

**« LAUNCH INTO THE DEEP ! »**

*(Lk 5:4)*

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# SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION .....	5
CHAPTER I : LOOKING AT THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE.....	8
Leaving everything as Abraham did .....	8
Being fertile .....	10
Being blessed and blessing .....	11
Setting out on God's behalf.....	12
Building an altar .....	14
Going up to the mountain .....	14
Giving thanks .....	16
CHAPTER II : LIVING THE PRESENT WITH PASSION .....	19
Choosing .....	19
Being called and calling .....	21
Launching into the deep.....	22
Having toiled all night without catching anything.....	23
Casting the nets .....	27
Calling out.....	29
Seeking help.....	32
Falling at Jesus' knees.....	35
Being without fear .....	36
Following Jesus .....	37
CHAPTER III : EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE .....	41
Embracing the future.....	41
Going fishing.....	42
Bringing.....	43
Getting closer .....	45
Feeding .....	47
Loving the Lord .....	49
Becoming a pastor .....	50
Being a disciple .....	52
CONCLUSION .....	55

**"Strengthen yourself more and more in your holy vocation, it must be very dear to you, since it calls you to fulfil the functions that our good Master has fulfilled himself. So do everything to walk in his footsteps; Above all, imitate his humility, his charity, his gentleness, his mortification, his spirit of poverty and his complete resignation to the will of his Father. "**

(Gabriel Deshayes to the Brothers of Saint Gabriel, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1841)



**"Sublime vocation! It is that of Jesus Christ himself; he has left the bosom of his Father only to do what you will do according to his example! Scripture tells us that He has gone about doing good, teaching the poor, giving sight to the blind, straightening the lame, healing the sick ... "**

(Jean-Marie de la Mennais, Sermons VII, 2237)

## INTRODUCTION

This circular letter **“Launch into the Deep”** (Lk 5:4) is an answer to various nods of Providence. Indeed, our last General Chapter invited us to open new pathways of fraternity and strongly affirmed that *“the Lord still calls today in all settings and across all walks of life”*<sup>1</sup>. What a beautiful invitation to dare launch into the deep to continue casting the nets with faith and hope, like the first apostles, our Founders and our predecessors!

The Church has just celebrated a synod *on youth, faith and vocational discernment*, where Pope Francis asked young people to launch into the deep with Jesus. *“When everything seems to be standing still and stagnant, when our personal issues trouble us, and social problems do not meet with the right responses, it does no good to give up. Jesus is the way: welcome him into your ‘boat’ and put out into the deep! He is the Lord! He changes the way we see life.”*<sup>2</sup> Magnificent exhortation to put out into the deep in the Church!

*“Calling Disciples”* is the theme of this second year of preparation for the Bicentenary of the Congregation which officially opened on June 2, 2019 in the chapel of our Mother House in Ploërmel. And June 6, 2018, already, we had launched an appeal to the whole Mennaisian Family: dare to go out, dare to look and dare to call. A triple invitation to put out into deep water in the Congregation!

**“Launch into the deep!”** (Lk 5:4) This invitation of the Lord is addressed to all the Brothers who are on the shore, who wash their nets and are tempted to put them away. To those who have toiled or are still struggling all night without catching anything. To those whose

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<sup>1</sup> *General Chapter 2018*, 5a.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 141.

nets are filled and who call others to their rescue. The Lord always precedes us! His hour is now. Do we dare believe this? He wants to gratify us beyond our expectations. Are we open to his surprises?

This circular letter is meant primarily for the Brothers, but the laity of the Mennaisian Family can take this opportunity to reflect on their own vocation and their participation in our vocation ministry. This could also be a great opportunity for Brothers and Lay people to discern together the Lord's calls to go further offshore as members of the same Mennaisian Family.

As part of the bicentenary of the Congregation, this circular letter will offer us the opportunity ***to look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope.*** It will also be a wonderful opportunity for Brothers and Laity to help young people to discover their own vocation in the pastoral care of our educational Centers, and to share our concern for vocations in the Church and in our Congregation.

Putting out into the deep is to agree to get into the boat with Jesus, a boat that is not ours, but that we received from the Lord. The boat that stays on the shore probably shirks its mission but while offshore, it has a chance to return with nets filled with fish, even at the risk of a possible shipwreck or spending a night without catching anything. To risk the sea is always to choose life. It is setting out with the Pilgrim of Emmaus. It is answering the call of the Master who asks us to throw the nets at the favourable moment, i.e., on his order and at his chosen time.

I hope that this circular letter will offer each Brother, each community, each Province and District the opportunity to give thanks to the Lord for our wonderful and holy vocation as Brothers. I encourage you to read it in community and to use it as a trigger for discussions on our vocational ministry, as much at the level of the community as of the District or the Province, in order to work out concrete proposals that can help us live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope.

## Abraham's vocation (Gn 12:1-9)

1. Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.
2. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing.
3. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."
4. So Abram went, as Yahweh had spoken to him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran.
5. Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls whom they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan. Into the land of Canaan they came.
6. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. The Canaanite was then in the land.
7. Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your seed." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who appeared to him.
8. He left from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Yahweh and called on the name of Yahweh.
9. Abram traveled, going on still toward the South.

## **CHAPTER I : LOOKING AT THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE**

In this first chapter, in this year of the bicentenary of our Congregation, the goal is to remember our wonderful and holy vocation as Brothers so as to give thanks to the Lord. Indeed, we want to look at the past with gratitude, not in the way we would visit a museum, *“but with the eyes of one who seeks the origin that inspires everything”*<sup>3</sup>. This past is our wellspring and contains our roots. Without them, the tree is likely to dry out, lose its leaves and compromise the expected fruits. This same past also contains the promise that inspired our Founders and the early pioneers. In fact, looking back at the past with gratitude is returning to our prime wellspring so that we never forget that the fruits of today originate from our common roots.

### **Leaving everything as Abraham did**

The story of Abraham's vocation (Gn 12:1-9) will be our perspective to look at our past with gratitude. The Lord asked Abraham to leave his country, his kinship, and his father's house for the land he would show him (Gn 12: 1). At this urgent invitation to go out like Abraham, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes responded generously without knowing in advance what to expect at the end of the road. They dared to press forward, surrendering to Providence.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Talks with Fernando Prado. La force de la vocation: la vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, 43.



In their wake and after their example, from the start of the Congregation, 4896 Brothers<sup>4</sup> have decided to leave everything to make Jesus Christ known and loved by children and young people and have remained faithful to their commitment. They said yes to the Lord daily and without looking back, notwithstanding the difficulties of the road, in the footsteps of Abraham.

Leaving everything to walk with the Lord, Abraham and our pioneers have shown us the way forward if we are to respond and be faithful to our fundamental vocation to holiness. The poor of heart is attentive to the call of the Lord and willingly follows him.

Only the poor of heart, after the example of Abraham, can indeed dare to press on, relying on God alone, attaching himself to Him and to Him alone. This is the recommendation of Jean-Marie de La Mennais to the Brothers who are willing to leave everything to be more available to God:

*“All around us, nothing is stable, and we ourselves keep changing like the rest. In this way, we should not at all lean on the poor man who is a prey of the most unforeseen events. Let us lean on God alone; let us stick to God alone; let us desire only the accomplishment of his always holy, just and merciful will.”<sup>5</sup>*

As pilgrims following Abraham, Jean-Marie and Gabriel, we give thanks to the Lord for those Brothers who have followed the Lord disinterestedly, ready to undertake everything for his glory. Their lives testified to the gift of their life to God, to children and to young people.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical study provided by Brother Louis Balanant on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018. This number comprises the 4113 Brothers who have died in the Congregation and the other 783 others who are still alive.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, Sermons VII, 2164-65.

## Being fertile

In the text of Genesis, the Lord promises Abraham numerous descendants. How is it possible to make such a promise to someone who is seventy-five and has no children? What provocation! But for God, nothing is impossible.

The call of God has always been and will be a call to fertility even if the signs of infertility seem to claim the opposite. The beginnings of our Congregation were modest, both in Auray and Saint-Brieuc. Among the three young people sent by the priest of La Roche Derrien, the only one who became Brother, Yves le Fichant, died very young. A few years later, Father de la Mennais compared the foundation of the Congregation to a grain of mustard seed thrown into the ground with the confidence that only God would ensure its growth. Indeed, at the death of Father de la Mennais, our Congregation had more than 800 Brothers.

*When I think of the tiny grain of mustard seed that I planted in the ground forty years ago, not knowing what it would become, but with the protection of divine Providence, and after so many years of toil and trials, it is gratifying today to see your work developing across Brittany. And, after establishing itself in the southern part of France called the Midi, it is spreading overseas. On seeing this, I cannot but cry out with the Scriptures: "Yes, there is the finger of God!"<sup>6</sup>*

Being fertile means opting for the beatitude of meekness. Indeed, the meek will possess the earth. In other words, *"they will see, fulfilled in their lives, the promises of God"*<sup>7</sup>. The Lord trusts them and gratifies their desire for fertility. This has been the experience of Abraham and our predecessors.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Circular letter to the Brothers*, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1857.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete and Exultate*, 74.

