

Petit ECHO

2023 / 10

1146

**Missionary and
Vocation Animation**



MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA





As a pastoral activity, vocation promotion represents a genuine itinerary of research, discernment and enlightenment about one's own vocation, as well as about the mission of the Church itself in the world.

The evangelisation of the world and the personal vocation are two indissociable elements of the itinerary of those who have consecrated their lives to Christ. Furthermore, the criterion of authenticity of good evangelisation is the capacity to arouse vocations and to bring to maturity projects of Christian life, to the point of making disciples who are witnesses to the Gospel.

Today, perhaps more than ever, we face the challenge of making ecclesial pastoral care truly vocational, by promoting a "vocational culture", that is, a way of conceiving and facing life as a gift freely received from God for a project or mission, according to his plan of love. Any work of vocational animation and evangelisation is generally difficult, especially at the beginning; hence the need for a deep personal experience of Christ before speaking about and promoting consecrated vocations and mission.

A good shepherd should move that way: in front to lead, in the middle to encourage and preserve the smell of the flock, and behind, since the people too have their own "sense of smell".

Pope Francis, Saturday, 18 September 2021

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Missionary and Vocation Animation for Prophetic Witness

Introduction

“It is among the peoples of the African world that we continue today to live out our vocation and our apostolic project: to be witnesses of the Kingdom and to share with those willing to receive it, the grace of the Good News. All our commitments in all their diversity are directed towards this end.” Both the missionary and vocation animation gears towards this goal. We read in Mathew 9:37-38, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” Thanks to the generosity of the Lord we have numerous candidates in formation. The missionary animation in various Provinces and Sectors also continues to stimulate missionary zeal among many lay people who in turn become agents of change in society. This edition of the Petit Echo reflects on missionary and vocation animation in view of prophetic witness.

Vocation Animation

Today many young men hear the call of God and respond to it positively by joining the Missionaries of Africa either as a brother or a priestly candidate. The vocation animators identify and recruit these men and accompany them to discern the will of God in their lives. For these young men to become a Missionary of Africa a number of qualities are required which are enumerated in the Vade-Mecum for Initial Formation such as “to be apostles and nothing but apostles”, willingness to dedicate one’s entire life for the proclamation of the Good News in Africa and



**Leo Laurence
Maria Joseph
Assistant General**



African world (CL 1), to live in intercultural community (CL 35), witness to the Kingdom of God (CL 4), to be open to encounter and dialogue especially with Muslims, African Traditional Religions and other Christian denominations (CL5) in mutual respect and being mindful of the cultural richness of the other, to embrace justice, peace and integrity of creation as part of being apostles today (CL 7) and above all being men of the Church (CL 8).

The selection of aspirants should not be based on *possible candidates* but rather on *promising candidates* who will embrace the charism of the Society and are willing to selflessly offer their lives to the building of the Kingdom of God in Africa and the African World. The vocation animators are mandated to verify an aspirant's motivations like social status, material advantage, desire for travel, further studies or problems linked to sexuality of the young man who wishes to join us. It is done through regular visits and meetings so as to discern together with the family, the parish and the young man himself. In other words, the vocation animator should know the future candidate sufficiently so that he can present him to the Provincial Council for admission. Failing to do that will result in candidates who are mediocre and who will become problematic in the future, not only for the Society but also for the Church. A good selection and good formation will produce good missionaries who will bear prophetic witness in Africa and the African world.

Missionary Animation

Missionary animation is making our charism known to lay people who in their own way cherish and participate in the charism of the Missionaries of Africa. The M.Afr. charism and the spirit of Cardinal Lavignerie are not private possessions of only the M.Afr. and MSOLA but rather they are priceless and unique gifts of the Holy Spirit to the whole Church for the common good. Therefore, the Missionaries of Africa are mandated to share their charism and the spirit of Cardinal Lavignerie with Africa, the African world and the universal Church. It is in this vein that each member of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa and in particular the missionary animators share with the lay people all that we are and all that we do. The animation varies from one



place to another, however the core purpose is to make our charism known and help people to embrace it. Many lay associations guided by our confreres already participate in the life and mission of the Church. It was observed during the recent meeting we had in Kigali that vocation animation is done systematically and due attention is given to it by Provinces and Sectors; however, the missionary animation lacked proper planning and follow-up. The 2022 General Chapter discussed at length on how to share our charism with the laity. “We note with joy that lay people feel a call to share our Missionary of Africa Charism and express the desire for a specific missionary commitment. This is, for us, a sign of the maturity and fecundity of the our Society especially after celebrating the 150-year jubilee.” Consequently, we are invited to share our charism with our brothers and sisters who live the apostolic life in their environment while being inspired by the Charism of a Society of Apostolic Life. All Provinces and Sectors are called to engage actively in this new sharing ministry with the laity.

Challenges in Vocation and Missionary Animation

Though we have so many vocations, we face a number of challenges such as a lack of sufficient place for all aspirants who want to join us, a lack of qualified formators to accompany them, the lack of regular follow up with promising future candidates, an overemphasis on the priestly vocation and a neglect to promote the brother vocation, the lack of a simple life style of animators who give a false impression of material and financial richness to aspirants and their families, the lack of well-prepared vocation animators to carry out the important responsibility of recruiting future candidates, the lack of adequate means of transport and sufficient financial means to carry out the mission entrusted to the animators, and above all the quota system of candidate recruitment that restricts vocation animators in their ministry. These challenges are to be overcome so that the vocation animation is carried out according to the precepts outlined in the Vade-Mecum. We need to work with the resources available at the moment; therefore, the selection criteria should be followed strictly so that future promising candidates are recruited and not just anyone who wishes to become a priest in the Society. The aspect of missionary vocation should be more



important than that of the priestly or brother vocation. In other words, what we need are missionaries who can embrace the charism of the Society and to live our vocation as prophetic witness. With regard to missionary animation, there has been a lack of proper planning and follow-up with various existing groups. Vocation animators who are at the same time missionary animators do not give equal importance to both ministries, and there is sometimes a lack of enthusiasm by confreres in sharing our charism with the laity, etc. Following the recommendations of the Chapter, each one is called to share the unique gift of our charism with the lay people who will become ambassadors thereof in their daily life.

Conclusion

The future of the Society depends entirely on the will of God. As custodian of the charism and legacy of the Society and the inspiration of Cardinal Lavigerie, the Society has the duty to preserve and share it with future generations. Consequently, both missionary and vocation animation have to be taken seriously. The animators are already dedicated to this ministry; however, we encourage each member of the Missionaries of Africa to engage actively in vocation and missionary animation. The challenges will always be there, but with the help of God, determined to continue our charism, we embark on a renewed commitment to the service of missionary and vocation animation.

I wish you all a happy new year 2024. May Our Lady of Africa intercede for us and may the almighty God bless our little Society with more missionary vocations.



APPOINTMENTS 2023 – 2

	NAME	GIVES	RECEIVES
Br	CHIMPALI M. Clenerius	SAP/Zmb	GhN/Gha
Fr	DERO O. Vitalis	GMG/Roma	PAO/Civ
Fr	GEORGE Rijo	SAP/Mwi	SOA/Ind
Fr	NDAYIKENGURUKIYE Olivier	PAC/RDC	SAP/Moz
Fr	NIYONGABO Gérard	PAC/Bdi	SAP/Zmb
Fr	NYEMBO Delphin	PAO/Bfa	GhN/Nga
Fr	OUDET Maurice	PAO/Bfa	PEP/Fra
Fr	OUEDRAOGO Michel	EAP/Ken	PEP/Fra
Fr	SALAZAR DEL MURO Fidel	SAP/Moz	AMS/Mex

André Simonart,
General Secretary





Missionary and Vocation Animation: is it a single Mission?

