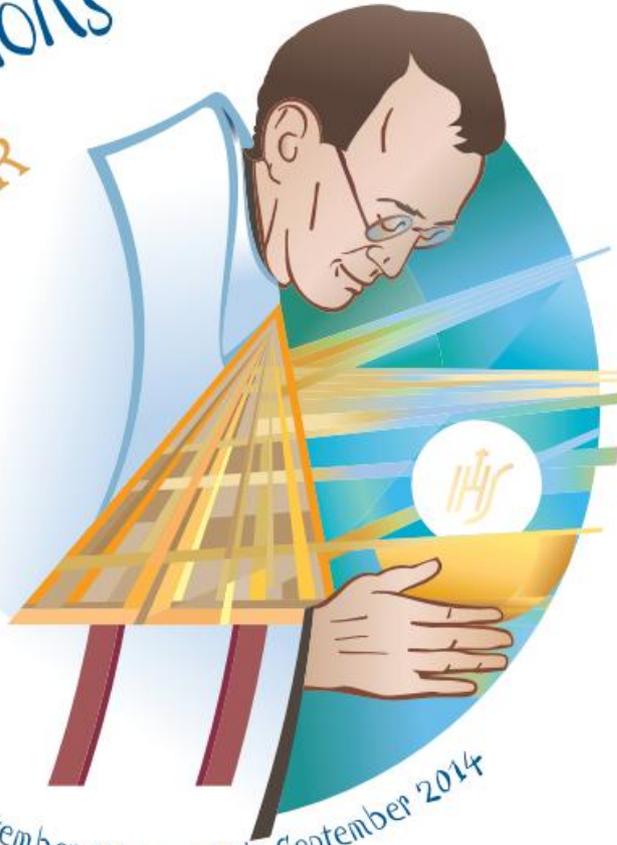


"My life for vocations"
JUSTINIAN YEAR



20th September 2013 • 20th September 2014

Grant all of us the gift of PERSEVERANCE and FIDELITY until the very end

Rome, 15th June 2014.
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

Dear Brother,
Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

May God the Holy Spirit unite us more and more with the Son to the Father!

Subject: Initial and Ongoing Formation

In the letter I sent for Lent, I considered sharing with you part of the speech the Holy Father addressed in November to us, major superiors. On purpose, I left out the part about the initial and ongoing formation and the vocational fidelity so that I might share it with you now.

That the formation of consecrated persons is a need, more urgent now than ever, is not news to anyone, and that, as Vocationists we are, it is a matter of survival, is equally true. I remember that to question 5 of the questionnaire in preparation for the XIV General Chapter *what do you suggest that our charism may really be a priority of life for all our brothers and in all our communities*, the answers were: 94 confreres answered for a compulsory course of study for vocational formators; 65 brethren proposed to have a compulsory monthly retreat or a day of vocational study for all confreres; 63 confreres said that there is a need to have more theological studies on vocation. It is true that we are used to sending many proposals to a general chapter and wait another six years to propose them again and give jobs to printers! However, the fact that 222 religious have pointed out formation as what is necessary to make our charism a true life priority, this makes us reconsider our priorities.

I believe that the Justinian Year we are living is a time of grace during which not only are we seeing the birth to a number of initiatives and events. Moreover, as I said in the letter calling , it is a time to deepen our knowledge of Fr Justin's charism starting from the experience of his priestly ordination. We have been given the opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the gift of the consecrated Vocationist call to which God has called us and we have joyfully welcomed. This Justinian Year is coming to an end, but it has to continue to be the favourable time to rediscover and rekindle the gift of and the commitment to vocational fidelity.

The gift of our vocation

God alone is the creator of souls, is the formator of souls, and is the author of vocations (Op. Omnia XXVI, 333).

