

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE ONLINE MEETING WITH VOCATION PROMOTERS

Dear Vocation Promoters,

1. This meeting is an opportunity for the General Government, together with the Secretariat of Formation, to meet you, to thank you for the valuable missionary work you do in the congregation and to encourage you in this mission. This is not an easy task, especially in a context of rapid and radical changes that raise new questions on a daily basis. You carry out your work in this context. Our vocations are not outside the world, but are part of it, with its opportunities and challenges within the church, the congregation, the family, etc. This should not discourage us but should push us to cast our nets into deeper waters, in obedience to the Word of the Redeemer (cf. Lk. 5:4), and to seek new alternatives.
2. The congregation is in a process of restructuring and reconfiguration. It is very important to seize this moment as a time of the Spirit, who urges us to a new missionary ardor and apostolic drive. It also invites us to invest human, financial, technological, and spiritual resources in vocation promotion. Perhaps the questions that the present times pose to us are: are the methods we are using in our pastoral ministry reaching young people and touching their hearts? Who are the young people approaching us and where are they? How do we help them discern their vocation in a context marked by superficiality, fragmentation, sense of belonging, fragile relationships, and identity crisis? And how to involve our confreres in this mission, which is everyone's task? (cf. Const. 79).
3. In today's context, Redemptorist vocation ministry must be attentive to new languages and technologies. Social media, digital platforms, and new social media have become essential for reaching young people. Digital evangelization is a powerful tool for sowing the vocational message, but it must be accompanied by lived experiences in the presence of communion, prayer, and service so that vocational discernment is integral. From the very first moment of contact with the young vocation, it is essential to communicate to him the Redemptorist charism. At the same time, the life witness of Redemptorist missionaries and religious is one of the greatest vocational tools. His example of joy in following Christ, his community life, and his work with those most in need continue to be an attraction for many young people seeking an authentic vocation. We need to explore this more deeply: where are Redemptorist missionaries and what work are they doing?

4. Each unit of the congregation has its own competencies in the field of vocation promotion, but this does not mean that we cannot improve this work. Active listening and open dialogue with young people help us understand whether we are really touching their hearts. It is important to ask them directly what they think about our mission, our activities, how they feel and what motivates or discourages them. Creating these spaces for expression and interaction is essential. To achieve this, we cannot do without creative methods, such as music, video, social media, art, and interactive activities, which can increase their engagement. The use of technology and digital media is part of young people's daily lives and can also help us capture their attention. It is worth remembering that even if we use the best technology, if there are no authentic testimonies of life and faith, we will achieve nothing. In this sense, we can ask: Why are so many young people involved with NGOs in challenging activities, in the pursuit of good and in helping with social transformation? Pope Paul VI said that “the world does not need teachers, but witnesses.” Today young people lack reference points because of the institutional crisis we are experiencing in politics, in the Church, in the family, in education, etc. But we can also draw on the examples of many brethren engaged in challenging missions, witnessing what it means to be a Redemptorist. For this reason, we need to encourage young people to know and be enthusiastic about the congregation. It is essential to introduce them to the Redemptorist charism and spirituality in a simple and experiential way.

5. The young people who approach us or to whom we reach out come from diverse backgrounds: Redemptorist vocation groups, Redemptorist parishes and communities, volunteer, and missionary work experiences, committed Christian families, contexts without community or catechetical initiation, diocesan or other congregational experiences. This requires vocation promoters to take a close look and provide personalized accompaniment to help them discern their vocation. And here we cannot overlook these elements:
 - a) The communication of the Redemptorist charism and identity, as well as the mission of the Congregation (cf. Const. 1-20).
 - b) To make them aware that we are a missionary congregation, which requires willingness to serve in different areas and to be sent where the Congregation needs them (cf. Const. 51, 54).
 - c) Communicate to young people that we are religious, first of all, and that the Congregation includes two ways of being: the religious priest and the

- religious brother, living the same charism. The priesthood makes no one more important than those who have chosen to be brothers.
- d) Personalized and communal vocational accompaniment, with spiritual and catechetical deepening, can be carried out through virtual meetings. During the period of accompaniment, this resource can be used by creating a vocational school, so that those who are searching for their vocation can deepen their vision of the Church and the Congregation.
 - e) Develop a spirituality of commitment, centered on Redemptorist identity and missionary spirituality.
 - f) To integrate faith and youth culture through dialogue with this culture and the witness of contemporary Redemptorist missionaries.
 - g) Conveying the value of commitment in a fragmented world, based on the witness of consecrated life throughout history, highlighting the role of the Congregation in the Church and its service of evangelization and presence among the poorest and most abandoned.
 - h) Facilitate concrete missionary experiences in which young people can come into contact with missionary life and the reality of the poor and marginalized.
 - i) To create a welcoming and authentic vocational community with true, stable, and fraternal relationships.
 - j) Encourage young people to overcome the fear of commitment, a very common fear in the modern world. Today, many young people experience insecurity when making stable and lasting commitments.
 - k) Involve families in the vocational discernment process of young people. It is also a way to evangelize the family and make them aware of the congregation your child is thinking of joining.
 - l) Integrate the laity in the work of vocation promotion, as a vocation network, which accompanies, supports and encourages the mission of vocation promoters.
6. Therefore, the process of vocational discernment must be personalized, continuous and multidisciplinary. It is essential to involve in vocation promotion lay people and women with professional training in the humanities: psychology and related areas, as well as our formators. Young people need close spiritual accompaniment, with people who listen to their concerns and guide them to

discover God's call. This accompaniment should not be limited to vocation meetings or events but should include patient and respectful listening to personal times and processes. Redemptorist vocation ministry should provide spaces for spiritual and community reflection in which young people can experience prayer, missionary service, and the Redemptorist way of life, thus facilitating the discernment of their call.

