

**INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF ANIMATORS
FOR THE PASTORAL CARE
OF VOCATIONS**

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

“IN VERBO TUO”

ASSISI, S. MARIA ANGELORUM, 7-29 OCTOBRIS 2000

Rome, 15 March 2000

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Letter from the Secretary General for Formation and Studies3

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PRESENTATION

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GGCC: General Constitutions
IL: Instrumentum Laboris
YM: Youth ministry
PCV: Pastoral Care for Vocations
RFF: Ratio Formationis Franciscanae
VC: Vita consecrata

Prot. 089343

Dear Brother,

With my fraternal greeting of *Pace e bene* I am sending you **The Instrumentum Laboris (IL) "In Verbo Tuo"** which we have prepared for the International Congress of Animators for the Pastoral Care of Vocations. As you well know, this Congress will be held in Assisi from October 7 to 29, 2000 (Cfr. Letter from Minister General, Prot. 088115). All the participants must be in Assisi on the afternoon of October 7. In a subsequent letter more detailed information will be sent to you.

The **IL "In Verbo Tuo"** was prepared having present the answers to the Questionnaire which we had sent you on April 4, 1999. Seventy nine entities responded to this Questionnaire. The answers, since they come from entities on all continents and from very diverse situations, seem to us to be sufficiently representative.

Using your answers the General Secretariate for Formation and Studies made a First Outline which was presented to the Commission named by the General Definitorium to prepare the **IL** for the Congress. This Commission was made up of the three of us who work in the General Secretariate for Formation and Studies (Br. Ernest, Br. Rubén and the undersigned) and Brothers Massimo Fusarelli, Frank Peters, Manuel Buiza and Francis Tebbe. Francis, however, was not able to participate in the meeting. To your responses the Commission has added its own reflections where it treats of the Identity of the Pastoral Care for Vocations (PCV) and where the Path of the PCV is explained. It also composed the "Points for Discussion." In everything else it sought to reflect your answers in as far as possible.

The work of editing the **IL** is finished. We are sending it to you now, so that you, Ministers and Animators for the PCV who will participate in the Congress, have a prior contact with the text

which will serve us as a basis for the reflections we will do during the second week of our meeting in Assisi.

As you can see the document contains several "Points for Reflection." At the same time, as I ask you to read the text, I invite you to reflect on these "paths for discussion." With this preparation at home, the Congress can be even more fruitful.

I take this occasion to thank you, Ministers and Animators for the PCV for your interest in the Congress. Up to this point 103 Animators for the PCV have confirmed their participation in the Congress. I also take this occasion to express my appreciation to all the provinces which have responded to the Questionnaire and to the Commission which prepared the **IL**.

May the abundant blessing of the Lord descend upon all who have actively shared in the preparation for the Congress and on all of you who will participate in it.

Fraternally,

Brother José Rodríguez Carballo, ofm
*Secretary General
for Formation and Studies*

To the Ministers Provincial
To the Animators for the PCV
Loro SEDI

To discern, so that the young man can arrive at an existential option, freely choosing our form of life (cf RFF 107).

In this entire process of accompaniment it is necessary to pay special attention to the following areas:

- human maturity
- sexual-affective maturity
- maturity of faith

Themes in the deepening of faith:

- encounter with the great figures of the Bible
- Christian life as life in Christ
- The following of Christ as the inspiration and form of the moral actions of the believer

Franciscan themes:

- maturity in the vocational journey of Saint Francis
- Mission
- identification with Christ - La Verna
- journeying in prayer with Saint Francis - principal lines

Means

- a rather intense personal accompaniment
- some prolonged periods of being welcome and living in a fraternity

Activity

- Initiation into prayer

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The PCV is based upon the concept of a "journey/"
 - What merits does the idea of a "journey" seem to have in your judgement?
 - What elements would you enrich or enhance?
 - What elements would you eliminate?
 - How is the journey pursued in your entity?

the discovery of God who calls and who comes close to every person. If the accompaniment looks to the concrete option for the Franciscan life, the Animator of PCV, or the person who undertakes the accompaniment, must be a Friar having a deep understanding of Francis, a sense, likewise profound, of belonging to the Franciscan fraternity, and an intense longing to hand on to others the form of life which gives meaning to his own existence.

In this moment of his vocational journey it is necessary that the young man have by his side an “elder brother in the faith and in discipleship,” who “breaks bread with him” (cf. LC 24, 13-16) - the bread of faith, of the experience of God, and of the exhausting quest, which he shares as his call not to impose it on the candidate. but to offer a testimony to the beauty of a life lived according to the plan of God. He indicates that this is the source of living water (cf. John 6,6ss) -from which the young can satisfy his thirst for fulfillment. He witnesses in his own choice and story - not necessarily by words - his vocational journey which reveals the presence of Jesus who walks at his side (cf John 1,36) and leads him to Himself (cf John 1,41.42.45; 4,29).

The role of one accompanying another in a vocational journey, who must always feel that he is simply a mediator between the liberty of God who calls and the liberty of a man who can respond, positively or negatively to this call, can be described in three words: educate, form discern.

Educate is to draw out that which the young man bears in his heart, his possibilities, his weaknesses and his limitations until he himself is able to respond freely to the vocational call. To educate to an understanding of himself and to an adequate reading of his own history in the key of salvation history.

To form is to offer a form, or a mode of being which carries the young man to a progressive identification with Christ. In this regard the one accompanying must be quite clear in what he proposes and, at the same time, very demanding. The young man will not succeed in arriving at an identification with Christ, if he sets out from equivocations or if he does not approach us with a radical desire to follow.

I

THE REALITY FROM WHICH WE DEPART AND ITS INFLUENCE ON A VOCATIONAL RESPONSE

1. The surrounding situation

The Pastoral Care for Vocations (PCV) does not depend solely on the efforts which we Friars expend in this area and the possibilities for which we can take responsibility, but it seems to be conditioned by factors inside and outside religious and Franciscan life which usually do not depend on those who work in the pastoral care of vocations.

Among these factors the Questionnaire underscored four as most important: society in general, the world of the young, the Church and religious life, and the Order of Friars Minor itself

1.1 *Society in general*

We find ourselves on the threshold of a new era and of a new millenium. As can be expected, given the differences between what is called modern society and traditional society, the modern and post-modern world is characterized, among other factors, by the following phenomena:

1.1.1 The moment in which it is our lot to live is a confused time, but at the same time it is a fascinating time. We live amid unimagined cultural changes and dizzying social and cultural processes and, at the same time, we are assisting at the birth of a culture and subculture of new symbols and lifestyles. It is also an epoch favorable to prophets, poets, exponents of the esoteric, apocalypics and futurologists of various backgrounds.

1.1.2 Many people in the world, not only in Europe and North America, find themselves facing phenomena which many consider the weakening and collapse of the great values which have characterized, at least up to now, western culture. Among these it is necessary to cite the “philosophy”

of the market, neo-liberalism, and the orientation of the individual towards competition. Nor can we forget that in many parts of our planet the violence of war continues and there are many who are forced to flee from their place of origin.

1.1.3 The family, for a great part, has lost its influence on the individual. That influence, at least in part, has been replaced by other institutions of society: friends, work, schooling. On the other hand the family is less numerous. The decline in the birth rate seems to touch, although in different ways, almost all countries and continents.

