

International Meeting on Vocational Ministry for Consecrated Life

Rome – December 1-3, 2017

More than 800 representatives from all over the world took part in a gathering in Rome, December 1-3, to prepare for the 2018 synod on *"Young people, the faith, and vocational discernment."* This conference for religious working in the field of vocational ministry, was an initiative of the *Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL)*.



During this meeting I continually reported using www.twitter.com/houseofvocation. This impression of the meeting is built on these tweets.

1 December 2017.

Looking forward to the Bishop's Synod 2018 on Youth, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, religious from all over the world meet three days on *Vocational Ministry and Consacrated Life*. I feel privileged to participate and will try to report some headlines.

The vocation-conference started today with an inspiring message of pope Francis, I hope we can share later on. After an introduction on "The sequela Christi in the New Testament", by Mgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, focus in exchange is immediately on international differences.



Then, father Pascual Chávez, S.D.B. speaks to the Conference on *"Today's young people and Consecrated Life"*. He describes their culture in its internet-connectivity and the aspect of living the moment. An important question he asks, is if young people meet not only our services but 'what we are'.

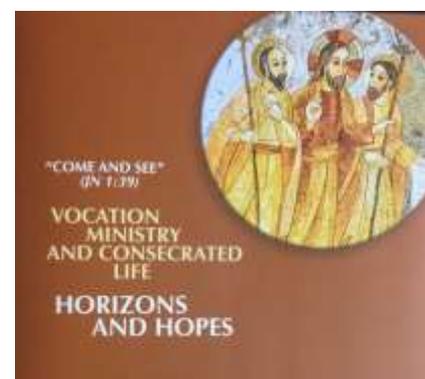
In response to questions from the audience, father Pascual Chávez stresses that attention for vocation isn't a task for a few, but for the whole church community. This is what we call a "Vocation Culture".

But: "how can we develop such culture?", a sister asks.

Pascual Chávez reacts that in everything we do, people we meet must be able to be touched by our charism and the joy of religious life. Mgr Carballo and mgr Braz de Aviz add that religious should be prophets of hope and that 'ars moriendi' doesn't apply to charism.

Father Timothy Radcliffe, O. P. now gives reflections on *"Cultures and vocation to Consecrated Life: possibilities and difficulties"*. He says: Religious life is a call to live abundantly. Can people discern this in us, considering all differences of culture and generations?

Timothy Radcliffe continues: Culturally, young people around the world, now have – being "online" – more in common with each other than with their parents.



Religious life stretches us open to a worldwide way of brotherhood and love: encounter with what is different.

Father Radcliffe stresses that your “identity” is not what you choose to be, but what you discover to be: *how to be Christ*. Religious life should be the frightening, radical call to follow Christ. *We have no vow of comfort*. We need a strong theology on vows !

What we need is courageous and creative leadership. The model of the gospel is that of the servant, letting go of control and – as pope Francis shows the way – following the in-predictable influence of the Spirit, including listening to the young. Do we have the courage, not only to let the young come and share our ways, but ourselves to share theirs? The young *won't take our place and do what we did, we have to leave it to them to go new ways, trusting that Christ is in and with them*.

Answering some questions, Timothy Radcliffe says that what we have to learn, is to converse: to respectfully and patiently enter in dialogue with those we meet, and especially with those from whom we differ most. A conversation that's capable to convert vice-versa.

2 December 2017.

On the second day of our World Vocation Meeting, we start with sharings on experiences in Vocational Ministry.

- Rosanna Christina Zan, ASCJ stresses that Vocation Ministry demands to move on in hope, to cooperate and to awaken people to discern Gods personal vocation for them.
- José Maria Ezpeleta RCJ shows that vocations in Vietnam are booming. Factors that stimulate this, are the strong sense of prayer among the people, the intense parish-life and extended family-bonds. A threat is urbanisation and father José tells how their project responds to that.
- Sr. Paschaline Dubam TSSF from Cameroun, shares that in her country, Vocation Ministry is expressly embodied in the pastoral plan of each diocese, in narrow cooperation with all religious. Vocation Ministry is fully integrated in the church activities.
- After her contribution, father Francesco Piloni, OFM talks about the strong need of the young to have challenges. In their ministry therefore, they choose for active evangelization, individual accompaniment and youth ministry aimed at finding their personal identity and mission. “To fail in love is to fail in life.”
- Now sr. Natalie Becquart,XMCJ presents how in France the *National Service for Evangelization of the Youth and Vocation Ministry* is strongly working together to create a Vocation Culture. Partnership is a stimulating keyword for religious and dioceses.
- Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC marks six best practices of the American National Religious Vocations Conference: 1. Be pro-active about Vocations, 2. Build a Vocation Culture, 3. Appoint a Vocation Director and/or Team, 4. Use media for Vocation Promotion, 5. Discernment Programs, 6. Targeting Age Groups.