Guadalajara - Mexico



Missionary walking with youth groups in Quéretaro, Mexico 2023

There is a slight difference between missionary and vocation animation. Missionary animation focuses more on raising awareness for mission *Ad Gentes*. In missionary animation we remind people that right from their baptism they are “baptized and sent on mission”. The primary vocation of the church is to evangelize, to be on mission, to encounter etc. So, in raising missionary awareness we call people to pray for missionaries, to support the mission of the Universal Church, and to be missionaries

themselves wherever they are.

Vocation animation, on the other hand, animates youth groups, students, children and all the people of God to follow Jesus in a particular way through the charisms that each one has received from God. It helps the person to discern the desire and plan of God for them, and respond generously to that call (plan). In this article I will first focus on vocation animation and secondly I will tackle the theme of missionary animation.



Vocation animation: an important mission

Indeed, missionary and vocation animation is a very important mission. The quality of our mission and of our confreres depends very much on the foundation that we have given to our aspirants and candidates. It is for this reason that confreres appointed for vocation and missionary animation should at least have some training. Before undertaking this office, I did a three months course for formators in Mexico City. It helped me to acquaint myself with new methods of spiritual and human formation of our candidates. It also helped me to interact with different congregations, to know their formation programs, insert myself in the cultural set-up, understand new challenges that formation needs to respond to today etc. Before forming others, we need to form ourselves first; in the formators' course we had spiritual accompaniment and sharing in teams every week and classes every day from Monday to Friday. In addition to that we had different psychological sessions during weekends. Many facilitators presented to us different topics and invited us to participate, analyze and interiorize them in our congregations and charisms. Being an

animator or a formator is not a title, but rather a mission of accompanying and journeying with those who have a desire of knowing, loving and following Jesus. It is good to understand that any mission has its origin in God. To be a disciple of Christ one has to closely imitate Him, become another Christ and act as Christ did. Christ is the missionary sent by the Father to reveal to us the image of the invisible God. In so doing he impressed people through his compassion, mercy and love. Christ inserted himself in the middle of the people and in that way he revealed to them that he was the sent and promised one (the Messiah).

A prophet is a man of faith

Before admitting an aspirant or candidate, it is good to ask oneself: is he a man of faith? What is his involvement in his parish community or with young people? What is the place of religious practice in his schedule and daily life? Is there a search for Jesus in his heart and a desire to accomplish God's will? Does he have the desire to give himself to God, in the service of the mission in Africa? What is the quality of his prayer life? Obviously we should not expect everything



in his life to be perfect; but at least he has to show some signs of a wanting to be a disciple, willing to grow and anxious to learn new things.

Vocation animation today

Today more than ever it's imperative to initiate our candidates already from aspirancy into the socio-cultural-politico-economic and religious challenges affecting our world today. In the Come-and-See sessions and in the forums of vocation animation, before talking of Africa, I call on the participants to share about realities in their areas; this helps them to acquaint themselves with the situations of

their social milieu. By appreciating one's own society, one can easily understand better other areas.

In Mexico for example some of our aspirants come from areas affected by narco-traffickers. Sometimes some people are forced to flee and migrate to other states in search for protection and peace; some youths are forced to work hard to help their families; when an aspirant understands better his own milieu he can more easily understand the toils and the sufferings of others, develop the desire for justice and peace etc.

Mexico is one of the countries in the world that receive a lot of



MAfr candidates and confreres in Mexico Guadalajara 2023



migrants, most of whom come from central America and some Caribbean countries (Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Haiti etc.) and their aim is to travel to the United States of America. The life of these migrants is not always easy. We help our aspirants to look around so as to appreciate and understand the social challenges of their country and become aware that this may also, in one way or another, be found in Africa.

Missionary animation in Mexico

Missionary animation is a vocation of each one of us. Through the Masses we celebrate, and retreats, classes and lectures that we give etc. we try to make our charism known; whenever I get the chance of being in a parish, meeting youth groups, visiting family visits, attending diocesan and national gatherings, I always talk about Africa and our presence in that continent and what we do. Missionary animation needs creativity. Today more than ever we have social media and internet; we can use those tools to evangelize. Sometimes when I am animating a youth retreat I share films or interviews about our confreres and I ask the youngsters to comment and ask questions about what they have heard and seen.



Francisco Ambrosio and Cyriaque Mounkoro
taking charge of a parish in Querétaro,
Mexico 2023

A call for people to support our mission

In Mexico we publish each year a missionary calendar and some magazines. Through these calendars and magazines, we share about our presence in Africa, we ask people to think globally and see the needs of their brothers and sisters around the world. With the permission of the Bishop we visit some parishes offering them these calendars and magazines. In this way we manage to get some funds for the mission of the Society in Mexico.



Missionary groups

We have very promising lay groups, one of which has been with us for more than 20 years. We are now in the process of restructuring this group through formation, and admitting new members. Our aim is to make these groups truly missionary and encourage them to have regular meetings, prayers, retreats and fundraising for our mission in Africa and work in Mexico.

New parish insertion in Queretaro

On 17th of March 2023, our first and ever parish in Mexico was inaugurated. Two confreres were appointed for this mission: Father Cyriaque Mounkoro (parish priest) and Fr Francisco Javier Ambrosio Vargas (curate). They are doing a very good job; many people

from all over Queretaro are already coming to our parish, which surely will be a fruitful terrain for vocation and missionary animation. It is located in a popular area and very lively. Our mission is to animate the laity, the youths, families and children, encouraging them to keep the missionary candle burning in them.



Emmanuel Barongo



The joy of being part of those who help young people to discern their vocation

Kampala - Uganda

Three years ago I began the work of vocation animation in Uganda. I have come to appreciate the joy of being part of those in Uganda, who help young people discern their vocation to enter into the Missionaries of Africa. Part of our mission is to help these young people discern what they are called to do with their life. When they come to ask about the Missionaries of Africa, most of them are in the prime of their lives. This is the stage at which, if they make the right choices, they will succeed in life. But if on the contrary they make bad choices it will also have bad consequences in their future. It is therefore a very important and fragile stage and they deserve the generosity of our hearts to help them discover what God is calling them to be.

I have worked with many young people, and most of them who interact with me tell me how life is hard. That is mostly the message I hear, the challenge they throw to

me. Life is hard, because there are no jobs, no money to pay school fees, no money to buy basic needs etc. Financial challenges are pushing all other challenges, including moral ones, to the sideline, so that other aspects of life are not attended to.

I myself experienced this a little bit while growing up, but in a different way. At that time, it was more about how to become a good person in society than to “make it big” as young people call it today. It was all about “work hard in your garden and you will get food to eat, work hard in school and you will get a job”, etc. Today it is different: you now hear more about innovation, creativity, thinking outside the box, prudence, being smart. All because times have changed. You can work hard, yet not get the food to eat. You can succeed in your education, but not get a job. It is more about whom you know than what you know. Leadership today is about dominating and



Josephat Diyuo at missionary animation at St Peters secondary school in Kampala

being served, and not about serving. It has become in most cases a channel to enjoy lazy life.

The above has also influenced the discernment process of young people even into religious life and for that matter the Missionaries of Africa. This aspect has to be taken into consideration in the context of missionary and vocation promotion today. In my first year as vocation promoter, an aspirant was sent to start formation and to my surprise, he came back after having been only a week in the pre-first phase. His reason was that he got a scholarship to study in the university. We all know that education has become very costly in Uganda and in most countries today. If education were free, this young man could have made a better

choice right from the beginning. We are now torn between looking for economic progress or searching for eternal life through the service of God and neighbour. Many young people today will tell you, that their first wish is to achieve their dreams, rather than to follow Christ.