Meekness is fruitful because it helps to practice the perfect charity that *"consists in supporting the faults of others, not to be surprised at their weaknesses"*<sup>8</sup>. And it is humility, according to Jean-Marie de la Mennais, which allows us to live this fertile meekness, this other name for perfect charity and which makes us into the likeness of Christ. *"Without humility, there can be no resemblance to Jesus Christ, whose birth, life, and death were, so to speak, but one great act of humility."*<sup>9</sup>

We bless the Lord for our predecessors who have welcomed the fruitfulness of God. Theirs was the daily bliss of meekness and they opted for the sweet humility that allowed the Lord to do in them and through them great things, following the example of the Virgin Mary.

## Being blessed and blessing

In the story of Abraham's vocation, the notion of blessing comes up five times. Throughout the Bible, blessing comes with a promise of happiness and salvation for oneself and others. Thus, God wants the happiness and the salvation of Abraham and of all of his descendants.

Blessing is also recognising the already active presence of God in a person's life. When God blesses Abraham, he recognises that his life is already his work. Blessing is also accepting to enter into a cascade of blessings. In fact, by accepting to be blessed, Abraham makes the commitment to mediate blessings for his brothers and sisters by learning to speak well of them, to comfort and value them.

During its two hundred years of existence, the Congregation has been blessed by the Lord and has joined this cascade of blessings by encouraging the Brothers to be guardian angels of children and young people, to make their students not only scholars but saints. In doing so, the Brothers learned to be tender and merciful fathers: *"Love them greatly in Our Lord and don't neglect anything to inspire them with his*

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<sup>8</sup> Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1996, 250.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Sermons II*, 649.

*love; how dear they ought to be to you! What happiness for you to have been called to be their father and apostle! Strive then to become more and more worthy of such a sublime and holy mission.”<sup>10</sup> “My dear child, give some thought sometimes to the indulgence with which God treats you, and following the words of the Gospel, be merciful, so as to obtain mercy.”<sup>11</sup>*

To bless and to be blessed the way Abraham was is to learn to embody in one's life the beatitude of peace that incorporates into the great family of God. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"* (Mt 5:9). To build peace is therefore to continue the original blessing of creation, the prime vocation of every man.

For Jean-Marie de La Mennais, peace is the yardstick that measures the height, breadth and depth of our faith. The Brother whose faith is well rooted in God lives in peace despite the storms that can shake his house. *"Nothing that is said or done on earth can disturb the peace of him who is raised by faith to an infinite height, and who rests on the bosom of God himself"*<sup>12</sup>.

We give thanks to the Lord for those Brothers who have been blessed and who have blessed the Congregation because they have sown peace by their words but above all by their lives.

## **Setting out on God's behalf**

Abraham, Sarah, his wife, his nephew Lot and all the people who served them set out on the Lord's command. Thus, they became pilgrims, going from encampment to encampment. Like Abraham, like all groups of newly called, the Congregation also made its pilgrimage during its two hundred years of existence.

It made a double pilgrimage! An *ad intra* pilgrimage: The Brothers made the total gift themselves, forever, gratuitously, asking nothing in

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<sup>10</sup> B. Gaudeul, *Le Père de la Mennais m'interpelle*, I, 05.

<sup>11</sup> B. Gaudeul, *Le Père de la Mennais m'interpelle*, I, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Memorial*, 118, 4.

return for the salvation of children and young people. Many have totally sacrificed their lives for the sake of the gospel. Then an *ad extra* pilgrimage: Very early on, the Congregation was a missionary order, as of 1837. The missionary Brothers left without hope of return to the native country. They were apostles totally given to God and to the young. Many of them died of yellow fever, malaria and all kinds of illnesses because of their passion for Jesus and for the children who were entrusted to them.

Abraham and our predecessors launched into the deep because they were hungry and thirsty for justice. To be thirsty and hungry for justice basically means to seek to be faithful, adjusted to the will of God throughout one's life. But what does this will of God consist of? It is to set out to bring to all in his name, and especially to the poorest, his merciful embrace that warms the heart and awakens hope. It is also being able to offer to everyone the smile of God by imitating the great generosity of the Father who makes his sun rise on the just and on the unjust. It is also a commitment carrying out presence, companionship and conversation with those who are excluded from society.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais has never stopped urging his Brothers to make a preferential option for the poorest the path to sanctification and passionate search for justice. Should not the poorest<sup>13</sup> and most unhappy, the least virtuous and the most difficult young people be our favorites?

We praise the Lord for these Brothers who have set out on their journey and who have brought this merciful embrace of the Father who warms the heart and awakens hope, who have given back to so many children and young people a taste for life, and who have allowed the Congregation to remain in constant conversation with the poorest.

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Letter to Brother Lucien*, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1849.

## Building an altar

At each stage of his journey, Abraham built an altar (Gen 12: 7-8), a sign of his response to and faithful covenant with his God. On this altar, he offered the best of himself, his joys, his sorrows, his struggles, his failures. He offered himself as a holocaust pleasing to God. His life was a celebration of thanksgiving to this God who traveled with him and invited him to set off. From camp to camp, this faithful companion gave meaning to his pilgrimage.

How many Brothers in the Congregation, like Abraham, offered themselves as pleasing and holy holocausts to the Lord! Their life was a monument in memory of the God who was the source of their fidelity to their wonderful and holy vocation! Thus, by their life all offered to God, they testified that *"holiness is the most beautiful face of the Church"*<sup>14</sup>.

Abraham and our pioneers offered God and their brothers and sisters the best of themselves. It was their strategy to live the beatitude of the pure of heart. They gave themselves with a sincere heart. They learned to put charity at the center of all their activities. They knew how to welcome the grace of the new heart that allowed them to see God in the poor they served, in the prisoners they visited, in the sick they cared for, in the little ones they taught, educated and evangelized.

We bless the Lord for those pioneers who dared to set out and who offered their whole lives to God, to children and to young people.

## Going up to the mountain

Abraham, the seventy-five-year-old, taking seriously the invitation of the Lord to launch into the deep, dared to climb the mountain east of Bethel (Gn 12:8). What audacity! What vibrant energy! His passion for God greatly increased his strength to love.

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete and Exultate*, 9.

But climbing the mountain opened to Abraham other horizons, other perspectives on himself and on God. He experienced the strength of God in his weaknesses. The Lord always gave him in keeping with what he commanded him to do. Such is the wonder of grace in the life of this longing seeker of God.

The history of our Congregation is filled with Brothers who have surpassed themselves in bringing the Gospel to children and young people. In 1991, I was a scholastic and I attended at the foot of the steeple of our Mother House in Ploërmel the departure of three of the five Brothers who went to found the mission of Benin. The Brothers were Yves Jean Labbé, Joachim Le Corronc and Jean le Jeune. These Brothers were more or less of Abraham's age and they responded joyfully and generously at the invitation of the Lord to set out. How many such Brothers upon reaching retirement age so opted for the mission *ad gentes* because their health allowed them to? And some, keep in mind, even gave their lives. I'm especially thinking of Brother Albert Youinou who died in Haiti barely three years after his arrival and, more recently, of Brother François Milin, in Togo.

As they learned to outdo themselves and aim higher, Abraham and our predecessors suggested a way for us to experience the beatitude of mercy. In fact, they learned to love to the limits of love, that is, without limit. They poured a measure well packed, shaken, overflowing into the apron of their neighbor. They allowed the grace of mercy to flourish in their lives.

These pioneers were not afraid to aim ever higher, to let themselves be loved and set free by God, to be guided by the Holy Spirit. They were the happiest when they made others happy. What a beautiful bouquet of holiness for our Institute and for the Church! A beautiful crown of intercessors in heaven for new vocations of Brothers in the Congregation.

## Giving thanks

The year of the bicentenary of the Congregation is a good time to celebrate the faithfulness of all the labourers who have worked in the Lord's vineyard, whether of the first, third, sixth, ninth or eleventh hour. God calls every hour of the day, every month of the year and every season of life. What matters is to work faithfully in his unique vineyard.

Let us give thanks to the Lord who called whom he wanted, when he wanted for them to serve the children and young people in our Congregation. Let us give thanks to the Lord for Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes to whom he entrusted this founding charism. Let us give thanks to the Lord for the pioneers who, like Abraham, have left everything to follow the Lord by relying on God alone and surrendering themselves to Providence.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for all the Brothers who have promoted our wonderful and holy vocation by committing themselves as if everything depended on them while trusting that everything depended on God. Let us give thanks to the Lord for those Brothers who worked on their sanctification while making saints. Let us give thanks to the Lord for all the Brothers who, like Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, waited patiently, hoping against hope for the children of the promise.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for the missionary Brothers who went from camp to camp like Abraham, bringing the Good News to children and young people in far-off lands. Let us give thanks to the Lord for the Superior Generals who have served the Congregation with availability and generosity, faith and humility, self-denial and charity! Let us give thanks to the Lord for all our Brothers: they freely chose to be Brothers of Christ, *"Brothers in an International Congregation, Brothers of our Brothers in community, Brothers of the Laity, of the young and the poor, Brothers of creation"*<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> General Chapter of 2018, 13.



Let us give thanks to the Lord for those who, when frequenting the Brothers, have experienced that *"truth is sought and found in the sweetness of fraternity"*<sup>16</sup>. Let us give thanks to the Lord for these wonderful roots that still allow the sap to circulate today, thus keeping our tree very green and still promising numerous fruits!

