

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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LASALLIAN CULTURE  
OF VOCATIONS,  
A LATIN AMERICAN VISION

REPRESENTING THE RELAL NETWORK  
OF EVANGELISATION-PASTORAL-CATECHESIS:

AUTHORS

MARÍA JOSÉ DE LA ROCA GONZÁLEZ

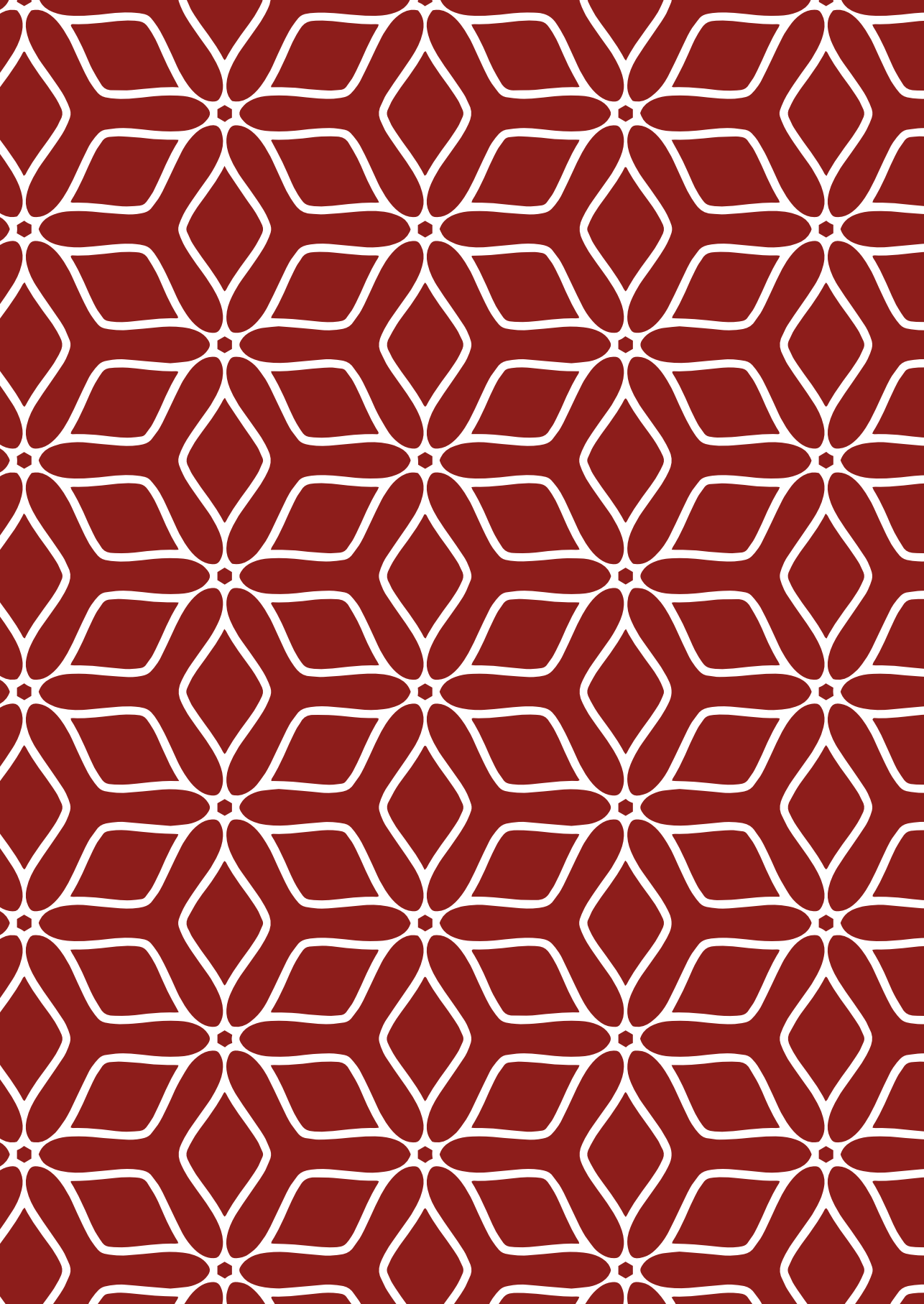
BR. JUAN CAMILO CALERO CAMPO FSC

CECILIA VALLEJOS PARÁS

JUAN RENÉ PÉREZ YAÑEZ

MARÍA DEL CARMEN DE URQUIJO CARMONA

BR. CÉSAR PABLO CAMPOS FLORES FSC



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## AUTHORS

María José de la Roca González  
*Central America-Panama District*

Br. Juan Camilo Calero Campo FSC  
*Norandino District*

Cecilia Vallejos Parás  
*Antilles-Mexico South District*

Juan René Pérez Yañez  
*Mexico North District*

María del Carmen de Urquijo Carmona  
*Antilles-Mexico South District*

Br. César Pablo Campos Flores FSC  
*Mexico North District*

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the Christian  
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**Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools**

Lasallian Culture of Vocations, a Latin American Vision

**Representing the RELAL Network of Evangelisation-Pastoral-Catechesis:**

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Ms. María del Carmen de Urquijo Carmona

Br. César Pablo Campos Flores FSC

**General Direction**

Br. Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, FSC

**Editorial Direction**

Mr. Óscar Elizalde Prada

**Editorial Coordination**

Ms. Iliaria Iadeluca

**Translator**

Br. Agustín Ranchal, FSC - aranchal@lasalle.org

**Graphic Coordination and Layout**

Ms. Giulia Giannarini

**Editorial Production**

Iliaria Iadeluca, Giulia Giannarini, Fabio Parente, Óscar Elizalde Prada

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# PRESENTATION

**W**e are pleased to present this work produced by a group of Lasallians, lay people and Brothers, women and men, from Latin America, on the Culture of Vocations in this Year of Lasallian Spirituality and Catechesis.

As they themselves explain it, the Bulletin is the result of a formative process which intertwines pastoral work with study, and opens up into a series of projects. I think that, as well as admiring the attitude of this group, reading it will provide an opportunity to take advantage of the results in other Regions of the Institute. It is not a question of transposing decontextualised proposals, but of rethinking possible processes of formation leading to possible projects.

Our gratitude and congratulations to the authors.

To you, readers, our prayerful good wishes for a productive reading.