A young man came to me and said he wanted to join. I asked him his age and he said he was 30 years. Then I asked what he has been doing. He told me “nothing” and that, since 2016 when he finished university in accounting, he has only been moving from place to place looking for a job. Then I took time to explain to him about our founder Cardinal Lavigerie, whose first desire was to make life better for others, and not just remain in his comfort zone. Con-



sequently, all missionaries are also called to act in a positive way to change society for the better. This is the core of the gospel, the core of our call as Christians. The conclusion of my message to him was that it is not getting a job that is most important, but rather the resolve to have a positive impact on society. “Don’t say you have nothing to do, simply because you are not employed. Begin planting trees, begin a vegetable garden, begin using your hands to create things that are useful to your neighbours. Even if you are not getting a job and you feel it is only the certificate you have that can get you a job, you should be aware of all the many other gifts you have.” This was the advice I gave him.

To serve and not to be served

Our animation, whether missionary or vocational, has to start from the “I have come to serve and not to be served”. We don’t have to look far. Our charism emphasises simple lifestyle, and we should teach this charism not only to our aspirants, but also to our Christians, family and friends. I look at simple lifestyle as an important way our world can be saved and individuals can be in touch with themselves. It starts with self-acceptance, our

family, village, our physical and intellectual capacity etc. From there we are able to see well what else we need to make ourselves more useful to others and the Society. This is the beginning of charity. We accept to empower ourselves so that we can empower others. Here I will call on the intellectual people of our Society to explore how to make the idea of simple lifestyle more understandable for all of us and how we can teach it to our flock. Most of the problems of today are caused, not because of lack, but because of refusal to accept ourselves. We think that we have to look for things outside ourselves to make us complete, but this is not attainable. This leads



Josephat Diyuo visits the family of an aspiring MAF. in Kampala



to frustration and to get rid of this frustration we frustrate people around us unnecessarily.

My opinion and position on this issue is as simple as simple lifestyle itself: “can what u can, can’t what you cannot. Be happy with the little you have and use that little to get the more you want, but do not jump the queue.”

Our animation in all its facets has to include entrepreneurship, our call to self-reliance cannot materialize if we are not empowered. At all levels missionaries have to support and empower one another, so that there and then we can be useful to the Society. This itself will be a witness and will make us self-reliant.

Let the Society empower vocation promotion by revitalizing it as it used to be. In the past there was in Kampala what we called ‘old Kampala’ and ‘Yes centre’.

We have to foresee such houses for vocation animation and provide all the structures that make them self-reliant, such as enough land for agriculture. We should also emphasise other skills and jobs which will help our aspirants from the onset to know that we have to produce what we eat. And these centres will also help young people aspire to be good citizens of the world.



Josephat Diyuo



Mission and Vocation Animation

Madrid - Spain

Introduction

Before I begin this mission and vocation animation article, I want to introduce myself. My name is Manuel Fernández García (Manolo); I've been a Missionary of Africa since I took my missionary oath at the Dalbade in Toulouse at the beginning of April 1986. I have lived in two mission countries: the Dogon country of Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, where I arrived at the end of November 1994. I must confess that the Church of Mali, the Malian people and their diverse cultures have left a deep impression on me and helped me in my missionary life as a White Father.

Since my stage, apart from being the community bursar, I have always been a youth animator and passionate about being a vocation animator, thanks to the formation I received during my first cycle, novitiate, stage, theology and ongoing formation. I appreciated the two sessions in Jerusalem, especially the opportunity to meet

and live with the other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam. I also enjoyed the active encounter with the Eastern Rite Catholic Church and the Armenian Church. Let's try to answer the questions posed.

In your experience, what do you understand by missionary and vocation animation in relation to our formation for prophetic witness?

The Encyclical Redemptoris Missio, in no. 83, defines missionary and vocation animation as follows: It is "informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization. (.....) Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense."

Therefore, our missionary action must bear witness first and foremost



through our joy, life, fidelity to the Gospel, and our charism. As mission coordinator in one of the eight vicariates of the Archdiocese of Madrid, vicariate 1, I know that the Missionaries of Africa are very present in the local Church of Madrid, which seeks to be close to the people, without distinction, especially the most needy and migrants. We appreciated this during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We live missionary witness during specific missionary campaigns, such as World Mission Sunday, Missionary Childhood, etc. But the witness that goes straight to people's hearts is the one we give in our daily lives: closeness to people regardless of their "category" or "social rank". The Missionaries of Africa are at ease everywhere, be it in a simple house, a hut, or a palace. Remember the Master's attitude when he called Levi.

Thanks to this everyday witness, we are prophets of the Good News that we also received from the mouths and witnesses of other missionaries. This Good News is the centre and driving force of our missionary and vocation animation.

What would be for you today the signs of missionary and vocation animation for a prophetic witness

in your Province/Sector/Section or our Society of Missionaries of Africa in general?

Our daily witness: "With all humility, and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love; take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together" (Eph 4, 2-3). It is in the simplicity of our lives, in our openness to the people we meet and in those who encounter us that we can discern the sometimes abrupt changes in our world today

The crisis of authority that we are experiencing in our communities, the crisis of roles where the one who has "won a place" (call it an appointment) is incapable of sharing, incapable of asking the opinion of the other confreres. Our prophetism could be more effective if we returned to the charism of simplicity and openness that has always characterised the Missionaries of Africa.

How do you experience the dynamics of missionary and vocation animation in your daily commitments?

Dialogue with Islam and traditional religions is integral to our charism as Missionaries of Africa.



Manuel Fernández García with the Santa Paula missionary group, Mangirón, Spain

How can we witness this encounter with others if we cannot open our office doors to the confreres with whom we live?

Spain - and perhaps the whole of Europe - has become a land of mission, even if there are missionaries who go on mission "ad gentes". These are "old" countries that need human resources. Daily, I try to get closer to the sometimes bewildered migrants increasingly roaming our streets. Our prophecy is to fight against the barriers that separate us and move towards this intercultural encounter, which is, I think, the bridge to this new era heralded by the sudden changes we are witnessing.

Is there anything in missionary

and vocation animation that we could develop to help us become better prophetic witnesses?

I would point out several things. As far as community life is concerned, we need to be more serious about evaluating the Team work at the different stages of formation. It is the foundation of our charism. It's about respecting others and the standards community members have established.

Concerning the excellent idea of auto-financing, let's be careful not to become sedentary and, above all, not to fall into the temptation of the "love of money": For the love of money is the root of all evils... But as someone dedicated to God avoid all that. You must



aim to be upright and religious, filled with faith and love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith... (1 Tim 6:10-12).

It is also a question of forming our young students, and perhaps ourselves through ongoing formation, for the common good of the Society. The projects that I associate with the places of my appointments are assets of the Society that must be well looked after. Let's be careful not to instill latent hypocrisy in our young people: never drink in front of your superior, and always take sides with your superior to please him...

Conclusion

Lastly, remember that we have been formed and now form ourselves for the mission that we have received freely and whose driving force is Jesus Christ and his Good News: "The mission is not a con-

quest, but an encounter that requires us to enter into dialogue while respecting others and their culture, in which the Spirit never ceases to act and sow the seeds of the Gospel" (Fr Stan Lubango). That community life has its full meaning in the competitive world in which we live. In response to violence and extremism, we need gentleness, a spirit of dialogue and moderation. In the face of insecurity, let us trust and live in solidarity.



Manuel Fernández García



Missionary Vocation Animation: An Inclusive Apostolate

Tamale - Ghana



Jean-Claude Habimana visits the Notre Dame Minor Seminary in Navrongo. Ghana 2023

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

From this invitation of Christ, we get to understand that none of our missions (apostolates) should be exclusive; not even the one of vocation animators.

When my generation and I joined the formation, and throughout our initial formation with the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, the expression “vocation animation”

was the only one being used. Of recent, the word ‘missionary’ has been added to it. In my humble and little experience, the latter makes it more complete, as we are constantly reminded of the missionary nature of the Church. Indeed, looking at it, the emphasis was more on the young man joining us and not on his family and environment. With the invitation to be missionary vocation animators, we get to understand that no one should be left out in that animation. It is important to remember that the young man joining us has a family;



and while in formation and in our Society his family becomes automatically ours too.