The vocation is not chosen, but is given to us; we can only recognize it and accept it, if we were the one to choose it, it would be no longer a vocation, but a project that we could always change. With the religious profession, God confirms the covenant already established at baptism. He consecrates us to totally live for Him in fraternal communities, following CHRIST: obedient, poor and chaste, at the service of vocations among God's people; our response to his consecratory action is the offering of ourselves. To be faithful, means to renew our response to this special covenant that God

has established with us. According to Fr Justin, God, not only enjoys our response to his consecratory action, but, somehow, he feels obliged to give to and encourage in us ever new forms of union with him: *every consecration and relative commitments that the Lord inspires, is preceded and infallibly followed, on the part of God, by a new way of belonging to the soul, of working in the soul even greater effects of grace. Everyone should willingly make his all consecration of the saints, and should want his life to be a synthesis of all consecration. (Op. Omnia IX, 222-223).*

It is true that we are a clerical congregation but first and foremost we are a religious congregation, that is, made by consecrated people, not clerics (Const. art.1). It is true that parishes are one of our fields of action but it seems that, lately, we are focusing almost, if not exclusively, on parish apostolate, in the maintenance of works (as best) and we do not look at what is happening in the lives of our confreres and to certain situations that sadden us all. The behavior of some parish-focused Vocationists is giving the younger ones the false hope that being in a Congregation is to assure continuity and upkeep of these, that they are almost the only field of action.

I believe that from this Justinian Year we should continue or begin a process that should aim at strengthening the fidelity of the confreres in the initial formation as much as the one of us all in ongoing formation.

If only for a moment we go back to the day of our first profession, the formula of profession we professed, asks us fidelity, not a temporary experience. The formula for the temporary profession highlights that our choice is subjectively definitive; in the formula we say: *I offer and consecrate all myself to You alone, all myself to You forever*, despite having the intention to offer ourselves to God forever (for life), we vow poverty, chastity and obedience for a specified time. I believe that this has to be taken in high consideration by all of us: the first profession is perpetual already in our heart. The Lord and the Congregation are chosen once and forever. This has to be considered even more in the initial formation and should not be overlooked during the ongoing formation. Then, it should be pointed out that vocational fidelity brings along the possibility for infidelity in its various forms and that lack of fidelity does not coincide with defections; it is also useful to remind ourselves that by helping processes of fidelity, somehow, personal and communitarians infidelities will be overcome.

Sometimes our response can be uncertain, weak, unfaithful, but it does not mean that God's covenant with us will be weakened. God's fidelity is founded on and draws from our fidelity.

Love and Loyalty

If we were to convince ourselves that the more we give ourselves to love the more we will have done what we should have had, we would have made a great progress, a great spiritual achievement (Op. Omnia XXVI, 359).

Vocational fidelity is a commitment of love; is a free choice that embraces the whole life until the end. The commitment taken "forever" is a requirement of love; more than once I heard that the measure of love is to have no measure; so was the love of Jesus who "having loved his own who were into the world, he loved them to the end." In interpersonal relationships love is total and unconditional commitment; a partial and temporary love is not genuine; setting condition to love, i.e. a time limit, empties it of its true meaning. Love demands totality and finality. This is even more true regarding love for God and for Jesus, a radical love, total, eternal, perpetual.

At times, a question may arise in us: is it possible to be faithful until the end? It may sometimes arise in us a question: is possible to be faithful to the end? If we were to rely solely on our own

strength, it would be difficult to answer; but fidelity finds support in God's fidelity. With His covenant God unites himself to us as a reliable partner; it is not about, then, of how long our strength will last, but about how long His strength will last; it lasts forever. The history of salvation is witness to God's fidelity. God is always faithful. This gives us confidence because we know that, despite our weakness, God who has begun his work in us, will bring it to fulfillment; he will not allow that we may be tested beyond our strength; his grace is enough. Despite our infidelities, he is always faithful because he cannot contradict Himself. His gifts are irrevocable. God's fidelity makes our own possible. *The secret of perpetual and ascensional religious training, is fidelity, generosity, docility, obedience, love for the holy inspirations, both for our own sanctification and for the others, since there is no other life-giving Spirit than the Comforter and Sanctifier (I, 340).*

Another question that might worry us is: how can we live faithful to the end? We cannot know if our effort will last; daily fidelity alone is what, with the grace of God, we can assure. That is why Fr Justin from the time of Novitiate invites us to renew daily our vows after communion; this is the strength of the prayer for the holy perseverance which is found in every month of the devotional and that, unfortunately, seems to be one of those devotional acts we are losing or that we have already lost. When in the religious profession we say "forever", we are not announcing what will happen, but what we want to happen. That is why it is necessary to ensure a daily response to God.