1.1.4 The sectional and regional cultures, prevailing up to now, are dissolving and blending among themselves. Thus is being born an unlimited cultural pluralism, an ideological pluralism of new systems of relations and values, which frequently lead to a relativism in which every opinion is presented as a value.

1.1.5 The Church, at least in many countries where it formerly enjoyed a leadership and even a monopoly in the direction of society, has lost its capacity to influence this direction. The influence which the Church had in the past, for a great part, has been replaced by science giving rise to an industrialized society. During the last ten years, though, even science has lost its unassailable autonomy and has become a servant of society. Its influence, once defining modern society, has been replaced by the emphasis on the individual, who is very often turned in on himself and has difficulty listening to others, and whose highest aspirations many times are reduced to self realization, to being happy whatever it may cost, to doing whatever one wishes, to complete exploitation.

1.1.6 The uninhibited advancement of the individual is the origin of a culture of subjectivism, strongly hedonistic, making the subject the criterion and measure of any life choice.

1.1.7 Thus is born the “society of risk,” the “society of adventure.” In this society immediate experiences, images and feelings become a “civil religion.” One’s life is formed and directed towards religious and cultural values, but not by

It is important that during this period the candidate does not lose contact with other groups of young people in his original ambient.

Themes in the deepening of faith:

- the vocational dimension of the act of faith
- initiation into spiritual reading and Liturgy
- joining history and faith, Word and life (for an incarnated spirituality)

Franciscan themes:

- role and value of fraternity
- a sense of life according to the Gospel
- permanent (ongoing) conversion
- the Holy Spirit as a vocational agent
- the Spirit of the Beatitudes and of the poor

Means

- vocational trips, groups for reflection and for a deeper sharing

Activities

- being welcomed and spending time in a fraternity, insertion with the poor

3.3 Accompaniment: initial choice and incorporation

Accompaniment is a very delicate aspect of a vocational journey. Its basic objective is that of getting the young man to make a definite option for Franciscan life and to incorporate himself into the same in a recognised, or institutional, way.

The role of the Animator of PCV or that of another member of the team for PCV is essential in this context. In this phase a personal accompaniment is necessary - person to person, heart to heart. If the pedagogy of a vocational journey is a process directed towards maturity in faith, towards the state of being an adult believer; when one comes to this phase, it becomes necessary to have the presence of an accompanying person who knows the path, the voice and action of God, an “expert in ways leading to God, to accompany others along the road.” (VC 66): one who mediates in

In the process of vocational discernment it is the longest and most important phase. In it is required that the young man, attracted by the values of Franciscan life, by means of an adequate introduction, is able to commit himself to these values. The invitation is a help to discover the plan of God for the life of the person and an invitation to respond with generosity.

In this phase it is important that the young:

- take an active part in the life of the ecclesial community
- be introduced to a wise listening to the Word of God
- be introduced to personal prayer
- participate actively in the Liturgy

All this will foster in the young an attitude of listening, openness to God, and a sense of His presence so that he can respond to the fundamental question of this phase: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

It is in this phase that strictly speaking the work of the pastoral care of a vocation begins. It is the task of the agent of PCV to be concerned with and to elicit the passage from the phase of announcing one's intention to that of an initial commitment. The life of the Friars in fraternity also has a fundamental role here. There will be an invitation when [the fraternity] is open to welcoming, to listening to the signs of the time and is attentive to the authentic demands of youth.

The proposal/invitation must create in the young an attitude of reflection on himself, confronting himself with the values of the Gospel allowing it to form his personality for a genuine and relationship with God, with himself and with others.

For this reason individual dialogue with a member of the team for PCV is indispensable. Also important are gatherings specifically around the idea of vocations: time spent together to consider a vocational call with a deep experience of prayer, witnesses biblical groups for reflection and prayer. Among these specifically vocational groupings in some regions or countries the seraphic college or the minor seminary can still be valid.

the existing common models (family, tradition, religion, the Church). With these new values the man of today feels more free than before and often makes his choices without taking into account a set of values but in a selective and individualistic manner: a little of Buddhism, a little of new Age, a Chapter of the New Testament, a course in oriental meditation, a letter of Saint Francis, etc. The problem of post modernism is not the absence of religion but the mixture of various elements of diverse religions and the rapid "consumption" of these elements in the same manner, as it were, of "fast food."

It is evident that a society, dominated by the aspects we have listed, necessarily influences the vocational response. Our very own vocations and the vocations of those coming to us cannot but feel the influence of all these factors. It is God who chooses and calls, but the response is conditioned by the family, and by the cultural and moral context in which the one called lives.

From the response to the Questionnaire the following causes contributing to the vocational crises, especially in western countries, emerge:

Lowering of moral standards in society caused by materialism, prosperity, hedonism and other consequences of a consumerist society where one finds satisfaction of every legitimate and illegitimate inclination. In such a society there is no place for a life of renunciation, voluntary poverty, chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, and for the transcendent life one seeks to follow in religious life.

Profound changes in the institution of the family: the lessening of religious sentiment or, at least of religious practice; the changes in the relationships between the members of the family due to the pressure of study, work, free time, even the physically compact living space, the declining birth rate which, although in different ways, affects all nations and continents. For these and for many other reasons, the family once the natural "humus" for vocations does not seem to be such today. There seems to be an constantly increasing number of instances in which parents oppose the vocations of their children.

Changes in the school: This is a structure in which there has been a radical transformation having strong reper-

cussions on the attitudes of the young towards life in general and towards religious or Franciscan life in particular. The new organization, the methods of teaching, the social, ethical, and scientific mentalities, the personal influence of professors, etc are all elements which shape in an unforeseen manner the personal world and ambient of the adolescent and the young, and which consequently influence, at times in a decisive manner, their existential and vocational options.

1.2 *The world of the young*

The young who are privileged and destined to be the recipients of this pastoral care for vocations very frequently are the most vulnerable victims of the society just described. However, it is not easy to speak of the young in general, and it is not even exact. "Youth" is not an anthropological constant, but it depends on society and, in the final analysis, on each individual young person in particular. For this reason it is sometimes less risky to speak of a post-modern "youth culture" of which the youth of today are part and from which our candidates come.

The "youth culture" of today, in view of the responses to the Questionnaire on the youth in our situation (Cfr. 1,1 - 1,3), can be characterized by some typical components and some particular ways of acting.

1.2.1. Compared with the "youth culture" of the modern era with its faith in progress essentially intact, the post-modern "youth culture" is dominated by skepticism and frequently by a lack of illusion and utopia. It is a culture which is the "victim of realism."

1.2.2. The post-modern "youth culture" leads many young to distrust both the grand "myths" of the past and the promises of the future. It spreads a "credo" in the ephemeral nature of institutions - including the Church, family structures, human promises. In this way it is no longer the norm for many young that they find their personal identity in a traditional sector (profession, family, religion).

verse ministries operate have direct contact with the adolescence and youth in the educational process of the faith. Proclamation is deeply concerned with the life of the friars and the fraternity, because it is communication of the human, christian and franciscan values which stimulates and inspires the being and doing of the Friars and the fraternity, their vocation and mission. It is the Friars who are, living in fraternity, proclaim the Gospel of the vocation.