Families and Friends of the Missionaries of Africa

Today, I personally get a feeling of satisfaction anytime I see that the Society is more and more getting interested in the family of confreres. Most of the Provinces including our own of Ghana-Nigeria have started groups of “Family and Friends of the Missionaries of Africa”. The members of such groups talk a lot to other people about us and our charism, and where the groups function well, the work of the animator becomes easier. To me this is a typical sign of missionary vocation animation.



Jean-Claude Habimana and Pascal Ewuntomah

Moreover, when a missionary or a candidate is away from the family, either for Mission or formation, his family is entitled to visits of confreres to share with them the news about their son. On this, one can argue that as we live in an epoch of advanced technology, the family and confreres can easily communicate, but I bet that it always makes a difference when there is a physical visit. In my short experience, such visits bring joy not only to the visited family but also to the confreres themselves. I cannot explain the feeling of joy I experience whenever confreres visit my seventy-years ‘old lady’.

The participation of confreres’ families and friends in our Society’s big celebrations such as ordinations, jubilees and other anniversaries has also been very much improved over the years. Looking at it closely, this gives them an opportunity to feel that they are part of the bigger family of their missionary. This has allowed, and still allows them, to give their deserved contributions both in kind and in cash. Indeed, this creates in extension an image of what Cardinal Charles Lavigerie desired to see: Africa being evangelized by Africans themselves. Because, when our families get involved, they also take up res-



ponsibility for mission themselves, and the work becomes easy for all of us.

The work of missionary and vocation animation is combined in one and the same office. Ideally, this is a perfect match, because the same person, while going to fish for future Missionaries of Africa, can as well visit families of confreres living in the same geographical location. However, it is important to note that, with the limited budget of this office, it is often difficult to plan for visits, which are typically missionary animation, knowing that some families have migrated to the cities, where there are less vocation drives due to the poor response to the missionary vocation. This brings about a

kind of unbalanced dynamics of the missionary and vocation animation. In this area, there is still a need to put in more financial resources to enable a fruitful and effective apostolate.

Animation, the work of all our confreres

In addition, there is a need for all the confreres to take this as their apostolate. Even though, it might be given to an animator for the sake of coordination, confreres should take it upon themselves to visit their confreres' families, who are found in their places of apostolate. Joyful and sad moments are part of our daily lives. When these moments hit our families, we are invited to share this with confreres,



Jean-Claude Habimana visits the family of a MAfr candidate



so that those who are around can represent us. It is always sad and unpleasant to see that, when the family of a confrere goes through a very sad event, Missionaries of Africa are not present. In this case, I ask myself what could be our testimony to that family. Our absence can also be because no information is given to the confreres working in the area. Sharing our family information keeps us more and more bonded as people belonging to the bigger family of the Missionaries of Africa.

It should be encouraged at the level of the Society to get back to our traditional gandoura and rosary whenever attending events. This is because, sometimes our presence is not noted due to lack of recognition. From my little experience, in some parts of Ghana, especially in the north, our dress speaks louder than the one wearing it. Consequently, I am convinced that the commitment to do so can help a lot in the apostolate of missionary vocation animation.

Finally, as we think as a Society to pass to the next level, from vocation animation to missionary vocation animation, we need to know that we are responding to the signs of the times in the Church, which is asking us to go out to the peripheries. We need to be ready to commit our will, resources, our time and our energy to it. We should always remember that it is an apostolate for everybody, of everybody and by everybody.



Jean-Claude Habimana



Missionary and Vocational Animation in Mozambique

Chimoio - Mozambique



Pascal Mare with M.Afr aspirants at a retreat in Beira 2023

Missionary and vocation animation is an integral part of the pastoral work and daily life of any Missionary of Africa worthy of the name. For me, mission and vocation promotion means living our vocation as Christians, consecrated persons and above all, as Missionaries of Africa, thanks to the pillars of our apostolic life. These are community life and spiritual, pastoral, academic, and material life. Concretising and trans-

lating the values of these pillars into our daily practical life is a prophetic way of making every Christian, adult, old or young, aware that we have all been called and sent on mission through baptism, each in their respective responsibility and the choice of life they make.

Missionary and vocation animation involves motivating, guiding and helping Christians to discover their vocation and their talents and



Pascal Mare visits the family of a MAfr candidate.

to know that it is not only through the consecrated life that one can be a missionary. Every Christian can and should be a missionary in his/her home, environment or workplace while supporting missionaries with their prayers, advice, finance, etc. Finally, it is to awaken in each Christian the love of God and his Gospel and activate dormant missionary zeal so that they become living gospels in their environment. This responsibility is therefore not only reserved for those designated to do it, but it is incumbent on every member of the Society of Missionaries of Africa to take it to heart and accept it as an integral part of his daily activities. The formation period has provided us with

enough tools to engage in missionary and vocation animation. The proof is that there are already signs in places where confreres committed themselves to mission and vocation promotion without being specialised in it. This work is more a question of will than ability.

In Mozambique

Fortunately, many Missionaries of Africa have understood and taken this responsibility head-on, and we can see today in our Provinces, Sectors and our Society in general signs of a prophetic witness. The exemplary life, work and evangelisation of the Missionaries of Africa have inspired many Christians in some of our parishes to



seek a better understanding of our spirituality. Some missionaries seek inspiration in our method of evangelisation and life. Some Christians knew the M.Afr. or heard about their work, and organise themselves to support our mission. Being apostles and nothing but that inspires and attracts a lot of people. For example, here in Mozambique, we have the AMAMO Association (Mozambican Organisation of Friends of Missionaries of Africa), also including of course some former students who support us and participate in the Society's important events (ordinations, M. Afr. celebrations, etc.). Bishops and priests are amazed at how we work and ask for our presence in their dioceses.

These signs and concrete examples testify to our prophetic mission in our different environments of service and life. We recognise, however, that there is more work to be done. Some M.Afr. still think that the confreres appointed as animators must accomplish this task alone. All confreres are missionary and vocation animators, whatever their responsibility. We have to be living Gospels in our daily lives. Missionary and vocation animation is part of our vocation as Missionaries of Africa.

In Mozambique today, we notice more aspirants coming from dioceses and parishes where we have never worked. This is an invitation to redouble our missionary and



Pascal Mare celebrates Mass in a chapel in Chimoio



vocation animation efforts in our parishes because, as the saying goes: "Charity begins at home".

Given the lack of interest shown by some confreres in mission and vocation promotion, this task should be seen as an integral part of pastoral work, like any other activity. There are no confreres specialised in mission and vocation promotion. We have all been formed and sent to be living, life-giving witnesses to the Gospel through our lives, words, and daily activities. The Chapter also invites us to be prophets, living our mission daily with enthusiasm, self-giving and co-responsibility. The spirit of "All things to all people" invites us to a prophetic life while developing team spirit, esprit de corps, which brings about an edifying missionary

life. The sense of belonging, co-responsibility, love of the mission, mutual aid, etc., are all values that we are called to develop for a prophetic life and mission. May God help us witness His Word in our daily lives!



Pascal Mare



Missionary Vocation Animation as a Prophetic Witness

Kanengo - Malawi

The vocation animation team is composed of confreres from our respective Missionaries of Africa communities. Each confrere carries out the activities of the vocation team which are coordinated by the vocation director. Team work and team spirit moves everyone in the vocation field.

Vocation work is fundamental and delicate. Therefore, it should be taken seriously and holistically. That is why in Malawi, all confreres and students of the Missionaries of Africa are encouraged to get involved in promoting vocations for the Missionaries of Africa. This vocation animation involves also lay people who know us well or who work with us.

As regards to the missionary vocation animation and formation for prophetic witness, it must be highlighted that the missionary vocation animation is a gradual process whereby one has to help young men to understand and discern bet-

ter what it means to be a disciple of Christ and live a consecrated life as a Missionary of Africa. Most of the time, the youth come to us as Missionaries of Africa seeking answers for their vocation, uncertainties and doubts. They want to know how to join us. They take the first initiative after they have heard from a Missionary of Africa, or read our history or life testimonies. Some are directed by their friends who were once in contact with us. The role of the vocation animator is to inspire the faith and inform the young man accordingly. We promote missionary vocation because by our oath, we are all Missionaries of Africa, and we are called to serve selflessly our brethren by being apostles and nothing else as our founder Charles Cardinal Lavigerie has told us.

