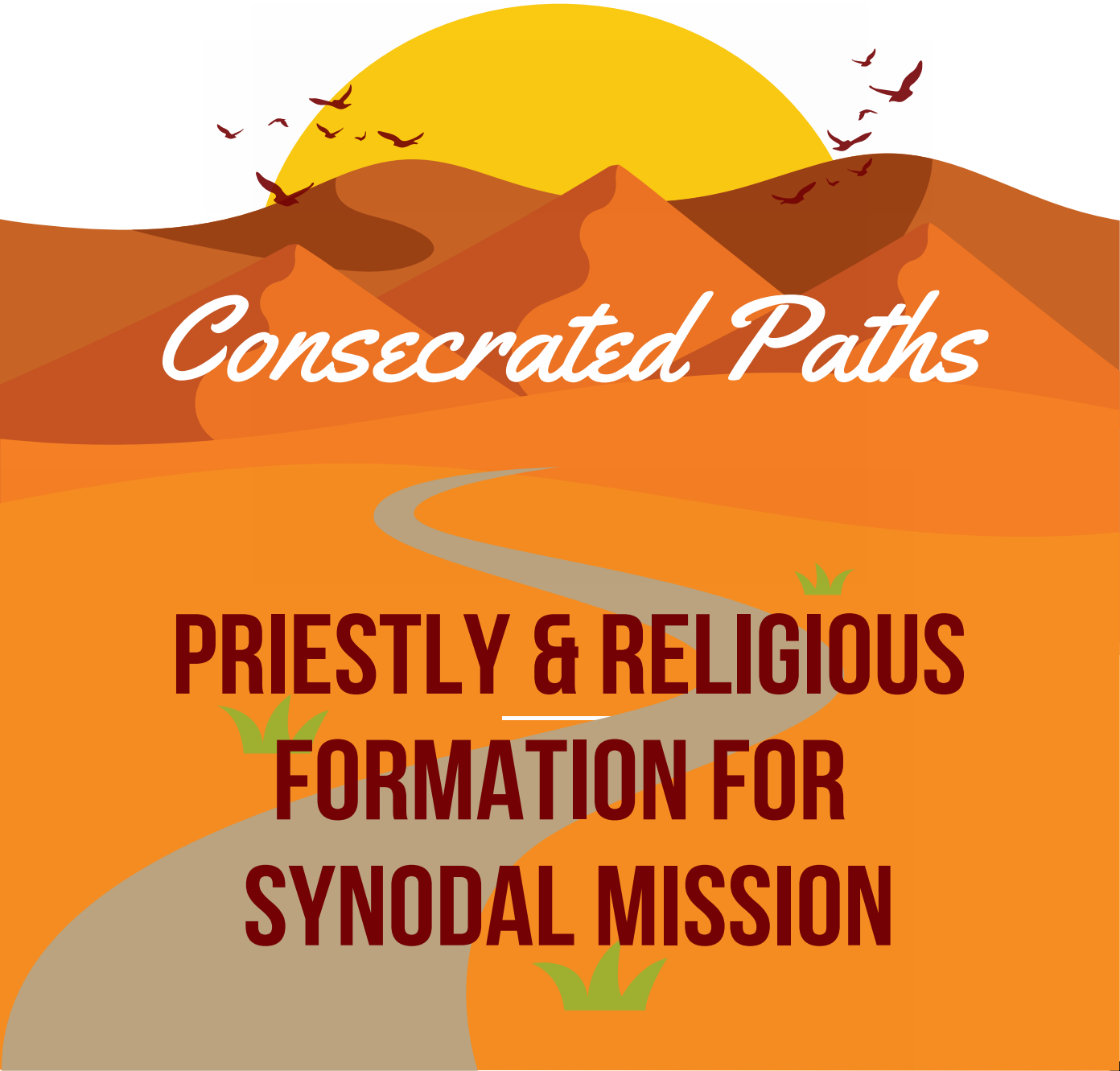


PROCLAIM

A Magazine for Missionary Animation

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Consecrated Paths

**PRIESTLY & RELIGIOUS
FORMATION FOR
SYNODAL MISSION**

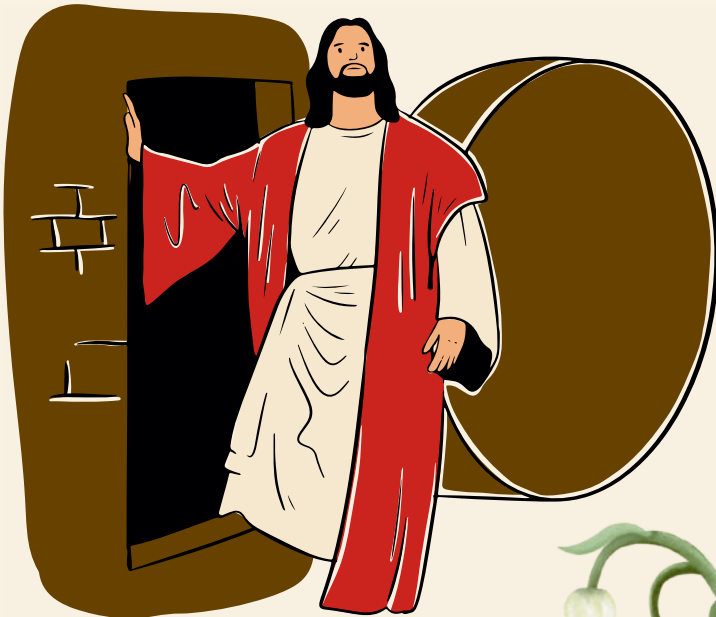
HAPPY Easter



*The stone is rolled, the tomb stands bare,
Christ is risen, hope fills the air.
From death to life, He leads the way,
Our light, our joy, this Easter Day.*

with Easter Wishes and Prayers,

+ Most Rev. Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
Director, PMO, India
Bishop of Vellore





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Nurturing vocations, shaping the future



Formation lies at the core of the Church's mission, shaping not only individuals but entire communities, cultures, and the future of evangelization itself. This special issue highlights the invaluable contributions of the Pontifical Society of Saint Peter the Apostle (POSPA) in nurturing vocations and forming dedicated

clergy and religious across India.

Established from a profound missionary zeal, POSPA tirelessly supports the holistic formation of priests, seminarians, and religious men and women. Its mission deeply resonates in India's vibrant faith communities, eagerly awaiting shepherds spiritually nourished, intellectually enriched, and pastorally equipped.

India's rich diversity—cultural, linguistic, and spiritual—brings unique opportunities and distinct challenges to formation. POSPA addresses these challenges effectively, ensuring seminaries and religious formation houses receive essential resources, empowering leaders to respond with wisdom, compassion, and cultural sensitivity.

In this issue, we acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude all who sustain POSPA supporting it through prayer, generous contributions and being available to offer their services. Their invaluable support ensures that formation remains strong, relevant, and responsive to contemporary pastoral realities. As we journey ahead, let us reaffirm our commitment to POSPA's vision: cultivating shepherds whose hearts beat in harmony with Christ's own—ready to guide, serve, and transform our world through the Gospel.

POSPA significantly supports seminarians and religious worldwide, providing critical resources, scholarships, and spiritual guidance. Its impact resonates throughout seminaries and religious houses, nurturing vocations destined to lead and inspire communities in our rapidly evolving world.

In an increasingly complex global landscape, POSPA's role becomes ever more critical. The organization recognizes that vocational formation must adapt to emerging challenges, integrating modern pastoral approaches with timeless spiritual

principles. By bridging traditional wisdom and contemporary insights, POSPA ensures that emerging religious leaders are not just prepared for today's challenges, but are visionary architects of tomorrow's ecclesial landscape.

Moreover, POSPA's commitment extends beyond immediate formation needs. The organization actively cultivates a deeper understanding of vocational discernment, recognizing it as a profound spiritual journey that requires ongoing nurturing, support, and spiritual accompaniment. By fostering environments of genuine spiritual mentorship, POSPA helps individuals develop a profound and transformative relationship with their divine calling.

This edition examines the current realities faced by vocations — challenges such as secularism, shifting societal values, and personal uncertainties. Yet, within these struggles lie profound opportunities for authentic discernment and renewed commitment. POSPA continues addressing these complexities by fortifying the educational and spiritual foundations of those discerning God's call.

You will discover powerful testimonies of priests and religious whose courageous 'yes' to God has transformed countless lives. Their stories remind us that behind every vocation is a profound narrative of faith, courage, and grace-filled perseverance, inspired by POSPA's dedicated efforts.

Through scholarships and comprehensive formation programs, POSPA ensures priests and religious are spiritually mature, academically capable, and pastorally responsive, ready to serve the global Church's diverse needs.