7. Constitution 79 states that “all brethren, through esteem and love for their vocation, should devote themselves to the pastoral care of vocation promotion for the congregation.” In this spirit, all confreres should be aware of this, even if this is not always the case. Perhaps we forget that we are eternally called by the Father, who renews our vocation every day, and we think that vocation promotion is the sole responsibility of the vocation team. There are confreres who are vocation promoters in their apostolate, others who show no interest in promoting new vocations, some who discourage young people from entering the congregation and encourage them to opt for diocesan life or other congregations, and there are also those who discourage young people from pursuing consecrated life because they themselves have lost their faith and love for their consecration. In this scenario, vocation promoters have the task of increasingly engaging those brethren who believe in the Redemptorist life and also of transforming the hearts and mindsets of those who are indifferent or who no longer see a future for vocation ministry. In this sense, vocation promotion is conducted not only ad extra, but especially ad intra. And here we can ask: Why is it that many of our pastoral works, parishes and shrines have never offered us a vocation, even though we have been there for a long time?
8. We need to take certain aspects into account in the process of accompaniment and vocational discernment of young people who wish to enter the congregation:
 - a) Young people with a significant clerical profile who come from traditionalist backgrounds and see consecrated life and priesthood as status.
 - b) True motivations for entering the Congregation must be based on God's call, and not driven by external pressures, unrealistic idealizations, or a desire for personal security.
 - c) Regular spiritual accompaniment to help them discern the signs of God present in their lives and vocation.

- d) Affective and human maturity and self-knowledge. Consecrated life requires the ability to face emotional and psychological challenges, so it is necessary that the candidate be supported in his or her human growth.
- e) We are a missionary congregation living and working in community. It is important to verify that the young person has the ability and willingness to live in community and fraternity, to share his life with others, to face the challenges and joys of community life, and to collaborate in a spirit of service.
- f) Identification with the charism of the congregation and options for the poor.
- g) Openness to spiritual life.
- h) A healthy understanding of sexuality, celibacy, and chastity as ways to fully live consecration to God. Accompaniment should include clear guidance on how to live celibacy as a gift and commitment, helping the young person to integrate it in a healthy way into his or her life. In such a sexualized postmodern context, for many this seems unattainable and breeds insecurity in embracing this lifestyle.
- i) Resilience and perseverance in the face of difficulties. The young person entering the congregation is not entering a bubble, but must have the ability to face challenges and a spirit of sacrifice, according to Const. 20.
- j) Adult vocations. Today it is a reality in the Church and the Congregation, and we must be open to them, with an approach and accompaniment adapted to their needs.
- k) The promotion of the vocation of religious brothers. The Congregation breathes with two lungs. From the point of view of vocation promotion, young people need to know both ways of being Redemptorists. A promotion that disregards the brothers does not fully fulfill its mission.
- l) The sponsorship (“accompaniment”) of the confreres that can hinder the vocational discernment of young people. One aspect of accompaniment is to encourage young people, and another very different one is to project personal expectations onto them and want them to meet them, thus creating a protectionism that prevents them from walking alone and making decisions freely and sincerely.

9. It is important to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect vocation, that vocational promotion is only one step in the formation process, and that the vocational call is found in the mystery of God. It is important to go beyond appearances. We often select a young person who seems perfect, but eventually leaves us. And there are those who, because of their life story, are looked upon with distrust, but manage to overcome obstacles and persevere to the end. We must have reasonable criteria for the selection of vocations, but we must also consider the human being with his capacity for conversion, search for holiness and overcoming his difficulties. If we look for perfect vocations, we will suffer deep frustration and discouragement in our mission.
10. Dear vocation promoters, thank you again for the work you were doing. We live in times of vocation shortage. Most of the time, the work is intense and there are little or no results. Vocations ministry is not only about the inclusion of young people in the congregation, but also about their evangelization. That is why it is necessary to bring together the youth ministry, the Redemptorist missionary youth, the youth groups present in our pastoral works, to value, encourage and involve them in the vocational work that the Congregation does. This can give greater dynamism and enthusiasm to the youth themselves. To work in harmony with the whole Redemptorist Family, with the laity associated with our mission and, when possible, also with Congregations related to our charism.
11. In many countries there is a month dedicated to vocations or vocation weeks. In the congregation, the annual Redemptorist Missionary Vocations Promotion Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of November. We take advantage of these occasions and all the means at our disposal to make the Redemptorist charism known and also to call young people to be part of this missionary family. We are missionaries of hope, following in the footsteps of the Redeemer, who also calls young people to follow him.
12. May Mary, the Mother of Perpetual Help, the call from the Father, raise up young people willing to give their lives for abundant redemption. May the Redemptorist Saints, Martyrs and Blessed encourage you in this beautiful, necessary, and challenging Redemptorist mission and accompany with their blessing the work you are doing.

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(Translated from the Original Spanish Language)