***Come and see" sessions,
spiritual companion***

Moved by our founder's words, our mission is to touch and inspire



the hearts of the youth being at vocation gatherings organized by parishes and attending diocesan youth rallies and by visits to the schools. Our simplicity and apostolate of proximity as vocation animators make us prophetic witnesses who eat and live like the people; and this, in return makes our aspirants desire to be rooted into prophetic and witnessing life as future Missionaries of Africa. So, vocation animation and missionary formation are intertwined in the sense that all our young men start their missionary vocation journey with the “Come-and-See sessions” which help them discern well their vocations in view of making a better decision on their calling. Furthermore, the aspirants are advised to choose a spiritual companion who will assist them to clarify and enrich their missionary motivations before they join us. It is very crucial that they are aware and informed that being a Missionary of Africa today is a prophetic calling and they are also called to be witnesses of the Good News in every aspect possible. And this is a continuous learning process nurturing and enriching the missionary vocation in the hearts and lives of the aspirants. It also requires from the aspirants

a positive mind and generous heart to embrace the missionary formation.

Our community life, because of its internationality and intercultural aspect, is a prophetic sign and witness among ourselves and for the youth we meet or serve. Coming from different countries, cultures and races, and being able to live together is a big challenge. Notwithstanding, it carries also a witnessing and prophetic message among us and for the people we serve, as it shows that people can live together despite their differences. Most of our aspirants want to join us because of community life which they see as a sign of witnessing our apostolate.

Apostolate of proximity

Our apostolate of proximity which brings us closer to people is the other aspect of our prophetic and witnessing vocation. Our joys, good examples and smiles give hope and desire to those who want to join us.

In Malawi, there are many signs with regard to missionary vocation animation for a prophetic witness. Firstly, each and every year, young men enter the pre-formation centre



Alfred Nkundimana during the celebration of National Vocation Sunday on 30 April 2023 in Dona, Malawi.

and each year we also have at least one ordination for the Missionaries of Africa. Secondly, many Christian parents encourage their children to follow the path of consecrated life. Again, during youth gatherings, the youths are eager to listen to missionary vocation talks and ask questions about missionary life. Thirdly, working in collaboration with the local church, religious congregations and the vocations directors is a positive sign of vocation as a prophetic and witnessing life in the Church. Our charism is well expressed through the spirit of team work and our vocation emblems like, rosaries, clothes, brochures, on radio, social media and the legacy of our confreres. This helps us to guide the youth who want to join us.

It should be stressed that the dynamic of missionary vocation animation has changed; hence promoting missionary vocation has become a very tough and challenging task. This is because with the coming of technology, our youths are confronted and engulfed by so many voices which make it difficult for them to make right choices in life especially embarking on a missionary vocation journey. In this regard, new approaches in vocation promotion have to be introduced like social media (WhatsApp, Facebook).

To improve our missionary vocation animation in the spirit of mission as a prophetic witness it is necessary that this type of ani-



Celebration of National Vocations Day in the parish of Madisi in Lilongwe, Malawi. 2023

mation has to be improved in many ways. First of all, the vocation animators must be equipped with the necessary tools which will make their work easier, for instance having a good means of transport, financing their office handsomely so that they should be able to move from one place to another to interact with the youths and inspire them to become Missionaries of Africa. Teaming up with the vocation teams of the dioceses enhances vocation animation ministry, for example, this year we took initiatives to print vocation animation booklet for all the congregations in Malawi

and it has been a success. So individualism should not be the option, but communion of fellowship should be the way to follow in the work of vocation animation.



Alfred Nkundimana



Vocation promotion in Poland

Lublin - Poland



Tomasz Podrazik and Emmanuel Noufe at a missionary meeting with schoolchildren in Lublin

Introduction

The changing situation of the Church in Poland forces us to reflect on a change in the approach to the issue of promoting vocations. Consciously or not, the topic of vocation animation appears more and more often at our community meetings. In the previous decade in Poland, we had on average two people expressing their willingness to join our Society. In addition, in previous years, boys used to come to us for vocation retreats. About five years ago, the situation began to change dramatically. Despite

announcing the dates of the vocation retreat, very few show up. Individuals who come to our home for retreats openly share their life plans, which do not include the possibility of engaging in missionary life.

Changes in the Church of Poland

When I came to Poland in 2021, it seemed to me that talking about a decline in vocations was exaggerated. I thoughtlessly accepted all invitations to parishes and schools - that is, I did what I thought I should do, and what I



thought my predecessors did. On the one hand, I was guided by the advice I received from my predecessor when handing over his responsibilities, and on the other hand, I remembered how the confreres responsible for vocation and missionary animation worked when I was a student myself, because during that time we were often asked for help during trips to various parishes. Besides, I joined the Society after an animation campaign at the diocesan seminary where I used to study. I also remember that after returning from Tanzania, Polish youth seemed to me much more mature than the youth from the times when I was a teenager myself. This is because the current generation of young people is more open than mine. Nowadays young people openly say what they think without regard to whom they talk to and are not

afraid to express their criticism towards teachers and priests. This observation of mine caused surprise among catechists who teach religion in schools, who, in my opinion, complain too much about young people. I also remember being struck by the way boys were treated in secondary schools, where most of the teachers were women. It seemed to me that there was too much demand for them to be polite and uncritically obedient, and they were looking for ways to demonstrate that they were not like that. I remember an animation at one of the schools where one boy followed me everywhere, helped me connect the projector and took care of the slide show during my presentation. Then I praised him to the teachers in the staff room, and how surprised the teachers were! Then they told me their opinion about him: he was the worst student in



Emmanuel Noufe with members of the youth group in Lublin



the class. Strangely, when I talked to him, it seemed to me that he was one of the best students in the class. Then I talked to him and he told me that his studies were not going well because he often missed school, because he was addicted to computer games and because of that he didn't get up in the morning, so he often missed classes. After some time, I realised that this was the problem of many young people who, during the pandemic, spent many hours in front of the computer without any control. I share this story because it is just one of many similar ones that I have heard from young people, and I think it has an impact on young people's ability to respond to the call. The intergenerational distance is growing, and more and more young people identify religiosity with the older generation,

which does not understand the world in which they are immersed. This does not mean that young people do not share any values. Many young people engage in various types of volunteering, and in church circles you can meet those who willingly participate in charismatic retreats or belong to movements in the Church. However, this does not translate into a willingness to make a lifelong decision to take up religious life as a member of an institute of religious life. I think that priests themselves contribute to this. Further sexual scandals involving priests are regularly announced in the media, and this has a huge impact on how young people perceive the Church.

My own experience

In the last two and half years of my stay in Poland, I realised how



Missionary meeting organised by the White Fathers and White Sisters in Lublin



little I understood contemporary youth. I continued to respond to invitations and conducted missionary animations in parishes and schools, alone or with another brother. From time to time, we also went on school trips with one of the White Sisters. Up to a certain point, I also went to fundraising events with the Missionary Friends of Africa, but it became more and more clear to me that what is needed is to focus on building relationships with young people and less on mass campaigns. At one of the meetings of animators and vocation chaplains, I heard the words of Bishop David Tencer from Reykjavik that we need to look for young people where they are, and not where they are not - that is, in the church. His grand-

father hunted moles. Every day at 11 o'clock he sat on the bench in front of the house, lit a pipe, and then went hunting. He didn't go out at 8, but at 11, because there were no moles at 8. In a similar way, when the disciples fished all night and caught nothing, the Lord Jesus told them to cast their nets again. And this time the catch was successful because now there were fish."