From initial discernment through holistic seminary training to lifelong dedication, each stage embodies a sacred pilgrimage — a journey POSPA faithfully and lovingly accompanies.

As you read this special issue, may you be inspired to pray, support, and nurture vocations. The Church's future relies upon our collective commitment to journey alongside those called by God. Through POSPA's unwavering mission, let us continue forming shepherds whose hearts reflect Christ's very heart.

Rt Rev Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu

Bishop of Vellore
Director, PMO (India)

Call of Moses, a paradigm for vocation to mission

Rev Fr Dr Reymond Joseph*

Introduction

Worldwide (the exception is Africa) one sees the downward trend of vocations to religious life and priesthood. Gone are the days when there was enthusiasm and interest for priestly and religious vocation among the young people in the Catholic Christian families all over the world. Vocation cannot be produced. One cannot recruit men and women for religious life and priesthood. Vocation cannot be compared with other professions which are promoted by publicity and strategy. Vocation is God's gratuitous gift and persons respond to this call freely and consciously. The calling that comes from God must find its way into the hearts of young men and women.

Pope Francis on vocations

Very often Pope Francis speaks on vocations. In his message for the 51st World Day of Prayer for Vocations-2014 Pope Francis said, "No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people. Did not Jesus say: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another?'" (Jn 13:35). In his message for 57th World Day of Vocations-2020 Pope Francis said, "Every vocation is born of that gaze of love with which the Lord came to meet us, perhaps even at a time when our boat was being battered by the storm."

Vocation is a call from God

Vocation to priesthood and religious life is more than an ordinary call. It is a call from God. One normally finds comfort in the assurance that



God doesn't call the qualified, but rather he qualifies the called. This powerful message can be found in 1 Cor 1:27, which states, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Anyone who experiences God's call knows very well that the process is not that simple.

Most people think of vocation

as what they are called to do in life. It is not the same as one's career or profession. A career or a profession is something that one has to support himself/herself and to contribute in a little way for the betterment of the society. One does not need to believe in God in order to choose a career or a profession. A person can pick, choose and switch profession freely depending on his or her preferences, strengths or circumstances. A profession or a career always has a horizontal dimension. Vocation has a vertical dimension in one's life, which is God. Vocation is not something that one can switch like a profession or a career. It is no longer "what does a person prefer?" but rather "What does God want a person to be?"

Vocation is for Mission

Each vocation is a mission to love and to serve God and the humanity. Mission is a divine activity of sending intermediaries, whether supernatural or human, to speak or do God's will so that his purposes for the redemption of the humanity and the universe are fulfilled. Vocation for mission certainly involves in building a better society, renewing the universal Church, guiding and helping to form spirit-filled families, seeking tirelessly to find





fulfilment in one's own life and helping people who are confronted with struggles and challenges. The biblical concept for mission is expressed by the use of verbs meaning "to send". The Hebrew verb for sending is *salah* and the Greek verb is *apostello*. These verbs emphasize the authoritative commissioning involved between God and the one who is sent by God. The biblical concept of "mission" comprehends the authority of the one who sends, the readiness and acceptance of the one who is sent, the task to be accomplished, the power to accomplish the task, and the purpose for which the mission is initiated. This is very well clarified in the mission statement of Jesus which he delivered before he was taken up to heaven: "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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" - Mt 28:19-20.

Key concepts in God's call for Mission

Discernment and commitment are important concepts in a person's call or vocation for mission. Without discernment and commitment, the call to priesthood or religious life will be a vacuum. These concepts give meaning and purpose for one's call to priesthood and religious life.

i) Discernment

Every day each of us make millions of decisions. But all decisions are not the same. Most of our decisions have little or no significant

consequence on our lives, but a few decisions, some big and some small, are game-changers with lasting impact. Making decisions around daily tasks and activities is not hard for us. Yet some decisions, especially decisions related to personal values and how faith plays out in everyday life, are much harder to make. These decisions are complex, their consequences are greater and they rarely have a "right" answer. The term many use for such decision-making is *discernment*. Discernment is a process for making decisions that draws on wisdom and requires opening up one's self to outside sources. Outside sources can be friends, experts, a community, or literature. It includes also spiritual practices, spiritual guide, sacred texts, and God. The process of discerning requires us to slow down, reflect on our experience, and listen to external voices. It means setting aside our ideas, wants, and needs, even for a few minutes, so we can entertain new insights and see things from different perspectives. Discernment processes open us up and allow for the possibility of being changed, gaining a deeper understanding, and discovering different pathways for living. Such kind of discernment is an important aspect in one's choice of vocation to priesthood or religious life.



ii) Commitment with dedication

Vocation is a divine call to a specific way of life, and commitment is the free choice to live according to that call, whether it is priesthood,

religious life, marriage, or single life, all of which are ways to serve God and others. Vocation comes from God's free choice of certain individuals; commitment comes from one's free choice to cooperate with the graces received. "Someone deciding to make a commitment in life" simply means that he or she is falling in love with certain way of life. It often involves leaving behind a secular life to answer a divine call. There is no commitment possible without dedication. Dedication is a core characteristic for becoming priest and religious,

encompassing a commitment to serving God, the church and others at large, marked by celibacy, obedience, and a simple lifestyle, all aimed at fostering spiritual growth and serving the faithful. Men and women chosen for priestly and religious vocation are expected to dedicate themselves to their faith and their role in serving others. In priestly or religious life, commitment manifests as a lifelong dedication to God, the Church, and the service of others.

Moses' vocation for Mission (Ex, Chs 3-4)

The Israelites consider Moses to be a great leader. He is rated the greatest among the prophets of Israel (Deut 18:18). But his journey to become a great leader and a prophet was not without struggle. He had to pay heavy price in the process of his discernment and conviction to choose the mission of delivering the people of Israel from the Egyptian captivity. He had to leave the pharaonic palace in Egypt. He had to bear the killer tag on his forehead. He had to face the betrayal of his own people. He had to wander in the wilderness of Sinai and Median for forty years. His decision to go back to Egypt and to commit himself to work for the liberation of his own people could materialise only after his encounter with Yahweh in the burning bush. Moses answered God's call from the bush with the words "Here I am". The process of discernment for Moses to take up the mission proposed by God Yahweh was a difficult one.



Believe it or not, before he said the final 'Yes' for the vocation to liberate the people of Israel from the Egyptian bondage, he rejected the offer of Yahweh five times.

Five times Moses rejected the call of God

God Yahweh called Moses for the first time and immediately Moses questioned God saying, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?*" (Ex 3:11). Probably Moses was totally lost. He was not aware of his power and strength.

He was probably searching for his own identity. That is why comes the reply of Moses in the form of a question "*who am I?*"

The Second time when God called Moses, he again questioned God saying, "*Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?*" (Ex 3:13). This question of Moses reveals to us that he was not only unaware of the knowledge of God but also disinterested to have anything to do with him. For him it is alright to say that God is non-existent. That is why he replies God with the question "*What is his name?*".

God did not stop with that. He called Moses for the third time and told him that he had to go to Egypt and prepare the people of Israel to get out of Egypt. But Moses answered and said, "*But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'*" (Ex 4:1). Now comes the cat out of the bag. The main reason for Moses' rejection was that his own people would not believe him. Of course, he carries the killer tag. Even after forty years he is gripped with fear of Pharaoh. His belief in Yahweh was shaky. God did not want to dismiss this excuse. But he

...Continued on Page 9



Mission of Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle

Rev Fr Dr Merlin Rength Ambrose*

Introduction

“The Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (*Ad Gentes*, 2). The message outlined is essential to the life of the Church. It emphasises the significance of Baptism, which establishes a profound communion with Christ and fosters connections among all baptised individuals. This understanding ignites a desire within us to engage in the Church's mission, recognising that it is an integral work of God within human history. Mission is not merely a tool; instead, it is a transformative event that encourages all to embrace and promote the Gospel. Consequently, the missionary mandate is expressed through every baptised individual. To support this mission, the Church has established four key Mission Societies: i) Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith, ii) Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood, iii) Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle, and iv) Pontifical Missionary Union.

The history of these Mission Societies shows how support for missions comes from the people of God and how God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1: 27-29). The Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle (POSPA), one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies established by the Catholic Church, was founded in 1889 to support the training of clergy and religious in mission countries, particularly indigenous clergy. It follows the establishment of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1822



and the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood in 1843, with the Pontifical Missionary Union founded in 1916.

Origin of the POSPA

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the Holy See consistently emphasised the critical importance of establishing a local clergy among indigenous populations. Missionaries operating in diverse regions believed wholeheartedly that their efforts would be incomplete without the creation of local clergy. However, the realisation of this vision frequently encountered numerous obstacles and challenges. Chief among these was the missionaries' inability to proceed due to inadequate resources for establishing seminaries and training seminarians. To address this issue, the missionaries reached out with heartfelt appeals to their benefactors in Europe.