**Br. Santiago Rodríguez Mancini**  
*Director of the Office of Lasallian Heritage and Research*

# The authors

## **Ms. María José de la Roca González**

*Central America-Panama District*

District MEL Assistant in Curriculum, Programmes and Interculturality. Member of the MEL Councils: District and the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL). Member of the Commission on Evangelisation of the Institute.

## **Br. Juan Camilo Calero Campo FSC**

*Norandino District*

Coordinator of the Youth Ministry and Pastoral Ministry of Vocations of the Institución Educativa San José - Turbo in Colombia. Secretary of the Norandino District Council. Member of the Evangelisation, Pastoral and Catechetical Network of RELAL.

## **Ms. Cecilia Vallejos Parás**

*Antilles-Mexico South District*

Full-time Professor and Researcher in the area of Educational Innovation at the Universidad La Salle México. Member of the International Network of Lasallian University Teaching (RIDUL).

**Mr. Juan René Pérez Yáñez**

*Mexico North District*

Secretary of Association and Lasallian Educational Mission in the Mexico North District. Member of the MEL Council for RELAL.

**Ms. María del Carmen de Urquijo Carmona**

*Antilles-Mexico South District*

Educational Advisor at the Centro Rural de Educación Superior, Member of the Governing Boards of Universidad La Salle Puebla and of the Mexican Thematic Network for the Development and Incorporation of Educational Technology.

**Br. César Pablo Campos Flores FSC**

*Mexico North District*

Coordinator of the Pastoral Spaces of Mexico North District. Member of the Institute's Commission on Youth.



# PREFACE

**A**polyphony is understood as the combination of various voices and instruments which together form a harmonious whole, and this is the purpose of this paper: the sum of hundreds of voices of Lasallians in Latin America read and interpreted from the point of view of a group of diverse vocations and scopes: pastoral ministers, educators, Brothers and researchers; hence the distinctive style which you will observe as you read the parts of this Bulletin. This collective work intends to invite more than a review of data, to lead to reflection on the value of the term culture of vocations from the Lasallian point of view in Latin America.

The Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL) is composed of eight Districts: Antillas-México Sur, Argentina-Paraguay, Bogotá, Bolivia-Perú, Brasil-Chile, Centroamérica-Panamá, México Norte y Norandino. After the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a process of networking began in order to interconnect the main agents of the Districts in the areas of: Education, Pastoral Ministry, Communication, Child and Youth Safeguarding and Volunteer Ministry, among others. This Bulletin is the fruit of this networking, which is described in more detail below, and seeks to share this wealth of interconnection with the rest of the Institute.

Specifically, the Network from which this Bulletin arises is that of Evangelisation, Pastoral Ministry and Catechesis. One of the main theoretical references that this group has explored is that of culture of vocations, understood as a contribution to the renewal of pastoral practice and accompaniment in general. This focus has led the Network, as in the itinerary of John Baptist de La Salle, from one commitment to another: to begin to talk about the term, to share successful experiences in each District, to make use of social networks for vocation promotion, to provide a formative space on this matter, until reaching this exercise of systematisation of the vision that many of the members of the RELAL Region have of it.

This formative space took the form of a MOOC (*Massive Open Online Course*), which sought to reach many people scattered across the wide and varied geography of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is in this space where the Network entered into collaboration with the Universidad La Salle México for the implementation of the course and this network collaboration continued in order to carry out the research and systematisation work that this document summarises.

The Bulletin is made up of three chapters. The first narrates the origin of the Network for Evangelisation, Pastoral Ministry and Catechesis and how it has come to highlight the vital importance of the culture of vocations. The second chapter delves into the theoretical structure of this concept and contrasts it with the opinion of a large group of Latin American Lasallians. The third chapter deals with a series of projects, plans and actions of a pastoral nature which emerge as a result of the reflections analysed above, triangulated in the light of the theoretical references, the opinions of Lasallians, and the institutional reality of the Districts of RELAL.

In a world characterised by disorientation and uncertainty, the search for meaning becomes an imperative that gives reason and hope to children, young people and adults who are immersed in educational environments. That is why this vocational theme occupies and concerns, at the same time as it invites us to reread our actions in the midst of the traditions which nourish us, of the daily actions which form and wear out our existence, and on the path which we want to walk in community, in the Lasallian style.

One of the key elements of the Lasallian educational proposal is focused on a holistic human formation. To carry out this principle, it is essential to involve students in the construction of their own knowledge. This is best achieved through fraternal relationships and a strong sense of community, which fosters the development of a healthy identity and the strengthening of their skills. In other words, this fraternity enhances the balanced development of individuals and helps them to find their purpose in life. All educational programmes and academic activities should promote the search for the meaning of life, impelling transcendental meaning through the experience of the culture of vocations.

# CHAPTER I

## GENESIS OF RELAL'S WORK FOR THE CULTURE OF VOCATIONS

**H**ope shines on the horizon in the midst of a series of exhausting activities; those who carry out pastoral ministry feel tired, they know that their work is essential for the human heart, they recognise that their ears need to be ready to listen to the cry of the helpless and they are willing to give the best of themselves. Knowing that a transcendent force encourages and nourishes them, they also perceive that in their actions they feel alone, theoretical references are distant and the need to build in common is dormant; from this thirst, an initiative has been bearing fruit in the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL), where a pool of Lasallians have joined together to form a group that responds to the thirst to join together in pastoral efforts.

This Network emerged from the dream of having a space to share the experiences of evangelisation that each District carries out in an innovative way and to join forces to identify needs and expectations among pastoral agents. Its genesis is rooted in the II International Assembly for the Lasallian Educational Mission (AIMEL) held in 2013 in Rome, Italy, which stipulated as one of its commitments: to evangelise using new paradigms that take into account cultural changes and respond to the needs of children, young people and adults, especially the poor (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Report II AIMEL, 2013).

In response to the call of the II AIMEL, Lasallians representing the Districts of RELAL gathered in Santiago de Chile in May 2016 for a Regional Meeting of leaders of Youth and Vocations Ministry. During this meeting, using the See, Judge, Act method, they reflected on the realities of the different Districts in the light of the Regional Animation Plan and responded creatively, specifically with plans for Youth and Vocations Ministry in RELAL.

In addition, echoes resounded that made clearer the horizon of being a Region that gets together in view to have common pastoral criteria that have an impact on the plans of each District, through the review of the current processes of evangelisation, the strengthening of pastoral ministry and the promotion of the culture of vocations and accompaniment (Lasallian Region of Latin America, 2016). This

meeting gave rise to the formal creation of the grouping known as the Evangelisation, Pastoral Ministry and Catechesis Network, which was represented by the participants of the meeting and therefore of the different Districts of the Region.

