



VI Training Seminar for Educators “Young people, faith and vocational discernment”

December 2017

On December 1 and 2, 2017 the Education Commission of the **Union of General Superiors (men, USG) and the International Union of General Superiors (women, UISG)** convened the sixth Training Seminar for educators to reflect on "**youth, faith and vocational discernment** " in order to make a contribution to the next Synod of 2018.

The event was held in Rome, Italy, and 74 participants from different countries and realities met there: religious, laity and priests, all of them related to the world of education and youth. Notably, it counted with the participation of 18 religious congregations and lay people associated with charismatic families, and several young guests to share their experience and reflection, all of different nationalities: Hungary, Senegal, China, Romania, Brazil, Italy, Canada, Spain, Mexico and others.

The Seminar was developed in an atmosphere of listening, dialogue and full of hope. Wide and deep reflection was illuminated with a keynote by Fr. Arturo Sosa, Superior of the Society of Jesus, a panel of experts on Youth Ministry and two tables of dialogue with young religious and laity, giving way to the reflection of the groups of work.

The most outstanding ideas include the cultural transformation in which we are immersed, characterized by digital culture, enculturation and multiculturalism, growing inequity in all fields, the weakening of politics as search of the common good, the increase of polarization and conflict, as well as the environmental deterioration. This is the humus in which young people grow.

Two fundamental attitudes are needed to confront this: 1, to accompany listening as an educational experience and 2, to accompany listening and walking towards the future. For that, it is essential to enable us and open learning spaces in our educational environments.

Similarly the importance of living a spirituality accompanied by educators of consistent living in a social compromise that allows live and increase the life of faith, was stressed.

Questioning young people about their needs, they answered that they need "not to be afraid"; not to be afraid of not finding a job, of failing or of not succeeding. But they also want to transcend against individualism, to update the language and the way to transmit the Gospel, to feel members of the same Church and to bring their natural strength and enthusiasm.

No less important was the time devoted to discuss the challenges involved in pastoral work. Such as including all young people, using dialogue as a method in addition to boosting attitudes such as active listening, effective proximity and the treatment as equals, among

others. Likewise, we reflected on how to make the proposal of faith in remote contexts, the positive educative-pastoral responses that the Church is giving young people and those that need to be strengthened or replaced.

At the end of the day Fr. Pedro Aguado, Superior General of the Piarist Fathers, made a synthesis of the work and invited to continue participating in this kind of events that twin us, enrich us, and put us in tune with the universal Church.

Below, we present the reflection of the groups on four aspects:

- 1) Challenges presented to us in the work with young people**
- 2) How to make the proposal of faith in "far away" settings**
- 3) What are the positive responses the Church is giving and we should strengthen and what proposals should be discarded?**
- 4) What substantive issues should the Synod address?**

1) Challenges presented to us in the work with young people

1. To enable us to active, authentic, empathetic listening, with effective proximity without asymmetric treatment.
2. To put into dialogue institution and structures, tradition and innovation, images, topical, language, moral doctrine... to achieve harmony and synergy.
3. To recognize the mystery of life, novelty and creativity in young people.
4. To dedicate audacity, time, energies, reception and accompaniment from the passion for the Kingdom.
5. To form ourselves and to form others in communication, in accompaniment of processes, in shared mission, in anthropological and cultural diversity and in dialogue with other religions.
6. To overcome the fear to proclaim the Gospel and to propose questions about the true meaning of life.
7. To bear witness to the experience of the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth as a personal transformation of life.
8. To share with them from the simplicity and familiarity life and mission, providing meeting spaces, avoiding generalizations and prejudices.
9. To form ourselves and to form others in the emotional education of men and women, helping in the peculiarity of gender.
10. To cultivate the daily encounter with young people from the interest in their reality and going towards the periphery, to the places where they meet, causing situations of encounter.
11. To believe that young people have a door in the heart which when knocked is able to open, even if it is just a little.

2) How to make the proposal of faith in contexts "far away"

1. Knowing their reality, going to them with proposals which, by language, reception, and means... will facilitate the encounter with the God of Jesus, from the experience of feeling loved, avoiding structures distant for them.
2. Being shepherds in the middle of them, who take care of the training according to the different charisms and becoming aware of the importance of the testimony of young people to other young people.
3. Proposing an announcement that is primarily personal testimony of life, constant dedication, attitude of true listening, accompaniment from empathy in dialogue and acceptance of their needs and proposals.
4. Being present in their media, encouraging the creativity of each one of them as a possibility to share a richness of gifts and going towards the peripheries with simplicity, humility and without dogmatism.
5. Using a more anthropological language in catechesis and liturgy.
6. Accompanying and helping to recognize and accept the own frailties.
7. Giving response to their need for beautiful things: nature, art, music, leisure activities...
8. Facilitating humanly rich volunteer and meeting experiences with the poor.
9. Taking care especially of the school context, proposing an alternative education from the Gospel values: welcoming, service, honesty, justice and peace...

3

3) What positive responses is giving the Church and we should strengthen and what proposals should be discarded?