The Provincial animator of the PCV and his team has, above all, the task of conscientization and to form the mentality of all the Friars of the Province on their responsibility of announcing the vocation and, at the same time, to give them adequate materials for the proclamation: catechesis and witness...

Themes in the deepening of faith:

- The person of Jesus
- The diverse ministry from communion and ecclesial mission.

Franciscan themes:

- The person of Francis
- His conversion

Means

- Biblical Reflections of vocational characters
- Vocational materials for catechesis
- Vocational Audiovisuals

Activity:

- Visit to Franciscan community/friary
- Day for Vocation
- Group Discussions on Vocational theme.

3.2. *Proposal/Invitation: Initial acceptance of a specific call*

This phase has as its specific objective the gradual acceptance of the values proper to the priesthood or religious life in general, and of Franciscan life in particular.

3. The PCV itinerary

The itinerary of the PCV is a process that brings the youth, from the openness to positive values of the vocation to the option and initial incorporation to the Order, through the progressive adherence to the call. This process is developed in three parts and moments: Proclamation, Proposal and Vocational Guidance.

3.1. Proclamation: *The Good News of Christ's call*

The general objective of Proclamation is the discovery on the part of the youth, discovering the positive value of the consecrated and ministerial life, in general, and concretely, the Franciscan life.

In this phase it is fundamental to consider:

- faith as a following of Christ,
- the ecclesial and communitarian sense of faith,
- that the ecclesial and communitarian sense is lived through diverse forms of ministry and charisma,
- among the diverse charisms of the Christian community is the Franciscan Charisma.

The proclamation finds its "Humus" nature in the YM. For which the agents of the PCV must exert much effort so that it is strengthened in all areas of the educative process of faith (catechumenal group, apostolic movements, religion classes, life experiences, spiritual exercises...) vocational reflection, not only among the youth, but also among the families (adult catechesis, marriage movements, pastoral family...) and the educators.

In this phase the various agents of the PCV must put before the youth three fundamental questions: How can Jesus be followed? How do you wish to follow Jesus? In whose favor do you follow Jesus?

Beyond the families and educators, who are always involved, the agents for the proclamation must all be Friars of the provincial fraternity; all of them, that is, who in the di-

1.2.3. From this post modern "youth culture" grows the so-called "composite identity" (put together like a mosaic) which is composed of many parts and partial experiences and does not follow an already existing integrated model - resulting in a fragmented identity.

1.2.4. Many of the young who form part of this post-modern "youth culture" are afraid to decide once and for all and to make a decision binding for the totality of their life. For many youth a bond, an identification, a commitment is always partial. Many of them adopt temporary "part time" alliances, while keeping intact their personal sovereignty or independence.

1.2.5. The young, victims of a culture conditioned by subjectivism, find it difficult to face fundamental questions regarding life and the future. They are content to respond to their own needs and to satisfy requirements for maintaining intact their own image. On the other hand maturity seems to be delayed primarily on account of a prolonged adolescence.

1.2.6. This "youth culture", despite all the above, has not swept along with it all the young. It cannot be denied that there are young with a great capacity for generosity, enthusiasm and fidelity. There are young who desire to live their life to the fullest dedicating themselves totally to God and to others. There are young who have a strong inclination towards prayer, who have a great desire for radicality and authenticity in their life choices and who pay great attention to spiritual values. There are many also who show an interest in justice and in solidarity with the poor and who are sensitive to the "provocations" coming from the last ones in society.

1.2.7. The aversion of many young towards grand institutions and "holy" traditions does not mean, as unfortunately is repeated so often, that in post-modern youth there is only narcissism and extreme individualism. On the contrary, in many young there is a tremendous capacity for commitment, altruism, solidarity, together with a desire to know more and better the charism of our Order, but with an obvious difficulty, many times, to accept its structures and traditions.

1.2.8. However, these potentials are often accompanied by a psycho-affective fragility and instability, by a tendency towards discouragement and by an obvious difficulty in accepting others as they are. Many youth show themselves very attached to their family or their group of origin. They exhibit a certain individualistic spirit and longing for advancement which seems more pronounced today than in the past and which often impedes their ability to collaborate with others and to accept communitarian projects.

1.2.9. In many instances their spiritual life is undermined by a difficulty in distinguishing between feasts and every day, between special occasions and daily life. All this has serious repercussions on the fidelity to the commitment one makes. Their religiosity very often is sentimental without a solid basis.

As we have said before in regard to society, again we must say that the “youth culture,” which we have just finished describing, influences in a very clear way the vocational options of our young.

According to the answers to the Questionnaire, the elements of this “youth culture” which seem to influence, in a negative sense, the vocational response are:

The dynamic that everything is provisional is united with a taste for experimentation and a constant search, even in relation to values which seemed up to now to be fixed and definitive. From this ambient comes the resistance of many young towards a definitive commitment, almost an allergy to committing oneself to a “state of life” whether this be marriage, priesthood or consecration in religious life. From the culture of “provisionalism” comes the desire to keep the door open to other possibilities. It is clear that since religious life is a commitment to the prophecy of eschatology, the definitive; the dynamic of “provisionalism” does present a serious difficulty for vocations to the consecrated life in general and to religious life in particular.

The necessity and anxiety to live. This necessity and anxiety to live, which at first glance can seem and be positive, is not at all so when to live is understood as the necessity to have experiences (and the more the better) such as

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The PCV has its principal platform in the YM.
 - How can this platform be strengthened?
 - Does the YM, as conducted in your entity, really favor their human growth and make possible a religious experience?
- The relationship between the Pastoral Care of the Family and the PCV continually seems to becoming more evident.
 - Based on your own experience what do you have to say regarding this?
 - What other pastoral priorities do you wish to add to those already mentioned?
- The necessity for a special preparation for the animators of the PCV has been stressed in all parts.
 - What experience can you offer in this regard?
- The Animator of the PCV is also a “Formator” of all who are introduced into the vocational journey.
 - What correlation do you propose?

But prayer for vocations cannot be expected as an easy recourse to disinterest us of the problem. It will then be an alienated prayer. Praying for vocations is, in the first place, getting us on the road in search for it, promote and provoke it. Praying for vocations is, moreover, creating the conditions to make it possible and easy to hear the call of God. Praying for vocations is assuming the task to convert us ever more to the Lord who has called us to follow Him.

In this context the Biblical and Marian dimension of the entire Pastoral vocation and the importance of the liturgical year must be underlined. With especial emphasis on the great celebrations of the Franciscan Calendar, as a permanent school for the vocational journey.

2.4. Special preparation for the Animators of the PCV

The fact that CPV is included in Chapter VI of the General Constitutions dedicated to formation (Cfr. GGCC 142-145), seeks to underscore three realities:

The PCV by its very nature, is related to the question of formation.

The PCV has its own purpose and path which, on a par with formation in general, looks to the processes of the growth of the person in its totality.