Once the dream of merger was outlined, despite the distances, the nascent network began its years of work (2017 – at the date of publication of this Bulletin) periodically through a series of virtual meetings, to follow up on the development of the actions that were being organised. The network was divided into areas/commissions that the group understood as the backbone of its constitution: *Youth and Vocations Ministry, Lasallian Spirituality, Formation of Pastoral Agents, Documentation and Projection of Pastoral Processes.*

From this style of organisation in areas, it was stimulated the implementation of projects spaces for sharing best practices, formative spaces, the presence of experts to share appropriate aspects of educational pastoral work, the creation of common pastoral documents, the dissemination of Lasallian vocations on social networks, the creation of a MOOC course on the culture of vocations, from which the reflective contributions of this Bulletin are derived, among others.

The fruit of networking has led to the generation of a shared vision and shared values, fostering mutual learning (Schieler, 2015), which led the team to draw up the *Documento Iluminador para la Región sobre la Pastoral Educativa y la Pastoral Juvenil y Vocacional* (Guiding document for the Region on Educational Pastoral Ministry, Pastoral Ministry of the Youth and Vocations), published in 2021, with the expectation of starting from a pastoral diagnosis of each District and from there to promote a common language in Lasallian educational communities; The guidelines provided therein require determination and commitment, so that they can go from being a documentary reference to an opportunity that challenges the pastoral ministry of each District (*Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas, Documento Iluminador para la Región sobre la Pastoral Educativa y la Pastoral Juvenil y Vocacional*, 2021).

The network, on becoming aware of the wide range of information present in the increasing number of publications in the Church and in the Institute on the topic of the culture of vocations, established a collaborative relationship with Universidad La Salle, Mexico to look for a training option that would bring Lasallians in the Region into contact with this topic. In the course of these conversations, the idea arose of creating a MOOC course, which in English means Massive Open Online Course, seeking with this tool the greatest participation of Lasallians, such as pastoral ministers, teachers and other members of educational institutions.

The articulation of the MOOC was inspired by Circular 475 “From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations” which deals with the culture of vocations, the Guiding Document for Pastoral Ministry in RELAL previously mentioned, the document of the Institute “A Conversation for the Lasallian Family: Deepening our Identity”, among others; from these, we were urged to break the isolation of pastoral work and focus the Region on a vision of accompaniment under the assumption that all persons are called, they all have a vocation.

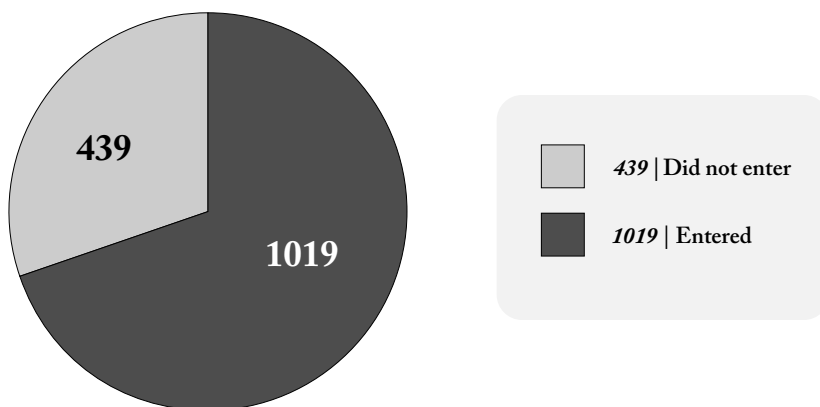
As a first point, the MOOC invited each participant to become aware of his or her relationship with pastoral activities. Subsequently, the course sought to reflect on the culture of vocations based on the contrast between the practice of offering accompaniment (the action) and that suggested by the reference documents. The third part of the course was based on the construction of a common language where a glossary of essential terms in the field of pastoral ministry, evangelisation and catechesis was created. Finally, the formative space closed with the drafting of a personal proposal for action that integrated the different themes and elements worked on throughout the course.

The structure of each unit of the MOOC course included objectives and a journey to follow, an audio prayer session with the voices of Latin American Lasallians, the lesson on the theme with audio-visual resources, a series of application activities and a reflection journal.

The name given to the course was the same as that of Circular 475: “From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations”.

And from the hope of offering a formative space, the commitment arose of having achieved a very high participation with a total of 1458 people registered, a high number for formative spaces of this type in relation to other experiences of the same format offered by Universidad La Salle, Mexico. Graph 1 shows the number of participants registered for the course.

**Graph 1. Number of participants registered in the MOOC course**

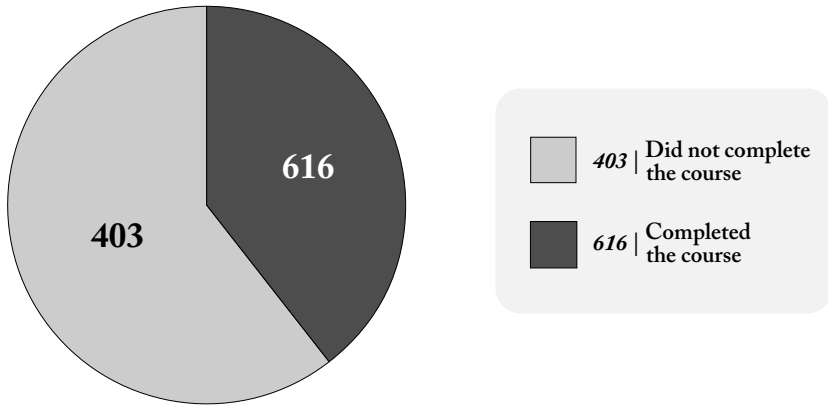


**Source:** Prepared by the author with data from the Virtual Campus of Universidad La Salle, Mexico.

Out of the 1458 people registered, 1019 entered and took the course (70%), as shown in graph 2. Of the latter number, 60.4% completed and accredited the course. It should be noted that, according to a study conducted in Colombia in 2020, dropout in distance learning programmes is usually high, around 38.2%, due to the fact that many people consider them to be cold experiences as there is not much interaction between teacher-student or student-student (Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, 2020). In the case of this MOOC, the dropout rate of those who entered was 18%.