Everything began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Msgr Jules-Alphonse Cousin was a member of the Foreign Missions of Paris. He became the Apostolic Vicar of Southern Japan in 1855 and then the Bishop of Nagasaki in 1891. He believed it was important to have Japanese priests for the growth of the local Church. However, he faced a lack of resources. Because of this, he had to sadly send young people who showed signs of being good priests back home. Addressed by a benefactress, he turned to Stephanie Bigard and her daughter Jeanne Bigard (the Bigard ladies) through a letter written on 1 June 1889. This letter marked the beginning of the Society of St Peter the Apostle. Msgr. Jules-Alphonse Cousin, then the Bishop of Nagasaki, sought financial assistance to



sustain his seminary. The Bigard Ladies contacted their friends and collected funds for the Bishop in Japan. In 1889, a society was established in Cain, France, to raise funds for the training of local clergy, named in honor of St Peter. The Bigards traveled extensively throughout France to promote the society's work. In 1922, the Society received papal patronage from Pope Pius XI. Its primary focus remains on Africa and Asia. Hence, the story unfolded in the second half of the 19th century, a time when many devoted missionary institutes began to emerge, rekindling the spirit of *missio ad gentes*. This period was marked by a sincere commitment to reach out and connect with those in need, highlighting a growing compassion for people across cultures and regions.

Mission of POSPA

Young churches often represent the vibrant and dynamic growth of the Church. While they possess a strong faith foundation, they frequently lack the material resources necessary to adequately train individuals who aspire to become priests and religious leaders within their communities. The Society focuses on the formation of young men and women in their own cultural contexts, equipping them to serve as religious sisters, brothers, or priests dedicated to their local populations. Additionally, the Society supports the training and development of catechists, enabling them to effectively educate and mentor other catechists within their countries.

The Society of St Peter the Apostle is dedicated to fostering awareness within Christian communities regarding the imperative development of local clergy and the enhancement of consecrated life in nascent missionary Churches. The Society engages in

Jeanne Bigard

—
**FOUNDER OF THE
PONTIFICAL SOCIETY OF
ST. PETER THE APOSTLE**



the animation and coordination of missionary collaboration across various local Churches, mobilizing resources through prayer, sacrifices,

and alms to facilitate the formation of future priests and religious men and women from younger Churches, alongside the essential training of their formators. Furthermore, it undertakes the collection and distribution of financial aid aimed at supporting seminaries and novitiates, working in conjunction with local Christian communities and under the stewardship of their pastors.

The economic collaboration facilitated by the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle encompasses Ordinary Subsidies directed towards the maintenance of seminarians and novices, as well as Extraordinary Subsidies aimed at the construction of new seminaries and the rehabilitation and self-financing initiatives for existing ones. Additionally, the



"Holy Mass Intentions" contribute to supporting formators, alongside Scholarships designated for future formators. The ultimate objective of POSPA, in alignment with that of all the other Pontifical Societies, is to spread the Gospel and advance the Kingdom of God. The Pontifical

Society of St Peter the Apostle has also extended its assistance to seminaries in India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Korea, and China. Currently, there are over 30,000 seminarians benefiting from support in approximately 400 major seminaries, along with around 10,000 men and women religious novices receiving financial aid.

From a structural point of view, the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle is both universal and local. It is coordinated at a universal level by the international secretariat under a single President and entrusted to the Dicastery for the Evangelization. The local

dimension of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) is manifested in approximately 120 national directions, which in turn support the work of the diocesan person in charge. Canon 791 of the Code of Canon Law provides that in each diocese “a priest should be appointed to effectively promote initiatives in favor of the missions, especially the Pontifical Mission Societies”.

Nurturing local clergy: Vocations in the Mission Ad Gentes

In mission territories, it can be challenging to allocate time and resources for vocation ministry. This is often because missionaries' primary focus is on more urgent areas of evangelisation. Nonetheless, recognising, supporting, and nurturing the vocations of young people is also a key pastoral priority within our context.

The Second Vatican Council, in its Document *Ad Gentes*, tells us: “The Church gives thanks, with great joy, for the inestimable mercy of the priestly vocation that God has granted to so many young people among the peoples recently converted to Christ. For the Church deepens its firmest roots in each human group, when the various communities of the faithful have among their members their own ministers of salvation in the Order of Bishops, of priests and deacons, who serve their brothers, of Good luck that the new Churches achieve, step by step with their clergy, the diocesan structure” (*Ad Gentes* 16).

These words prompt us to reflect, particularly those involved in mission territories. A Church that aspires to grow and mature in faith must cultivate its own priests rather than relying on the presence of priests or missionaries from other Churches. It is essential to train seminarians in a personalised environment



where the communal aspect is emphasised, fostering a close relationship with the missionary Church to which they belong. The setting in which seminarians pursue their ecclesiastical studies should actively promote the missionary dimension. Therefore, it is crucial to

support young individuals who wish to serve the Missionary Church with generosity and to embrace the role of priests, taking on the challenge of extending the mission beyond our own borders, as outlined in Canons 256 and 257 of the Code of Canon Law.

Engaging with POSPA: A baptized Christian's duty

The Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle collaborates in the growth of the young churches through financial support for building new seminaries and formation programs for the new local priests, religious and sisters. We, the faithful, also need to become missionaries without leaving our parish. We must also ensure that the missions are part of your parish life by encouraging parishioners to pray for the missions. St John Paul II said, “Some people give to the missions by going, others go to the missions by giving. Without both, there are no missions.”

Let us pray fervently for missionary priestly vocations, in accordance with Jesus' command: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest” (Mt 9:38). We should establish a spiritual network of friendship, interest, and shared apostolic life through letters, visits, and various forms of contact among the Church's educational and formation centers.

Moreover, let us engage with the Society to provide financial support for the expansion of seminaries and houses of religious formation in mission territories. We are



encouraged to actively and meaningfully observe Vocations Sunday through prayer, spiritual activities, and special offerings for seminaries. By collaborating with the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle, we can offer scholarships to individual seminarians and address the material and educational needs in mission lands. Let us also commit to adopting candidates for the priesthood through both personal and group contributions, supporting them on their journey toward becoming priests. On an organisational level, we should undertake initiatives to build or maintain new seminaries in mission territories.

Conclusion

The main objectives of the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle include promoting both local and missionary vocations within the Church. It calls on all the faithful to cooperate both financially and spiritually in the formation

of candidates for the priesthood and religious life in developing regions. Additionally, it seeks to foster a missionary spirit among the community. It is essential that these goals are achieved with the collaboration of every baptised individual. No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people. "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. When you see a priest, think of our Lord Jesus Christ", says St John Mary Vianney. Consequently, all actions taken to designate an individual as a priest represent a sincere endeavor to align with the principles and values exemplified by Christ.

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Continued from Page 5: Call of Moses, a paradigm for vocation to mission

promised to equip Moses to overcome such fear.

In spite of the encouragement given by Yahweh Moses rejected the call of God for the fourth time by saying, "*O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*" (Ex 4:10). Moses himself knew that he was telling a deliberate lie. There are plenty of biblical evidences to prove that Moses was a powerful speaker. In Acts 7:22, for example, we read that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. Such kind of outright rejection from the part of Moses only revealed the struggle that he was undergoing before discerning for a mission.

The fifth denial is the climax part of his call. When God Yahweh once again appealed him to take up the mission, he said, "*O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.*" (Ex 4:13). It was really too much from the part of Moses. He not only said that he was not qualified to take up the mission, but also suggested to send someone else. Moses, a man with the abilities, felt that he lacked the zeal for mission.

Conclusion

This finally brought the curtain down to the struggles of Moses in his discernment for God's call to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites for a great Exodus. God finally responded to all of his excuses in righteous anger. When the aged shepherd finished rehearsing his excuses, he showed amazing single-mindedness. He was slow and cautious to accept the call and the appointed work. But once Moses discerned to say the final "Yes", he held fast to it faithfully until completed his mission. He fulfilled his mission faithfully and lived up to the magnificent image. There was no turning back. The long process of discernment helped him to take up the mission with sheer dedication. He was totally committed to his mission in the next forty years. There after nothing could hinder his mission. Such kind of discernment and commitment is expected of every one who God calls for priesthood and religious life.