How to be faithful and persevering while living in a changing world and where we change too? The only answer is to live in a dynamic and creative fidelity. This is not to remain faithful, but to become faithful. Religious profession is "like drawing a frame: it defines the boundaries and distinguishes the interior space from what remains outside; this space will have to be filled by future decisions, which shall be regarded as successful and true, only if they are on the same line of this first beginning just chosen." We need to address the new circumstances, making choices consistent with the initial commitment. It will not always be easy; maybe there will be some infidelities; may cast doubt on having taken the wrong road, that it was misunderstood what was chosen, not to have imagined difficulties. No one knows what the future holds and therefore no one can anticipate problems; you cannot have a complete understanding of a way of life before committing to it; no one can experience different ways of life and then choose the right one. Life is a continuous discovery of the choice made and a renewed commitment to live it to the full.

In the modern era, fidelity is not immediately perceived as a value; therefore it is difficult to create a mindset of loyalty. Culture, especially when postmodern, while it appreciates values, such as the sincerity of the person and the authenticity of its relations, does not help building strong ties. On the other hand, loyalty is weak also in the ways of thinking and living the Christian vocation and in particular the vocation to consecrated life. Even though some situations may present difficulties and threats, it is always necessary to look for a way to turn them into opportunities and resources.

Choices in a click and relativistic mentality

The fundamental, the central and essential act of my freedom of will is the choice; is the elevation that I always can, when it comes to live, move and act among all the created and relative goods. In front of the created and absolute good, I cannot choose, because he is only one. (Op. Omnia, IV, 86)

In recent times, the fast development of technology, the central role of economic activity and the enormous impact of the media, have contributed to a significant cultural change in society. Some aspects of general and particular culture pose challenges to vocational fidelity or threaten it. It is opportune to be aware of it, in order to transform these challenges into the starting points of the

action. In the consumerist society, the person experiences the *difficulty of choosing*; often it is forced to satisfy what is immediate and close at hand, today we would say it is available in a click; you get used to a "disposable" mentality. Also beliefs, values and relationships are considered commodity to obtain, use and dispose of. The culture of acceptance is slowly growing, of what I like and of what satisfies me. With this mentality, if you do not like a choice or it is too difficult, it can be changed. The realization of one's needs and desires is now privileged; esteem for loyalty, truth, stable affection is lost; we neglect long-term commitments. So the person is likely to be psychologically fragile and immature.

Moreover, widespread *relativistic mentality* is felt in the air. There is a huge amount of pictures and opinions. Because the ability and the time to stop and think is lacking, we incur in the risk of being informed on all news, but to live superficially. It seems that in the virtual era what is distant is far more attractive and so one is likely to reach far and wide and moving away from neighbours. The search for truth is not fascinating, because this commitment is difficult and the outcome is uncertain. One can no longer distinguish what is essential from what is ephemeral. So everything becomes fluid. We are in a "liquid" society. Living in constant change, we are afraid to make commitments. They prefer to live "in the moment". It is not clear why bind yourself to final decisions at the beginning of youth, when you have no experience of the future. If by any chance, previously commitments have been taken, the abandonment of the choices made is justified saying: "I see things differently today and tomorrow I may still think in a different way."

In this climate, therefore, decisions often depend more from their immediate opinions, emotions than on the desires of the motives, beliefs and values; we let ourselves to be carried away by the easy enthusiasm and spontaneity. A sudden event can sometimes cause sudden and radical changes in lifestyle choices, without considering the consequences; what is important is to overcome the situation of dissatisfaction in which we find or get to a hoped level of well being, though not guaranteed. In this way, the capacity of waiting, renunciation and sacrifice in view of more durable goods in the future. Everything now and then and will last until gives me emotions and I like it; but what is even more serious is that we demand that others and also the structures change because I like it that way or because I have changed or because this is my need. Accepting the daily cross, the responsibility of a demanding duty, discipline, ascetic, self control becomes a heavy burden and then when faced with difficulties it comes easy to give up. The question then arises: how to live faithful to the vocation to consecrated life in a time of radical changes and rapid transformations?

Spiritual superficiality, loss of apostolic zeal, lack of brotherhood

The young man that is formed to the apostolate must also exercise the apostolate. The intellectual formation is not enough, it is also necessary and even more the one of the moral virtue; to one and to the other must be united practical, apostolic formation, at least with the initial exercise of the various works which will have to be undertaken tomorrow (Op. Omnia I, 286).