The animators for the PCV like the formators, need a special preparation to be able to educate and form the young by accompanying them in their journey to maturity in faith, which they must follow with them. On their part the animators cannot be satisfied unless they have an adequate preparation.

the concrete and rapid experience of novelties in an accelerated manner. With this compulsion often the experience is reduced to sensationalism and adventurism. The necessity to have an experience leads some young to knock at our doors without any other motivation than to “try it” and to “see how it feels.” It is clear that once they “made the test” and had the first feeling, if they do not have any other more profound motivation, they go their way.

The need to realize themselves. The culture of subjectivism leads one to see every thing in relation to oneself and to evaluate every thing in terms of self-realization. As a result of this there is no lack of young who come to religious and Franciscan life moved by the desire for self-realization and nothing more. Even in this case perseverance cannot be of long duration, or, if it is, it easily yields to individualism.

1.3. The Church and religious life seen by the young

Judging from the answers to the Questionnaire, the ideas of the Church and of religious life held by the youth we contact are very diverse. We can summarize the answers to the question: “What ideas of the Church and religious life do the young who approach us have?” in the following:

1.3.1. For many young the Church and religious life are too much united to structures of the past, to expressions of faith which say little or nothing to people of today, to temporal or secular commitments difficult to justify from the Gospel perspective. This is the opinion which prevails among the young whom we can call “marginalized” and “separated.”

1.3.2. A large majority seems to have a rather confused idea of the Church and of religious life and, as a result they identify the Church with the hierarchy and religious life with elements outside this and which often do not even exist. Other young people do not see a clear difference between the lay vocation and the vocation to religious life.

1.3.3. There are not lacking young who would like to see the Church and religious life as a platform and incentive for greater participation in a life of faith. This opinion seems to

be the one prevalent among the young whom we might call “committed.” Some of these young people do not realize, or do not seek to realize, integration into ecclesiastical groups or communities, or into religious congregations, because these seem to them not sufficiently committed. Other “committed” young, once they come to know such groups and communities, integrate well into them and work responsibly to build up a new type of Church and religious life.

1.3.4. There exists also a type of young person who does not manifest any conflict with the Church and religious life as an “institution.” This type of person can be called “integrated” or “whole.” Here we are talking about the young man who fits in well in a seminary or religious house. He is a socially adjusted and assumes without tension the models, and the behavioral patterns and programs received from the familial, religious, social and cultural “institutions.”

It is clear that depending on how the young man views the Church and religious life it will be easier or more difficult for him to integrate with the first and opt for the second. At first glance it can seem that the option for religious life will be easier for the “committed” young man. However, it is not always so, because, as we have already said, some precisely due to their feeling “committed” do not agree to be part of an institution (the Church or a religious institute) which does not seem to them to be sufficiently committed.

Also for the “integrated” the option for religious can seem easy. This depends without a doubt on the type of religious life they find. The integrated do not always accept a committed and radical religious life. What certainly makes a commitment in the Church and an option for religious life difficult for the young is the fact that they see both as power bases and their lives as anchored in the past.

1.4. The Order of Friars Minor

Francis and our life, what we do but especially what we are, are the fundamental “agents” for the PCV, in as far as they play a decisive role, positive or negative, in the actual process.

present and it actively influences the orientation phase, guidance, decision and formation in all levels. It follows the entire journey up to apostolic maturity. Even if vocations have diverse origins, the itinerary guidelines is that it comes from the families in which they actively participate in the life of the church. It is not by chance that the vocation crisis coincides with a strong crisis in the family.

How can the family be formed in order that it assumes its role as vocation animator?

In the first place, make the family aware of its very identity. Accompany it, along a formation process on faith, in an awareness of their human and Christian essence of “vocation and mission” with regards to their children, the society and the Church and therefore, in the face of the entire vocations. It is important that the parents give a vocation witness to their children, proclaiming and living their own sacrificing love towards the Lord and the Church, open to all vocations that God wills. It is, moreover necessary that parents are close by in whatever decision and way their children choose; in close relationship with the other vocational animators. It is fundamental that parents help their children overcome the great obstacles that today kills, restricts and, in many cases hampers vocations. Being prisoners of the perspective of egoism, hedonism, utilitarianism, interest for gain and power. To achieve a true vocational orientation, it is indispensable that parents collaborate by doing everything possible for their children to be open to a possible call of God to the life of priesthood and consecration.

2.3. The PCV animated and sustained by prayer

Prayer is the foremost and indispensable service that we can offer to promote vocation, because vocation is a gift from God that is asked for, because the vocational call can only resound and be heard in prayer, because this is the “mystery” which everyone can and must realise in the Church; because prayer makes us responsible, creative and dynamic in confronting the call.

The PCV finds its vital space in the YM (cf RFF 114). The YM, instead, is complete and effective when it is open to the vocational dimension, in such a way that the vocational reality is the direction and end of very educational itinerary for the young. Whatever educational itinerary for the young then, becomes formative in the Christian prospective only when it is open in the vocational dimension.

The PCV must not be incorporated in the YM only at the end, but must be part of the entire long course of the YM. The topic on specific vocation cannot sprout solely at the end of the process and must not be addressed only to a few. It must be included in the reflection and life as a normal reality, as a possibility and an offering to all, as service within the Christian community.

The incorporation of the PCV in the YM requires from the PCV YAnimators and other Pastoral vocation agents a deep respect for the gifts of the Spirit gives to each one and that they should take care of Evangelization carefully. The Lord calls when He wants, as He wants, whoever He wants and for something which He wants. The pastoral agent has the task to be respectful mediator regarding the liberty of God and of the liberty of the young that he guides. On the other hand, the rapport of the PCV with YM demands from the pastoral of vocation an itinerary of faith leading to a personal encounter with Jesus. It does not deal with engaging the youth with whatever activity; it rather deals with provoking in them a process that leads them to a maturity in faith.

2.2. *The PCV in close Relationship with the Pastoral Family*

Pastoral vocation is a joint venture with the Pastoral family. The primary vocational animators are really the parents because they represent the natural source of their children's vocation. Their love is the font from which springs the river of life, of society and the of the Church. It puts forth the basis of human and Christian formation and, as such, the remote basis of any disponibility to every call. The family limits or liberates the orientation to the option for life. It is very

On the figure of Francis and the values he lived and preached the opinion of the young, according to the response to the Questionnaire, seems to be unanimous:

1.4.1. Francis exercises a great attraction for the young today. They see him as near and real. In their conflicts, doubts, ideals, humanity, compassion for the poor the youth of today find him to be a young man like themselves.

1.4.2. Many of them feel as their own Francis' existential manner of acting marked by humility, joy, simplicity of life, minority...

1.4.3. There are also many young who believe that the values Francis promoted are very timely: reconciliation, peace, justice, universal brotherhood...

Regarding our form of life, judging from the answers to the questions on the questionnaire referring to Franciscan life and in particular to the question "What are the values and countervalues that the young perceive in our life?" (Cfr. 2.2.6), the reactions encountered seem to be the following:

1.4.4. Many feel attracted by our form of life, although they do not necessarily feel called to share it. They are attracted by our simple joyful, close way of acting; our capacity to listen, our life in fraternity and the familiar behavior of equal with equal which they observe among us.

1.4.5. Other times, however, our life appears to them as far removed from the "form of life" envisioned by Francis which he left to us. They see us as distant from the problems and necessities of the people of today. They see us as "middle class" acting in a "role" - that of followers of Francis - not always corresponding to the reality of our life.