*** The writer, a priest of the Diocese of Sivagangai, is a professor of Scripture, Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, Chennai. ♦**

Importance of Mission and promotion of vocations

Rev Fr Dr Antony Lawrence*

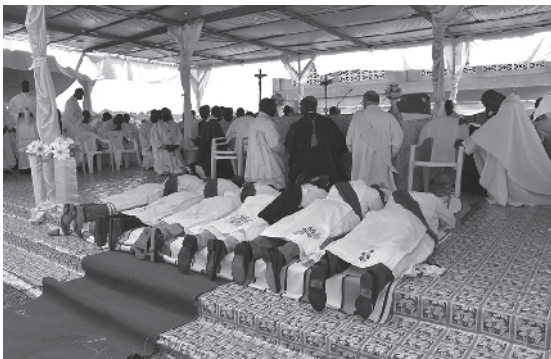
Paul is so forthright to the Roman Christians: "For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10: 13-17). The above quote speaks crystal clear about the absolute necessity of the evangelizers and their



rising religious fundamentalism and ever-increasing poverty with undiminished vigour, the widely prevalent caste and gender disparities, fast-spreading nihilism slowly even in many parts of Asian countries --- living as if God does not exist etc --- the building of God's reign should be the topmost priority of the Church's mission. We need

selfless and committed ministers of the Gospel today more than ever. Paul's quote at the outset explains the indispensable need for the ministerial priesthood of the specially called apart from the mission of the baptized Christians, which is no less important, who share in the common priesthood.

We need to gratefully acknowledge the significant role played by the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle in assisting the Church in India to continue this mission with necessary spiritual and economic support. Its assistance in promoting vocations and extending spiritual and economic support towards accomplishing this objective in the past can hardly be underestimated. The constant assistance of people of goodwill, who proudly continue to be part of the society and the readers of the esteemed magazine *Proclaim* coming from different walks of life, have indeed made contributions incalculably, by way of offering financial aid, praying for and promoting vocations for priestly and religious life etc.



evangelising mission for the world.

As we all know, Mission is God's (*Missio Dei*). But the Church is called to participate in God's mission. It is mission which defines her very existence. But for mission, the Church has no reason to exist. But how can the Church in India continue this God-given mission today? Today the meaning of evangelization has vastly changed. It can no longer be conceived in terms of adding more numbers to the Church. We, well-informed, realise that, in the contexts of

The challenges faced by the Church in our times only go to affirm that the need for continuing this service to God's reign with even more missionary enthusiasm and zeal must be reinforced today. In the contexts of insurmountable challenges faced by our country today, the Church in India needs many soldiers of Christ in the footsteps of St Mother Teresa, St Devasagayam and Father Stan Swamy SJ, who were the embodiment of God's love for the poor,

witnesses of faith they received even at the cost of their lives, liberators from injustice and oppression, fighters for a more just and human life and seekers of the reign of God and his justice. We need more such committed seekers after a new world according to God's will, fighters for peace and justice, bringers of hope to all victims.

Hence, the same noblest work needs to be intensified with greater vigour and zeal. In short, heightened consciousness for the same is the need of the hour. Concretely speaking, we could put in our invaluable share - an imperative for every baptized, towards continuing the Church's evangelising mission - in two ways, as discussed earlier: 1. Through our spiritual support, which includes instilling in our sons and daughters and relations and friends thirst and zeal and even more importantly accompanying with them and helping them discern God's call to become chosen instruments in His hands to preach His word to the groaning world of ours through our witnessing lives and 2. offering our financial support to the Pontifical Society of St Peter the Apostle.

The lack of witness can be one of the strong reasons for declining of vocations today. In the first place, Christian parents, through their loving communion, can bear witness to their children and the world outside. I am reminded of the words of Teresa of Child Jesus: "Our parents appeared to us as 'saints,' even as they were living on this earth." The seeds of vocations must be sown in the young hearts already in their family by their parents and grandparents, as they are growing in worldly wisdom and knowledge. The elders in the family must be

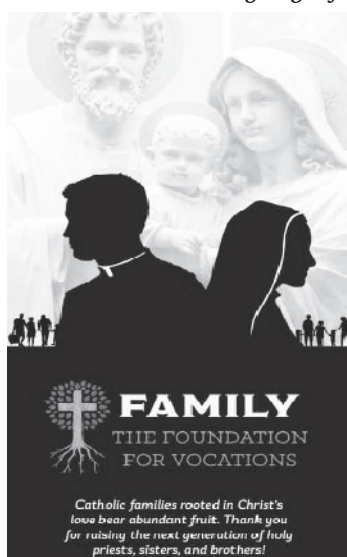


capable of inspiring and facilitating a conducive environment and ambience for the young children to embrace the celibate life. Family is the ideal place where an encounter with God can take place. But only when there exists a perfect communion in a family, can it become a place of encounter and above all an ideal recipient of the living water. A broken communion or a broken family is far from realising this: The Holy Bible

bears witness to this truth: Jesus tells the Samaritan women, "Go, call your husband and come back". (Jn 4: 16). In 1 Pet 3: 7, we see Peter exhorting husbands and wives to live in communion with their marital partners "so that nothing may hinder your prayers".

The Second Vatican Council Document on Pastoral Constitution of the Church puts it in clearer terms:

"Let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising up to life again." (GS 52)



Secondly, Paul, whose missionary strategy and tactics would differ from those of His Master and Lord whom he would follow with creative fidelity, sets an example for us in this regard. While Jesus would not rely on monetary

help from the people, Paul would go for collections to continue his mission 91 Cor 16: 1-

...Continued on Page 13

Walking with the called

Role of families and communities in fostering vocation

Rev Fr K Alexander*

We have been witnessing in recent years that there is a decline in priestly and religious vocation. There are many factors contributing to the decline. One of the factors could be said to be postmodernism. True, it has significantly influenced philosophy, culture, politics, science even religion, etc. Yet, honestly, the postmodern thinking, with all its positives, has also contributed negatively to the decline of the vocations to priestly and religious life. Another factor could be, that there is a lack of accompaniment for the young people in families and society. They go astray due to many challenging struggles in their everyday life. They are not properly motivated towards a purposeful life. Therefore, the whole Christian community must begin to realise its responsibility for the greatest task of discerning the religious vocation in their young generations by walking along with them in their daily life. This small article tries to explore the role of families and communities in fostering religious vocations.

Vocation, a gift of God

Vocation is born of the initiative of God; *it is a gift of the Love of God!* He is the One who takes the “first step”, and not because he has found something good in us, but because of the presence of his love “poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). Thus, the source of every perfect gift is God who is Love, that is what is affirmed, “Whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). This vocation is rooted in baptism. Even though every baptized Christian shares in the common priesthood of Jesus, some are specially called among the people of God to participate in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus. We recall the celebrated words of St



Augustine, “For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian.” And therefore, the vocation is purely a free gift of God. It should be discerned in the life of everyone.

Family, a house of formation

The family plays a crucial role in the formation of a priest, laying the foundation for a person’s character, moral upbringing, and eventual discernment of a priestly vocation. In a special way, parents have a unique role in initiating their children into the faith of their own. The faith that they transfer to their children is the faith that they received from their own parents. The candidate receives a genuine human relationship, mutual sharing, understanding of each other, accompaniment etc., from the family. And at the same time, prayer life both personal and community, reading and reflecting the Word of God, and praying the rosary together strengthen the life of the person who undergoes formation. If a person experiences the abovementioned formation properly in the family, he could reflect it in his ministerial life later in the Church. The families should follow the model of the Holy Family of Nazareth that nourished Jesus to grow in wisdom and understanding.

Parish community, A community of life-sharing

It is the duty and responsibility of the parish community to walk with the called. In his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations in 2012, with the



theme “Vocations, the Gift of the Love of God” Pope Benedict XVI states that the Christian community itself becomes a manifestation of the Love of God in which every calling is contained. Christian families whose love is an expression of the love of Christ who gave himself for his Church (cf. Eph 5:32). Within the

family, “a community of life and love” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48), young people can have a wonderful experience of this self-giving love. The community can also be “the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God.” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 53)



Our Parish Community

A family for all

everyone the need for ‘missionary discipleship.’ The formation houses should draw inspiration from the Pope while preparing the candidate for the priestly and religious life.

Formation House, *a place to discern*

The candidate who received the vocation as a gift of God should be discerned in the formation houses. The houses of formation play a crucial role in the life of candidate who would like to serve the Lord. Pope John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 60, says that the various members of the seminary community, gathered by the Spirit into a single brotherhood, cooperate, each according to his own gift, in the growth of all in faith and charity so that they may prepare suitably for the priesthood and so prolong in the Church and in history the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. Pope Francis also impressed upon



To conclude, the journey of fostering religious vocations is a shared responsibility of families, parish communities, and formation houses. While vocation is ultimately a divine gift, it flourishes through the nurturing environment of faith-filled families, supportive communities, and well-structured formation programs. In an era marked by postmodern challenges, the Christian community must remain committed to accompanying young people in their vocational discernment. By fostering a culture of prayer, love, and self-giving, we can create a fertile ground for new vocations, ensuring that the Church continues to be enriched with dedicated priests and consecrated individuals who serve as living witnesses of God’s love.