In addition to cultural aspects, there also are internal reasons to consecrated life that make it weak. This happens especially when the identity consecrated person, called to live as "a living memory of the way of being and acting of Jesus" among the people of God, fades or the sense of it is lost. If consecrated life is not lived in a prophetic mysticism of the primacy of God, service to the poor, fraternity of communion, not only it loses its identity, but it also poses a risk to the fidelity of the consecrated person. I have identified three reasons in this process: superficiality in the spiritual life, loss of apostolic zeal, lack of brotherhood.

Consecrated life is asked to have an intense experience of faith and spiritual life, which involves our existence itself, giving primacy to God, making the love of the Lord Jesus experienced, filling the

hearts of apostolic zeal. When though, life is lived with *superficiality in the spiritual life* or the spiritual experience is marginal or loses its mystical force, the values of the consecrated life are not absorbed so as to penetrate into the heart at the level of emotions, feelings, beliefs and motivations. Then, prayer, obedience, poverty and chastity, or community life can be outwardly lived, there is no longer an authentic life, but only formal observance and I noticed some religious who unfortunately are even lacking the latter; you do not live the Gospel radicalism. Progressively, the vocation of consecrated life loses its meaning.

As a result, over time, there is also the *loss of apostolic zeal*, it dilutes the ability of gratitude and generosity, there is a feeling of psychological and spiritual tiredness. The work for vocations, vocational focus in the fields of action, or to vocationalize our apostolate, ceases to be an animating and evangelizing presence; it is done only out of duty or because there is a personal gain or profit. Some of the brothers, because of a lack of resizing works, aging and scarcity of vocations, are burdened with too much and not always satisfactory work; others are discouraged by their own sense of inadequacy or poor performance; then it is not difficult to understand why a certain apostolic frustration. There is no more dynamism, inventiveness and creativity. And when the apostolic commitment is meaningless, there are questions about the meaning of one's vocation.

If we experience a *lack of community life*, then individualism takes over; this leads the brother away from the community, to create, follow and cultivate only personal projects detached by the congregation and sometimes betraying the charism; in one word, religious who formally belong to the congregation but their hearts and interests are elsewhere, live their own world. Thus, the family spirit and the sense of belonging are damaged. Community meetings, when they take place, turn out to be formal. Everyone would like a deep human contact, but sometimes they feel more employees of a company than people consecrated for a mission. Gradually, we are moving toward mediocrity and bourgeois; it prevents asceticism; we look for the easy life, accumulate money and/or personal accounts, search for the last technological gadget (smartphones, tablets, computers), more expensive cars. The confidence in charism is lost. Because a vital environment is lacking in the community, some are beginning to find it outside. The consecrated life is now perceived as a burden and fidelity begins to cause troubles.

There are also other factors that stress the difficulties. In the past, the consecrated person enjoyed prestige; this facilitated fidelity, even in those cases where the individuals felt fragile or less secure in their vocation. Today the Church is sometimes less credible and the image of the consecrated person enjoys less esteem, then there is little space and little recognition for his role; often indifference, disinterest, apathy are encountered. Moreover, in secularized societies, religion tends to be relegated to the private sphere. Overcoming this climate requires courage and a higher level of vocational maturity, now more than ever, but unfortunately not everyone makes it through.

Training faithful perseverance

The final perseverance is as a result of daily perseverance, and general perseverance is the result of particular perseverances (Op. Omnia V, 199).

Vocation is a priceless gift, but it is also "a treasure in jars of clay"; it is therefore necessary to put all the effort to continuously "revive" it with fidelity. Just because it is exposed to the risks and the threats of weak mentality and lifestyle, especially to our radical fragility, loyalty is a reality to be lived daily. It feeds on vigilance, care and attention, but it also needs to be cultivated and supported.

In the time of initial formation

Nothing is so beneficial to spiritual formation than the personal experience of one who has received more from the Lord, having been more faithful to grace (Op. Omnia VI, 41).

Today's experience teaches us to give relevance of the person with its affections, emotions and feelings, but also with its attitudes, motivations and beliefs. This requires a customization work throughout the formation process, starting with the initial training, which should aim to "reach the person in depth". I want to point out, now, some aspects of the initial training, which lead to a life of faithfulness.