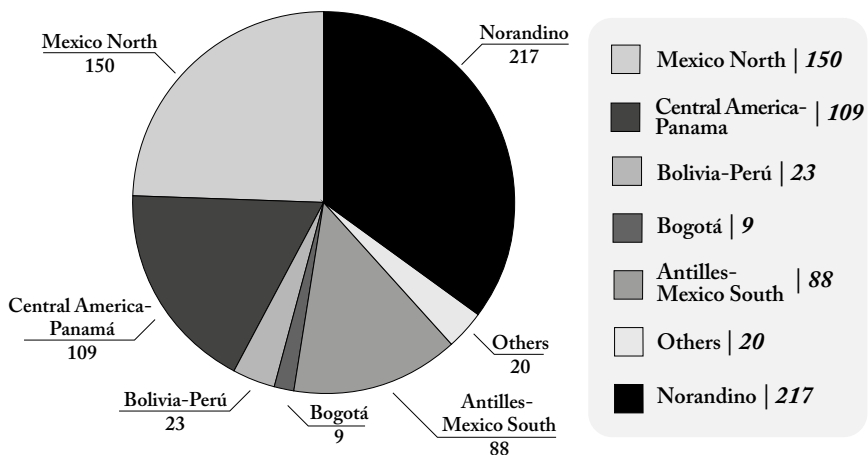
**Graph 2. Number of participants who completed the MOOC course**



**Source:** Own elaboration with data from the Virtual Campus of Universidad La Salle, Mexico.

Graph 3 shows the number of participants who completed the MOOC course divided by RELAL Districts.

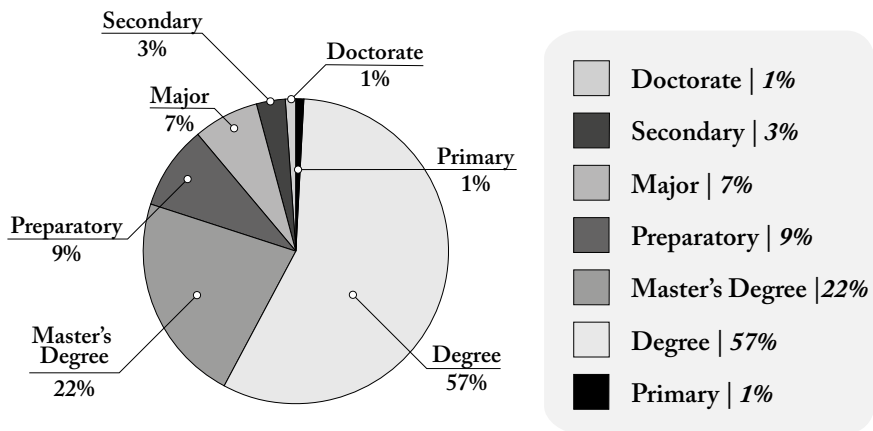
**Graph 3. District of participants who completed the MOOC course**



**Source:** Prepared by the author with data from the Virtual Campus of Universidad La Salle, Mexico.

It is interesting to note the population profile of the course participants, 66% women and 34% men; in terms of educational background, 57% of them hold a Bachelor's Degree and 22% hold a Master's Degree. If we add the 1% of them who holds a Doctorate and 7% a major, the group has a high level of postgraduate studies in 30% and 57% have an undergraduate degree. Therefore, the high level of education served as a support for active and informed participation during the MOOC, as exemplified in graph 4.

**Graph 4. Educational level of MOOC course participants**



**Source:** Prepared by the author with data from the Virtual Campus of Universidad La Salle, Mexico

It is important to note that the elements pertaining to the social and economic context of the MOOC course participants are of particular relevance for a deeper understanding of their conception of culture of vocations as expressed in their responses to the course; however, given that the MOOC participants live in different social, labour and economic contexts that are specific to each Latin American region, it was not possible to take them as a reference for this study to analyse their voices as reflected in the course.

As the above-mentioned statistical data show, the connection generated by the course between different Districts highlights the

importance of communication and participation, as well as giving enormous significance to networking which, from the pastoral ministry, seeks to boost its practices so that they make sense among all members of the educational community; in the network, spaces are opened up to share values, convictions, beliefs, uncertainties and common concerns with the intention of growing as a community (Suárez and Moreno, 2017). Proposals such as the MOOC course are the result of hours of reflection among the network; this is the reason why these types of spaces arise in response to a diverse reality, but at the same time with common aspirations.

This experience became a point of reference for RELAL by providing accessible and enjoyable spaces for formation from a Latin American perspective and in line with the guidelines issued by the Church and the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Network of Evangelisation, Pastoral Ministry and Catechesis, considering the richness of the responses provided by the participants in the MOOC in many of the assignments, especially those generated in the reflection diaries, was kind enough to make a documentary review of them with the intention of offering an input for research and reflection to the Institute. There was the conviction that networking has the ability to break the isolated work that commonly surrounds those responsible for the pastoral areas in the institutions and show the relationships of these with the other levels of the educational institutions.

Delving a little deeper into the point of the rupture of isolated work thanks to networking, the comments of Rodríguez-Gómez (2015) are enlightening, who expresses that this is achieved thanks to networking, as it involves collaborating in a systematic, coordinated and complementary way, weaving relationships and complicities in common, open and diversified spaces, in order to achieve these ends based on specific actions. It is inspired by mutual and collective learning, through critical reflection and self-evaluation, but also by creating and managing knowledge by working together. This is precisely what was generated thanks to the MOOC course and becomes a reference to continue offering a growth in community that goes beyond geographical boundaries and is strengthened through

dialogue and collaboration. And this is also precisely what this text aims to do, to bring together the voices of this Latin American network.

### **For reflection**

After reading this chapter, review your history as a Lasallian about times when you have had to collaborate in networks with others to complement your work:

- What has prompted you to seek out others?
- How does networking foster community living?
- What elements are conducive to networking and what are obstacles to networking?