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Continued from Page 11 : Importance of Mission and promotion of vocations

4; 2 Cor 8: 1-9 and Rom 15: 25-32). The change of circumstances would partly explain the difference in their missionary strategies and tactics. So, it is true that the Church must be poor after the example of her Master. Jesus’ community was a community of the poor, the marginalized and the outcastes. And we need to rely totally on divine providence. Such is the community Jesus wanted! And, yet, to continue the evangelising mission of the Church in today’s world, one needs the economic support of generous Christians, which will show to the world “the genuineness of their love” (2 Cor 8: 8), without which the evangelization of the Church

could seriously be hampered. Such early Church example is worth emulating by today’s Christians of goodwill and generosity. They will, then, receive blessings manifold already in this world. Their assistance offered generously towards achieving this mission of the Church itself is a blessing to them! May God bless us and multiply labourers for his vineyard! May His Reign be established on this earth! May New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21: 1) begin to blossom through the timely and noble service of all of us!!!

*** The writer is President of the St Peter’s Pontifical Institute, Bangalore. ♦**

Nurturing vocations in a changing world

Rev Fr Dr J Anthony*

I still vividly recall attending a vocation camp in the 1990's to enter into the Apostolic School that nurtured numerous priestly and religious vocations. A question consistently posed to participants was: "Why do you want to become a priest?". With the innocence of the teenager, and despite lacking societal awareness, our responses were straightforward: "to serve the Poor," "to be a simple pastor," "to emulate my parish priest," "to celebrate mass," or even "to drive a motorbike," or "to wear a white cassock" etc. Our genuine enthusiasm and interest nurtured the vocation. The simplicity of our early adolescence, unencumbered by modern gadgets, allowed us to adhere to daily routine timetables with fewer distractions. It has contributed to the persistence in our vocations. There was quiet, encouraging interest in becoming priests or religious, with formation houses full and a notably low dropout rate from seminaries and formation houses.

Sadly, times have changed. Many factors have contributed to the dwindling number of vocations in the present time. The prevalence of nuclear families, doubts about the credibility of priests and religious members, less attraction to becoming a priest or religious, economic independence, scandals, challenges in the community life, hardships in public life, excessive use of mass media, and smartphone addictions, have a significant negative impact on the life of young people, making it more difficult for them to consider and nurture a vocation to serve the Church as priests and religious. Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit* (25 March

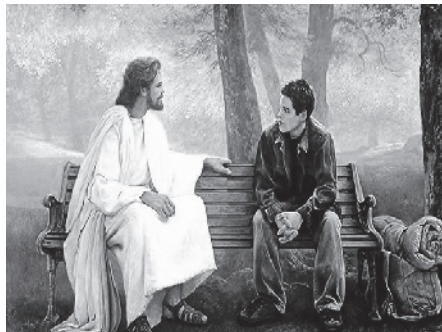


2019), mentions that young people are immersed in a culture of zapping in which they can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. They become prey to every passing trend without wisdom and discernment. (*Christus vivit* 279).

Today, the desire for a vocation and nurturing it must be presented attractively and appealingly to the youth. It should not be perceived as a burden, loss of happiness, friendship or freedom. On the contrary, pastors of the Church have the responsibility to instill in the hearts of young ones the proper understanding of vocation, highlighting its joy, freedom and fulfilment.

Vocation - friendship with God

According to Pope Francis, vocation in the broad sense refers to God's call in our lives, "including the call to life, the call to friendship with him and the call to holiness" (*Christus vivit* 248). He emphasised that vocation is a "calling from God," a call to life that is "a way of responding to the Lord, who has a wonderful plan for us." It is essential to communicate to the youth that vocation is a call to friendship with God, where He accompanies the person throughout life's highs and lows, ups and downs of life. Hans Urs von Balthasar defines vocation as "the only act by which a human being can correspond to the God who reveals himself, is the act of unlimited readiness. It is the unity of faith, hope and love." Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states: "Vocation is a fathomless mystery involving the relationship established by God with human beings in their absolute uniqueness, a mystery perceived and heard as a call

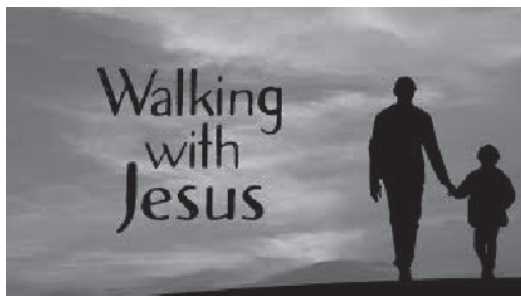


which awaits a response in the depths of one's conscience, which is "a person's most secret core and sanctuary. (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 38). Therefore, vocation nurtures a profound friendship with God, humanity, nature and the environment.

Vocation and freedom

The essential thing in a vocation is freedom. The candidate should be free from fear or force in choosing it. Any curbing of spontaneity in the choice of vocation has adverse effects on the candidate, not only during the early days of formation but also later in life as a priest or religious. If a person's freedom is compromised, he/she becomes less interested in their mission and ministry and may even decide to quit during times of crisis and hardships.

Pope John Paul emphatically stated: "There cannot be vocations unless they are free: that is unless they are spontaneous offerings of oneself, conscious, generous, total...Oblations, we call them: herein lies in practice the heart of the matter" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 36). The religious vocation must be a spontaneous and free decision in responding to the call of God. Seminary or religious houses of formation should be places of discernment of vocation. It is essential to recognise that the decision to enter a seminary or religious formation house is not the final decision to become a priest or religious. Rather, it is a step



in the discernment process. It is a time to explore their vocation and freely respond to God's call. Vocation should always be a free decision.

Vocation and Mission of the Church

Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* has repeatedly emphasised the inseparability and close bond between the awakening of vocation and the mission of the Church. According to Pope Francis, the cause of the dearth of vocation, "is due to lack of contagious apostolic fervour in communities, which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 107). He further states: "Wherever there is life, fervour and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will rise". Committed, joyful ministry of pastors, fraternal life and fervour for mission are sure to awaken vocations in the hearts of young people. As Pope Francis calls every baptised missionary disciple, he emphasises the personal involvement of every baptised to be actively engaged in evangelisation (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). Therefore, we need to propose to young people the path of special consecration to respond to the call of vocation to evangelise, emulating the response of the first disciples (Jn 1: 41) and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4: 39) after their encounter with Jesus.

Pastoral plan to awaken vocations

The Code of Canon Law emphasises the importance of fostering vocations in can. 233 § 1: "It is the duty of the whole Christian community to foster vocations so that needs of the sacred ministry are sufficiently met in the entire Church." This duty particularly binds Christian families, educators and, in a special way, priests, especially parish priests. Additionally, can. 233 § 2 highlights the duty of Diocesan Bishops in promoting vocations and assisting those who show inclinations towards vocations. Diocesan Bishops "are to instruct the people entrusted to them on the importance of the sacred ministry and the need for ministries in the Church. They are to encourage and support initiatives to promote vocations, especially movements



established for this purpose” (can. 233 § 1) Therefore, vocation promotion should be a top priority of all, including diocesan Bishops, priests, especially parish priests, teachers, parents, families and basic ecclesial communities. They have the undeniable responsibility in vocation promotion, setting quality time apart without any excuses, citing age, lack of time, ministry, or other commitments.

Despite the challenges posed by nuclear families and various professional jobs, with lucrative attractions to the youth, we must devise creative plans to attract young minds to vocations. Our formation homes should be open to young men and women welcoming them to participate in programmes that help them to know and discern the vocations. Pastoral plans to awaken vocations should be realistic, rooted in local culture and guided by universal guidelines. A well-designed pastoral programme is essential to explain why one should choose this way of life, highlighting the realities of contemporary priestly and religious life, its mission and its challenges. This programme will help young people to understand the value and purposes of such vocations.