1.4.6. The young, although they are not always consistent with what they demand of us, want to see in us men of God, persons close to them and the poor; they want to see us as more poor and austere; more fraternal and dialogical; more involved in the struggle for justice and peace...

Taking into consideration some responses to the Questionnaire, we are able to say that the elements which seem most influential negatively in the vocational response of some young are the following:

A crisis of personal and collective identity. Among us there are Friars who give the impression not having a clear identity of themselves as Friars Minor, that is to say, they have not succeeded in defining themselves as such neither for themselves nor before others. That reveals itself in a pessimistic attitude of having failed, in discontentment, in a lack of outward enthusiasm for the life they have embraced, in vocational insecurity, and, in not a few cases, in the decision to leave the Order. All this is transmitted and the first to discover it are mainly the young who come into our environment. Certainly this does not facilitate the option of the young for our form of life.

Lack of authenticity and middle class lifestyle. In many instances our life is hardly significant. The evangelical radicality which marked the life of Francis does not always appear clearly in our life. In other words we are not always authentic. The “role” of Franciscan leads us to “act” in a manner not always corresponding to the reality of our life. Our young search for an ambient in which they can experience evangelical values and options. Although they can be rather mediocre themselves, indeed they do not easily accept certain aspects of a middle class life. On the other hand, nevertheless, they want to see authenticity and ask us to walk the way of truth. They love high ideals and adventure and ask us to take risky options. In this sense we must confess that many times our life leaves much to be desired and instead of attracting, distances.

An idealized Franciscanism which convinces but does not challenge. Never has the Franciscan project been more studied and explained than today. Today more than ever Francis exerts a fascination in the mind and hearts of so many people. And, despite all this, we lack the courage to translate the evangelical options of Francis in our life. We lack the decisiveness to be and to live what we want to be and live. We lack the radicality. This cannot but impact negatively on the vocational option of those who know us.

2. Pastoral priorities

We are convinced that the PCV cannot be left to chance, but, on the other hand, must be carefully planned. This planning must take into account the social and ecclesial context in which the PCV will take place. For this reason, in the last chapter of the IL, we claim to indicate only some elements useful to define a project for the PCV and to assist in its organization. So we start with the pastoral priorities which must be considered when designing a program for this work.

2.1. The PCV inserted in the YM.

The PCV has necessarily a presupposition where it is inserted and of what is in the expression: the fundamental vocation of all the children of God to conform themselves in the image of the Son in a slow and painstaking process of daily conversion (cf GGCC 146,2) This presupposition has very concrete consequence at the moment of fulfilling the PCV.

First of all, emphasising the PCV must realise itself considering that the Franciscan vocation is one “expression” of the same Christian vocation of all those who were baptised; a vocation that stands out in a great variety of particular vocations, among which is the Franciscan, that are founded in the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, It seems clear that the PCV must cultivate the Franciscan vocation in the context and in fidelity to the common baptismal commitment.

Everything emphasises the close relationship between YM and PCV. The fundamental objective of YM is Evangelisation and education of the adolescent and the young on their active and responsible incorporation in the church; while the fundamental objective of PCV help the young to be able to follow his specific vocation in the Church and, in specially to gradually discover his own value of the Franciscan charisma until he identifies himself and adhere to this form of life discovering it as his own life in the context of the Christian vocation (cf GGCC 144; 145,2).

1.3.2. Objectives “ad extra”

- To make the People of God aware of their duty towards the vocations of each person (Cfr. GGCC 144; RFF 103).
- To help those coming to us contemplate their own life project according to the vision of the Kingdom of God (Cfr. GGCC 144).
- To foster, welcome and support new vocations, cultivating with diligent care the vocational seed in those offering hope of entering the Franciscan Family (Cfr. GGCC 145 §2; 146 §1; RFF 103).
- To accompany the candidates in their journey of faith so that they know themselves, penetrate ever deeper the figure of Jesus Christ and that of Saint Francis, and are able to discern better their real vocation and so make a life choice (Cfr. RFF 107).
- To collaborate with the YAnimators for the Pastorals for Vocations in the local Church and the Franciscan Family.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The PCV does not concern itself only with those who feel interested in this form of life, but rather in the first place with the Friars who welcome them.
 - What awareness do the Friars of your entity have of their being “recipients” of the PCV?
- One of the objectives of the PCV is that of “fostering, welcoming and supporting” new vocations.
 - How does your entity seek to respond to this objective?
 - What are the results and the lack of results in this respect?

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The description of the situation in the society in which we live is necessarily a synthesis and incomplete. The same must be said about the description of the “youth culture.”
 - Do the characteristics of the society and the world of the young described in the Instrumentum Laboris IL reflect the characteristics of the society and world of the youth with whom you work?
 - Concretely, is the reading of the “youth culture” excessively negative? If perhaps it is, what would be the positive aspects you would like to underscore? What would be the faith filled and Franciscan reading of this culture? What horizon of hope opens before your eyes when you observe the society and youth with whom you work?
 - In your pastoral work what attention is given to knowing the reality of youth? Do you really know the youth with whom you work, their anxieties, aspirations...?
- The economic globalization and the growing inequality in the world between North and South is a great challenge and makes it more difficult each day to be able to talk of a “vocational culture.”
 - With the reality in which you live as a point of departure, what challenges does this culture of globalization and the inequalities between the rich and poor pose for the pastoral care for vocations?

2. The reality of Vocations in the Order of Friars Minor

2.1. Numerical trends in vocations

Regarding the numerical trends in vocations, the situation differs greatly in each country or region. In some regions there are few young knocking at our door and, as a consequence there are also few who enter to become part of our Fraternity.

In other countries or regions there are many who are interested in Franciscan life and arrive even to the point of making profession, but the perseverance rate is generally low. The result of this is that a lessening of numbers of Friars can be seen in all the geographic areas in which we are present. Thus the increased number of friars alone does not solve the problem of the Order's call to "mission ad gentes" nor is it even an adequate response to the demands of a New Evangelization. All this is so, despite the fact that the number of Friars entering exceeds the number of friars receiving a "visit" from Sister Death. Especially significant is the lessening of the number of lay friars, despite the fact that there is a growing awareness and sense of being one Fraternity.

Some statistical data on the number of vocations in the Church, in religious life in general, and in the Order, read in the context of world population, can illustrate what we go about saying.

The statistics of the Church offer the following data:

The world population of 2.8 billion in 1958 increased to 5.7 billion in 1995 (+ 203.6%). In 40 years the increase, therefore, is more than double. The Catholic population for its part passed from 419 million in 1958 (15% of the world population) to 976 million in 1994 (17.4% of that of the world population).

The Diocesan priests numbered 267,969 in 1969 and 274,392 in 1994.

The religious priests numbered 145,469 in 1969 and 142,925 in 1994. While the number of diocesan priests increased by 2.4%, the number of religious priests decreased by 1.9%.

The Pastorals Care for Vocations "ad intra" demands of each Friar personal renewal and of each local and provincial fraternity institutional renewal. It deals with undertaking a commitment to a profound conversion in a way that the Gospel life of Francis becomes actual in the life and activity of each Friar and fraternity. For the other part the preparation of the one with the primary responsibility is placed at the center of the whole project for a pastoral for vocations.