## CHAPTER II

# TOWARDS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CONCEPT OF “CULTURE OF VOCATIONS” FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

## 1. Development of the theoretical concept of culture of vocations

The concept of culture of vocations has taken on relevance in the Church and among Lasallians since the second decade of the 21st century. Tracing its origins, we refer to the XXX World Day of Prayer for Vocations, where there is talk of basic vocational attitudes that give rise to an authentic culture of vocations (John Paul II, 1993) and to the European Congress on vocations in 1997 (John Paul II, 1997). Later, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (2002) called for a paradigm shift in the vocation ministry from a recruitment approach to a long-term process of building a culture of vocations, in which every Christian is enabled to identify and respond to the mission to which he or she is called as a member of the Body of Christ, in and for the world. According to Currò, S., 2020:

*The term vocation has always referred more and more not only to the specific vocation to the priestly and consecrated life but to all vocations, also to the Christian life and to life itself as a vocation. In this sense, a culture of vocations has developed (p. 45).*

Later, the concept of culture of vocations began to arrive in Latin America at the II Latin American Continental Congress on Vocations in 2011, where it was expressed that the culture of vocations is a central axis of the vocation ministry, since it determines it not only from the Christian point of view but also from the anthropological point of view (CELAM, 2011). This meeting followed in the wake of the requests of Pope John Paul II who, in the face of the crisis of the current culture and the need for a new evangelisation, spoke of the need for a culture of vocations. From there the congress sought to promote some values that are perhaps somewhat forgotten in our culture but which are nevertheless fundamental and constitute the culture of vocations (Currò, S., 2020).

Delving a little deeper into the anthropological dimension of the culture of vocations, this is shown to be a construct that goes beyond the theological and embraces the human condition in general.

This implies that the creation of the environments it proposes allows us to understand the human dispositions that influence the reception of that call (*vocare* in Latin) and the response to it through intelligence, freedom, spirituality, personal history, responsibility and conscience.

In a certain way, the rise of the culture of vocations is a response to the indifference and apathy of society towards the human, which has emerged in societies marked by discontent, as well as by global and social crises; it is in the midst of this situation that the imperative of a constant search for the meaning of life and justice arises, which makes room for all, which represents the discriminated and vulnerable, characterising the culture of vocations as a movement of openness towards all and towards existential dynamics (Currò, S., 2020, p. 47). In this sense, the culture of vocations goes against a “throwaway culture”, of life seen from the point of view of contempt and invites to leave consumerism, hedonism and materialism aside, to find that mission of every human being in society.

Culture of vocations is a concept that raised within the Christian-Catholic sphere, therefore it takes place from theological readings, but at the same time it has a profound anthropological basis; hence its capacity to dialogue with an intercultural and multi-religious world that wants to give meaning to its existence, it invites the human being to investigate in the values that from the theology of Christian vocation are considered superior: love, friendship, prayer and contemplation (John Paul II, 1993). For this reason, it is worth investigating the etymological origin of the term and its main characteristics.

If the words of the term are analysed, that is, culture of vocations, it is possible to have a deeper approach to what it intends. *Culture* is understood as a set of common beliefs, values, institutions, customs, knowledge and behavioural patterns of a social group (Sierra, 2021). The term *vocation* comes from the Latin *vocatio* which means call, invitation; this word takes on greater meaning in the light of Christianity by associating it with an intimate act of God that calls each human being to a lifestyle, to complete a mission, to adhere to a faith, among others (Sierra, 2021).

The main characteristics and elements of the culture of vocations have been described in a systematic way by the Italian theologian Amadeo Cencini, who also participated in the aforementioned II Latin American Congress on Vocations, through a classification in three dimensions: mentality, sensitivity and praxis. Mentality refers to the theoretical, intellectual and cognitive components that lead a group of people to have an identity with a shared, common mentality. The second element is that of sensitivity, where affectivity comes into play; here the subjective is touched and the testimonies of life that inspire. This dimension moves the heart and the dispositions. Finally, praxis is about translating thoughts and feelings into methods, ways of life, actions and decisions; here we are referring to practices.

In support of what Cencini affirmed, Gómez (2015) states that the culture of vocations is made up of three components:

*A vocational mentality or intellectual component, a vocational sensitivity or affective component, and a vocational praxis or lifestyle. The vocational mentality refers to the theological truth of the vocation (logos); the vocational sensitivity, to the subjectivity of the call (pathos); and the vocational praxis, to the gestures that make it credible and sustain it in space and time (ethos). To the first component corresponds the theology of vocation; to the second, vocational spirituality; and to the third, vocational pedagogy (p. 265).*

Therefore, it is important to make a distinction between the term culture of vocations and that of vocation ministry. The first term refers to the environment that is conducive to the emergence from within the human being of a response to the search for the meaning of their present life through their actions and the interpretation that the person makes of their environment. While vocation ministry is linked to the accompaniment that one person offers to another in their vocational search, hence the term pastor (shepherd) as an analogy of someone who accompanies by supporting the other in their discernment of life, which is understood as the self-examination of God's action in one's own life, the examination of one's own values and attitudes (Sierra, 2021). From this point of view, vocation ministry is embraced within the field of culture of vocations, because



its action is one of the means to create an environment conducive to vocational awakening.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in the face with the impact that the concept discussed here has had on the Church, has developed, through an international consultation, a consensus on what culture of vocations is all about, from the perspective of the Lasallian charism. This has been detailed and made explicit in a document entitled “Circular 475: From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations”, which includes the following definition: *culture of vocation is a social environment, an atmosphere created by members of a community that promotes the understanding of human life and allows them to discover their passion and purpose in life* (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Circ. 475, 2020).

## **2. Documentary analysis of MOOC course responses**

Taking culture of vocations and what it implies as a reference point, we sought to have an approach to a vision of this term from the point of view of a part of the Lasallian community in Latin America that participated in the MOOC formation space mentioned in the previous chapter. The discursive and reflective style of the course allowed the participants to freely express and interpret culture of vocations in writing, relating it to their usual pastoral and educational practice. The work and reflections of the participants in the aforementioned formative space are the basis of this document, with the aim of constructing, assembling and bringing together, from a Latin American vision, what is understood by culture of vocations. In addition, we sought not only to understand it, but also the possible ways of putting it into practice from the work of each participant and their own environment.

To this end, the different discourses written in the course were compiled and analysed using a qualitative methodology. The text presented below is based on the analysis and interpretation of the participants’ texts, using two criteria: the frequency of themes and

the importance given by the participants to the object of study – in this case, culture of vocations – with the aim of constructing a Latin American discourse on the concept of culture of vocations. For the analysis, the words were faithfully collected. It should be noted that the writings of the participants in the MOOC course are anonymous, which is why they are not published in full.

In this way, categories were created. They were based, firstly, on the meaning that culture of vocations has for the participants; secondly, on the importance and transcendence that it has for Lasallian work; thirdly, on the forms of expression of this culture; then, on the spaces, both physical and symbolic, where it can be experienced and practised and, finally, the category was formulated on those people who can take the concept of culture of vocations as a reference in favour of others.