Youth ministry

I came across similar words during meetings with vocation chaplains as part of workshops devoted to youth ministry. A large part of these workshops was the Nonviolent Communication course, where the importance and quality of relationships were repeatedly



Franciszek Szczurek celebrates a missionary Mass with all the neighbours and friends of the Missionaries of Africa in Lublin, 2023



emphasised. In addition, I believe that bearing witness is based on building relationships based on mutual respect, not slander and violent language. Isn't that what esprit de corps is all about? This is not only the task of confreres appointed for vocation animation, but of all members of the Society. It's not about taking up new types of activities, but about the way we build relationships with each other and with others. I wonder whether, when entering the culture of contemporary young people, we should not give up the category of vocational and missionary animation altogether, because it may be interpreted as violent. Maybe sometimes it's the other way around. A young person looking for his or her vocation needs to be heard in the process of accompaniment, and the animator himself becomes animated by listening to him!

Conclusion

I have no doubt that if young people do not call or write to us, it means that we are not responding to their needs, and this is because we are listening too little. How many long-winded animations were

filled with portraying oneself as a fearless missionary who had already overcome so many adversities and had more to come? This does not build relationships. As I share here, the words in St. Luke's Gospel keep echoing in the back of my mind, "These you should have practised, without neglecting the others" (Lk 11:42). We have to go to schools and parishes (perhaps even to open our own parish), because this is where we most often meet young people, and this is where we have a chance to meet local communities - but it is much more important to adapt to the culture of contemporary youth, giving up negative judgments and the language of violence.



Tomasz Podrazik



Foundation for Prophetic Witness Formation

Dar-es-Salaam - Tanzania



Justin Ramde at the Easter celebration for young people in Tunduru, in the diocese of Tunduru-Masasi, 2023

Foundation for Prophetic Witness Formation

In his account of the choosing and sending out of the seventy-two disciples, Saint Luke tells us that Jesus sent them ahead two by two to wherever he would be visiting to bring peace, heal the sick and announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. So he said to them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore,

to send out labourers into his harvest" (Lk 10:2). This story shows the importance of Mission and Vocation Promotion (MVP) both in the life of the Church and for our Missionary Society. "The missionary vocation is a call from God to continue the mission of Christ in communion with His Church" (CL 51). Therefore, we will reflect on the MVP as the foundation for the formation of prophetic witness in response to the invitation of the 29th General



Chapter to bear prophetic witness in our mission.

What is our understanding of MVP?

At first glance, we notice two dimensions of MVP. On the one hand, it is the missionary animation during which we make our Society known, i.e. its charisma, mission and lifestyle to a community or group that doesn't know it yet. On the other hand, it involves encouraging young people to respond favourably to God's call to missionary life and accompanying them in their initial discernment.

However, our three years of experience in vocation promotion have shown us that we cannot really dissociate the two dimensions. Any prophetic witness to our mission raises questions and inspires vocations. In the same way, every serious initiative in vocation promotion leads to the Society being better known and is also a mission. This is why a vocation animator must be, on the one hand, a sign of Christ himself who loves, invites, welcomes and accompanies young people who wish to follow him and, on the other hand, the embodiment of the values of the Society through which he

has consecrated himself to following Christ and invites young people to do the same. We can, therefore, sum up our understanding of the MVP in this Bible verse: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you too may share with us" (1 Jn 1:3). Receiving candidates who are willing to be prophetic witnesses in our Society calls for true witness of missionary life on the part of the animator and every confrere in contact with young people. Even if vocations promoters are appointed specifically for this mission, the fact remains that the MVP, as a missionary witness activity, involves every Missionary of Africa.

The organisation of the MVP in our Society and our Province/Section.

The recommendation of our 29th General Chapter inviting the Provincials to ensure that vocational animators receive a formation appropriate to their mission is a sign of the Society's deep desire to provide vocation animation for prophetic witness. With this in mind, the Secretary for Formation organised a meeting with the vocations animators of the Society from 27 March 2023 in Kigali to coor-



dinate the MVP's activities. This shows the interest in the MVP.

In our Province of East Africa, we organise annual meetings during which vocation animators from the different Sectors meet to share their experiences to always respond to the demands of this mission. We also have meetings between vocational animators, propaedeutic and first cycle formators and those responsible for formation in the Province. These meetings enable good collaboration and coordination between the different phases of vocation discernment. We also benefited from a formation session in Nairobi, organised by the Association of Vocation Animators

of Kenya. This meeting has equipped us to face the current challenges in this mission, particularly concerning LGBTQ people and families in difficulty.

In our Sector of Tanzania, there is good collaboration between the vocation animator and the confreres, who are generous in accompanying the aspirants in their parishes or when they have the opportunity to speak during meetings of the aspirants. At the end of the missionary camp and the discernment recollection, the vocation committee recommends the aspirants admitted to the propaedeutic. These recommendations are then submitted to the Sector Council for consider-



Justin Ramde and Desiré Kwizera at a vocational meeting with some aspirants at the Sengerema school



ation, with the intention of producing prophetic witnesses for our Missionary Society.

The MVP in our daily commitments

The parable of the sower in Mt 13:3-8, in which the sower generously sows his seed, serves as a reference and motivation for our activities as MVPs. Every vocation is a call from God, so for me, it's a question of having the courage and generosity to sow (witness to our missionary life) everywhere and let the Holy Spirit do his work. Meanwhile, we continue to witness the evolution of his actions in the lives of those who commit themselves to discover more about God's call. As part of this process, we travel almost everywhere in Tanzania, meeting young people in parishes, youth centres, schools and institutes, and at youth forums and sessions organised by the various dioceses. We also visit the families of our Tanzanian confreres to witness the family spirit in our Society.

We also accompany young people in their search for meaning in their vocation. We journey with them, as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24, 13-35), because sometimes they cannot recognise Christ's call in our new world. We do this through meetings and discernment camps, individual accompaniment, correspondence and communication, making use of the new means of communication.

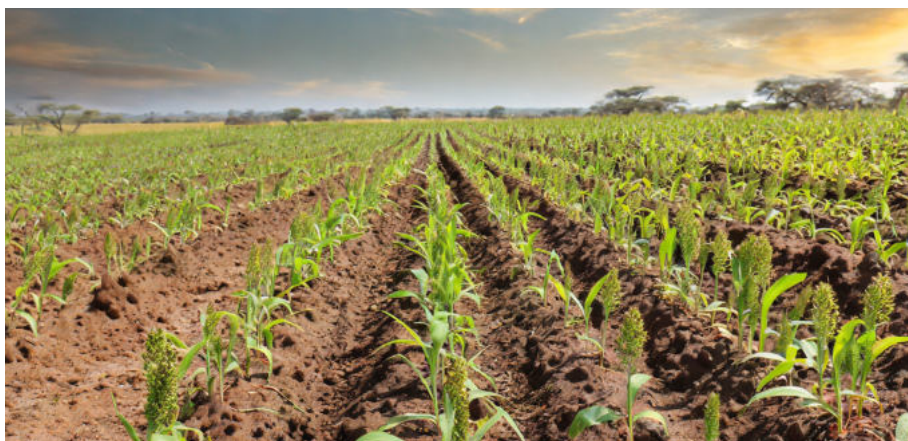


Justin Ramde



Missionary and Vocation Animation: A Seedbed for a Prophetic Missionary Life

Bamako - Mali



We cannot underestimate the vital role missionary and vocation animation plays in preparing our young men for missionary formation. Missionary and vocation animation is the foundation for a successful missionary life. And it is obvious that once the foundation is ruined, the whole building will not stand. The preparation to missionary life does not start during initial formation, but it actually starts from vocation animation and the creation of missionary awareness. This is because vocation and

missionary animation do not only aim at selecting young men to begin the missionary formation, but it also helps them understand what missionary life is all about, and the kind of commitment they are about to make. Hence, once the young men do not get necessary tools capable of helping them to understand the life they want to embrace, we would end up selecting career seekers and not missionaries who are ready to be sent out as messengers of the good news of Christ. In this short reflection, I



would like to share with the readers about vocation and missionary animation in Mali, and in the Province of PAO (francophone Province of West Africa). I will conclude my reflection by giving my views on what could possibly be done to develop this essential part of our apostolate which is missionary and vocation animation.