Paraphrasing Pope Francis speaking of the Church, our Congregation is like water: if it remains stagnant, it rots. Let us dare to launch into the deep. Like Abraham tells us, life belongs to those who set out, knowing how to risk everything, surrender to Providence and rely on God alone.

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<sup>16</sup> B., CADORE, *Avec Lui, écouter l'envers du monde*, 49.

## The call of the first four disciples (Lk 5:1-11)

1. Now it happened, while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.
2. He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets.
3. He entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.
4. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch."
5. Simon answered him, "Master, we worked all night, and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the net."
6. When they had done this, they caught a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking.
7. They beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. They came, and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.
8. But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord."
9. For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had caught;
10. and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people alive."
11. When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything, and followed him.

## **CHAPTER II : LIVING THE PRESENT WITH PASSION**

This second chapter is dedicated to a reflection on our vocation as Brothers in today's reality. It will be an ideal opportunity, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the Congregation, to give thanks to the Lord, personally, in community, as a Province or District for the gift of our vocation. It is equally an excellent opportunity to testify, today, of our joy and passion to be Brothers:

"These Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with Him, 'the firstborn among many brothers' (Rm. 8:29); brothers to one another in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church."<sup>17</sup>

### **Choosing**

The text of Luke (Lk 5:1-11), narrating the vocation of the first four disciples, was chosen for four main reasons that we might interpret as four signs of the times, or calls from the Lord, at this time in the life of our Congregation.

This text probably describes our state of mind in certain sectors of the Congregation in the field of vocational pastoral care. We toiled all night without catching anything. We are sad, disappointed and perhaps discouraged. We want to wash and put away our nets like Peter, Andrew, James and John. But at the same time the text tells of the reality in other areas of the Congregation where the Lord continues to invite young people to be Brothers. Without the Lord we cannot do anything, and our nets will remain empty.

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<sup>17</sup> CIVCSVA, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, 11.

This passage from Luke also invites us to dare to risk and to put out into the deep, at the command of the Lord, to call other disciples. The surprise of the Lord is at the rendezvous. Shall we dare, like Peter and Andrew, notwithstanding our disappointments and our fatigues, cast the nets? This is the strong invitation of our last General Chapter:

*"The Chapter dares to restate its belief that our God is a God of the covenant, of the unexpected, of hope and of life. At a time when in various places we are experiencing the grace of being in a minority, we may yet be surprised by vocations springing up, though probably finding alternative forms of expression. In the light of requests coming from young people themselves (both girls and boys), who desire to live as Mennaisians with their own form of consecration, we must heed the calls of the Spirit, daring to invent new pathways which correspond to what the Spirit is accomplishing in the hearts of today's young people."<sup>18</sup>*

This story of vocations also highlights the appealing force of the person of Jesus whose very person fascinates. One of the greatest expectations of today's youth is encountering credible witnesses. This is what Pope Paul VI meant in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on the evangelisation of peoples, when he affirmed that young people *"listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, or if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"*<sup>19</sup>.

This text of Luke is finally a superb hymn to hope. For Jean-Marie de La Mennais, hope is the theological virtue that makes it possible to imitate the patience of God. God never despairs of man. Hope helps the Brother to walk at God's pace. And to hope against all hope is a characteristic of the Mennaisian spirituality. *"God is patient because he is eternal. In everything he does, he wants us to see his hand at work and the character of his high wisdom. He proceeds only by degrees, and*

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<sup>18</sup> General Chapter of 2018, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

*he reaches the end of his projects only when all human hope of seeing them fulfilled is entirely eclipsed.*"<sup>20</sup>

## **Being called and calling**

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke does not narrate the explicit call of the first disciples: he opts instead for the pedagogy of symbolic action, a gesture that is supposed to carry out the meaning of what it states and announces. In other words, Jesus calls, challenges by doing concrete actions. Indeed, Peter, Andrew, James and John understand his call. They bring their boat to shore, they leave everything behind and begin to follow him.

The symbolic action of the evangelist Luke obeys the three-tiered structure of any vocational narrative: the call of God, the response of man and the mission. Every vocation is first and foremost an initiative of God. Luke affirms it very clearly by insisting on a whole series of gestures of Jesus: he goes to the boat of Simon, he asks him to move away from the shore, he proposes to him to move offshore for fishing. Then the vocation implies the response of man: Peter, Andrew, James and John leave everything behind and follow the Master. Finally, it leads to the mission: Jesus announces to the first four disciples that they will now be fishers of men.

For those who are called, the mission is above all an act of faith and of obedience. Peter and Andrew toiled all night and they caught nothing. By daring launching into the deep and casting back the nets at the Master's command, they catch a large amount of fish. The mission finally involves the call of new workers. Confronted with the immensity of the harvest, Peter and Andrew call James and John. Thus, they become in turn transmitters of the call. James and John put themselves at the service of the Master and not of Peter and Andrew. Like their two companions, they become disciples of the Master.

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Sermons II*, 507.

Thus, called by Jesus, Peter and Andrew become those who call James and John in their turn.

## **Launching into the deep**

Responding to today's invitation of the Lord to again cast the nets requires of each Brother to believe that God's hour has come. Jesus goes to work at God's hour, that is to say at the very moment when Peter, Andrew, James and John gave up and stored their fishing gear, thinking that it was then too late for fishing. God's time is today: when we feel it's too late, when fatigue and discouragement set in or when we believe we have enough fish. Will we, like Peter and Andrew, discern the hour of God and take the necessary action that spells a new beginning, which sets things in motion, which puts out into the deep? The Lord gives us an appointment.

This also requires of us the firm conviction that nothing is impossible to God. After talking to the crowd, Jesus asks Peter and Andrew to put out into the deep and cast the nets. Obedience to the order of Jesus makes the impossible possible. Will we, like Peter and Andrew, obey in faith the order of Jesus who asks us to go out to sea and to cast the nets after a long, fruitless night? A miraculous catch is waiting for us.

Today's response to Jesus' invitation to put out into the deep also assumes that we place our trust in him. The fear of a new failure often paralyzes us. The fear of letting go numbs us. But Jesus reassures us, restores our confidence in him and always precedes us when he asks us to be bold. Will we, like Peter and Andrew, dare to risk relying solely on the north star of his thoughtful presence? The Lord is ready to fill our nets.

Such a change in our attitude implies a true conversion. Setting out on a journey, putting out into the deep destabilizes us, challenges us and forces us to let go. Will we, like Peter and Andrew, know the grace of conversion that requires us to leave the shore of our habits

and the firm ground of our certainties? The Lord reaches out to welcome us and to gratify us beyond all our expectations.

Moving forward with Jesus finally implies that we agree to find ourselves in the boat with him and cast the nets when he says so. As to the results, it is he who takes care of it. It is he who moves the hearts of those to whom we announce the gospel of the vocation. Shall we then, like Peter and Andrew, get into the boat with Jesus and dare to call other disciples for the Master? The Lord seeks our help and collaboration.

### **Having toiled all night without catching anything**

Faced with the invitation of the Lord who asks him to put out and cast the nets, Peter retorts that he has toiled all night and caught nothing. This is a humanly valid and well-founded objection that might have led him to reject Jesus' call. Today, in the Congregation, what are our objections to the invitation of Jesus who asks us to dare to put out to sea? What are our reservations that prevent greater fidelity to our vocation and the transmission of the call to others?

I can identify, among others, six major diseases that threaten the good health of our Congregation in the field of vocational ministry.

The first one is **blindness**. In fact, this impaired vision consists in asserting that the Lord can certainly no longer call young people who are so far from the Church, who no longer share our values, who are almost strangers to the Christian faith. May the call of our last Chapter open the eyes of our faith and the ears of our heart to welcome the fact that the Lord continues to call new disciples in all settings and in all walks of life, and to believe that being a Brother is still today good news for the world and for the Church!

The second disease is called "**adolescent ill**" which is the tendency to promote a vocational pastoral ministry based on superficiality and immediate results. It is the culture of "*everything, right now*" and sometimes without inventive, creative, sustainable, persevering efforts adapted to the reality of today's young people. And

yet, the Lord never ceases to remind us of the importance of the patience of the sower whose seeds fall on different soils and who trusts that the seeds that have *"fallen in the good ground will bear fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold"* (Mk 4:8).

The third disease refers to this form of **depression** that leads to discouragement, skepticism and resignation. The time for vocations is over: let's turn the page and prepare to die! Now, is not the Lord ready to join us on our different journeys to Emmaus for a new beginning, provided that we invite him to remain with us (Lk 24:29)? *"Are we not often tired, disappointed, sad, ... do we not think that we will not make it? Let us not fall back on ourselves, let us not lose confidence, let us never resign ourselves: there are no situations that God cannot change... if we only open ourselves to Him"*<sup>21</sup>.

The fourth disease is called the **fear of reality**. It is nothing other than the tendency to escape the complexity of reality by failing to adapt to it, by our inability to control it, by our wish to withdraw from it. This is the exact opposite of what the Church, by the voice of Pope Francis, is asking from us today.

*"The Church must step outside herself. To go where? To the outskirts of existence, whatever they may be, but she must step out. Jesus tells us: "Go into all the world! Go! Preach! Bear witness to the Gospel!" (cf. Mk 16:15). But what happens if we step outside ourselves? The same as can happen to anyone who comes out of the house and onto the street: an accident. But I tell you, I far prefer a Church that has had a few accidents to a Church that has fallen sick from being closed. Go out, go out!... and do not forget: there must be no question of a closed Church, but rather a Church which is ready to step outside, to go to the outlying regions."*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily of the Easter Vigil*, March 30, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Vigil of Pentecost with Ecclesial Movements*, 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2013.