After the categories constructed as a result of the analysis of the course participants' work, these were converted into six dimensions that group together the recurrent elements in which the participants allude to culture of vocations:

1. The meaning and understanding of culture of vocations.
2. The aims and purpose of culture of vocations.
3. The ways of living the culture of vocations.
4. The agents who promote, receive and live the culture of vocations.
5. The specific and symbolic spaces where culture of vocations can be experienced.
6. The benefits of living and transmitting culture of vocations.

These dimensions emerged from a process of documentary review of the responses obtained from the MOOC participants. It should be made clear that the quotations presented in the following sections

in italics justified on the right are taken literally from the writings and thoughts of the course participants; they are the voices of the Lasallians who, in their own language, express the conceptions they have of the concept of culture of vocations, responding to the what, what for, why, who and how.

We also reviewed some Institute documents which underpin the main concepts dealt with in this bulletin. The starting point was a review of some Lasallian glossaries such as the one proposed in the Thematic Vocabulary of Lasallian Association by Antonio Botana FSC (2007) and another glossary of terms drawn up by the District of Central America-Panama (2016), which highlighted and clarified concepts related to culture of vocations, vocation ministry, Lasallian identity, among others. The reference was taken from Circular 475, from which the characteristics of culture of vocations such as participation, collaboration and intentionality are taken up. An interesting point that stands out is the concept of “community of Brothers and Lasallian communities” (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Circular 475, 2020).

The Report of the III International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission (Brothers of the Christian Schools, AIMEL, 2020) was taken as an enlightening reference point, especially in its strategic axis 2 which deals with building and revitalising formation and accompaniment for the future of the Lasallian Mission, where it sets out the importance of the culture of vocations for the future of the Institute. Another document which sheds light on the subject dealt with here and which has emerged as a result of the proposals of the 46<sup>th</sup> General Chapter is the Leavening Project, from which a call is made to fulfil the motto, we are a Lasallian Family, with diverse vocations (Brothers of the Christian Schools, The Leavening Project, 2022), and to contribute to the Educational Mission from the context of each Lasallian.

## **2.1 The meaning and understanding of the culture of vocations**

Observing the overall picture of the participants' writings, it can be perceived that, broadly speaking, culture of vocations is understood as the foundation of life. The Latin American participants consider that this concept is an essential part of the life of Lasallian institutions as it gives the possibility of developing in each of its members an understanding of the meaning they have of their own life, and they also consider that this is a fundamental part of the Lasallian teaching mission.

In this same sense, the RELAL participants understand culture of vocations as part of the identity of any Lasallian, as it provides the necessary elements for teachers and formators to guide students in their life project, enabling them of finding the journey of their vocation from an anthropological and religious sense, combining it with listening to God's call.

This culture enables students to find value in both the spiritual and the human part, and to live the Lasallian spirit inside and outside the institutions. As a result, they structure their lives in response to a personal call to love and serve (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Circular 475, 2020). This means that living a spirituality, understood as a way of being, thinking, choosing and acting in the world according to its ultimate values (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Lasallian Formation for Mission. The Pilgrim's Handbook, 2019) is an essential part of the growth of the interiority of the person. It is an essential part of moments of feeling the presence of God in their lives, in their daily lives. That is then contrasted with Lasallian spirituality from the proposal of Saint John Baptist de La Salle which is incarnated in a way of seeing reality with the eyes of faith and invites us to live the educational ministry with zeal.

Therefore, this spiritual vision expressed by the Lasallians of RELAL is complemented by the creation of a culture of vocations, from a community that lives a personal, charismatic and ecclesial spirituality that offers the possibility of understanding life as a vocation. Culture

of vocations is thus conceived as the environment in which the members of a community live: their codes of beliefs and experiences.

*Culture of vocations is nothing more than creating a spiritual way of life to share with others, without distinction, and especially with those of us who live a Lasallian charism, which the Holy Spirit gives us to share and put at the service of the community (MOOC Participant).*

*Culture of vocations is about inviting young people and the most vulnerable people to come closer to God, to feel at peace with themselves and to correct the things in their lives that are hurting them. This is achieved through dynamic activities where the young person or adult feels comfortable and opens their heart to God (MOOC participant).*

Depending on the vision and the place where each participant in the MOOC course develops, it is possible to appreciate a different nuance between the ways of conceiving the concept of culture of vocations; therefore, this theme is divided into five sub-themes, which are presented below.

### **2.1.1 Culture of vocations in Lasallian education**

*Culture of vocations is being able to touch the hearts of our students, it is a dream that often seems unattainable; that is why it is so rewarding and brings so much joy when we achieve it (MOOC participant).*

Culture of vocations enables the community to get to know the Lasallian charism, mainly through the teams of pastoral ministry and the presence of religious Brothers in the institutions where they are present. It gives the possibility of spreading the thinking and mission of the Gospel and of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

It also seeks to help children and young people to set out on the path of faith, service and community building. In this sense, the

culture of vocations promotes and invites adults to accompany children and young people in decision-making processes, which is both a gift and a responsibility, because, as De La Salle said, it is “to fulfil in the education of youth the function of Guardian Angels” (Meditation 198).

*Culture of vocations is an opportunity to proclaim, remember and live the principles of our Holy Founder (MOOC Participant).*

In addition to working with the students, culture of vocations contemplates the formation of persons of integrity, that is, giving support and company to the whole school community, seeking not only to be individuals of integrity in their actions, but also to promote the integrity of those around them, that is to say, to form in interiority and transcendence.

Culture of vocations is to seek a common environment in the various institutional tasks, so that not only the activities and curricular elements related to faith, but the totality of the tasks of the educational community promotes the search for a vocation.

Likewise, culture of vocations gives strength to the needs of students, teachers and families:

*Lasallian charism enables us to discover, value and respond to the human and Christian educational challenges of today's children, young people and adults, especially the most vulnerable, who need committed people to accompany them on their personal, spiritual and educational journey and to safeguard their rights (MOOC Participant).*

Along the same lines, for the participants in the MOOC course, culture of vocations must be present in each of the educational projects and formation programmes. It is not just another issue, but must be transversal and explicit in all educational practices.

In this way, culture of vocations can respond to current educational needs in accordance with the real context in which we live, since with

it we are able to transcend and transform in a collaborative way, in union with others who, by association, follow the same path, model, life journey and ideals, where some share the same faith in Christ, but all share a faith in a life-giving humanity. This is how fraternal love becomes an essential element in the culture of vocations linked to Lasallian education.