Catholic parents, catholic teachers and catechists play a vital role in sowing the seeds of vocation. It is essential to educate the catholic parents about the purpose of priestly and religious life and clarify the misconceptions and doubts. We need to rebuild the trust of parents regarding the Church and vocations to the priesthood and religious life amidst the scandals in the Church concerning accountability and transparency. Implementing adult catechetical courses and strengthening youth movements in

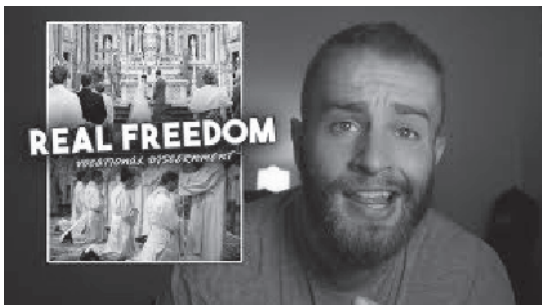
parishes and vicariates can certainly help promote vocations. The local parish communities, especially Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), play a significant role in supporting and encouraging young people to discern their vocation and assist them by word and deed. Through appropriate pastoral care for vocations, the Christian community and the development of society as a whole can flourish. (Final Document, Synod on Synodality, n. 57)

Patient accompaniment

Young people value fellowship and reject paternalism or authoritarian attitudes. Therefore, it is essential to reject such attitudes in promoting vocations. Instead, young people expect the promoters of vocations to accompany them and walk together in their lives. This accompaniment requires patience, understanding and solidarity. During times of discernment, young people are often confused and succumb to peer pressures and misleading information. However, companionship and spiritual guidance shared by parents, teachers, and parish priests can greatly assist them in their discernment. The patient accompaniment and support given to young people boost their morale to serve and participate in the mission of the Church. (Final Document, Synod on Synodality, n. 62).

Pope Paul VI wisely remarked in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Young people look up to real witnesses in the Church. The witnessing lives of young saints such as St John Berchmans, St Aloysius Gonzaga, St Theresa of Child Jesus, Sts Francisco and Jacinta, and Blessed Carlos Acutis, as well as exemplary and dedicated priests and religious, can serve as motivational figures in promoting vocations and holiness of life.

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Pilgrimage of hope in light of Jubilee 2025

Rev Sr Anjala Lincy Clark*

The Church prepares to celebrate Jubilee 2025 under the theme “Pilgrims of Hope”, inviting all believers to a renewed commitment to faith and mission. At the heart of this pilgrimage is the call to religious vocation, which has always been a profound response to God’s love, echoing through the ages in the lives of prophets, apostles, and saints. The Jubilee offers a providential moment to reflect on the significance of consecrated life as a journey of hope, deeply rooted in Scripture, illuminated by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and further enriched by the wisdom of Papal encyclicals.



invites religious to rekindle their initial enthusiasm and respond with renewed fervor.

3. The Apostles: leaving everything for Christ

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they “left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:20). Their radical response continues to inspire religious to embrace poverty, chastity, and obedience as a means of total dedication to Christ.

Vatican Council II on religious life: a sign of hope

The Second Vatican Council, through *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*, reaffirmed the beauty and necessity of religious life in the modern world.

- *Lumen Gentium* (Ch. VI) describes religious life as a “sign of the heavenly kingdom”, calling religious to be witnesses of Christ’s love through their consecration.

- *Perfectae Caritatis* exhorts religious to return to the spirit of their founders and adapt to contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to their charism.

As the Jubilee calls the Church to renewal and hope, religious are reminded of their prophetic role: “They not only bear witness to the hope of future glory but also anticipate it” (*Lumen Gentium*, 44).

Papal encyclicals: A guide for religious life

The teachings of various popes have consistently highlighted the importance of religious vocation in the life of the Church. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, reminds us that consecrated persons are called to be “missionary disciples”, bringing the joy of the Gospel to all: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1).



Biblical foundations of religious vocation

Religious vocation finds its deepest meaning in God’s call and the human response. Throughout the Bible, we encounter figures who, like modern-day consecrated men and women, left everything to follow God’s will.

1. Abraham: a journey of faith and hope:

Abraham, our father in faith, responded to God’s call with unwavering trust: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). His journey prefigures the religious vocation, where one leaves behind worldly securities to embrace God’s promise. Just as Abraham became a pilgrim of hope, religious men and women are called to witness hope in a world searching for meaning.

2. Prophet Samuel: listening and responding to God’s voice

The young Samuel, hearing the Lord’s call in the temple, answered, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9-10). His openness to divine guidance mirrors the attitude of those discerning their vocation. The Jubilee



Similarly, Pope John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, underscores the prophetic dimension of religious life, stating: “Religious life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church” (*Vita Consecrata*, 1).

Pope Benedict XVI, in *Spe Salvi*, connects hope with Christian life, affirming that true hope comes from an encounter with Christ: “The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life” (*Spe Salvi*, 2).

These encyclicals reinforce that religious vocation is not merely a personal call but a gift to the entire Church, a means through which God’s love and hope are made tangible to the world.

Examples from the lives of saints



Saints throughout history have embodied the essence of religious vocation, leaving everything to follow Christ and becoming pilgrims of hope in their own time.

- St Francis of Assisi: A radical response to God’s call

St. Francis, once a wealthy merchant’s son, renounced everything to embrace a life of poverty and service. His famous words, “My God and my all,” reflect the essence of religious consecration—placing God above all else.

- St Teresa of Calcutta: A witness of charity and hope

Mother Teresa, driven by love for the poorest of the poor, lived out her vocation as a beacon of



hope. Her life echoes the words of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*:

“Life exists where there is bonding, communion, and fraternity” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 87).

- St Thérèse of Lisieux: The little way of love

St Thérèse, though living a hidden life in the convent, became a Doctor of the Church through her simple path of holiness. Her “little way” teaches that religious vocation is not about great deeds but about great love for God and others.

- St John Bosco: Forming the youth in faith

Don Bosco dedicated his religious life to educating and uplifting poor youth, emphasizing that hope and faith must be nurtured in the younger generation—a message relevant to Jubilee 2025’s call for renewed faith.

The Jubilee Call: renewing commitment to vocation

The Jubilee Year is a time of grace, inviting consecrated persons to:

- Deepen their prayer life, drawing strength from the Eucharist and Scripture.
- Renew their commitment to their charism, making their communities places of hope and witness.
- Embrace the missionary dimension of their vocation, bringing Christ’s love to the peripheries.

Conclusion: Pilgrims of hope in a changing world

Religious vocation remains a radiant sign of God’s faithfulness and a beacon of hope for humanity. As pilgrims of hope, consecrated men and women are called to walk with the Church into the Jubilee Year, witnessing to the world that true fulfilment lies in following Christ. Inspired by Biblical examples, Vatican II teachings, and Papal encyclicals, religious are reminded that their vocation is a path of joy, sacrifice, and unshakable hope. May this Jubilee 2025 inspire many to listen to God’s call and embark on this sacred journey of love and service.

*** The writer is a nun in the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Coimbatore. ♦**

SAINT OF THE MONTH – I

St Salvador of Horta

1520 – 1567

Feast Day : 18 March

In the sixteenth century when the Faith, especially in Germany, was so mightily shaken by the so-called reformers, when the Sign of the Cross was abolished as a superstitious practice, almighty God permitted this very Sign of the Cross to shine with special power and radiance, in order to strengthen the Faith in another country. This was Spain, and it was through the great miracle worker of the sixteenth century, St Salvador of Horta.

St Salvador can be another name for Jesus. He is the Saviour Saint, who through his death on the cross gives his life to save the world and brings freedom and forgiveness to all people. Salvador Pladevall was born in Santa Coloma de Farners in the province of Girona, Catalonia, where his parents worked as servants in the local hospital. Orphaned at the age of 14, he moved with his sister to Barcelona, where he worked as a shoemaker. After his sister had married, Salvador felt free to pursue a calling to religious life.

He originally entered the famous Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, but desiring a simpler life, joined the Observant Friars Minor in Barcelona in 1541. After his profession in 1542, he was assigned to the friary in Tortosa as cook and seeker of daily alms for the community. As he went out begging, he would pray for the sick people he encountered and soon became known in the town as a healer.

So many people came to the friary seeking a cure that his superiors began moving him around to various friaries to avoid publicity,

eventually in 1547 to the remote friary of Horta de Sant Joan, where he was stationed as cook for twelve years. Still, crowds came there seeking him out, sometimes hundreds of people a week. He would gather the sick together, urge them to go to Confession and Communion and would then make the Sign of the Cross over them. Many were cured.



Salvator of Horta was sent to assist the brother in the kitchen, and one day, when the cook was ill, Salvador had to undertake the entire round of duties alone. When it was close to the noon hour, the Father Guardian went to the kitchen to see what Brother Salvador had prepared. He found the kitchen locked. After looking for Salvador for a considerable time, he finally found him kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, deeply absorbed in prayer.

Salvator had been there since early morning without being aware of it. The superior reproved him severely, and Salvador acknowledged his guilt amid many tears, begging for a severe penance. How astonished, however, were both men when they arrived at the kitchen and found all the food ready to be served; the angels had substituted for Salvador.