The fifth form of disease I identify is simply that of **fear**. Often, we are afraid of taking the first step because of lack of confidence in ourselves and / or in others, out of pride, discomfort, self-sufficiency or shyness. And yet, the Lord assures us that he is but waiting for our first step so that he can take the ninety-nine others (Lk 15:3-10).

The last disease is the **albatross complex**. In psychology, this bird personifies the tendency of a person to smother his dreams and motivations for fear of rejection by society and young people. Some Brothers are tempted to claim that they no longer know how to talk to young people and that they no longer belong to their generation. And yet, the Synod on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment has just asked consecrated persons to be sentinels of hope and awakeners of holiness for young people.

To confront the six main diseases just presented, the Apostle Peter offers us a very interesting pedagogy. Faced with the challenge of fatigue, doubt and discouragement, he has to make a choice between flight and rising above his fears.

**To run away** would mean giving up. Giving up would mean admitting one's powerlessness which would show that what the Lord asks Peter exceeds his strengths and potentialities. As a result, the apostle would remain blind because he could not trust the Lord; deaf, because he would not hear Master's invitation to put out into the deep; and paralyzed, because it would continue to place limits to the great generosity of God who is capable of making possible what seems impossible to human views. *"After the initial momentum, marked by generosity, enthusiasm and perhaps idealism, emerges the temptation to stop, to 'store the oars', to give up struggling, growing..."*<sup>23</sup> In doing so, Peter's possible escape could be described as a form of *"early retirement"*.

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<sup>23</sup> F. Imoda, *La hauteur, la largeur et la profondeur... (Eph 3 :18) Exercices spirituels et psychologie*, 62.

**Overcoming** means, first of all, measuring the height, length, depth and breadth of the obstacle that stands in the way; then, anticipate side-stepping the obstacle; and ultimately, providing the effort needed to overcome it. By relying on the word of the Master, Peter rises above the obstacle of discouragement, disappointment and fatigue and dares to put out into the deep: "*But on your word, I will cast the nets*" (Lk 5,5). Only faith in the word of the Lord is our salvation when we participate in Master's fishing expedition. Do we really believe that the Lord continues to call young people today to join our Congregation? What if the Lord wanted to test our faith in the strength and effectiveness of his Word and of his orders? What if the Lord wanted to measure the height, length, depth, and breadth of our faith in his Word that requires us to launch into the deep? At what excellence are we called like Peter and Andrew to continue casting their nets even if, like them, we have toiled all night without catching anything?

To overcome the crisis of vocations that certain parts of the Congregation experience, and possibly anticipate in other sectors, we are invited to avoid, better still, to face three temptations: stoicism, idealism and fatalistic complacency.

The temptation of **stoicism** consists in affirming that the crisis of vocations does not affect us, does not concern us. We have vocations and others do not because they do not know how to go about it. Stoicism sins through pride and self-sufficiency: we tend to exalt ourselves. This will not happen to us because we know how and plan ahead.

The temptation of **idealism** amounts to talking about it, rationalizing, justifying. Suffice it to say that life will always triumph, and that the strength of God will always make up for our resignations and our escapes. We might recall that there is no Easter Sunday without going through Good Friday, and that the cross, of course, is the only way to life. Idealism takes refuge in a superstitious attitude that deprives us of our personal responsibility.

The temptation of **fatalistic complacency** consists in resignation: our life is no longer appealing, and we wait patiently for death because it is willed by God. Fatalistic complacency also errs by downgrading us in a crushing feeling that sometimes provokes our aggressiveness and leads us to look for a scapegoat for our failures in vocational pastoral care. There are no more vocations because young people are not courageous and lack maturity. Our society is in a crisis of values and of benchmarks. Or, the long-term commitment is frightening because young people prefer "day to day" and "à la carte".

To resist these three temptations, as did Peter and Andrew, is to let the future come, to welcome the present as a gift and to find meaning in it, as painful as it may be.<sup>24</sup> To achieve this, we are invited to nurture these two main qualities: broad shoulders and clear-headedness. **Having broad shoulders** means being able to learn from one's mistakes and those of others and working to avoid being contaminated by the context of discouragement, disappointment and pessimism in which we live. **Being clear-headed** is to be, like Peter, able to continue to trust the Lord, even when apparent failure is upon us. For Pope Francis, it is to have a penetrating look and, at the same time, a look of faith on the world, especially on the world of youth. It is therefore most important to be well acquainted with their world so that by seeking the best means to announce the Good News, we can also announce the gospel of the vocation. Otherwise, we risk answering questions that nobody raises.

## Casting the nets

At Jesus' command, Peter and Andrew cast the nets again. Such an action has several meanings for those who still want to take such a risk today.

First of all, casting nets is fundamentally an **act of trust** in the great generosity of God who comes to the rescue of our weaknesses,

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<sup>24</sup> E. Perrot, « Au-delà des bonnes leçons », in *Croire Aujourd'hui* 251, December, 2008, 28.

who always offers us what is good for us and who invites us to cooperate in his mission. When a fisherman, from his boat, casts the net into the sea, he does so for the sake of sustenance and love. Subsistence and love are the two great motivations that led Peter and Andrew to dare trust the Lord to put out into the deep and cast their nets again. That trust has been a source of superabundant fertility: *"And having done so, they captured such a quantity of fish that their nets would be torn apart"* (Lk 5:6). To trust God, as St. Augustine asserts, is to let the roots of love grow in oneself, *"for from these roots can flourish only good things."*<sup>25</sup> In other words, taking the path of trust in God is to follow the path of the superabundant, surprising, even confusing, fertility of God. Thus, our fragility can be life-giving if it is received in the full and total trust in God.

Casting nets is also an **act of obedience**. Peter and Andrew obeyed the Lord's command. Casting the net by day might seem insane and stupid to any connoisseur. The good time for fishing is at night and not by day! In wishing to indicate the omnipotence of obedience, St. Vincent de Paul writes that it is the hand *"which changes everything it touches into gold."*<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it ensures success, the success and the fecundity of our poor human endeavors. It is this little seed dropped into the ground that will produce, in its good time, a harvest of one hundred to one. It makes of us beggars who agree to go on the journey with the Lord, open and available to the order of the Master, following the example of Peter and Andrew.

Casting the nets is finally a call to know how to welcome the **surprises of God**, surprises that often jostle us and sometimes scare us. But this is the way to go if we want to be fertile and bear fruit in abundance. This was the exhortation of Pope Francis at the Mass of Pentecost 2013:

*"Newness always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones*

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<sup>25</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, « Amour et toi ».

<sup>26</sup> Saint Vincent de Paul, *Les maximes spirituelles* (Œuvre posthume), 1576.

*who build, programme and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences. This is also the case when it comes to God. Often we follow him, we accept him, but only up to a certain point. It is hard to abandon ourselves to him with complete trust, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the soul and guide of our lives in our every decision. We fear that God may force us to strike out on new paths and leave behind our all too narrow, closed and selfish horizons in order to become open to his own. Yet throughout the history of salvation, whenever God reveals himself, he brings newness - God always brings newness -, and demands our complete trust: Noah, mocked by all, builds an ark and is saved; Abram leaves his land with only a promise in hand; Moses stands up to the might of Pharaoh and leads his people to freedom; the apostles, huddled fearfully in the Upper Room, go forth with courage to proclaim the Gospel. This is not a question of novelty for novelty's sake, the search for something new to relieve our boredom, as is so often the case in our own day. The newness which God brings into our life is something that actually brings fulfilment, that gives true joy, true serenity, because God loves us and desires only our good. Let us ask ourselves today: Are we open to "God's surprises"? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit? Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God's newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new?"<sup>27</sup>*

## **Calling out**

Faced with the overabundant catch, Pierre and André called out to James and John. To know how to be a sign and how to make a sign is the fundamental double vocation of every disciple.

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<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily of the Mass of Pentecost*, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2013.

To be a sign is to learn how to live our vocation as Brothers by being the prophetic memory of Jesus and by welcoming the gift of fraternity that God gives us in his Son Jesus. It is also learning to be brothers of Jesus by listening to and embodying the Word of God in our life. In other words, it is to give flesh and life to his Word. By obeying the Master's Word, Peter and Andrew were signs for James and John. Our vocation as Brothers is fundamentally obedience to a Word that asks us to be signs of fraternity in the Church and in the world. By paraphrasing Saint Bernard of Clairvaux<sup>28</sup>, one could say that the beauty of fraternity is our mutual love. Today, to be a sign for children and young people is to embody this appealing fraternity, like the first Christians whose fraternal love represented the best vocational pastoral care: "*See how they love each other!*"<sup>29</sup>

Being signs today is also learning to share the gift of fraternity. Faced with the permanent temptation to dominate and to look for the first place, we opt for the evangelical value of horizontal fraternal relations. In doing so, we live our vocation as Brothers of Christ by being Brothers of our confreres, Brothers of all men, especially the youngest, Brothers for a greater fraternity in the Church. In doing so, we live fraternity as a shared gift:

Thus, the community is, for Brothers, an experience more than a place; or better still, the Brothers live together, gather in a place, to deeply develop that experience. In that way they are responding to the call to be experts in communion, effective signs of the possibility of living deeper relationships rooted in the love of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

To be a sign today is to finally learn to offer the gift of fraternity by becoming a servant in the manner of the good Samaritan (Lk 10,29-37) and prophet of the evangelical value of horizontal fraternal relations. To serve after the example of the good Samaritan is nothing

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *La double beauté de l'âme*, XII<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> Non-Christians witnessing regarding Christians as reported by Tertullian, 155-220 after Christ.