First of all, since the first steps of formation, the process of *human growth* deserves great attention. The low self-esteem, for example, makes the person to feel misunderstood, with little appreciation and love from others; when one does not get enough affection and consideration, he lives in difficulty and turns to himself; this explains some of the problems associated with the practice of chastity, which then affect fidelity. It is therefore necessary that the one in formation, while he discovers the presence of God in his own history, pays attention to what lives within himself, not by concealing personal problems, questions, uncertainties, resorting, then, to spiritual and, if necessary, to psychological accompaniment. Formation, in these initial stages, must seek to prepare people with a psychological and affective maturity and an ability to live peacefully chastity, this gives strength to fidelity.

As love occupies a central place in life, formation about affectivity and chastity requires a deep *spiritual life*, mainly aiming to fall in love with Jesus, and together with Him, God, Mary, Fr Justin. Feeling the Risen Jesus as his "friend", this "great, living and personal love" for Him becomes the unifying center of the life of who is in formation. He gradually adopts the sentiments of Jesus, he discovers the meaning and the beauty of the gift of self to God in the Vocationist consecrated life, he feels a strong sense of belonging to the Church and to the Congregation, he nourishes an attachment to Fr Justin and enthusiasm for the congregation. It is love that gives life to vocational fidelity. In order to make this easier, we need a big change in educational practice and help the one in formation to take on the capacity of personal prayer, starting with daily meditation, made for at least half an hour, and preferably in the form of three-way or "*lectio divina*", the visit and Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, until union with God is achieved. Even personal entrusting to Mary must be cultivated; it has a strong affective connotation which supports chastity and fidelity.

The Pope is aware of the fact that the problem of education today is not easy to deal with and requires a different attitude. For example: "Problems are not solved simply by forbidding doing this or that. Dialogue as well as confrontation are needed. To avoid problems, in some houses of formation, young people grit their teeth, try not to make mistakes, follow the rules smiling a lot, just waiting for the day when they are told: 'Good, you have finished formation.' This is hypocrisy that is the result of clericalism which is one of the worst evils. I summarize by some advice that I once received as a young man: 'If you want to advance, think clearly and speak obscurely.' That was a clear invitation to hypocrisy. We need to avoid that at all costs." When in Rio, the Pope had in fact identified in clericalism one of the causes of the "lack of maturity and Christian freedom" of the people of God. Then, "The seminary ought to be divided into smaller communities with formators who are equipped really to accompany those in their charge. Dialogue must be serious. Without fear, sincere. It is important to recall that the language of young people in formation today is different from that in the past: we are living through an epochal change. Formation [of future priests] is a work of art, not a police action," he added. "We must form their hearts. Otherwise we are creating little monsters. And then these little monsters mold the people of God. This really gives me goose bumps."

The initial formation, which is the process of identification of oneself with the Vocationist consecrated vocation, aims to form disciples and apostles of Jesus, in the style of Fr Justin; its

center is therefore the spiritual life and apostolic commitment. The love for the Lord is converted into apostolic zeal which inspires enthusiasm in who is in formation. And this is what sustains his fidelity.

The Pope, has then insisted that formation should not be oriented only toward personal growth, but also in view of its final goal: the people of God. It is important to think about the people whom these persons will be sent while forming them: "We must always think of the faithful, of the faithful people of God. Persons must be formed who are witness of the resurrection of Jesus. The formator should keep in mind that the person in formation will be called to care for the people of God. We always must think of the people of God in all of this. Just think of religious who have hearts that are as sour as vinegar: they are not made for the people. In the end we must not form administrators, managers, but fathers, brothers, travelling companions."

The Pope finally wanted to point out a further risk: "accepting a young man in a seminary who has been asked to leave a religious institute because of problems with formation and for a serious reason is a huge problem. I am not speaking about people who recognize that they are sinners: we are all sinners, but we are not all corrupt. Sinners are accepted, but not people who are corrupt."

The same love motivates *intellectual formation*. Who is in formation, filled with apostolic zeal, recognizes the need to prepare for the pastoral service. He finds in intellectual formation a solid foundation for his spiritual life; acquires knowledge and expertise for the Vocationist mission; he forms a mindset consistent with vocation. At the same time, he enhances the positive aspects of modernity and post-modernity and prepares himself not to get lost in the face of relativist tendencies of culture and moral disorientation. For this reason, intellectual formation must help change the mentality and, if it wants to affect the motivations and beliefs of who is in formation, it must also take an affective connotation.

