poor in slum areas of large cities through sharing their living and working conditions.

Open-door Policy in the Jean de la Mennais Province

As a means of fostering vocational awareness and identifying eventual candidates to the religious

life, the Provincial team has advocated the following approach in communities:

1. Should someone knock on the door of our community to become better acquainted with us, the community makes it its responsibility to facilitate a first contact.
2. The local community, and not only the superior or one Brother, welcomes the interested party.
3. The role of the community is twofold : first, get to know the person concerned and allow him to know the community; second, exercise a first discernment as to the seriousness of the candidate's intentions.
4. Invite the young adult to share in some community activities: a meal, prayer, community sharing, etc.



Youths of the Saint-Romuald College give some of their time to a center for the aged.

5. Be available to answer questions.
6. After a few months, should a serious intent persist, the candidate is put in touch with a member of the provincial team.
7. The candidate may then be oriented to a community whose mission corresponds to one of the Province's priority commitments in the Church : schools, parishes, ad extra missions.
8. In such communities, stays may vary in length, with short periods of commitment in the relevant ministries.
9. Only then can a candidate be invited to live some form of postulancy.

This novel approach to vocation pastoral care requires commitment on the part of all although some would still wish to revert to former recruitment practices... The Provincial Chapter's resolutions invi-

te Brothers and lay persons to serenely and prayerfully surrender themselves to God's astonishing ways while they take stock of everything that is being done to assist students and young adults in discerning their life project and provide promising candidates further opportunities to experience forms of commitment, moments of sharing, time spent in community, etc.

Conclusion

Nowadays more than ever, vocational pastoral care is part of a process of evangelisation. It is during the period of Christian initiation that young people discover that they are called to follow Christ and to transform the world with Him.

It is with this in mind that I wish to underscore the work of some Brothers more directly involved in this process of evangelisation which opens the way to vocational discernment and promotion: Bro. Joseph Bourgeois, CEGEP Edouard-Monpetit and Le Phare, Longueuil; Bros. Roch Bourbonnais, Gaston Boucher and Gilles Ménard, École de la foi, Chambly; Bro. Yvon R. Roy, Collège Jean-de-la-Mennais, La

Prairie; Bro. Claude Labrosse, Saint-Hubert parish; Bros. Georges Gouron and Yvon Roy, Philipsburg; Bro. Mario Houle, Juvénat Notre-Dame, Saint-Romuald; Bros. Mercellin Perron, Jacques Goay and Jean-Paul Boisvert, Dolbeau-Mistassini; Bros. Marius Tanguay and Julien Saint-Laurent, Village des Sources en Acadie, Shédiac.

These Brothers and others, together with numerous associates, are aware that any youth ministry implies a vocational dimension which sensitizes young people to the needs of the Kingdom and invites them to consider commitments at the service of the Lord in His Church.

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Internet site to be consulted : www.suivrelechrist.org . This site "is meant to help young Canadians who feel themselves called to the consecrated life or to the priesthood." You can find there, among others, the testimony of Brother Mario Houle.

Statistics on the religious life in the world <i>(provided by the Union of the Major Superiors of Rome)</i>								
Religious priests,			Religious non-priests			Women Religious		
	1980	2005		1980	2005		1980	2005
Africa	11294	11206	Africa	5634	7949	Africa	35586	58781
America	54150	42869	America	22938	16457	America	293737	215372
Asia	13581	20723	Asia	6117	9166	Asia	87889	153472
Europa	74411	59787	Europa	35345	19574	Europa	527707	322995
Oceania	2755	2064	Oceania	3226	1963	Oceania	16072	9909
TOTAL	156191	136649	TOTAL	73090	54708	TOTAL	960991	760259