<sup>30</sup> CIVCSVA, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother I the Church*, 24.

more than to be more brothers of those who most need our solidarity, our attention and our fraternal compassion. And we are called to be signs of fraternity by making ourselves prophets of hospitality, of the meaning of life and of the integrity of creation. Concretely, hospitality is verified in our ability to open and welcome others, foreigners, those who are different. The prophecy of the meaning of life is lived in the service of dialogue and free listening which children and young people, among others, need so much today. The prophecy of the integrity of creation is realised in the promotion of an ecological citizenship that is expressed by the attention to small daily actions such as we are reminded in *Laudato Si*:

*“avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.”<sup>31</sup>*

Knowing how to make a sign, following the example of Peter and Andrew, refers above all to the missionary dimension of our vocation as disciples. Today, if we want to be signs to children and young people, Pope Francis gives us four significant ways. First, carry the embrace of God. What does this mean? God sends us to transmit, through our presence, his tenderness that warms the heart and awakens hope, his mercy that heals and restores dignity. Then share the smile of God. In a sad and discouraged world, the Lord asks us to join all the disciples of Emmaus to share with them the joy of a new beginning. Then, live proximity as companionship. This means learning to witness to another way of acting and living, where presence to others is empathy and care. Finally, replenish the want of love, which translates into the ability to *“tirelessly seek the good of the other, of the beloved.”<sup>32</sup>*

If we want our life as Brothers to be a sign and to be significant, following the example of Peter and Andrew, we have to let Christ be

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 211.

<sup>32</sup> CIVCSVA, *Circular letter Addressed to Consecrated Persons*, 11.

our seal<sup>33</sup> on the forehead so that we may continue to witness to him, and to carve our seal on the heart so that we love him always, and stamp our seal on the arm so that we always work for him.

## Seeking help

In the vocation story reported by Luke, Peter and Andrew solicit the help of James and John. The fishing is abundant, and their boat threatens to sink. We could conclude here that this is an interested request: without the help of James and John, their success could quickly turn into a failure. It is therefore at the heart of our frailties, our fears and the dangers that threaten us that the call of God reaches us and invites us to dare setting out to lend a hand to those who seek our help.

Seeking the help of others: this is God's pedagogy to teach us that the mission is fundamentally communal. It is also his strategy to call other companions to join us in our discipleship experience. It makes it possible to recognize that the call of God transcends and precedes us, and that God calls us at the very heart of our activities. Four simple fishermen of the lake of Gennesaret are thus invited to become, henceforth, fishers of men.

In the pastoral care of vocations, seeking help from someone else is an invitation to welcome him in the faith. The first help we must seek is the Lord's. Did he not advise us to ask the Master to send laborers for the harvest? *"The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Pray then that the Lord of the harvest send workers for his harvest"* (Lk 10:2). Following Jesus' recommendation, Pope Francis asks all Christians to make prayer for vocations a priority. *"Behind and before any vocation, there is always the strong and intense prayer of someone: a grandmother, a grandfather, a mother, a father, a community ... Vocations are born in prayer and from prayer; and they can persevere and bear fruit only in prayer."*<sup>34</sup> Are we, as the widow of the Gospel, ready to shout day and night before the Lord, until we have what we

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<sup>33</sup> Saint Ambrosius, *De Isaac et anima*, 75; PL 14, 556-557.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Francis, *Regina Caeli*, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2013.



want (Lk 18:1-8)? Are we convinced, as St. Augustine asserts, *that "God hears a sob more than a call"*<sup>35</sup>? When a poor man cries, the Lord hears: He saves him from all his anguish, Psalm 33 reminds us. Let us therefore humbly implore the Lord to give us many holy vocations of Brothers. Let us not be afraid to spend long hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament. The Lord will certainly answer us, but in his good time.

Knowing how to seek the help of others is also knowing how to open your heart and your hands. In fact, it is being able to learn from the experience of others and from one's own mistakes. It is knowing how to welcome the invitations that come from the Church, from the Congregation, from the signs of the times. What personal, community, pastoral and structural conversions are we called to in order to receive the young people whom the Lord sends us? What new types of collaboration are we open to? Are we ready to abandon dry wells to go elsewhere to dig others? Our last General Chapter reminds us that *"despite its weaknesses, nothing can replace the testimony of a happy and joyous community, open to the mercy of God."*<sup>36</sup> Is my community happy, joyful and open to the mercy of God? It also invites each Brother to promote a vocational culture and to dare go out, see and call. What is my response to this call from the General Chapter? Finally, the Chapter urges us to open ourselves to welcome young adults who seek to discern with us a Mennaisian vocation whose expression would be part of the educational mission other than through teaching. What welcome have we given to this invitation from our last Chapter?

Knowing how to seek the help of others is also knowing how to take initiatives. It is to be jostled, to be disturbed in one's comfort and self-sufficiency. It's agreeing to break the routine. It is welcoming the unexpected in one's life. To meet the vocational challenge where vocations are scarce, and better accompany them where they are more numerous, the last General Chapter invites us to be bold and to take initiatives.

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<sup>35</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*.

<sup>36</sup> *General Chapter of 2018*, 6.

First, **dare to go out**. Going out, before being an external attitude, is fundamentally an inner pilgrimage that makes it possible to be close to each young person. As I go out and make myself close at hand, I allow him to touch the tenderness, kindness and gentleness of the Lord.

Then **dare to look**. This is about seeing reality with the positive look of Jesus. It is a look of solicitude and compassion, of attention and empathy. It is a look that expresses, like Jesus, our love for God and for young people.

Then, **dare to call**. In the evangelical vocation narratives, *"the look of love of Jesus is transformed into a word, which is a call to welcome a novelty, to explore it and to build it"*<sup>37</sup>. In other words, it is daring to propose to each young person an ideal of happiness and holiness for his life. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod on youth, faith and vocational discernment reminds us, youth is a time for holiness because all saints were young.<sup>38</sup> And this call to holiness concerns everyone: it is our first vocation.

Finally, **dare to propose service and proximity commitments**. Many people working in the field of youth ministry are convinced that there is a vital link between generous service and vocational discernment. Today, many young people are particularly open and available for volunteer and service experiences. A Congregation that serves is a mature Congregation that attracts young people, because it testifies to its vocation to imitate Christ who has become the servant of all, especially the poorest.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Synod of Bishops, XVth General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. Lineamenta*, III, i- Calling.

<sup>38</sup> Synod of Bishops, XVth General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. Instrumentum Laboris*, 2018, 213-214.

<sup>39</sup> Synod of Bishops, XVth General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. Instrumentum Laboris*, 2018, 194.

## Falling at Jesus' knees

At the sight of this superabundant and surprising catch, Simon Peter falls at Jesus' knees and begs him: "*Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man*" (Lk 5:8). With this attitude, Peter says that his vocation is indeed a mystery that he cannot understand and that he can only welcome in all humility and poverty, on his knees. As a result, he is ready to wholeheartedly devote his life to the Lord.

To fall at Jesus' knees, like Peter, is to welcome him as the only treasure worth devoting one's own existence to. It is accepting to leave everything to follow more closely a poor Christ. Only a consecrated life that opts for the poor Christ can be attractive today. Let us fall at Jesus' knees and ask for the favour to make him our only treasure. Let us ask him in all humility this loving poverty which is called solidarity, sharing and charity and which expresses itself in sobriety, the search for justice and the joy of the essential.

To fall at Jesus' knees is also to confess one's faith in him and to recognize that he is the only Lord of one's life. It is to choose radical simplicity, rejecting a divided heart. It is belonging to God alone, to love him with all one's heart, with all one's strength, with all one's soul and with all one's being. Only a consecrated life that testifies that chastity in celibacy makes it possible to love like God is meaningful and attractive for today's youth. Let us fall at the knees of Jesus and ask him for the grace of this loving chastity which is expressed in the total gift of an undivided heart, and in a life full of charity and active compassion for our brothers.

To fall at Jesus' knees is to finally surrender to him and to submit one's own will to his. It is to let oneself be dressed to go where the Lord sends, willingly and joyfully. It is to be a watchman and a beggar of the will of God who uses human mediations. Today's youth is attracted to a consecrated life that the vow of obedience educates to co-responsibility and synodality. Let us fall at the knees of Jesus and ask him the grace of this loving obedience which "*manifests the liberating*

*beauty of a filial and non-servile dependence, rich with a sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust*<sup>40</sup>.

## **Being without fear**

Seeing this unexpected catch, Simon Pierre and his associates are seized with great fear. But Jesus reassures them by saying to Simon: *"Do not be afraid, henceforth you will be catching men"* (Lk 5,10). When God calls us, he is well aware of our worries, our fears and our resistance. But he wants to free us from these so that we can be his friends. The friend lives in trust while the slave remains in fear.

The Lord asks us to be without fear as to what he wants for us.