Missionary and vocation animation in Mali

It's strange to hear the remarks people make when we talk about vocation and missionary animation in Mali. For some people, Mali is a Muslim dominated country, with just a few Catholics, and so it makes no sense to talk of vocation animation. I was once sarcastically told by someone to do all my possible best to convince the chief imam of Bamako to become a missionary. These and other similar comments give us a clearer picture of what people think about Mali and her catholic faith in general. But those of us who have worked in Mali or have come in contact with her catholic faith, would certainly have a different story to tell. For us, Missionaries of Africa, the growing number of Malian confreres in the Society is a testimony

to the growing catholic faith and the great missionary work carried out by our confreres in this part of the world. That is to say, the church in Mali, which, in fact, is one of the oldest in West Africa, has grown to the extent that she is capable of sending out missionaries. Therefore, we can comfortably say vocation and missionary animation is not only important but a necessity in Mali.

We know that Mali and the sub region of West Africa in general are going through security turmoil. And this constitutes a stumbling block to effective missionary and vocation animation. Out of the eleven aspirants that we are journeying with, six are from zones of insecurity. The advantage is that most of them are studying in Bamako. It therefore makes it easy to get in touch with them. It is more difficult to visit their families and their home parishes. We however still do our best to remain in touch with them. In journeying with these young men, we see their missionary zeal, ready to work in environments with realities different from the one they are used to. For me, this is already a sign of a missionary vocation. What these young men need is spiritual ac-



companiment to be able to understand the actual meaning of their missionary call and to be able to respond with a generous heart.

Vocation and Missionary animation in PAO

My small experience as vocation and missionary animator in the province of PAO proved to me that it is quite a tedious and demanding work, especially when it comes to vocation animation. In the PAO, the vocation animator actually plays a double role: vocation animator and pre-phase formator. That is to say, the vocation animator in PAO does not only look for candidates, but he has also the tedious task of preparing them spiritually and intellectually

to begin their philosophical studies. Unlike other Provinces where there are pre-first cycles, in PAO, it is the vocation animator who performs the duty of pre-first cycle formator. That is why during the monthly meetings we have with the aspirants we are obliged to insert in our program things like French courses. This is because most of these young men have a very low standard in French and so they need French classes to be able to study in case they are admitted. A pre-first cycle in PAO is therefore a matter of urgency. Because it will help prepare aspirants spiritually and intellectually to subsequently begin philosophical studies. It will also reduce the tedious task of the vocation animator, who, in fact, is playing



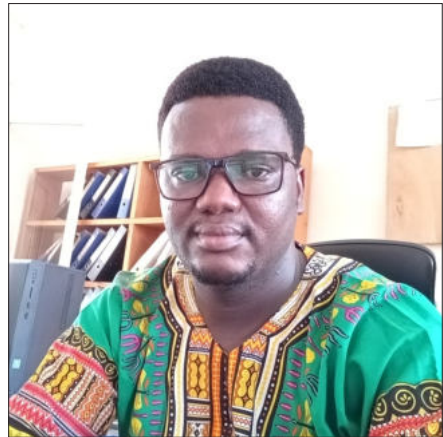


a role that he has not been sufficiently prepared for.

The point

To come to the point, I would say that missionary and vocation animation should be the responsibility of all confreres and not necessarily the confreres who have been appointed as animators. We all have the obligation to create missionary awareness in wherever milieu we find ourselves. Confreres who have been appointed to this task will need an appropriate preparation. I therefore agree with the 29th General Chapter of our Society that “Provincials are to ensure that vocation animators receive a formation appropriate to their mission”. I think we should not take it for granted that since we have all received eleven or ten years of formation, we are therefore sufficiently

prepared for any task. Spiritual accompaniment of these young men requires that the vocation animator be equipped with the appropriate formation to be able to carry out this task. If vocation animators are not well prepared for that mission, we will surely select young men who do not really know what they are looking for.



Edward Akanlu



Fostering a culture of Missionary and Vocation Animation in our communities

Philippines - Cebu



Young lay people help to set up a stand for the mission and vocation promotion campaign, Cebu, 2023

One of the things that my childhood interaction with traditional wisdom taught me in matters of gardening is that, if you want to be sure of the quality of vegetables that you produce, you must have

your own nursery. It will enable you to control the amount of water the seedlings receive, the kind of manure you feed them on and the light you expose them to. It is essential, for example, that your seedlings don't grow leggy before sinking corresponding roots and thickening their stems, because these factors determine their resistance and adaptation capacity. However, if you don't own a nursery, in order to produce quality vegetables, you have to combine two key aspects: selection of good seedlings and a double preparation – both of the selected seedlings and the garden that receives them.

Missionary and Vocation Animation (MVA) is not an end in itself. It only makes sense in relation to our entire formation program. As such, it is an essential element in producing prophetic witnesses for today's mission. Since we don't have our own nursery for producing



candidates according to the demands of our formation program, MVA is that stage of selecting resilient seedlings from the market and preparing them to be planted in a good garden. Good seedlings transplanted into a well prepared garden can only produce quality vegetables. As such, MVA focuses on offering a possibility of discernment to young men considering a missionary vocation. It is about giving correct information about our vocation, selecting good aspirants and preparing them for our formation program.

The 29th General Chapter echoes this in its recommendation that "...the selection of candidates be made following the objective criteria contained in the *Vademecum* for Initial Formation". In our setting, this is but the least of our preoccupations because we don't have our own nursery, and good nurseries for solid vocations to religious life are becoming rare. Our target groups have a whole new way of looking at the future and a whole new set of values. MVA in view of prophetic witness should embrace a more community-based personalized approach. This should allow a good identification of vocation animators who

will be able to identify vocations early, accompany them with the assistance of Basic Ecclesial Communities before the actual process of selection for initial formation. For this we need to seriously cultivate a culture of vocations in our communities and among the people, and secondly to offer expedient, fitting and complete formation to our vocation animators.

Vocational culture

Vocational culture is a coherent and shared set of ways of thinking, feeling, acting, relating and celebrating able to create the necessary atmosphere for people to discern and discover their Christian vocation. It is a culture that unifies, gives sense and leads to fulfillment. It has to do with priorities guiding our work, the style of community life we are living, the quality of our pastoral work in general, youth ministry and the preparation of our pastoral workers. For us, Missionaries of Africa, the perspective of this environment which encourages young men and women to discern on how to collaborate in the Church's mission must always be missionary, generous and prophetic.

To generate a vocational culture as a whole, the starting point is



rooted in the authenticity, intensity and passion with which we express our missionary identity. The quality of our community life and our ability to create life, the visibility of prayer life, fraternal communion and our core options, and the clarity of our missionary motivation, all this will produce a culture that imprints indelible good impressions of missionary life in the spirits of young people. It is with such a vocational culture that we will generate an organic and efficient MVA pastoral that will nurture and boost sound and well-balanced vocations.

The disciples of Jesus

In any vocation discernment process, human experience is central. The choice of a life will depend on the environment the person grows up in, the teachings they receive and what they actually see. This was true even for the disciples of Christ: they first came to experience him, they observed him and listened to him. They saw him touch a leper, speak words of forgiveness, challenge the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, invite the hemorrhaging woman to touch him, treat everyone equally, and many other striking things. This led them to ask questions and make a final allegiance to him.