1.2.2. Recipients "ad extra"

The youth. To them is addressed the information and, above all, the invitation and accompaniment in such a way that their response can be free, prompt, generous and mature.

The Church community. To it is addressed the message, namely, that to it will be presented the various types of vocations and among these will be that of the Franciscan vocation.

The Pastorals for Vocations "ad extra" entails a serious option for evangelization, a real drawing near to the world of the young, and a concrete pastoral plan for vocations. All this implies that we must move from an attitude of silence and waiting to an attitude of clear and courageous invitation.

1.3. Objectives

The objectives of the PCV, as indicated in our Constitutions, are clearly united. There are two types of objectives which must be elaborated simultaneously: objectives "ad intra" and objectives "ad extra."

1.3.1. Objectives "ad intra"

- To show to those approaching us that the lifestyle of Francis and the values of Franciscan spirituality are part of our life (Cfr. GGCC 145 §1; RFF 105).
- To live with authenticity and joy our vocation, in such a manner that our witness "invites" others to embrace our form of life itself (Cfr. GGCC. 145 §1: RFF 104).
- To prepare the fraternities to welcome whoever shows an interest in the Franciscan charism (Cfr. RFF 106).

the young who show a definite interest in the distinct form of life, the Franciscan charism in the First Order, the Second Order and the Secular Franciscan Order.

When referring to a **specific project** orientated toward the young who offer a certain hope to be able to follow Christ by embracing the Franciscan form of life, the PCV must be based on

- the witness of individual and community Franciscan life with the intent to offer to others the charism of Saint Francis as a model for life.
- the message of Saint Francis (his person, his life, his word) with the intent to move others to share their experience of Gospel living.
- the activity geared to discern, welcome and cultivate new vocations to the Franciscan life as raised up by the Holy Spirit (Cfr. GGCC 145).

1.2. Recipients of the Pastoral Care for Vocations

In discussing the Pastoral Care for Vocations we must speak of the recipients “ad intra” (within) and “ad extra” (outside).

1.2.1. Recipients ad “intra”

All the Friars of the local and provincial fraternity. “Authenticity and testimony” of life is sought from them. Pastoral care for vocations should dictate that the Friars be conscious of the importance of living authentically their own vocation. In the Pastoral Care for Vocations this cannot be delegated. All the Friars and each fraternity are needed in this endeavor and all are called to develop this “ministry” of animation of the Pastoral care for Vocations. This awareness depends greatly on how one looks at ongoing formation which aims, as we know well, to give a greater quality to our life.

The Animators of the Pastoral Care for Vocations.

Even though all must be animators, a greater commitment to the service of vocations is asked of the Animators through the testimony of their life and their pastoral ministry. The “ministry” which the Animators carry on depends likewise on how they view ongoing formation and on their specific preparation for this mission.

The religious men not priests (of pontifical and diocesan right) numbered 84,441 in 1969, while they numbered 59,872 (- 41.0%) in 1994.

The religious women (of pontifical and diocesan right) passed from 1,006,034 in 1969 to 848,455 (- 15.3%) in 1994.

2.1. On its part our Order offers the following data

2.2.1. Regarding the solemnly professed

- During the last 8 years 704 solemnly professed have left the Order. This means that 88 friars leave the Order each year. The majority of these were solemnly professed for less than 10 years.
- There were 3,081 deaths in these 8 years. This means that about 385 solemnly professed friars die each year.
- During the same period of time 2,215 Friars were admitted to solemn profession. Each year about 276 Friars enter the Fraternity as solemnly professed.
- In these 8 years the Order has lost by departure or death 3,785 Friars, or an average of 473 Friars a year. This figure relates to that of 2,215 Friars who during this period of time have pronounced solemn profession. This means that during this period the Order has diminished by 1,570 Friars, or by about 196 Friars a year.

2.2.2. Regarding the Friars with the clerical option

- The number of clerical Friars (bishops, priests, and deacons) has passed from 12,668 to 11,615. These figures indicate a diminution of 1,035 Friars, about 131 a year. Since the number of bishops and deacons remains constant, the decrease fundamentally regards the number of priests.

2.2.3. Regarding the Friars with the lay option

- In 8 years we have passed from 2,856 Friars with the lay option to 2,567 which means a diminution of 289 in 8 years or about 36 each year.

2.2.4. *Regarding the temporary professed*

- During these 8 years 1,673 Friars have left the Order during the period of temporary profession which is an average of 209 Friars a year. To this it is necessary to add that during the same period 19 temporary professed Friars died. This means that there was a decrease of 1,692 temporary professed, that is to say an average of 211 Friars in temporary profession a year. However, this does not mean that all the others arrived at solemn profession.

2.2.5. *Regarding the novices*

- In the last 8 years we had 4,869 novices, which on an average is 608 novices a year. Reckoning that during these 8 years 4,365 Friars made first profession, the annual average for professions is 545. This means that 63 novices have left the novitiate each year. This figure is really low, in comparison with that of those leaving later, either during the time of temporary profession (209 Friars per year) or after solemn profession (88 friars per year).

2.2.6. *Regarding the zones*

- The Order is diminishing in all the zones in which the Friars live with the exception of Eastern Europe. There, in Eastern Europe, although the number of novices is going down, every year an increase in professed Friars can be can be verified. This speaks of a perseverance rate higher than, for example in Latin America where although the number of novices is increasing, the number of solemnly professed still is decreasing.

As can be observed, the tendency to lower numbers, begun in the Sixties, continues and there are no clear signs of a reversal of the trend yet. This comes about because the number of vocations is not numerically proportioned to the lack created by the demographic aging of the priests and consecrated religious and caused by those who abandon the priesthood and religious life.

III TOWARDS A PROJECT FOR THE PASTORAL CARE FOR VOCATIONS

1. Identity of the PCV

1.1. *Meaning of the Pastoral Care for Vocations*

Our documents “translate” pastoral for vocations as “The Pastoral Care of Vocations.” The etymological analysis of the words allow us to discover their deep meaning and, therefore, the “identity” of pastorals for vocations.

Pastorals for vocations is first of all “cura” in Latin. “Cura” is a substantive derived from “curare” which means: to take a person or cause to heart, to take care of, to be concerned for, to take charge of someone or something. These meanings clarify the full implication of the real competence of the person called to “care.” The Pastoral Care for Vocations is a “ministry with a priority” which on a par with formation demands the loving, vigilant and respectful attention of the Agent for Pastorals for Vocations for the one with whom he is dealing.

Pastorals for vocations is also a “pastoral” care. The adjective “pastoral” calls to mind the figure and role of a pastor, or shepherd, which in this context assumes the semantic intensity of the Bible. Therefore the term “pastoral” highlights the manner in which the care must be offered. It is that of the “biblical pastor,” an image which God the Father and Jesus made their own to express their relationship to the people and to each individual. From this it can be inferred that whoever is called to “pastoral care,” in the fulfillment of this mission, must make his own the feelings of God-Pastor of Israel: closeness, understanding, constant accompaniment, education for freedom.