One time the grand inquisitor, a renowned theologian, whose duty it was to guard the purity of the Faith, came in order to learn whether anything occurred there that savored of superstition. Without giving any indication of his rank, he took his station at a corner of the church where the sick were expecting the healing

...Continued on Page 21

SAINT OF THE MONTH - II

St Juli Billiard

1751 – 1816

Feast Day : 8 April

In the small village of Cuvilly, north of Paris, France, Marie-Rose Julie Billiard, born on July 12, 1751, was the seventh of nine children of Jean-François Billiard and Marie-Louise Antoinette Debraine. Most of her siblings died in infancy and adolescence. She attended a little one-room school in Cuvilly. She enjoyed all of her studies, but she was particularly attracted to the religion lessons taught by the parish priest. Recognizing something "special" in Julie, the priest secretly allowed her to make her First Communion at the age of nine, when the normal age at that time, was thirteen. She learned to make short mental prayers and to develop a great love for Jesus in the Eucharist.

Though the first years of her life were relatively peaceful and uncomplicated, Julie had to take up manual work as a young teen when her family lost its money. However, she spent her spare time teaching catechism to young people and to the farm labourers. A mysterious illness overtook her when she was about 30.

Witnessing an attempt to wound or even kill her father, Julie was paralyzed and became a complete invalid. For the next two decades, she continued to teach catechism lessons from her bed, offered spiritual advice, and attracted visitors who had heard of her holiness.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, revolutionary forces became aware of her allegiance to fugitive priests. With the help of friends, she was smuggled out of Cuvilly in a haycart. She then spent several years hiding in Compiègne, being moved from house to house despite her growing physical pain. She even lost the power of speech for a time.

But this period also proved to be a fruitful spiritual time for Julie. At this time she was privileged to receive a vision. She saw her crucified Lord surrounded by a large group of religious women dressed in a habit she had never seen before. An inner voice told her that these would be her daughters and that she would begin an institute for the Christian Education of the young.



As time passed and Julie continued her mobile life, she made the acquaintance of an aristocratic woman, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who shared Julie's interest in teaching the faith. In 1803, the two women began the Institute of Notre Dame, which was dedicated to the education of the poor, young Christian girls, and the training of catechists. The following year the first Sisters of Notre Dame made their vows. That was the same year that Julie recovered from the illness: She was able to walk for the first time in 22 years.

She was elected as the Mother General of this young congregation.

Though Julie had always been attentive to the special needs of the poor and that always remained her priority, she also became aware that other classes in society needed Christian instruction. From the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame until her death, Julie was on the road, opening a variety of schools in France and Belgium that served the poor and the wealthy, vocational groups, teachers. Ultimately, Julie and Françoise moved the motherhouse to Namur, Belgium. Julie died there on April 8, 1816.

Julie did not live to go beyond continental Europe but her religious Congregation serves today in a variety of ministries, with a priority for education, in 16 countries on five continents.



The Paralyzed Saint who started a Religious Order

Letters from the
Saints Blog

known God's goodness, given to our apostolic religious Congregation and to others who claim her as Foundress in our Mission. Sisters, Associates, Mission Volunteers, alumnae/alumni, administrators,

On June 22, 1969, the Church recognized the Sainthood of Julie Billiart, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, in a liturgical celebration of her Canonization at the Vatican in Rome.

Pope Paul VI declared to all the world Julie's holiness of life and her legacy of *making*

faculty, students, staff in all our schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, clinics, centres, parishes and social agencies celebrate Julie's Sainthood.

www.franciscanmedia.org; www.sndden.org;
www.stjulies.org.uk ♦

Continued from Page 19: St Salvator of Horta

hand of Brother Salvator. When the good religious arrived, Saint Salvator of Horta had the sick make way for him as he passed through their ranks till he reached the grand inquisitor. There he reverently kissed the latter's hand, and begged him to come to the upper church, where he could watch the entire proceedings



sufferers were then all suddenly cured, except, as Salvator had foretold, those who were not sincere in their conversion.

The crowds would sometimes tear off pieces of his habit as relics. Two years before his death, Salvator was

Astonished at finding himself recognized, the inquisitor was already assured of the power from on high which held sway there. Nevertheless, he followed the brother.

Salvator began, as usual, to admonish the sick to examine their conscience and to receive the sacraments of penance and of the Holy Eucharist worthily. Then he blessed them with the Sign of the Cross while he called upon the Blessed Trinity and imposed on them a few prayers in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whose intercession he ascribed all the cures. The

moved again, this time to Cagliari on the island of Sardinia. He died at Cagliari saying, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit" on March 18, 1567.

At the request of King Philip, Salvador was allowed to be venerated as "Blessed" on 5 February 1606 by Pope Paul V, which was confirmed on 29 January 1711 by Pope Clement XI. He was canonized on 17 April 1938 by Pope Pius XI.

www.franciscanmedia.org/saints;
www.franciscantradition.org/blog;
<https://catholicsaints.day> ♦

Here is a wonderful story that explains how value of life changes in different places --- the Ruby Stone – Story about the Value of Life

A man went to God and asked, "What's the value of life?"

God gave him one stone and said, "Find out the value of this stone, but don't sell it."

The man took the stone to an Orange Seller and asked him what its cost would be.

The Orange Seller saw the shiny stone and said, "You can take 12 oranges and give me the stone."

The man apologized and said that the God has asked him not to sell it.

He went ahead and found a vegetable seller. "What could be the value of this stone?" he asked the vegetable seller. The seller saw the shiny stone and said, "Take one sack of potatoes and give me the stone."

ALVIN BARNES

**I am
precious
in His
sight.**

The man again apologized and said he can't sell it.

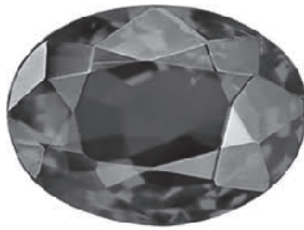
Further ahead, he went into a jewelry shop and asked the value of the stone.

The jeweler saw the stone under a lens and said, "I'll give you 50 Lakhs for this stone."

When the man shook his head, the jeweler said, "Alright, alright, take 2 crores, but give me the stone."

The man explained that he can't sell the stone. Further ahead, the man saw a precious stone's shop and asked the seller the value of this stone.

When the precious stone's seller saw the big ruby, he lay down a red cloth and put the



ruby on it. Then he walked in circles around the ruby and bent down and touched his head in front of the ruby.

"From where did you bring this priceless ruby from?" he asked. "Even if I sell the whole world, and my life, I won't be able to purchase this priceless stone."

Stunned and confused, the man returned to the God and told him what had happened. "Now tell me what is the value of life, God?"

God said, "The answers you got from the orange seller, the vegetable seller, the jeweler & the precious stone's seller explain the value of our life... You may be a precious stone, even priceless, but people may value you based on



their level of information, their belief in you, their motive behind entertaining you, their ambition, and their risk taking ability. But don't fear, you will surely find someone who will discern your true value."

In the eyes of God you are very, very precious. Respect yourself. You are unique. No one can replace you!

Moral of the Ruby Stone story

We need to be placed ourselves in the correct place to get maximum value out of our life. *"One is often so busy doing life that it is easy to avoid evaluating whether you are putting your energy in the direction you value most."* — Deborah Day

<http://selectoday.com/inspirational/value-of-life-a-true-inspirational-story/> ♦

NEWS ROUNDUP

Catholicculture.org

Pope encourages charismatics to share experience

In a message of encouragement to participants in a Jubilee pilgrimage of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service, Pope Francis told that their spiritual experience “is not meant for you alone. It is for everyone!”

The Pope said that “just just as the beating heart pumps blood throughout the entire body, you desire to dedicate yourselves not only to the Church but also open yourselves to her universal dimensions, making your own the intentions of the Holy Father, especially for peace and reconciliation.”

Vatican hosts the screening of *The Chosen: Last Supper*

The Vatican Film Library hosted a special screening of *The Chosen: Last Supper*. Msgr. Lucio Adrian Ruiz, secretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, and Elizabeth Tabish, the actress who plays Mary Magdalene, took part in the event.

“The Chosen is one of the most watched series in the world, with over 280 million viewers, 900 million views of individual episodes (translated into 50 languages), and more than 17 million followers on social media,” Vatican News reported.

Look less at screens, look each other in the eyes more: Pope

In a video for his April prayer intention (proper use of new technologies), Pope Francis exclaimed, “How I would like for us to look less at screens and look each other in the eyes more!”

“Something's wrong if we spend more time on our cell phones than with people,” he said in the video. “The screen makes us forget that there are real people behind it who breathe, laugh, and cry.” “It's true, technology is the fruit of the intelligence God gave us,” he added. “But we need to use it well”: “to help the poor, to improve

the lives of the sick and persons with different abilities,” and “to care for our common home, to connect as brothers and sisters.”