### **2.1.2 Culture of vocations as service to others**

The second sub-theme is culture of vocations at the service of others. A large part of the Lasallian community considers culture of vocations as selfless help to others, with the aim of improving the living conditions of the people around them, academically, emotionally, spiritually and financially, wherever we are. It is help for people in general, regardless of whether or not they are lay people, young people, minors or Lasallian religious.

Thus, culture of vocations is about raising awareness of the importance of focusing attention on the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

Under this notion, culture of vocations is based on values such as: inclusion, respect, dialogue, patience, fraternity and empathy. That is, in its work towards others, culture of vocations requires elements such as listening and understanding, in order to work with greater meaning and intensity.

Inclusion, from the point of view of the participants in the MOOC, is related to understanding that the Lasallian community is made up of Brothers, Associates, Lay Partners, young people, children, and that they all have the same responsibility to participate in the generation and experience of the culture of vocations in the areas where each one carries out their daily work; this vision corresponds to the proposal made at international level by the participants in the fourth International Symposium of Young Lasallians: “To promote Lasallian vocations by emphasising inclusion and openness to young

people of all religions, beliefs and ideas” (International Symposium of Young Lasallians, 2022).

Similarly, inclusion considers those who believe in the God proclaimed by Jesus, but also those who do not believe; as well as those who have financial resources and those who do not. Inclusion is also linked to participation, in which all visions and vocations are recognised and valued, and that all, together, are part of the mission of the Church.

### **2.1.3 Culture of vocations as a response to God’s call**

As a third sub-theme, the Lasallian community considers culture of vocations as a call from God. In this sense, knowing God’s plan for each person is another essential element of culture of vocations, since it is a personal response to God’s call. It implies commitment and, at the same time, gratitude. It is a personal encounter with him. It is a constant engagement to discover and rediscover one’s mission and vision of life in the eyes of God.

This vision presupposes the individual “I” and also the others. That is, culture of vocations helps to understand where to go, which path God is asking us to follow, as well as, by experience, accompanying other people to have an experience with God and, therefore, to understand what He wants for each one.

In this way of appreciating culture of vocations, they recognise it as a life experience in which children, young people and adults are allowed to discover God’s call, in the confidence that He acts permanently in the midst of everyone. It is also teaching young people to believe in God, by spreading his word in daily activities, with the help of prayer and spirituality lived in community. It is also to help young people to discern the call to live as Christians in the Lasallian way, and to experience this experience in practice with others:



*Young people are the pillar for living the experience of God from their contexts, as a result of times of crisis, and it is there, from the crisis, that we must be willing to learn that there is a Creator who works with us in each of his works (MOOC participant).*

#### **2.1.4 Culture of vocations as testimony of Christ's followers**

As a fourth sub-theme, culture of vocations is recognised as that which moves to witness to Christ, to embrace Christian values that enable others to question themselves about their way of life and the reasons for their existence, as it favours the living of the Gospel.

Under this vision, culture of vocations is seen as synonymous with hope, where those who live it are the light of the world - as Jesus was - and are called to continue his legacy hand in hand with Lasallian spirituality:

*In short, to have God in every fibre of our body, and to have Him burning in our hearts (MOOC participant).*

Culture of vocations is the motive to follow Christ, where everyone feels “called” and can serve the Church from the different realities in which they find themselves. It is the potential that each one has to serve God in a specific vocation, particularly in the vocation of love and in giving oneself for the common good.

#### **2.1.5 Culture of vocations as a way of life**

Finally, several of the participants consider culture of vocations as a way of life, as an individual and community way of life, which allows a person to develop in something he/she likes or is passionate about and which is enriched through daily personal and societal actions. Under this conception, culture of vocations invites people to be a reflection of what they believe in, and what they are convinced of.

It encompasses all that the person does and dreams of, in the pursuit of individual and collective fulfilment.

Consequently, culture of vocations is part of a way of thinking because, thanks to it, one is aware that each of the activities that are proposed for the community do not arise from a personal interest, but from a community call to build a different society. In other words, culture of vocations implies harmony, so that the community takes ownership of it, forming a common language and being on the same frequency, so that collective goals and objectives can be achieved.

Culture of vocations proposes a lifestyle that includes everyone. It is a culture of inclusion that helps to create an awareness of faith, to awaken the desire and need for human and spiritual growth, the harmonious development of people and their relationship with themselves and with others, with God and with nature.

In summary, the Latin American vision expressed by the participants about the concept of culture of vocations revolves around the fact that it is immersed in the very being and doing of Lasallian education; they understand that the mere fact of working in education is already an experience of culture of vocations. They also associate the concept on recurring occasions with the experience of service actions, other Lasallians see it as a response to God's call, while another group associates it with the fact of being followers of Christ, up to those who see it as a way of life. From the "what", we now move on to the "what for" of this culture.

## **2.2 The aims and purposes of the culture of vocations**

*The culture of vocations comes to rescue the meaning of life, the reason and purpose by which I am functioning in my community, the rediscovery of the dimension of the person in terms of who they are, their commitment, their degree of responsibility with themselves, but also with those around them (MOOC Participant).*

### **2.2.1 Personal purposes**

Culture of vocations implies a change of personal attitude, in which love and service are at the heart of each person's actions. It also implies being an example of hope and love for life. It favours the search for a balance between heart and mind, between body and soul, between sexuality and affectivity, between feeling and the intellect. For the MOOC participants, the aim of the culture of vocations is to change towards the attitude of love and service.

### **2.2.2 Purposes in the community**

Culture of vocations invites us to participate and to be present in everything that takes place within the educational institution, and to be aware that any activity in which we are involved, however small it may be, has an impact on the community and on the students. At the same time, culture of vocations makes it possible to relate academic activities to the religious vision and in a special way to the legacy of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Likewise, it gives the possibility of bringing the Lasallian community closer to its own talents, and to understand that the most important thing in life is to serve others. It favours the building of Association for the educational service of the poorest.

Finally, under this vision of community, culture of vocations must develop an inclusive Lasallian spirituality, which is fraternal, where diversity is accepted and the needs of the children and young people entrusted to the Lasallian educational ministry are listened to.