This “pastoral care” has as its direct object “vocations.” “Vocations” must be understood both in the broad sense - any calling within the People of God - and in the strict sense - the Franciscan calling. The PCV must be conceived at the same time as a broad project, directed towards all youth, so that they can discern the mission for which God has destined them, and as a specific project directed towards

working with youth. (VC 64). On the other hand, it is also clear that the PCV does not restrict itself simply to YM. And here the problem rises, or at least the questions surface. At what point does one end and the other begin? On the basis of approach how does one differ from the other?

There are many who have the impression that there is not always the courage or the imagination - even within an indispensable pastoral for youth - to concretize a method or more precise an approach properly directed towards vocations. There is a need for a genuine and specific pastoral care for vocations, because approaches are taken sometimes, in the best of cases, out of regard for the person, and other times out of fear of being accused of "vocational proselytism."

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The mind-set of "delegating" the PCV seems to be fairly common in our entities.
 - What do you propose to overcome this mentality?
 - In many cases an easy transition from YM to PCV is not realized.
 - What are your recommendations that YM also be PCV?
- Neither the GGCC nor the RFF speak of YM.
 - What are your suggestions on how to proceed in this area?

2.3. Our candidates

Taking into account the answers to the question on the Questionnaire "What type of young man listen to our vocational call?" (Cfr.1.1.4), the profile which our candidates seem to present is the following:

2.3.1. In reference to the cultural level and intellectual preparation there is an extremely wide range of difference: from those who come to us after studies at the university level to those who knock at our door after having only elementary schooling. This last situation prevents them from adequately taking up philosophical and theological studies.

2.3.2. In regard to religious formation there are not lacking those who have a good base in their understanding of the faith of the Church. These usually come from active church groups. However, those who have an insufficient Christian formation are rather numerous. Most often their religious formation is based on spiritualism, devotionalism, or a pre-counciliar vision of the Church.

2.3.3. The type of religious formation influences vocational motivation. Generally little religious formation is on a par with weak vocational motivation. Nor can we overlook the fact that some of those who knock at our door and who opt for our form of life do so for what can be called "social advancement" ("upward social mobility"). Others ask to be received because they seek a refuge in our Fraternity. There are also some candidates who have had seriously and gravely negative moral experiences. However, there are those who approach us because they are moved by the ideal of unconditional dedication to Christ, according to the pattern of life left to us by Francis. These come to us after having made the decision by some type of discernment.

2.3.4. Regarding the place of origin: it seems that those coming from seraphic colleges or minor seminaries, still existing in some provinces, do not constitute the majority of our candidates, but those coming from youth groups (sometimes from GIFRA), from prayer groups, or after the experi-

ence of being a volunteer. Some come from the universities, very few from our colleges.... Some come to us without ever having had in the past any type of vocational accompaniment. It is necessary to conclude that “our groups” are not then usual source of candidates for our Order.

2.3.5. In some provinces a considerable number of candidates come from other congregations, diocesan seminaries or directly from other provinces of the Order.

2.3.6. With regard to age: the majority of candidates arrive for postulancy at about 18 to 20 years of age. But there are more and more instances, especially in Central and Western Europe, when the aspirants knocking on our doors are in the age ranging from 30 to 40 years or even older.

2.4. Reactions to the numerical trends in vocations

Looking at the numerical shrinkage of vocations in a large part of the Order the reactions are quite diverse, from very negative to rather positive.

Among the negative reactions it must be emphasized that there are entities of the Order which with a certain guilt complex accept the situation with the attitude that they are victims. “We do not have vocations,” they say, “because of a lack of witness in our life”. In other entities there are friars who are resigned to a prolonged final agony, convinced that all is coming to an end. There are also Friars who simply cross their arms and wait for better times to come.

In contrast to these reactions there are other reactions of a contrary positive nature. In many entities there are Friars who faced with the lessening of vocations show an increasing interest in a pastoral approach to the problem of vocations. This interest is visible in the attention which some entities give to the preparation of the Friars working in Youth ministry (YM) and in the PCV; in the design of projects for YM and for the PCV; in personal and community prayer for vocations; in renewed attention to spiritual direction and to a personalized accompaniment of the young in

bishops and pastors on more than one occasion lament the fact that religious conduct their own independent pastoral programs and take no account at all of the pastoral programs for youth and vocations in the parishes and dioceses.

2.2. The easy “delegation” of responsibility of all for the pastoral for vocations

All the friars are certainly concerned with vocations, especially in regard to numbers. On the other hand the provinces, as was already said, invest their best energy in the pastoral care of vocations and employ all means available so that this work bears fruit. But it is no less certain, state many responses to the Questionnaire, that the erroneous thinking continues that this pastoral care, on both the provincial and local levels, depends on the activity of one Friar alone.

With too great frequency the members of an entity “delegate” their personal responsibility to the promoter or coordinator of the PCV or to the “Fraternity of Welcome.” The understanding and involvement of the communities and of the individual religious in the service of vocations is slight, indicate some responses: because of the many work commitments within the structures, because of the advanced age of many religious, because of the difficulty of the communities to accept what is “new,” because of a certain resignation to the decline of vocations, because of the constant temptation to delegate care for vocations to the ones assigned to the task, because of the slight sensitivity of the religious to the challenges coming from the world of youth.

2.3. The difficulty in moving from pastorals for youth to the pastoral care of vocations

Without any doubt the platform par excellence for the pastoral care of vocations is pastoral activity with youth. The Pope himself recalls this when he states: “The most authentic way to support the Holy Spirit’s action is for the institutes to invest their best resources generously in vocational work, especially by their serious involvement in

2. Negative Signs

In the PCV, as in many other realities of our life, not all is positive. In the journey already undertaken, in which we have discovered many positive signs, there are not lacking some negative signs. Among these the responses to the Questionnaire highlight the following:

2.1 *Difficulty in sharing*

At the same time while the necessity of working together is evident, as was said in the preceding paragraphs, the difficulty of this working together is also evident. Sometimes there are occasions of study in common, but they are more for comparing experiences than for building together. The agreement and fervor which in former times brought us to sit around the same table and elaborate plans for a shared effort, today seem to belong to the past. The agents of pastorals for vocations forgetting the attitude of graciousness and free giving frequently yield to the temptation for efficiency and for what is useful for their own entities. With such a mentality it is useless to listen to others. So it happens that the specter of suspicion of recruitment, which seemed overcome, reappears in the Order as well as in the rest of the Church itself.

There are Friars who lament the fact that they are not welcomed and heard in the local Church. They maintain, the bishops in theory say they support religious vocations, but they themselves are traumatized by the reduced number of diocesan vocations. On the other hand it is clear that in the Christian community religious life is hardly appreciated and vocations to religious life frequently are discouraged and impeded by both the local clergy and the laity. The friars continue to complain that the bishops and pastors hardly understand religious life and that there is scarcely a presence of our religious in the area of pastorals for vocations in the dioceses. Generally the activity of religious in this field is not viewed kindly by them. They fear that religious steal vocations for the seminaries. At the same time one does not see a sensitivity on the part of bishops and pastors towards the pastoral care of vocations to religious life. On their part

vocational discernment; in a greater courage on the part of the Friars to suggest a vocation; in the increase in “houses of welcome” for youth with a great variety of activities: retreats, live-ins, spiritual exercises, etc. There is a sufficiently large number of Friars who are convinced that the crises through which we are passing, in the light of the lessons we can learn from the past, far from leading to discouragement, feelings of being victimized, or to a facile resignation, must lead us to an attentive reading of the signs of the time and to an increased and positive pastoral approach to the vocational problem.

