

AWAKENING VOCATIONS

(District of Quebec, Canada)

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«Vocation is a call to give life»
(John Paul II)

Among the means we have to awaken vocations among young people between the ages of 16 and 18, we have the possibility of teaching catechism. I should like to speak about its content and method of presentation. What I have to say is not intended to be exhaustive: it is rather an attempt to present a few thoughts and some information put together with the religious education teacher.

It should be mentioned that the initiative to provide this catechesis came from the Vocations' Office of the diocese of Quebec. On the basis of an agreement with the heads of schools, the Office uses volunteers to offer this service with a view to promoting vocations. Teachers work in pairs, a man religious teaming up with a Sister. The aim of this is to offer a measure of complementarity in dealing with the boy and girl pupils of State and private schools. The time allowed for sessions is about 65 minutes, which is enough for contact to be established and views to be exchanged.

The catechists introduce themselves and state the reason for the session.

At the beginning of the catechetical session, we introduce ourselves individually to the young people. We tell them who we are, what institute we belong to, where we live, what our apostolic work is.

We think it is important to tell the youngsters why we have come among them: *«One thing is certain: we haven't come here as people who possess the whole truth, nor with the teacher's answer book. Above all, our aim is not to give you a vocation to the religious life, to*

the priesthood, to be a missionary or to join a secular institute. Even if we wanted to, we wouldn't be capable of doing so. All we want to do is to make things a little bit clearer and help you make an informed choice with regard to vocational commitments. We come among you as witnesses to Jesus, as witnesses to what we are and to the way we live.»

The participation of the youngsters

Next, the youngsters are asked to form groups of 6 or 7 around a sheet of paper on which is written: «**Vocation or life-plan?**» We give them a felt-tip pen and ask them to write down their spontaneous reactions: *«What do you think when you see the words vocation or life-plan?»* Session after session, the same words come back: love, marriage, sharing, family, profession, Jesus, a job, difficulties, money, religious life, celibacy, etc. These sheets are then pinned up on the walls of the pastoral centre room, and on the basis of the youngsters' input, the two catechists introduce possible ways of living a vocation. Each catechist makes a personal statement about himself: how his life-plan came about, how he puts it into practice in his daily life as a religious. *«What is my vocation? My vocation is to love. I live for SOMEONE and I am loved by someone. For me, this someone is Jesus (the focus of my life).»* Each person, whether celibate or married, has a vocation to love. The same love characterises all states of life. What varies is the WAY of loving and the MEANS... (to develop). It is love which urges us to commit ourselves, to help a friend, to work to make others happier, to build a more fraternal world and to spread the Good News of Jesus who died and is now risen.

Baptism, options and commitment:

It is at baptism that the life-plan is born in each one of us, that the demands involved in being a Christian first appear, and that the love that was placed in us is called to grow. Every vocation is a loving RESPONSE to LOVE. Everything depends on Jesus' call: *«Have I not chosen you?»* (Jn 6, 70) All depends on our tastes, our abilities, our generosity, the way we see people.

De La Salle's YES to Jesus and to young people is an enduring witness: his work spans the centuries... Jesus continues to call... there are many needs to be met. It is never easy to say YES, witness the REFUSAL of the rich young man in the Gospel to follow Jesus. Christ calls but respects each one's freedom. *«I am responsible for my rose»*, said the Little Prince.

Each person, face to face with society, has choices to make. You are at the end of your secondary schooling. You know what CHOOSING OPTIONS means

because of the type of teaching you have received. What is important, is to choose where I as a Christian can fulfil myself best, where I can serve my brothers and my sisters best. To refuse to work is to leave people in need... The real question is: «*Lord, what do you wish me to do?*» (Ac 22, 10). What do you expect of me? Show me what I can do in order to do YOUR WORK. By pursuing only material goals a man builds a prison for himself... and life is not worth living.

What form should my commitment take?

Perhaps to live in a Christian home; perhaps to be a religious missionary in Cameroon, Haiti or Japan, working with young people, with young people in need, doing pastoral work or teaching catechism. Perhaps to be a priest and gather together the People of God, proclaim the Word to it, and distribute the sacraments; perhaps... To build his Church, Jesus chose twelve apostles. Today, Christ needs me as an apostle of love, as he no longer has hands or arms with which to build his Body which is the Church. He wishes me to be a WITNESS to a gift of self in order to help the unfortunate, the poor and the young. «*What does it mean to witness to Christ? Quite simply, to live according to the Gospel.*» (John Paul II, August 19th 1989). «*Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life.*» (Jn 6, 68) It means giving your whole life to Jesus like the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At this point, one can briefly explain the Brothers' religious commitment (vows), their life lived together as brothers, their prayer, the great variety of their apostolic work in their own country and abroad. We can mention also to the young people the need for prayer, for guidance, for commitment, for the stimulation and awareness of vocational commitment.

A time for an exchange of views.

Throughout the session with the young people there have been opportunities for an exchange of views, but

now seems to be the best time for reactions and questions. Generally, pupils find the talk interesting, but are more reticent when it comes to questions. One question keeps on coming back: «*How does the call of the Lord make itself felt? How can we know if we are called to one state of life or another?*» The way we try to answer these questions is by stressing that God calls to us through his Word, through others, through events, on the basis of what the young man has in his heart, of his ideals, his tastes, his abilities, his prayer and commitment.

The young people are offered a chance to take things further.

By agreement with the one in charge of pastoral care and with the catechism teacher, we offer the young people we have spoken to further opportunities, on a voluntary basis, to consider the question of vocation. We offer them:

- The chance to meet and discuss, one lunch-time in the school pastoral care room.

- the chance, once again only for volunteers, of having a longer meeting, one evening or for a whole day, off the school premises, at some pleasant place which is conducive to reflection, exchange of views, and which offers catechetical and social programmes.

Literature dealing with vocations and the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is available for the youngsters who want to know more. This is in the form of simple and attractive brochures. The attendance rate at these meetings remains very low: many young people do not dare to compromise themselves, fearing to be thought by their peers to have been called to the consecrated life.

**«Speak, Lord,
your servant is listening!»**
(1 S 3, 10b)