POSITIVE RESPONSES

1. The work carried out by the religious Congregations and the whole Church, to offer young people processes and ways of faith, of human and spiritual growth, of vocational discernment, in different educational contexts: school, university, parish, social contexts...
2. The Synod of Bishops 2018, on the theme "Youth, faith and vocation discernment". The study and the deepening on the preparatory document (lectures, meetings...). The announcement of the pre-synod with the participation of young people from around the world to speak and discuss the meaning of their existence.
3. The reception that Pope Francis offers young people with his gestures and words.
4. The Centers of Listening to young people, present in some local churches.
5. All the experiences of solidarity and service, of volunteering, that congregations, youth movements and the local diocesan Church offers to young people.
6. The WYD with the themes of reflection, global participation, the process, preparation, methodology, continuity, openness to all, the volunteer service.

ANSWERS TO DISCARD:

1. A proclamation of the Gospel "ad intra", only for residents, the closest and not for those who are uncomfortable with their criticisms, contrasts, distrust and indifference...
2. The difficulty of believing in young people and in giving them responsibilities and roles that make them an active part of the Church.
3. The imposition of a little participatory style of ecclesial life, not taking into account young people, their existential needs, their characteristics and their languages.
4. To measure faith primarily through the participation into the sacraments and not through processes of encounter with the person of Jesus inviting the young man to ask himself questions of meaning.
5. Pastoral isolated events, not integrated into processes and routes of growth as disciples /missionaries of the Gospel.
6. Certain religious movements that are not helping young people discern their vocation in full freedom, but that work from the "recruitment".
7. A Church that takes care of exteriority and is not witness to a particular closeness with those who suffer and those most in need.
8. An inappropriate and, at times, incomprehensible language used in the proclamation of the Gospel (not prepared long homilies, catechesis and boring and lacking of all didactics religion classes, poor and inadequate presence in the media...)

4) Proposals for substantive issues that should be addressed by the Synod

1. The language and the interaction between the generations
2. The Evangelical radicalism as message of transformation: living radically the Gospel to act prophetically
3. The youth, protagonists of the ecclesial and social mission
4. Education of children, adolescents and youth in values, in the light of the Gospel, to promote the civilization of love.
5. What kind of pastoral inclusion should be designed with creativity the Church, to proclaim the Gospel to all young people?
6. How to help to confront and overcome the void experienced by many young people in front of questions of meaning, so that these become source of growth and maturity, rather than cause a real existential tragedy: depression, suicide, drugs, alcohol, sex...?
7. The presence of the Church in the digital world.
8. The accompaniment of young people. Training and attitudes to it.
9. The vocational culture.
10. To rediscover the image of Mary as a model of a young woman and a mother who accompanies.

FINAL CONVICTIONS

FOUR BACKGROUND STATEMENTS THAT ARE FRAMING THE WORK OF THE SEMINAR

1. Our time is a "timely" one. It is the time that God gives us. God acts in history and communicates with humans. We are called to recognize this moment as a time of salvation.
2. The Gospel is to be proclaimed thoroughly and with his radicalism.
3. We are challenged to understand the world in all its complexity.
4. We bet for young people, with all its consequences, determined to find new paths that will uninstall us will bring us out of the routine and conformity. It is not about "working for youth ", but "working with youth".

5

TWELVE PROPOSALS TO REFLECT UPON

We have experienced that the fact of speaking about and with young people rejoices us, challenges us, and helps us to situate ourselves as active and propositional. It stimulates us. We feel ourselves called to move forward.

1. We highlight, in three verbs, the challenges that we have as educators: to accompany, to listen and to co - create.
2. We are called to be serious with the theme of discernment: discovering the signs of the times, listening to find the will of God, to discern the spirits. Recognizing, interpreting, and choosing.
3. We have the challenge of being messengers of hope, of hitting with the right questions that lead us to seek answers that really help and offer horizon, from the human experience and open to transcendence.
4. Looking to the future, we are challenged to:
 - a. Remain faithful to the *raison d ' être* of the educational work
 - b. Make renewal a permanent task in education
 - c. Provide a human formation open to the transcendent dimension of life
 - d. Educate to and from the universality
 - e. Progress in education for Justice
 - f. Offer training according to the ecological dimension.
 - g. Generating a culture of safeguarding of minors of age and vulnerable persons.
5. We are called live, together with the whole Church, Synod attitudes. We highlight three:
 - a. To try to reach everyone.
 - b. To build Church spaces that allow encounter and listening
 - c. That the synod route will be, indeed, a road. That we can start a new phase. We feel that the Church has to take on the challenge of change, starting with detecting areas of distance, separation and bridges broken in relation to young people.
6. We are committed to building spaces of adult Christian life for post-university ages. We have to build and offer authentic communities.

7. We take well seriously training and support for educators and pastoral agents, guaranteeing that they live what they teach. In particular, we must pay attention to attitudes.
8. We need to give young people something greater than themselves, to break the closed, self-referential or without horizon positions that they may be living. Faced with an uncertain future, Christ is greater than their hearts, and we must offer Him in fullness. But we can only do it from our own life. Young people, many young people, they want and need strong and bold proposals.
9. We have to go out to meet young people, to meet them in their time, their language... from an active and missionary attitude. Renewing the attitude of searching, moving, bringing us closer to them, also to those who are far away.
10. We must be prepared to review what we do in our educational task, from childhood and from the family. Valuing all the good, which is a lot, but working on what we need to improve. We must offer integral processes of growth in Christian life.
11. We work in creating schools capable of provoking accompaniment, proposals of Christian life.
12. We share with the young people dreams and efforts to build the Church that we dream. An open, credible Church, with simple language. A Church of communion, co-responsible and missionary.

A Synod on Youth is also a Synod on the Church.

Rome, 26 December 2017