

Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

The Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today.

The purpose of vocational discernment is to find out how to transform them, in the light of faith, into steps towards the fullness of joy to which everyone is called.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN TODAY'S WORLD

Approaching the subject will require adaptation to the specific circumstances of each region.

A Rapidly-Changing World

A rapid process of change and transformation is the main characteristic of contemporary societies and cultures (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 18). The highly complex nature and pace of this process is creating a situation of fluidity and uncertainty never before experienced. The situation demands complete attention and an ability for long-term planning.

New Generations

Today's generation of young people live in a world which is different from that of their parents and educators. Economic and social changes have affected the extent of obligations and opportunities. Young people's aspirations, needs, feelings and manner of relating to others have changed as well.

In many parts of the world, young people are experiencing particular hardships which pose difficulties for them in making real choices in life, because they have not even the minimal possibility to exercise freedom.

Young people, on the one hand, show a willingness and readiness to participate and commit themselves to concrete activities in which the

personal contribution of each might be an occasion for recognizing one's identity. On the other hand, they show an intolerance in places where they feel, rightly or wrongly, that they lack opportunities to participate or receive encouragement.

The discrepancy between young people who are passive and discouraged and those enterprising and energetic comes from the concrete opportunities offered to each one in society and the family in which one develops.

Personal and Institutional Points of Reference

Various research studies show that young people have a need for persons of reference, who are close-by, credible, consistent and honest, in addition to places and occasions for testing their ability to relate to others and dealing with their feelings and emotions.

The role of parents and families is crucial yet sometimes problematic.

Young People and Choices

In this context, the old approaches no longer work and the experience passed on by previous generations quickly becomes obsolete.

“How can we reawaken the greatness and the courage of comprehensive choices, of the impulses of the heart in order to face academic and emotional challenges?”

FAITH, DISCERNMENT, VOCATION

The Church wants again to state her desire to encounter, accompany and care for every young person.

Faith and Vocation

Faith is seeing things as Jesus does (cf. *Lumen fidei*, 18). **Faith is the source of vocational discernment**, because faith provides vocational discernment with its fundamental contents, specific development, personal style and pedagogy.

Faith “is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives”.

In the light of faith, we gradually become aware of the God's plan of profound love for each person.

To discern the voice of the Spirit from other calls and decide how to respond is the task of each person. Others may accompany and affirm a person, but they can never take another person's place in this regard.

The Gift of Discernment

Making decisions and guiding one's actions in situations of uncertainty and in the face of conflicting inner forces is the place for exercising discernment, a classic term in the tradition of the Church which applies to a variety of situations.

Indeed, one form of discernment is exercised in reading the signs of the times which leads to recognizing the presence and action of the Spirit in history.

Vocational discernment, that is, **the process by which a person makes fundamental choices**. The question of how a person is not to waste the opportunities for self-realization is part-and-parcel of every man and woman.

The Spirit speaks and acts through the happenings in the life of each person. **Discernment is required to reveal their meaning and to make a decision**. The three verbs in *Evangelii gaudium*, 51, used to describe discernment, namely, "to **recognize**," "to **interpret**" and "to **choose**".

Recognizing

"Recognizing" **concerns how life's happenings**, the people one meets, and the words one hears or reads affect the interior life, namely, the various "desires, feelings and emotions" (*Amoris laetitia*, 143)

"Recognizing" requires making this emotional richness emerge and ascertaining these feelings without making a judgment.

At this stage the Word of God is of great importance. Meditating on it, in fact, mobilizes the passions as in all experiences which touch one's inner self, but, at the same time, offers the possibility of making them emerge and identifying with them in the events it narrates. **The stage of "recognizing" focuses on the ability to listen and on one's feelings and emotions.**

Interpreting

The next step is “interpreting”, in other words, to **understand what the Spirit is calling the person to do** through what the Spirit stirs up in each one.

This interpretative stage is very sensitive, requiring patience, vigilance and even a certain knowledge.

“Interpreting” desires and inner movements requires an honest confrontation, in light of God's Word, with the moral demands of the Christian life, always seeking to apply them in the concrete situation that is being experienced.

Choosing

Once all the desires and emotions are recognized and interpreted, the next step in **making a decision is an exercise of authentic human freedom and personal responsibility**, which, of course, is always connected to a concrete situation and therefore limited.

A decision needs to be proven by facts to see whether it is a right decision. A choice cannot remain imprisoned in an interiority which is likely to remain virtual or unrealistic.