Today we are more aware of the importance of initial training; for this we are looking to invest everything we have in the formation of formators and students. We are carrying out schools of Formation, study days, the "little novitiate" and regency, preparation programmes for candidates and perpetual professes, training of formators; steps are being taken in order to improve the content and formation methods, to reformulate houses of formation, invite the brothers chosen to form others to attend formation courses. While I thank the councilor for formation for his work he is doing, I invite him to do even more.

No matter how good it may be, initial formation, however, is also aware that in life there are continuous and unpredictable changes; then it feels challenged to develop in forming the ability to live the vocation in creative fidelity, i.e. to assume a mentality of *ongoing formation*. "The initial training must be closely connected with the ongoing one, creating a readiness to let themselves be formed every day of life." For this it is necessary that whoever is in formation, invigorates his ability to self-formation, being careful, though, not to feed individualism in his journey of formation.

In the time of ongoing formation

It is absolutely necessary to achieve and maintain a character of ongoing formation, rejecting any form of stagnation, both in the spirit and in the works, either on the premises either in person, in all (Op. Omnia, I, 339).

A great support of vocational fidelity is ongoing formation; in fact, it helps to cope with the challenges arising from the changing culture and the person who evolves over the course of life. In the Congregation, it needs to be treated better.

In the same questionnaire in preparation for the XIV General Chapter, the brothers have asked to invest, with qualified personnel, in the religious formation not only in the initial stages but also in the ongoing one. Only then we can have a Vocationist culture that makes us more Vocationist in practice.

We now suggest some aspects on a personal, communitarian, provincial, delegation, missionary level which can help fidelity.

Personal Commitment

Each consecration is, at the same time, a leap forward and a commitment to persevere in it (Opera Omnia VI, 337).

The ongoing formation, is entrusted first of all to personal responsibility. What is needed to grow in our own vocation is attitude and personal effort. "Every formation is ultimately a self-formation. No one can replace us in responsible freedom that we have as individuals." Unfortunately, especially in the early years of apostolic activity, when we throw ourselves into full time work also, it happens that we expose ourselves to perils such as habit, activism, and demotivation. So, it takes a personal commitment, that knows how to use all the opportunities we encounter in our lives, to keep alive in us the desire to grow and to be faithful; community animation, the atmosphere of prayer, apostolic zeal, study, fraternal relations are situations to be enhanced.

One of the most effective means to preserve the fidelity to our vocation is spiritual life. Our heart is made to love and to be loved; by embracing consecrated life, we gave our hearts to the Lord Jesus in response to the love we have received from Him. Eucharist, Reconciliation, meditation, devotion to the Virgin Mary, personal prayer, union with God, these are some of the fundamental expressions of our spiritual life. Prayer is like the oil with which we keeps the alight the lamp of our love for Our Lord Jesus and by which we revitalize the joy for our Vocationist vocation, but when it is burning low, the flame of our love goes down and we expose ourselves to "temptation" threatening our fidelity.

Together with the spiritual life, and as its fruit, is *apostolic zeal*. It is a pastoral zeal inspired by love for the Lord Jesus and the charism of Fr Justin, which makes us look everywhere for "the glory of God and the salvation of souls." The apostolic passion lets out the best there is in us: love for vocations and the people of God, generosity, dedication, creativity, communion with other pastoral workers, but also the spirit of sacrifice, asceticism, self-discipline. It purifies our motives; it preserves us from discouragement in times of trouble and in return, it fills us with joy and satisfaction for vocation.

Nevertheless, a vocational crisis is always possible; it does not come suddenly, but develops progressively; it may relate to the life of faith, the psychological exhaustion, apostolic disappointment, loss of motivation. Often this crisis concerns affectivity *and chastity*; it begins with small rewards and failures that at first seem lawful or harmless, but that then gradually turns into habits and ambiguous behaviors, until it turns into vocational crisis. In these times it almost seems as if there is no going back and take on again a religious life, these situation are not irreversible. It is important to recognize that we are weak; we can never presume to be strong. This is precisely why we must exercise prudence and vigilance, and have self-discipline and self-control. In this

context, to be honest with ourselves and with a spiritual guide is very helpful; we must have the courage be honest before God, to recognize in us feelings, behaviors and attitudes that are not consistent. This reveals that we are taking responsibilities for our life and our vocation, and a seriousness in wanting to live faithful to our commitment.

Community Care

For every soul, but especially for those who live in the community, much more than those who live in the family, fraternal charity, with all its sweetness inside and outside, is necessary. You have to practice it, radiate it, and inculcate it to Vocationists, both for their edification and for their apostolate (Op. Omnia X, 203).

