



# LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

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## *Accompany the call today!*

Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,

"The pastoral care of vocations, that of the Brother as well as that of the Lay Mennaisian, is a vital issue for the Mennaisian Family. 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" (CG 2018, no 5c). This is a strong affirmation of our General Chapter of 2018 which invites the Laity and the Brothers of the Mennaisian Family to accompany young people in the discovery of their own vocation. But faced with this daunting challenge, we might be tempted to say that we have already tried everything and that the results are rather meager. We are disconnected from the world of young people and we no longer speak the same language. What good is it for us to persist? And yet, today never as never before, young people wait to be reached in their reality and are ready to take the hand that we extend to them on their way to Damascus (Acts 9: 1-20)<sup>1</sup>.

### **I- The Lord calls and accompanies.**

Today, as in the days of the apostle Paul, the Lord calls and accompanies. He does this by first welcoming the other as he or she is, with his/her passions and wounds, initiatives and sense of responsibility, his/ her past and the present (Acts 9: 1-2). Then, by joining him on his journey on his road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3).

Starting from this unconditional welcome, the Lord dares a word which calls the other by his/ her name and which invites him/her to conversion: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" (Acts 9: 4). It is a word which initiates a dialogue, which creates bonds, which awakens the desire for a better knowledge and which reveals the identity of the One who calls: "*Who are you, Lord?*". "*I am Jesus, he whom you are persecuting*", the voice answers (Acts 9: 5). It is a word that brings people to their feet, that encourages them to walk again and that calls for obedience (Acts 9: 6).

The accompaniment initiated by the Lord continues thanks to guardian angels who take over. Dazzled by the light and the clarity of the encounter, Saul becomes blind and accepts to take the hand offered to him by his fellow travelers to bring him into Damascus (Acts 9: 8). After a three-day fast,

he receives the visit of Ananias whose mission is to lay his hands on him in order to restore his sight (Acts 9: 9-12). To meet Saul, this disciple of Christ overcame all his prejudices and conquered all his fears. How can the Lord choose the one who persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and who had Stephen stoned (Acts 9: 13-14)? What a long interior journey made by Ananias to succeed in welcoming Saul as his brother (Acts 9: 15-16)! Thus, to lay hands on the one who came to Damascus to arrest him and throw him in prison represents a true profession of faith in the grace of conversion that the Lord offers to those who accompany and to those who are accompanied (Acts 9: 17). In fact, accompanying the call is helping another discover the beauty of giving his / her life to the Lord by living baptismal grace to the full (Acts 9: 18-20).

Yesterday, it was to Ananias, to Saul's fellow travelers and to so many other pioneers that the Lord had entrusted the mission of accompanying the call: "*You will be told what to do*" (Acts 9: 6)! Today is our turn! Are we ready to take over the responsibility of guiding the young people the Lord sends to us? Do we dare to join them on their road to Damascus to welcome them as they are and to walk with them? Will we be able to offer them a word that creates bonds and brings people back to their feet? Will we have the courage to overcome our prejudices and overcome our fears in order to meet them?

Even today, the Lord continues to count on the Brothers and Lay Mennaisians to accompany the young people who are searching for the way to which God calls them. But how do you get to do it? Nothing extraordinary except a presence that supports the walk by adopting the rhythm of the other, a closeness that extends a hand when necessary, a gesture that indicates a direction when the heart hesitates, an invitation that encourages people to move on, a light that eventually illuminates an area where darkness still reigns. In fact, like a mountain guide, it is about learning to journey with the young: knowing how to be ahead or at the back when necessary; take time out together to rebuild your strength and review the progress made.



<sup>1</sup> Before going any further, it is advisable to read the text of Paul's vocation: Acts 9:1-20.



## II- Support the call today

How can the Mennaisian Family today support the call to be a Mennaisian Brother or lay person? By listening to Paul's vocation and taking into account the expectations of the young people of our time, the most suitable attitude can be sought from the side of craftsmanship because it is more a matter of knowledge of being which combines creation and poetry. Indeed, the craftsman becomes creative when he realizes with his hands what he first thought and liked. This gives him the spontaneity to act without programming everything in the smallest detail. To accompany the call is to accomplish today this work of craftsmanship which means:

### ▪ **Knowing how to join:**

Many young people are waiting for us to join them on their way to Damascus. To do what? To listen to them and learn from their experience. The first sign of listening is the time we are willing to devote to them to be with them, to share who they are, what they do and what they have. This is what Jesus does when he begins to walk beside the disciples of Emmaus and accompanies them for a long while on a path that took the opposite direction away from the right one (Lk 24:13-35). What initiatives can we, Brothers and Lay Mennaisians, take together to go and meet the young people in order to listen to them and "walk with them in the manner of Jesus" (GC 2018, no 19a)?

▪ **Dare to speak:** When the Lord dares to speak, it is to create, forgive, heal, raise, reassure, restore confidence, call, challenge, question, reveal himself and arouse hope. Today, it is the greatest thirst of young people. As with the disciples of Emmaus, they are looking for witnesses who, starting from the Word of God, are able to help them discover the One who gives meaning and favour to life. Only this word which leads to an encounter with the person of Jesus will enable them to quench their thirst at the source of Living Water (Jn 4:14) and in turn be his witnesses (Jn 4:42). What "spiritual experiences" could we offer the young people to enable them "to feel God's freely given love and have a personal encounter with Christ" (GC 2018, no 7a)?

▪ **Lending a hand:** In a world marked more and more by individualism, fraternity and solidarity are prophetic gestures to which young people are very sensitive. They are easily moved towards holding hands with the other to help them move forward. It is in this sense that Pope Francis encourages to integrate into all the pastoral plans "various resources and means to help young people to grow in fraternity, to live as brothers, to help one another,

to create a community, to serve others, to be close to the poor" (Christus vivit, no. 215). What "projects of missionary solidarity and Mennaisian volunteering" (CG 2018, no 7a) can be put in place to help young people discover the beauty and the joy of being able to join hands with others?

▪ **Overcome fear:** Out of timidity or due to fear, we tend to withdraw into ourselves and distance ourselves from the world of young people. We had begun to develop

barrier gestures long before the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it is the fear of death or resignation that locks us into pessimism, that tunnel that darkens everything. As at Pentecost, only one who opens himself to the action of the Holy Spirit is able to break the barriers of fear in order to set out with the other. How can we respond to the call of

the last General Chapter which encourages us to welcome "young people for times of sharing, conviviality and prayer, in an atmosphere of warmth and mutual kindness" (GC 2018, no 6b)?

▪ **Overcome prejudices:** Anything outside of our usual categories is often labeled and viewed with suspicion. How is it possible that the Lord chose Saul, the persecutor of Christians (Acts 9: 13-15)? This is the conversion to which we are all called: to overcome our prejudices. Nothing is impossible for the Lord: he calls whomever he wants, when he wants and how he wants. Thus, by adopting his logic, we will be ready to accompany "surprising vocations" (CG 2018, no 7 conclusion) that he will "hatch" at his appropriate time. What are the prejudices that we are called to overcome if we want to "accompany the human and spiritual progress of the young according to their socio-religious context" (CG 2018, no 6d)?

## Prayer

Lord, support our desire to accompany the young people you call to follow you. Allow us to join them on their way to Damascus. Put on our lips the word that brings life and awakens hope. Teach us to join hands with them as they seek to discover the beauty of fraternity and solidarity. Give us your Spirit to overcome our fears and defeat our prejudices so that we learn to walk with them, as you once did with the disciples of Emmaus.

God alone in time! God alone in eternity!

**Brother Hervé Zamor,  
Superior General**