For us to attract and nurture good and solid vocations, we need to listen to the call of Christ inviting us to a prophetic mission. We should simply start by responding "...today to the challenges of the contemporary world by going to the fractured zones, to the peripheries of society and of the Church, where others would not go (...) remain present in difficult pastoral commitments in and out of Africa, such as the apostolate with migrants, prisoners, street children, and the fight against



Paul Johnston promoting the missionary vocation, Cebu 2023



human trafficking.” Without any doubts “our intercultural life is a challenge and an inspiring example to an increasingly polarized world where tribalism, racism, religious fundamentalism and greed divide people. Through our closeness to people, we bear witness to the boundless love of a God who chose to become one of us. “ (Mission in 2022 Capitular Acts, p.21).

In his Encyclical on the permanent validity of the church’s mission, Pope St. John Paul II offered this reflection on MVA. “Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals, namely, informing and forming the

People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization (...) Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense.” (Redemptoris Missio, 83)

The success of our MVA rests on the impact we make on the communities that we minister to. Usually the best vocations are not those that we encounter during mass vocation campaigns in schools but mainly those that are presented to us by people who know us and



Come and see" meeting hosted by Lito Duguiles, Davao 2023



our vocation. Vocations are born in families and nurtured in communities. Solid vocations are those carried by informed families and Basic Ecclesial Communities. A good culture of vocations will lead us to informing and forming the laity to accompany us in our MVA activities both actively and passively and also in recruiting and preparing future missions.

Animators are not commercial models but satisfied customers.

The 29th General Chapter invited Provincials to ensure that missionary and vocation animators receive a formation appropriate to their mission. The question is: what formation is appropriate?

When choosing a vocation animator Provincials look for a spiritually, mentally and emotionally stable character who is outgoing and relational, one who attracts and can easily relate with people. While this is a worthy criterion, we should always remember that missionary and vocation animators are not commercial models, but satisfied customers. A model can sell a product simply for the sake of profit while a satisfied customer lives of the product and promotes it by his own life, proposes it to

others because of its worth. Over the years, history has taught us that customers are very efficient promoters of commercial products. Network marketing thrives on this principle. This is equally true with MVA.

During one of our campaigns in Camotes Island, there were some very talented and dancy sisters who were pulling masses of young girls, but most of these girls never entered the convent. The ones who attracted more consistent and sure candidates were the timid and deeply smiling hermetically veiled sisters. The quality of their contacts with the young girls, borne of deep inner satisfaction and high level of trust in their product, made a long lasting impact. Because it is important to have people who can easily bond with the youth as vocation animators, a more careful selection and preparation of animators is imperative.

MVA will yield good fruits when animators are happy and satisfied missionaries, and are able to make visible their missionary joy, passion for mission, satisfaction, love of their charism and trust in the future of their congregation. It is in view of assisting



animators at this level that the first part of their formation could be proposed. They should be given time for a more focused spiritual and human formation which can allow them to possess their vocation story and integrate their missionary experiences. This will enhance their ability to make their satisfaction contagious to future candidates, lay collaborators, benefactors and friends. All seasoned vocation animators know that the primary resources for this apostolate are within the person.

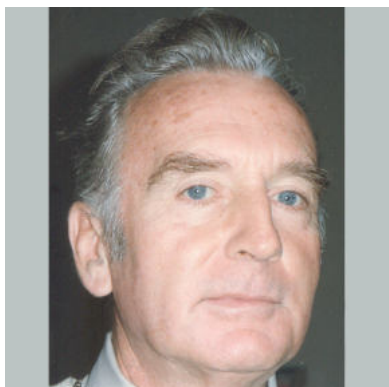
The second level of formation should focus on equipping the animators with knowledge and tools for actual animation, accompaniment and selection of candidates. The good will of a confrere alone is insufficient. If we want quality candidates for a prophetic mission, there is need for a certain degree of expertise. For that, professional and complete formation for animators in spiritual and human accompaniment, counselling, group dynamics, social media, interaction skills and other such domains can equip them with the necessary tools.



Rennie Chisha Kambole



Paul Brems 1928 – 2023



Born in:	Putte, Belgium on 11/01/1928
Sp. Year:	Varsenare, Belgium on 20/09/1950
Oath:	Eastview, Canada on 18/06/1954
Priesthood:	Eastview, Canada on 29/01/1955
Died at:	Evere, Belgium on 12/11/2023

Paul was born in Heist op den Berg on 11 January 1928 and was baptised in the Saint-Lambert church two days later. He was a member of a large family of 8 children, three boys and five girls. His father, Jozef Brems, was a major in the Belgian army and fought on the Yser during the First World War. He had received several medals and decorations for his conduct and command.

Paul attended the local primary school in Heist op den Berg for three years and continued in Mechelen for the remaining years. He studied at the Collège Saint-Rombaut in Mechelen for his secondary

education from 1942 to 1948. He obtained a degree in Greco-Latin humanities. Paul then went to Boechout, where he studied philosophy for two years. He entered the novitiate in Varsenare on 12 September 1950. and donned his gaudoura and burnous for the first time on 21 September 1950. He was appointed to Eastview in Canada at the end of his novitiate. He spent four years there, from 1952 to 1955. He was ordained a priest in Ottawa on 29 January 1955.

Uganda and Tanzania

In December 1955, he was appointed to Uganda and left for Bukalagi (Rubaga) to learn the language while serving as curate in



the parish. In January 1957, he was appointed to the major seminary in Katigondo. There, he was bursar and taught canon law, fundamental theology and pedagogy. Two years later, in January 1959, he was appointed teacher of the sixth year at the minor seminary in Bukalasa. He was also the spiritual director.

Two years later, in January 1961, he was asked to found a new parish, Katimba. For this purpose, he moved to Kyamaganda. Paul subsequently went on leave to Belgium on two occasions. Paul was expelled by the government from Uganda in December 1972. Not at all discouraged, he decided to learn Swahili in Belgium to return to Africa, to Tanzania. In October 1973 he arrived in the parish of Chato (diocese of Rulenge) in Tanzania .

In July 1974, he was authorised to return to Uganda. He returned to Kalungu as curate. In January 1977, he was asked to start a new parish in the diocese of Masaka, where he had worked for many years. He began building Lwamaggua. He was first parish priest, then became dean of the Kujjukizo deanery. Paul went on leave to Belgium in August 1978. When he returned in January 1979, he

continued to work in Lwamaggua until 1 May 1983. Following another leave in Belgium, he returned to the Kyamaganda parish until his leave in 1989.

Later, volunteers were invited from among the White Fathers in Uganda to go on mission in the Teso region in north-eastern Uganda. Until then, Paul had always lived in the diocese of Masaka, where he knew the language. However, he wanted to try something new. In Teso, he worked with a Nilotic people who used a completely different Nilotic language. He managed to speak it well. He worked in the Usuk, Acumet and Katakwi parishes from October 1989 to 2013. The region regularly experienced rebellions. Paul sometimes lived there alone. He said he didn't mind at all. His numerous hobbies kept him busy, including updating his German. Paul also looked after animals wherever he went; he loved it. Whenever he moved to another parish to take up a new appointment, he left his cows behind and started again in his new parish.

Paul was well-known everywhere for his door-to-door visits. During his home visits in the Teso area, he noticed many couples



never married in church. He encouraged them that the parish would provide the wedding meal. Many couples, around 500, were married on this occasion.

In Belgium

Paul felt ill at one point; he went for a check-up and was told that it would be best to return to Belgium for proper treatment. In October 2013, he was operated on and treated in Brussels. His rehabilitation went very well. The following year, he was appointed to the Saint Joseph care centre in Evere. It was there that Paul spent the last years of his life.

He wrote and worked a lot on his computer. Paul would walk

around the block of houses where he lived for three-quarters of an hour daily at a fixed time in the morning and afternoon. He would also take a walk on the grounds of the house when the weather was fine. Paul loved nature.

Paul's death came as a surprise to everyone—just a slight fall in his bedroom with far-reaching consequences.

Paul was someone who truly loved Africans. He left us on the night of 11 to 12 November 2023. Paul really felt happy in Africa, especially among the Ugandans. May he now intercede for them with Our Father!

Yvo Wellens



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