The community is a great support for loyalty, because it is close to the brothers in their concrete situations. The community may have weaknesses and limitations, but also possesses elements of vitality that make it a privileged place to meet the challenges of both the vocational fragility of those in formation and the difficulties of vocational fidelity of the members of all ages. A living, lively and vital reality arouses interest, charm, attractiveness, but above all, it generates fertility, authenticity, totality of response. Life begets life. In order for the community to help the brothers to live creatively their fidelity, it is necessary to strengthen the vitality of members that constitute it, and that is its ability to offer a prophetic witness, to attract vocations, to strengthen the sense of belonging, to mobilize confreres for duties and ways of life of greater commitment, to involve the laity and the youth, to increase its significance in the Church and in the areas where we operate.

Among its vital elements, one of which contains great resources for loyalty is the *lifestyle and work ethics*. The warmth and joy of being together makes each one feel loved, appreciated, valued. There is a wealth of relationships to be discovered and received. The family spirit creates a mentality of common research and discernment; the climate of faith and prayer strengthens the inner motivations and has to live with evangelical radicalism and apostolic dedication; the proper setup of working together and both of community and pastoral projects, promotes growth, improves apostolic performance, providing less stress and fatigue. And if anyone is to be found in difficulty, the sense of mutual responsibility of the members makes them alert to the first signs of his discomfort, they show support in their friendship, interest and understanding; their exemplary life is a stimulus for them. I wonder: Is it that difficult planning activities together? I saw with pleasure that, in some of our communities, the brothers get together at the beginning of the week to plan the pastoral activities, to share and distribute commitments. So everyone knows about what the other does and then support each other, avoiding the personalism and individualism. Why not taking this good habit? Believe me, this avoids the isolation, closure, indifference. The superior should be the first animator of such lifestyle. I also feel this need with the general councilors, and it is precisely for this reason that I asked all councilors to leave their communities and live in the curia in Rome from September onwards.

Of particular relevance, is the commitment that the community takes to help the brothers to investigate the *identity of the Vocationist consecrated life*. The community promotes updating in the vocationistality, reflection on the Constitutions, the study of pastoral activities, learning new approaches in parish, vocations, youth, catechetical ministry and the announcement of the charism. In this way, the confreres are living a profound experience of gratitude to God for the gift of vocation; they feel the pride of being members of the congregation and the sons of Fr Justin; they experience the joy, the enthusiasm and the commitment to the vocation.

The way the *service of authority* in the community is exercised contributes decisively to this. The superior is committed to create a climate of acceptance and respect for each brother, so as to make

him feel 'at home'; he maintains daily contact with everyone, always acting as a "father, brother and friend." His concern is to keep everyone together in brotherhood and shared responsibility. He demonstrates concern for those who suffer, feels lonely, is on the edge, is in trouble. With dialogue and sharing spiritual he helps the brothers to live mature affectivity, to take responsibility for their own formation, to find the joy of friendly relationship with the Lord Jesus, to make good use of the time and the means of social communication, to have their own personal project of life and to cope with the difficulties of apostolic action. The superior should not be the manager, administrator or the one who does everything in the community, centralizing everything on himself, his first job is to be an animator, it is to him that the brothers are entrusted. The animation is intended to ensure a good level of spiritual and pastoral life in the community, taking care of community prayer and asceticism, fraternal sharing and the apostolate.

Responsibilities of the General Government, provinces, delegations, missions

The work of universal sanctification requires the collaboration of many, if not all, because everyone should correspond to the divine love, creator, saviour, sanctifier (Op. Omnia XXV, 55).

The general father and his council, the provinces, delegations, missions, all play a significant part in fostering the fidelity of the members, as it instills in the brothers, first of all, a sense of belonging. Fraternity must be experienced particularly on the occasion of professions, ordinations and anniversaries, events of the congregation, care in case of illness, closeness in times of loss of family members, they are proof of affection for our brothers and that bind us together. It is important that the relationship between brothers and authority is serene; the brothers are to be involved in the processes of discernment in view of the important choices; a mentality and a "culture" consistent with the identity of the Vocationist consecrated life has to be perceived.