- He wants to open new horizons for us to evolve and dream together, while fear brings us into withdrawal and distrust. The Lord's dream for the Congregation is that we go out, that we go to the peripheries to serve the most disadvantaged children and young people. Will we be involved in making this dream a reality, so that we may be Brothers who transmit the call by witnessing to a life totally given to the cause of the Gospel? Will we be able to open the doors of our lives and of our communities so that children and young people can come and live with us and share with us the bread of fraternity?
- He wants to give us a new mission, while fear pushes us to secure what is. The last General Chapter invites the whole Congregation to write a New Page. A New Page that must be personal and communal. A new Page at District, Province, Congregation levels. Are we ready to risk this adventure at the invitation of the Master? To what mission, to what new departure does the Lord call me when He asks me to be without fear? His grace is enough for me. His grace precedes the initiatives of my Province, District, Congregation.
- He wants to freely give us what he orders us to do, when fear rather pushes us to set conditions to respond to his call and to

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<sup>40</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 31.

demand guarantees for the future. The presence of the Lord will never abandon us, especially in moments of struggle and doubt, or when taking a long walk in the desert or at night. So why are we hesitating to launch into the deep, to throw ourselves into the arms of Divine Providence, to dare to risk everything with him? Have we forgotten the great prodigality of our Lord? Let us dare to cast our nets: a superabundant and surprising catch awaits us.

- He wants to give us the courage to do what God asks of us here and now; fear causes us to become discouraged at the slightest obstacle that stands in our way. Indeed, the Lord gives us the gift of the necessary courage to live our vocation with consistency and fidelity, to assume our consecration without concealing it or diminishing its requirements. When we open ourselves to the grace of the Lord here and now, the impossible becomes reality. This grace touches today's living and transforms our fears and limits into missionary audacity, into a generous response full of fertility for the Congregation and the Church, in service and dedication, especially to the weakest and poorest children and young people, in joy and enthusiasm that bear witness to those around us. Are we open to the grace of courage and audacity that the Lord offers us to walk together in the here and now?

## **Following Jesus**

Peter, Andrew, James and John bring the boats back to shore and, leaving everything, they follow Jesus (Lk 5:11). It is a following of Christ without conditions, full of affection, joy and admiration. As in the Gospel parable, they found the pearl of great price and agreed to sell everything to acquire it. To follow Jesus is to choose to rely on him wholeheartedly. A risky wager, full of foolhardiness but equally filled with passion.

To follow Jesus is to learn to live with the Master, to listen to him and to let yourself be trained by him. It is, like Mary, sister of Lazarus,

to sit at his feet. It is to stay in his presence and let yourself be looked at by him. But the danger that threatens us all is to want **to do things** for the Lord instead of learning to **stay with him**. This is the warning of Pope John Paul II to the religious: *"Without prayer, religious life loses its meaning. A constant danger for the apostolic workers is to be so overwhelmed by their own activities for the Lord that they forget the Lord of all activity. It will therefore be necessary for them to become increasingly aware of the importance of prayer in their lives."*<sup>41</sup> Our consecrated life will be meaningful to today's youth as it will nourish itself at the wellspring of prayer, of a personal encounter with Christ.

To follow Jesus is also to let oneself be gradually configured to him. To be configured to Christ is, as John de la Mennais reminds us, to make one's own the very life of Jesus. It is to be holy like him. It is to be merciful, compassionate like him. It is to love what he loved, to despise what he hated. It is to be his living image. It is to live of the very life of Christ (cf. Ga 2:20). Today, the form of consecrated life that attracts is the one whose fragrance of Christ embellishes all its members.

To follow Jesus is also to be accompanied by him. In fact, it is daring to listen to the word of Jesus as the disciples of Emmaus did, a word that helps starting again even if it causes stupor and consternation. It is also letting others join and accompany us so that truth leads to light. It is recognizing, welcoming and accepting one's ignorance, one's fragility so that Jesus can give it breath and meaning. It is finally learning to stand up and set out after welcoming and recognizing Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Today, the salt that gives flavor and light that illuminates the road of the young can be found in a consecrated life in the footsteps of the Master.

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<sup>41</sup> Pope John Paul II, To American Religious, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1980.

## The second calling of Peter (Jn 21:1-19)

1. After these things, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself this way.
2. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.
3. Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing." They told him, "We are also coming with you." They immediately went out, and entered into the boat. That night, they caught nothing.
4. But when day had already come, Jesus stood on the beach, yet the disciples didn't know that it was Jesus.
5. Jesus therefore said to them, "Children, have you anything to eat?" They answered him, "No."
6. He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." They cast it therefore, and now they weren't able to draw it in for the multitude of fish.
7. That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around him (for he was naked), and threw himself into the sea.
8. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits away), dragging the net full of fish.
9. So when they got out on the land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.
10. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught."

11. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of great fish, one hundred fifty-three; and even though there were so many, the net wasn't torn.

12. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." None of the disciples dared inquire of him, "Who are you?" knowing that it was the Lord.

13. Then Jesus came and took the bread, gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

14. This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples, after he had risen from the dead.

15. So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

16. He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

17. He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

18. Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself, and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you, and carry you where you don't want to go."

19. Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."



## CHAPTER III : EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

The objective of this third chapter is to launch a reflection on a new approach to vocational ministry in the Congregation. As our last General Chapter reminded us, *"Vocation ministry is of vital importance to the Mennaisian family, both in relation to the vocation to be a Brother and the vocation to be a lay Mennaisian. It enables the young person to discover that being Mennaisian is a path leading to life, a path that can fulfil his/her deepest desires and make him/her happy."*<sup>42</sup> Pope Francis did not say anything else when he said: *"Without a passionate love for Jesus, the consecrated life has no future. This passion is what launches us into the prophecy."*<sup>43</sup> Embracing the future with hope is a strong reaffirmation of our conviction that *"the Lord still calls today, in all settings and all walks of life"*.<sup>44</sup>

### Embracing the future

The text of Peter's second call (Jn 21:1-19) will serve as a guideline for this reflection on vocational pastoral ministry in our Congregation. Why such a choice? First of all, because everything starts for Peter from this loving and decisive encounter with the person of Jesus. Then, after the triple denial of Peter, where the only possible horizon seems to be discouragement and disappointment, Jesus offers his apostle a new future: to become the pastor of his sheep. And in

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<sup>42</sup> General Chapter of 2018, 5c.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Francis, *La force de la vocation : la vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, 45.

<sup>44</sup> General Chapter of 2018, 5a.

Jesus Christ, Peter embraces the future with hope and dares to rely on the fidelity of the Master to go to the end of his commitments.

## Going fishing

After the resurrection, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other disciples decide to go fishing, but they work all night without catching anything. At sunrise, Jesus asks them to cast the nets to the right of the boat, and to their surprise, they are catching a large quantity of fish. In this narrative, as in the pastoral care of vocations, any initiative that tends to set Jesus aside is doomed to failure. Fishing is abundant when it is done at the command of Jesus and when the nets are cast where he tells us.

But today, how can we discern these places and favorable moments? First of all, the strength of the vocation always translates into joy. *"When you feel this strength in the consecrated people, it touches the young at heart; they ignite, they read the message and they sign up."*<sup>45</sup> Then, the experience of the three "P's": poverty, prayer and patience, is crucial. Poverty gives credibility to our consecration. Prayer makes it fruitful. Patience purifies and sanctifies it. Finally, the **courage** to trust the one who tells us the right time and place. It's a multi-faceted courage. The courage to risk: there is no serious commitment without pitfalls. The courage to recognise one's weakness: without Jesus, we can do nothing. The courage to hope: God calls whom he wants, when he wants and how he wants. The courage to act: we must cast the net where the Lord sends us, here and now, for he will not do it for us. And the courage to love: *"Love alone is committed. For it alone refuses death and the sclerosis of rigidities. It is engaged in a perpetual quest for harmony. It is miracle. Love is Presence in silence, presence to life, presence as delicate and vibrant as the wind which is enriched by the perfume of flowers. Provided, however, that the flowers are alive, connected to the nourishing soil, call for tenderness."*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis, *La force de la vocation : la vie consacrée aujourd'hui*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> M. Dubost, *Grandir avec l'engagement*, 111.

A vocational pastoral care whose net is interlaced with joy, whose boat is built on poverty, prayer and patience, whose sails are called daring and courage, will certainly bear fruit for the Congregation, in God's own time.

## **Bringing**

Jesus asks the fishermen of Lake Gennesaret to bring him some of the fish they have just caught (Jn 21:10). Magnificent invitation from the Master to collaboration, to active participation. Beautiful exhortation to synodality! Getting together with young people by accepting who they are, what they do and what they have, this is the challenge that we are called to meet if we want to help them discover the beauty of a life consecrated to the Lord and lived in community.

How is vocational ministry organised in my community, in my District, in my Province? Are we content to confide it to a single Brother, perhaps the youngest? What place does it occupy in my school, in my pastoral involvement, in my daily encounters? Does every Brother in my community place his personal charisms at the service of vocations? How do Lay Mennaisians participate in the vocational project of the school, the educational work, the community, the District, the Province?