One certainty is that the results are not always in proportion to the efforts. There are entities which work hard and well in YM and which invest great means and human effort in the PCV without realizing great or even slight vocational results. Other entities, on the other hand, with less effort are realizing greater results.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- The statistics make us think.
 - What reactions and lessons do they suggest to you?
 - How are the Friars in your entity living with the decreasing number of vocations?
 - How does the data presented affect the YM and the PCV in your province or entity?
- The portrait of the candidates presented in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, although certainly only partial, still orients us in our reflection.
 - What is the “typology” of the candidates who come to your entity?
 - What demands does this type of candidate make on the PCV?

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- One of the characteristics of the PCV, without a doubt, is the great richness of initiatives, either on the level of activity or on the level of the journey, proposed for the young.
 - What must be the essential elements of these activities and this journey, and what are the Franciscan characteristics which must not be missing in these initiatives?
 - Among the initiatives cited, has one in your entity perhaps been omitted?
 - Working with the Local Church and with the Franciscan Family has been proposed as “choral work” of the whole Church in the PCV.
 - In your entity how is this collaboration with the local Church and the Franciscan family working out?
 - The fraternity for welcoming vocations seems to be an important element in the PCV.
 - What is your experience in this endeavor?
 - What suggestions can you offer?

*1.2. In collaboration with the Church
and with the entire Franciscan Family*

The pastoral for vocations, as a “choral commitment of the whole Church” (VC64) has become a constant in the last years. The Order, in harmony with the Church, has become aware of the importance of a pastoral for vocations and has applied itself to work in this area as a Fraternity open to other ecclesiastical communities. The fruit of this is the cooperation with diocesan secretaries for a pastoral for vocations, with the families and educators, the meetings and cooperation between vocational YAnimators of the various institutes. It is not surprising to say that there is also a respect for the young and an attention to their proper charism irregardless of where the young can realize it.

It must be pointed out that, despite not a few limitations, there is a growing awareness of the necessity to work for the Kingdom and for the good of the Church, to transcend the wall of one’s own institute and to appreciate the charism of others.

Particularly significant is the collaboration with the rest of the Franciscan Family, above all with our Sisters the Poor Clares, the Secular Franciscan Order and other institutes of Franciscan religious women.

II
LIGHTS AND SHADOWS
OF THE PASTORAL CARE FOR VOCATIONS
IN THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR

1. Positive signs

During the last years in the Church, and consequently in our Order, there has been not a brief journey with regard to the PCV. This journey has extended through several phases: an absence of a pastoral for vocations, corresponding to the period when there was an abundance of vocations; an emergency pastoral for vocations during the period when there was a lack if vocations; a pastoral for vocations as an incentive for change, proper for the period of discernment; and a pastoral for vocations as a sign and means of renewal, corresponding to the time of prophecy. Today, what remains of all this?

It is not easy to make a generalized “diagnosis” in as far as the reality cannot be painted simply in “black and white.” In many of our entities the “new” lives along with the “old,” confidence with fear, the “lights” with the “shadows,” and the signs of life and hope with the signs of death. Among the **positive signs** we must refer to the following:

1.1. Richness of initiatives and attempts

In the last years almost every province has invested “great spiritual and material energy” (VC 64) in the field of the PCV. Although, as we already said, the results do not always correspond to the expectations and efforts made, and although in many of our entities it has been proven that there is a lack of proportion between the work and the results; it is a fact nevertheless that efforts in this field are not lacking and the dream is constantly being put to the test. Field work, publications, vocational events, weekends of reflection, schools of prayer, vocational “vacations,” vocational “telephone friends,” use of the Internet, ...are only some of the initiatives which are in process.

It can be said that great results are not seen, and there is even discouragement and sadness before an uncertain future, especially in entities in which the average age is quite high; but there is present the effort and, above all, of great significance, the reflection which accompanies these initiatives. Furthermore it is also a very positive fact that in all the activity which is undertaken special attention is given to assure for the young a process of maturation in the faith, a journey leading them to discover the person of Jesus and, then, setting off from there, the idea of a vocation is proposed.

Among the richness of these initiatives and steps, according to the responses to the Questionnaire, it is necessary to highlight

1.1.1. The experience of fraternity

“Come and see.” This is the golden rule for a pastoral for vocations ever since Jesus Himself made it His own. (Cfr. John 1:30; VC 64). Without any doubt in these last years there are many friars who strive to bring the Fraternity to the young and the young to the Fraternity. Convinced that one experience of the life makes a greater impact on the young than thousands of speeches, many active in the pastoral for vocations have made “come and see” the slogan which brought about the opening of “**houses of welcome**” in which the young share the very life of the community; **field works** in which the animators participate with the young; **monasteries** in which the young share important moments, especially the prayer, of the life of the Poor Clares and the contemplatives of the Franciscan Family. They are always motivated by the care (desire) to share that which is most genuine in our charism: fraternity, joy, life style, and to avoid proselytism, that is manipulation and a program designed simply for “hunting” vocations.

1.1.2. Personal Encounter with the Lord

To follow Jesus through priestly or religious consecration, the total dedication of oneself to the cause of the Gospel, is possible only if it begins with a personal encounter with the Lord leading to a transfiguration in Christ, to union with Him. Only in a personal encounter

with Jesus is it possible “to discern His life plan for each one, “only in a personal encounter with Jesus is it possible to have a “precise and concrete program for the service of the Gospel.”

Aware of the fact that the young do not allow themselves to be charmed by abstract realities and recognizing the fact that faith, and therefore pastoral activity, is a saving encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, the animators of the PCV have a special interest in the quality of prayer, personal and in groups. They take special care to teach the young how to pray. They program **desert days** and **days of recollection** in which the young have the opportunity for an **encounter with the Word** and with themselves. They offer themselves for **spiritual accompaniment** which facilitates discernment. Every day there are more animators of the PCV who require a reflective and prayerful atmosphere in their activity. There are many who from the beginning insist on the primacy of being over doing, and on the necessity of a generous and freely given offering of self for the plan of Jesus for one’s life.

1.1.3. At the service of others

“The beauty of total dedication of oneself to the cause of the Gospel” (VC 64) has become, and rightly continues to be, a constant point of reference for the pastoral for vocations during the recent years. This dedication begins with a rather **humble and ordinary service**” and manifests itself in an **altruistic management of one’s time and personal energy, as** expresses one’s feeling on being loved without limit and the need to love in the same manner.

Such a principle has led the animators of the PCV both in the planning of their activities and in the actual moment of discernment **to value highly the human qualities** so important that they are required of us by our General Constitutions: “All the brothers should promote continually a family spirit and friendly relationships especially among themselves. They should be courteous and cheerful and develop all the other virtues. Thus they can continually encourage one another to be men of hope, peace and happiness. United in true brotherhood, they should reach a maturity that is fully human, Christian and religious.” (GGCC 39)