In the afternoon, we have a panel on “*How to present Consecrated Life*”.

- Sr. Micheline Kenda, SFB tells from African context how the longing for the “absolute” leads to following Christ, search for life and for everyone's place and path in church, society and creation.
- Sr. Maria Goretti Lee, SPC, a Korean sister, tells about three essential points: 1. Start at the level of search for God. Foster that with all kinds of means. 2. A life of communion is an important element of spiritual growth. 3. Service to others, mission is needed.



- Father Juan Bytton, SJ (Peru) – The youth is fragile in all kinds of aspects, as is also our society. To face the danger of superficiality, we have to put Christ in the center. Therefore we need “**P**assion, **P**atience and **P**roposals”. We must share our lives with the youth, build hope. Consecrated life is not a refuge. We must be a church that takes risks, goes out and invites others. Religious life needs to be prophetic, showing new paths of life in the footsteps of Jesus.
- Sr. Mary Johnson, SND starts her touching talk with pointing out the anti-immigrant sentiment in USA right now, that also has many victims among Catholic immigrants. We have to look anew at our foundational principles. People entering religious life meet seven factors. Some of these Factors are: 1. Family-life is fundamental, including its differences, 2. Parish-life adds a lot to this. 3. The Catholic schools, 4. Numerous volunteer-programs offer good opportunities.
- Father Mario Llanos, SDB speaks about backgrounds of European vocational ministry in the last decades, leading to the conclusion that witnessing of the joy of religious community-life is essential. Also good formation of religious vocation-animators is needed.

The meeting on Vocational Ministry now receives a Communication by the Secretariat of the Synod, H. Em. Card. Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary of the Synod of 2018.

This Synod will put the young people in the center of its reflection. We aim at *all* the young between 16 and 35. This has as a consequence that *we can not aim only at our own agenda of discerning vocations to priesthood and religious life. We must really listen to them, to what they need and live for, but without leaving out our living the gospel.*

The last contribution of today is a Communication by H. Em. Card. Beniamino Stella, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy. He speaks on the human dimensions in the journey of religious life, as



formulated also in the new “Ratio”. Card. Stella describes formation as a life-long discipleship, radically living the gospel, following Him. This must constitute our religious roots, but is impossible without letting it touch our deepest humanity. The “Ratio” addresses this human formation.

Card. Stella continues that self-knowledge about our weaknesses, talents, passions, etc. is needed to be able to fully live a life of joy, also religious joy. God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness, as pope Francis said. Build on the rock!

Card. Stella adds that fully being yourself enables to grow in capacity to relate to others and to take up the ministries that are entrusted to them. It makes able to be integrated in the world around us and to have fitting intimate relationships. This also includes – Card. Stella concludes – an integrated and mature affective life and sexuality. All this urges us to give attention to this in our Vocational Discernment and in every formation process, including ongoing formation.

3 December 2017.

This first Advent Sunday morning we start with “Feedback by three young consecrated persons”. They pay special attention to aspects of community life, that shouldn’t be only communities of living with one another, but life-giving communities. One of them, sister Harvik Iniarte, CCIM stresses that young people discerning their vocation, should first of all meet our communities. They must not only get an image of us as “always always always working”, but should be able to meet the joy of our life and to feel our first love.



This is followed by groupwork in linguistic groups, aimed at formulation of proposals for the Synod of 2018 regarding vocational ministry.

Our own West-European, English speaking group comes to two points for reflection to be communicated to the Synod:

- 1. We urge an active working towards a greater sense of collaboration between laity, religious communities, dioceses, clergy and bishops to build trust and community among us, so that we can witness to a unified, passionate and joyful church.*
- 2. We request the Synod to reflect and engage in discussion on the place of vocations to consecrated life in the church.*

Further this group would like to make – themselves – a West-European networking-website to share resources, linked for example to a European network of vocation-workers.

Then, in the last hour of this vocation-meeting, all the proposals of the working groups to the Synod are presented in a nutshell. There is strong emphasis on rethinking the place of religious communities and on stimulating vocation culture on all levels of the church.

Also often is highlighted that we should get more in touch with the language and lived situation of the youth. Our religious communities must be welcoming places where the young can deepen their faith and gradually can discern their path in life; ‘even’ religious life.

After that, Mgr. J.R. Carballo draws some conclusions. Among many, he stresses that vocational attention must be a mission of all members of our communities, not only the vocation-workers. Our communities are ‘par excellence’ places where the young can discern their vocation.

*Pierre Humblet
January 2018*