Today, the vocational ministry can only be synodal, which implies the enhancement of each person's gifts and charisms. In other words, it's about learning to walk with young people where they are and who we are. This is an occasion for evangelical witnessing on the part of the elders. If vocational ministry is flexible and fosters the quality of human relations, the warmth of fraternal life and synodality, then it will be meaningful and attractive to young people. In this way the community will be understood and perceived as a family that joyfully welcomes young people, a mother who gives life and promotes self-realization. Is vocational pastoral care an important part of the community project? Is the community faithful to prayer for vocations?

The opening of the community to young people will certainly bring freshness and dynamism. These can contribute to building a community that is more humane, evangelical, fraternal and closer to the poor. By opening itself and welcoming the excluded and the marginalized, the community will find its original identity: the home of charity.

The celebration of peak moments between young people and Brothers – a pilgrimage, a gathering, festivals, sports events, retreats, recollections, camps – represents a true synodal pedagogy. These meetings, if they are prepared and carried out together, make it possible to experience fraternity and to grow in the spirit of belonging to a body. Each one learns to rely on others to progress and grow. This is a wonderful opportunity for young people to evangelize other young people. In other words, these peak moments may constitute, as Pope Francis calls them, a true pastoral of contamination. *"Young people feel the need for close, credible, consistent and honest reference figures, as well as places and opportunities where they can test their ability to relate to others."*<sup>47</sup>

A form of synodal action in the vocational ministry needs to be invented with and for young people. It could be a group of Brothers, Lay Mennaisians and Youth whose mission would be to announce the good news of the vocation. This group would invite other young people to experience meeting the Lord. Young people are often better than us to find attractive ways to call. They can organize festivals, shows, plays to raise awareness and encourage other young people to promote a vocational culture in their different environments. *"The most important thing is that every young person dare to sow the first announcement in this fertile land that is the heart of another young person."*<sup>48</sup> And in the context of a community, Province, District, Congregation "going out", such groups could meet young people where they are, at school, on

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<sup>47</sup> Synod of Bishops, XV<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. Preparatory Document, 2017,2.*

<sup>48</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 210.

social networks, in the existential peripheries, in the rural world and the world of work.

## Getting closer

Jesus gets nearer because he wants to serve his disciples. He is this companion who prepares fish and bread for his friends on a hot fire. He puts himself at their service. He calls at table as does the mother of the family or the wife. In the Bible, when God is close to man, it is to reassure, to protect in the image of every good father. When approaching him, God allows people to feel his tenderness. Jesus' closeness is thus imbued with mercy, thoughtfulness, friendship, service and affection.

If our vocational pastoral care wishes to touch the hearts of young people today, it must be articulated around the proximity which, before being a know-how, is first and foremost a way of life. An ability to listen! A sense of being that requires mutual knowledge, relational capacity, self-forgetfulness, healthy self-esteem and trust.

A vocational ministry that aims at being close to young people must take the path of mutual knowledge that leads to recognition and acceptance of our qualities and fragilities. Today's youth, though part of the "*selfie*", "*millennial*" or "*Z*" generation or "*fluid*" or "*gas*" culture, want to see and meet Jesus, even if they do not always look for him where they can find him. And in their quest, they need to be accompanied by witnesses who are not perfect but authentic, inspiring, transparent and happy. The apostle Paul educates us in this knowledge that is the knowledge of self, by accepting to see himself in his true light.

*"And, in the last place, he appeared to me too, as to the runt. For I am the least of the apostles; I do not deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God. It is by the grace of God that I am what I am, and his grace for me has not been fruitless. Far from it, I worked more than them all: oh! not me, but the grace of God that is with me "(1Co 15:8-10).*

If our pastoral care ministry opts for proximity, it is called to create bonds with young people the way Jesus did. It is not a matter of doing pastoral work for but with the young people. In fact, listening is the first form of hospitality expressing our ability to be with young people. The Apostle John educates us about this interpersonal relationship: *"One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was at the table, leaning against Jesus' breast. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, and said to him, 'Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.' He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'"* (Jn 13:23-25).

A pastoral vocational ministry close to young people also implies self-forgetfulness. To listen to young people, we must fade away, know how put aside his personal difficulties, his concerns of the moment. Mary educates us in this way of being. At the Annunciation, she learns that her cousin Elizabeth is expecting a child. She immediately crosses mountains and valleys to put herself at her service. *"In those days, Mary departed and hurried to the mountainous region in a city of Judah. She entered Zachariah's house and greeted Elizabeth "* (Lk 1:39-40).

A vocational pastoral ministry that aims at proximity also fosters a healthy degree of self-esteem. The person who enjoys true self-esteem lives in transparency and authenticity. That person need not resort to ploys to conceal his thoughts, feelings, intentions and values. He overcomes the fear of revealing himself as he is. A vocational pastoral ministry with a healthy degree of self-esteem becomes a word, a message and a conversation. A conversation that leads to conversion. The Syro-Phoenician woman educates us in this knowledge which is the healthy degree of self-esteem. She does not take herself too seriously and surprises Jesus by her ingenuous response.

*"But she came and worshiped him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' But he answered, 'It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even*

*as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour." (Mt 15:25-28).*

A vocational ministry that seeks to be close to young people is also based on trust. Others must be convinced that what they share is greeted with respect and that confidential matters remain at the meeting place. For trust to be established, patience and time are needed. The one who confides into another always tries to test if the listener is trustworthy. The woman at Simon's teaches us this trustworthiness.

*"Behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of ointment. Standing behind at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." (Lk 7:37-38)*

*"Effective closeness, the sharing of spaces and activities, create the conditions for authentic communication, free from prejudices. This is how Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and his Spirit urges us to follow the same path today."<sup>49</sup>*

## **Feeding**

After his invitation to the fishermen of Lake Gennesaret to eat, Jesus takes the bread and gives it to them, and he does the same for the fish (Jn 21:13). This is an appetizing and nourishing breakfast: bread and fish are grilled over a hot fire. What consideration and thoughtfulness on the part of Jesus! He anticipated their hunger. The fishermen spent a whole night on lake Gennesaret without catching anything. The encounter with Jesus nourishes and gives strength for the road.

Today, as in Jesus' time, young people expect from us a food that satisfies their hearts, their intelligence and their hands. What food are

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<sup>49</sup> Synod of Bishops, XV<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document*, 2018, 130.

we ready to offer them? What bread are we giving them to eat? What fish do we offer them? On what fire do we prepare breakfast for them?

At the level of the heart, our vocational pastoral care must favor the language of selfless, relational and existential love, capable of awakening hope and enthusiasm for what is truly beautiful, good and true. *"The language that young people understand is spoken by those who radiate life, by those who are there for them and with them. And those who, for all their limitations and weaknesses, try to live their faith with integrity."*<sup>50</sup> Thus the bread offered here, in this case love, is bitter and moldy if it is not preceded by hospitality, thoughtfulness, consideration and benevolence.

Concretely, a pastoral ministry of vocations close to the **heart** of young people is called upon to use empathy, this ability to put oneself in the shoes of young people to experience with them their joys, their sorrows, their difficulties, their blockages. In fact, the pedagogy of the heart teaches us to love and save young people, showing respect for their dignity and their fragility.

At the level of the **intelligence**, the vocation pastoral care must be articulated around the proclamation and the deepening of the kerygma, that is to say the founding experience of the encounter with God through the death and resurrection of Christ. It is not uncommon to meet young people who have been lectured on doctrinal questions who have lost the fire of the encounter with Christ and the joy of following him.

*"Consequently, youth ministry should always include occasions for renewing and deepening our personal experience of the love of God and the living Christ. It can do this in a variety of ways: testimonies, songs, moments of adoration, times of spiritual reflection on the sacred Scriptures, and even an intelligent use of social networks. Yet this joyful experience of encounter with the Lord should never be replaced by a kind of "indoctrination".*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 211.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 214.



At the level of the **hands** that must be involved, a vocational ministry aims at growth in community and fraternal life, through service. The love of God is verified in the love and service of our brothers, especially the poorest and the weakest. In this regard, our last General Chapter *encourages "life experiences with the most vulnerable: the poor, the sick, the elderly, especially for members of vocation groups of our educational centers"*<sup>52</sup>. It is in this sense that the final document of the synod on youth, faith and vocational discernment affirms: *"No vocation within the Church can place itself outside this communitarian dynamism of going out and dialoguing; hence every effort of accompaniment is called to measure itself against this horizon, giving privileged attention to the poorest and most vulnerable."*<sup>53</sup>

If a vocational ministry nourished only the intelligence, it would become an ideology. If it fed only the heart, it would be a passion. If it were limited to healing hands, it would be reduced to a know-how.

Without educating the intelligence, vocation pastoral care will be short of vision and breath. Without forming the heart, it will quickly lack dynamism and energy. Without accompanying the hands, it will soon lack depth, concrete application and motivation.

## Loving the Lord

On three occasions Jesus asks Simon Peter the question: *"Do you love me?"* (Jn 21:15-17). And three times, Peter renews his love affiliation to his Master. Jesus' love for Peter is a healing, saving, invigorating, forgiving love that embraces the future with hope, that gives freedom, comfort, transformation and life. One who lets himself be loved by Jesus, like Peter, looks like the tree planted by a stream whose foliage is always green. He lives from the eternal youth of God. The love of Jesus always keeps people young and beautiful.

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<sup>52</sup> General Chapter of 2018, 7a.

<sup>53</sup> Synod of Bishops, XV<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document*, 2018, 127.