At the same time, it is of great help for the growth and fidelity of the members the *ongoing formation*. In a rapidly changing world where people evolve within a matter of years, "continuous formation helps to integrate dynamic growth and religious loyalty in the concrete circumstances of existence." For this reason, there should be good animation at different levels, offering various opportunities for growth and spiritual and pastoral renewal of the confreres. In particular, special attention is required regarding the newly ordained confreres. It is not always easy in fact, the passage from one life organized and accompanied in the house of formation to a full immersion into pastoral work requires a re-evaluation of the modalities of how these brethren are to fit in and to be accompanied. For the moment it has been decided that after obtaining the baccalaureate in theology, which everyone is required to obtain in order to be ordained, they do two years of pastoral work in one of our fields of action and then may ask to do a licentiate or other specialization agreed in accordance with the needs of the congregation and with their superiors (general and/or provincial councilor for formation).

Finally, it is important the way in which the *territorial mission* is carried out. This, in fact, is of great influence on the fidelity of our confreres. Therefore it is important that they can devote themselves to vocational animation, to the care of the people of God entrusted to us, to young people and especially the poorest, using their gifts and abilities and having the possibility of an animating presence among them. All this is carried out in the name of the congregation and the community and not as private properties. It is important that they can live and work together in community, that are numerically and qualitatively consistent, together with brothers fully devoted to God and sustained by Him. It is important that the strengths of the members of the community are adequate to accomplish a job that gives clear and effective witness, attract vocations, that involves collaborators. The mission plays a central role in the lives of our confreres and is a stimulus for their fidelity to their vocation. If you want to ensure that the brothers are happy and faithful to their

vocation, you have to engage in the process of "re-design of our presence", with attention to the process of re-signification, downsizing and relocation. It should aim not so much to begin or continue works, as this is important, but above all it has to ensure a better quality of pastoral of the Vocationist presence in such territory, because only in this way will the Vocationist charism will have a future. This will be one of the topics that we will cover in 'general assembly with the provincial delegates, heads of missions and the general government' from the 10th to the 19th of September in Pianura.

I want to conclude this letter leaving these four streams of reflection and comparison for you

1. The *confrere*, both in initial and ongoing formation, has to reflect personally on these guidelines; he has to revise its current life, testing it from the point of view of vocational fidelity; put into his own personal life plan what can help him to live faithfully.
2. The *local community* needs to have moments of sharing in which to reflect it on its vitality, how to live the Vocationist consecrated vocation and the help it offers to its members to live in fidelity.
3. *House of formation* need to ask itself about what it is doing to help those in formation to take on a mentality of vocational fidelity and ongoing formation.
4. The provinces, delegations, missions have to reflect on how to plan ongoing formation, on which means one can strengthen vocational fidelity. They have to find ways to involve confreres, local communities and houses of formation in this process regarding fidelity.

I remind you of some upcoming event in our congregation:

August 2nd, the liturgical feast of the Founder

Mass in Pianura at 18:30 where 8 of our young people in formation will make their final profession: Anselmus Meze Nai, Christian Suriano, Fabianus Hane Seran, Francisco Gatdula, Innocent Ofeimun Osaremen, Marselinus Abur, Rodolphe Mupa Mbuta, Vitalis Barik.

Do everything you can to be present and take part.

September 20th, Closing of the Justinian Year

In Pianura, at 17:30 we have a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided by Cardinal Em.za S. JOÃO Braz AVIS *DE prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* and the with participation of the bishops of the dioceses in which we operate, during which 12 of our brothers coming from different parts of the world will be ordained priests: EMILIAN PIRAN VARGAS (Argentina), Edwar URREA (Colombia), FRANCOIS RASOANAIVO and GABRIEL FENO (Madagascar), GIUSEPPE SURACE (Italy), LUIGI MORRONE (Great Britain), MAGNUS ONYEULOR and PAUL OLOGUN (Nigeria), OLIVER MANINGO (Indonesia) JOHN VILLARET (Philippines), WILSON OLIVEIRA LIMA (Brazil) and Vipin Kollannoor (India).

I thank our confreres living abroad who are already planning to be present at the closing celebration.

The brothers of Italy, who are serving in parishes, are invited to organize themselves from now on, so that at least one is present at the celebration or find a replacement for the Masses September 20,

or if really there is no other way, I authorize you to eliminate the Vigil Mass, after communicating with the diocesan curia.

Looking forward to meeting you at these events I wish you a holy solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

Father Antonio Rafael do Nascimento, sdv