The monthly videos typically include excerpts from a papal interview that had been recorded live; there are no such excerpts in this video. Instead, the video features a recorded commentary from the Pope—and the recorded voice is strong, suggesting that his convalescence is proceeding well.

Vatican underlines achievement of Council of Nicea

Looking forward to ecumenical celebrations of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, the International Theological Commission (ITC) has issued a statement: “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”

The ITC statement expresses hope that the anniversary observances will give “new impetus to the journey toward Christian unity.” In particular the document mentions the “hope for an agreement on a common date for the celebration of Easter.”

The Nicene Creed, the document states, along with the Council itself, “bear witness to the same event of Jesus Christ, whose irruption into history offers unprecedented access to God and introduces a transformation of human thought.”

Vatican marks 20th anniversary of St John Paul's death with Mass, newspaper tributes

On April 2, the Vatican marked the 20th anniversary of the death of Pope St. John Paul II (1920-2005), who governed the Church from 1978 to 2005.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State of His Holiness, presided at Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. Thirty cardinals and as many bishops concelebrated, *L'Osservatore Romano* reported. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was in attendance, as were a government delegation from Poland and numerous ambassadors to the Holy See.

In his homily, Cardinal Parolin recalled the highlights of the John Paul's pontificate, from his first homily in 1978 ("Do not be afraid! Open, indeed throw open the doors to Christ!") to his funeral Mass in 2005, at which "the certainty of the people concerning the sanctity of the deceased Pope" was evident.

Cardinal Parolin preached that "the 'great ecclesial and historical mission' of St. John Paul II was to 'introduce the Church into the third millennium' and he committed himself 'with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his strength in the 26 years of his immense pontificate,' as a 'tireless pilgrim' of the Gospel «to the most distant corners of the planet,' as well as a tireless servant of peace," according to the Vatican newspaper's summary of his homily.

Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the saint's personal secretary from 1966 (when John Paul was a bishop) to 2005, also spoke during the Mass, recalling St. John Paul's death and asking for prayers for the health of Pope Francis. The prelate recalled that John Paul trusted that Christ would make his death "useful for the most important cause which I seek to serve: the salvation of men, the safeguarding of the human family, and in it of all nations and peoples."

Cardinal Baldassare Reina, the vicar general of the Diocese of Rome, asked St. John Paul to intercede that young people be "tireless missionaries of the Gospel today."

"Bless every family," Cardinal Reina added, recalling that John Paul warned against "Satan's assault against this precious spark of heaven that God has lit on earth. Make us strong and

courageous in defending the family."

"Pray for the whole world, scarred by so many injustices and lacerated by absurd wars, which turn the world into a bloody battlefield, deliver us from war, which is always a defeat for everyone," Cardinal Reina added.

Later, thousands gathered for an evening prayer vigil in St. Peter's Square. The president of the Polish bishops' conference, Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdańsk, paid tribute to the saint and led participants in the recitation of the holy Rosary.

Vatican newspaper: In its April 2 edition, L'Osservatore Romano devoted a front-page editorial, as well as two additional pages, to the anniversary. In his editorial (Italian, English), Andrea Tornielli, editorial director of the Dicastery for Communication, recalled St. John Paul's work on behalf of peace.

Tornielli wrote: Two decades later, he is rightly remembered as a great defender of life, human dignity, and religious freedom. Most particularly remember his insistence against communism. However, few recall his other prophetic teachings, which are particularly relevant in our own dark moment of history ... Today, more than ever, as the world burns and nations rush to fill their arsenals, with propaganda fostering an atmosphere of alarm and fear to justify massive military spending, we must remember those prophetic words of the Bishop of Rome who came from "a distant country." His successor now echoes that same cry, once again standing alone against the madness of war.

Holy Father's Prayer Intentions

March 2025

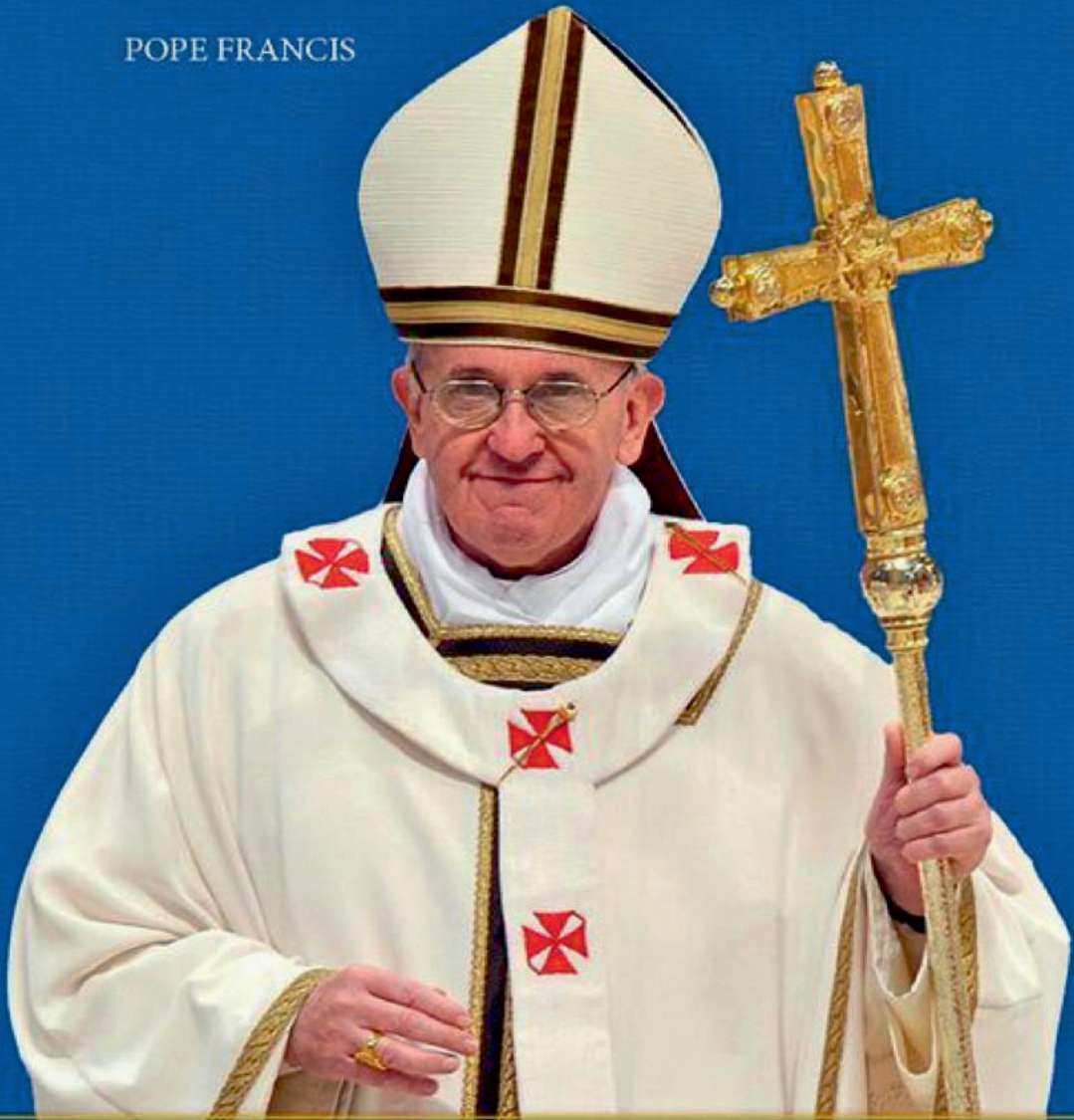
For families in crisis: Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.

April 2025

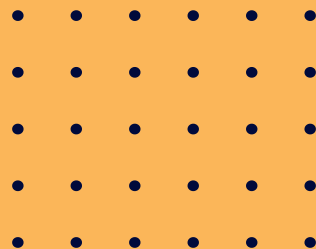
For the use of the new technologies: Let us pray that the use of the new technologies will not replace human relationships, will respect the dignity of the person, and will help us face the crises of our times.

“DO NOT BE AFRAID OF
WHAT GOD ASKS OF YOU!
IT IS WORTH SAYING YES TO GOD!
IN HIM WE FIND OUR JOY!”

POPE FRANCIS



CONSIDER PRIESTHOOD
OR CONSECRATED LIFE



SOCIETY OF SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE

Founded in 1889 by Jeanne Bigard and her mother Stephanie in response to a letter from a French Bishop in Japan asking for funds to provide for 50 young men preparing for the priesthood. Ever since its inception the Society supports mission vocations, both priestly and Religious.



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