The pastoral ministry of vocations whose dynamism is the love of the Lord provides a setting where young people learn to live according to the evangelical radicalism. *"The Lord gives everything and asks for everything: he gives total love and asks for wholehearted sharing"*<sup>54</sup>. It is also this loving proposal that elicits a confident and free response. It is also rooted in the joyful testimony of free love. It finally awakens to the generous service towards the little ones, a true bridge between the proclaimed faith and the lived life. A faith without works is indeed dead.

The vocation ministry centred on the love of the Lord is this place where the unique and universal call to holiness is lived which is nothing other than the fulfillment of this invitation to the joy of the vibrant love that resonates in the heart of the young. Such pastoral care will certainly help to show young people that holiness is the face of the Church and *"we are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves."*<sup>55</sup>

The only pastoral ministry meaningful for the young and fruitful for our Congregation is one based on the love of the Lord, as described by Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit*:

*"His is 'a love that does not overwhelm or oppress, cast aside or reduce to silence, humiliate or domineer'. It is the love of the Lord, a daily, discreet and respectful love; a love that is free and freeing, a love that heals and raises up. The love of the Lord has to do more with raising up than knocking down, with reconciling than forbidding, with offering new changes than condemning, with the future than the past".*<sup>56</sup>

## Becoming a pastor

Three times, Jesus asks Simon Peter to be the pastor, the shepherd of his sheep (Jn 21:17-19). In the Johannine tradition (Jn 10:

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<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 116.

1-5), the Good Shepherd is an educator, that is, someone who leads, accompanies, and serves the sheep. The evangelist specifies even four main qualities of the Good Shepherd. He is first and foremost the one who calls everyone by name, who pays special attention to each sheep, especially the weakest. Then, his mission is to foster growth, to help through risky passages and assist gaining control of one's life. He is also the one who walks at the head of the flock because he knows the way with steep climbs and obstacles. Finally, the true pastor gives his life and time without measure, even sacrificing his own life.

A vocational ministry inspired by the Good Shepherd ensures the quality of attention and listening given to each young person. These can be verified by the time we devote to it. It's not first and foremost about quantity, but about the quality of our presence. Our attitude must convey to the young person the assurance that we listen to him unconditionally, showing no offence, surprise, boredom or fatigue. In other words, we learn to walk beside him like the Pilgrim of Emmaus, even if for a moment we have to walk with him in the wrong direction. Thus, listening and being present show the value that the person has for us, whatever his life choice may be.

A pastoral care ministry that imitates the Good Shepherd allows discernment. Discerning comes from the Greek word 'krinein' which means to evaluate, separate, distinguish, determine, choose, sort out. In addition, the Latin word 'cernere' brings a very interesting complementary definition: it means to perceive with acuity, to seize with precision. In other words, discernment is above all an exercise in critical analysis. But to stop at this stage would be to make it a simple intellectual exercise. For Christians, faith must always be the backdrop. In this sense, discerning means looking, perceiving, grasping a reality with the eyes of faith. For Ignatius, discerning means above all feeling and recognizing. It is a matter of heart. It is therefore the mission of all vocational ministry to help each young person understand the reality of his/her life with the eyes of faith and the ears of the heart.

A vocational ministry modelled on the Good Shepherd seeks to accompany the growth of young people, especially the most

vulnerable. It takes care not to put out the wick that still smokes, not to break the bending reed. It can identify paths where others see only walls and recognise possibilities where others perceive only risks, threats or dangers. It can take the lost or injured sheep on its shoulders.

## **Being a disciple**

The risen Jesus concludes his meeting with Simon Peter by: *"Follow me"* (Jn 21:19). To follow Jesus is to learn to be his disciple, to follow in his footsteps, to live as he has lived, to share his destiny by allowing himself to be dressed and taken wherever he wants. It is this crazy gamble that will have to be lived every day.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be fascinated by his person, so much so that his life appears to us to be good and beautiful because it is simple, poor, given generously to others and always available for the giving. Jesus asks those who wish to be his disciples to take their cross every day and follow him on a paschal path of death and resurrection.

A vocational pastoral ministry meant to help young people to respond to Jesus' invitation to be his disciples should adopt the pedagogy of the Eucharist which teaches us to break the bread of the Word and the bread of the Body of Christ together. Without the sustenance of this double bread, the young disciple may faint along the way. It will be difficult for him to testify to what he has heard, seen, contemplated and touched of the Word of life (1 Jn 1:1).

The pedagogy of a vocational ministry suggested by the table of the Word should be articulated around the four elements that constitute it: forgiveness, the word, the profession of faith and intercession.

First of all, teaching the youngster a sincere revision of his life automatically leads to a request for forgiveness from God and neighbor. This forgiveness, in turn, becomes a supplication and a trustful encounter with the mercy of a God who lifts up and invites to continue one's disciple experience. The forgiveness requested, granted

and welcomed in a discipleship attitude soothes the guilt of the heart and makes one available for listening to God, first through his Word, but also from the Church, the Congregation, the Province, our predecessors, the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. It is a word that warms our hearts and reaches us on the road that leads to the Master.

This Word of God - double-edged sword that penetrates to the junction of the bones - listened to and received leads to a fundamental option: The Master or the idols. The disciple thus renews his profession and his adherence to the one who calls him. The true encounter with God finally expands his heart to the dimensions of the world. Faith acting through charity then takes the form of compassion for humanity. Thus, the disciple feels called to intercede and offer his life for those with whom his Master has identified: the poor, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner.

This pedagogy of vocational ministry stemming from the table of the Eucharist could contain the following six elements: the offering, the consecration, the fraternization, the communion, the thanksgiving and the sending off on the mission.

During the offertory, the priest presents the bread and the wine, the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands which will become the body and blood of Christ. At this first level, the youth is educated to offer himself to the Lord as he is, with his lights and shadows, strengths and weaknesses. At the moment of the consecration, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine, the blood of Christ. Throughout his journey, the young man is invited to become satiating bread, blood that quenches children and young people.

Praying the Lord's Prayer makes the assembly a people of brothers and sisters who give priority to the Lord in seeking to do his will, wishing the coming of his reign and working to sanctify his name, a people who enter the path of forgiveness, who earn their daily bread with the help of the Father and who entrust to him their safety. During

the meetings of vocational groups, young people are thus encouraged to take steps that build bridges and promote fraternity.

At communion, God is one with us. He comes to establish his home with us. He is pitching his tent among us. The young person on a vocational path is thus educated to live in solidarity with those around him, to dwell with the poorest.

The Virgin Mary is the ecclesial figure of gratitude, of thanksgiving. Everything was offered to her gratuitously. She is the maid who marvels at the great generosity of God on her behalf. During his vocational journey, the young person is accompanied in this same spirit of thanksgiving. Only a grateful heart can rely on the Master to be a faithful disciple.

Every Eucharistic celebration ends with the sending off on a mission. Every Christian is called to go and proclaim he whom his eyes have contemplated, whose hands have touched. Day after day, the young person is educated to be a missionary disciple too, testifying that friendship with Christ is the only source of happiness that enables us to embrace the future with hope and that allows us to welcome the call to holiness as a grace, a vocation and a mission.



## CONCLUSION

At the end of this reflection on our wonderful and holy vocation of Brother, I would like us to contemplate the Virgin Mary, the icon of the mystery of vocation. First disciple, she becomes the prototype of all the other ways of responding to the call of Christ.

The yes of the Virgin Mary at the call of the Lord is strong, generous and faithful. It is the yes of a young woman who commits herself and risks, who accepts to wager everything on her Lord, without any other security than the certainty of knowing that she will give birth to the child of the promise. It is the yes of a young woman who leaves in all haste and crosses mountains and valleys to serve her cousin Elizabeth who needs her help.

It is also the yes of a young woman who gives birth to her newborn in a manger, because there is no place for them in the inn! It is the yes of a young mother who then escapes with Joseph to Egypt to protect her child. It is the yes of a young mother who presents her first-born to the Lord by obeying the prescriptions of the law of Moses.

It is also the yes of a blessed mother because she is part of "*those who listen to the word of God, and who keep it!*" (Lk 11:28). It is the yes of a mother who intercedes with her Son on behalf of the new couple at Cana. It is the yes of a suffering mother who welcomes in her arms the lifeless body of her crucified Son. It is the yes of a praying mother who awaits the Spirit who will give birth to a young, bold, dynamic, joyful, confident Church ready to launch into the deep.

Virgin Mary, generous, strong and faithful young woman, teach us to launch into the deep and risk everything following your Son, the only Way we have to follow, the only Truth we are called to adhere to, the only Life for which giving everything is worth it.

Virgin Mary, guardian of hope, sustain us, accompany us and take us in your arms when we are tempted by discouragement or when we are afraid to leave the sand of our habits or the firm ground of our certainties. Be the lighthouse that lights our way when the storm hits our boat and it risks sinking.

Young and beautiful Virgin, make us courageous, inventive and creative and so to dare to go out and call new disciples. Guide our hands and our hearts when we cast our nets.

Virgin Mary, Mother and Merciful Mistress, in this year of our bicentennial, continue to accompany our Congregation and implore the Holy Spirit for her to enjoy a new Pentecost that will make her ever more faithful to God alone, ever more ardent in fraternal communion and ever more daring in the service of the poor. Help us look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope.

Brother Hervé Zamor, s.g.

25<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

On the feast of saint Mark, the Evangelist