From this perspective, the MOOC participants understand that the object of culture of vocations supposes a change in the understanding of vocation in order to speak of words such as balance, love, service, awareness, an integrating dimension and acceptance of diversity. From these motives it is possible to advance in the construction of the educational projects present in Lasallian institutions. We now move on to the concrete ways of embodying and living the culture of vocations within the educational communities.

## **2.3 Ways of living the culture of vocations**

With regard to daily practice and living in and for culture of vocations, the Lasallian participants in the MOOC course consider culture of vocations as an environment created by the members of the community with the aim of fostering a climate conducive to awakening the beauty of what is human and for this to be embodied in daily life.

Just as Saint John Baptist de La Salle had great guides who accompanied him throughout his life and were witnesses to the encounter with the God of Jesus, today we need to live day by day accompanying, mentoring, and being a constant support for students, former students, teachers, families and De La Salle Brothers, so that they can discover or rediscover their vocation, through a consistent, firm witness, also following the example of Jesus.

In this way, culture of vocations is to affirm a continuous 'yes' to God, a close encounter with that which we understand as our reason for being in life and from that to seek fidelity to personal vocation. For this reason, three headings are identified that contribute to ways of living culture of vocations.

### **2.3.1 Testimony of life**

*Culture of vocations is living with the presence of Jesus in everything we do (MOOC Participant).*

We contribute to the culture of vocations through our actions, through the witness of people committed to Lasallian mission, that is, by being at the service of others, without mistreatment, by helping when asked to do so. We also contribute to the culture of vocations with an optimistic attitude and using the charisma that each one has in the Lasallian community to invite others to join in and to seek a vocation.

The contribution to culture of vocations takes place when people are transparent, without wearing masks, just as they are, with their attitudes that make them unique:

*I am contributing to the construction of a culture of vocations, because I recognise and share with those around me that we are called to work together to establish the Kingdom of God; that we were chosen for this mission and that we have the strength of the Holy Spirit. That we must work together to ensure that the children and young people in our care find meaning in their lives, fostering spirituality and creating people who are responsible and committed to our society. (MOOC Participant).*

At the same time, one helps to build culture of vocations starting from one's own vocation. In this sense, the participants understand this as perseverance in prayer, living a Christian life, taking reference from models of holiness, noting each of the sacraments that each person has received, for example, marriage. On the other hand, culture of vocations requires a change of attitude towards daily life. An example of this is prayer; the participants consider that it is important to be faithful to personal prayer and also to teach the community to pray, because no one can love what he/she does not know, and through prayer God is known.

Consequently, Latin American People perceive that it is necessary to make a daily effort to transmit the value that daily prayer gives us, because it becomes a reference point in the journey of life, where one learns to love God and, consequently, to not want to be separated from him. Therefore, culture of vocations entails constant prayer, both personal, as well as that of the students and staff, and in particular, community prayer, to ask God for vocations.

As testimony of life, culture of vocations also involves sharing Lasallian values and teachings with others by means of the basic documents of the Institute, such as the Guiding Document of the Pastoral Ministry of RELAL. This also involves the formation of students and all staff, in order to make them more aware of the Lasallian Educational Mission and Gospel values.

Finally, the MOOC participants consider the Brothers as guides. Their presence in different areas of the community contributes not only to the construction, but also to the growth and deepening of the culture of vocations. In this regard, listening to their life experiences can revitalise the atmosphere towards a better culture of vocations.

### **2.3.2 Accompaniment**

Accompanying students in the discovery of the meaning of their life and of the call coming from God can strengthen and give presence to the culture of vocations. It is a daily task among the members of the community. In addition, contributing to the culture of vocations entails listening, giving space for expression, patiently helping those around us and encouraging to be passionate in their actions.

It is also to lead students to discover what they long for in order to be happy and to go beyond their current situation. It is to support them in discovering their mission in this life, deeply desired by God, favouring an atmosphere of prayer. It is to accompany people so that they question themselves about their own vocation, starting first of all from the vocation they have to life.

### **2.3.3 School participation**

*I am contributing to the construction of a culture of vocations because I respect individual differences. Also, in our work teams, I try to distribute the tasks according to our abilities as teachers, and there is a harmonious coexistence and the talents of each one are valued (MOOC participant).*

Culture of vocations can be lived through active participation, whether by the associate, the teacher or another agent, both in the activities of the institution and in pastoral groups, in which spaces for meetings and encounters are generated:

*To speak a common language, to involve the whole community, from all areas (administration, educators, students and workers in general), in the mission of institutional pastoral ministry, which seeks to discover God's love and share it with others through our way of loving and living, since it is the axis where all the dimensions of the person are integrated. (MOOC participant).*

It is interesting to see how the Latin American participants in the MOOC course refer to the following ways of living the culture of vocations: witness of life, accompaniment and awareness that what is done in the institution tends to be a key element of this culture. In this regard, it is possible to speak of a deep understanding that is not limited to practices, but that starts from a mentality, is rooted in dispositions and finally takes shape in concrete actions.

The following section describes who the agents in this culture are.

## **2.4 The agents promoting, receiving and living culture of vocations**

*Culture of vocations is built and promoted in community and in the context where we Lasallians are immersed day by day; it is necessary to make young people fall in love with it so that they are encouraged to form part of pastoral groups and, why not, to become part of the Brothers' community. In the midst of this society which gives priority to consumerism and forgets about values, about the person, about being, it is necessary in each institution to cultivate this culture of vocations and to instill in children and young people a taste and pleasure in serving others and God. (MOOC Participant).*

The MOOC participants believe that each and every one of the subjects in the educational community where they work should be considered as agents who promote and live the culture of vocations. For this reason, the promotion of the Lasallian mission and its basic documents, to mention just a few, should be disseminated and reflected upon by the whole community.

The accompaniment of the agents becomes fundamental for the emergence of a culture of vocations. Agents such as teachers, pastoral ministers and De La Salle Brothers are central to this. In addition to this, there are voices that call for the opening of spaces for reflection and the participation of other figures, such as alumni and families, in order to permeate them with the so-called culture of vocations.

In this section, the agents who are suggested as the main ones in the development and experience of culture of vocations are presented by category and in order of greater to lesser frequency.

### **2.4.1 The De La Salle Brothers**

The community participating in the MOOC recognises the work of the De La Salle Brothers as the most important in the promotion of the culture of vocations. Not only do they perceive them as another member of the community; the Brothers are seen as examples of life, as witnesses of Christian life in the service of others.

In this regard, the Brothers represent the Lasallian ideals, they strengthen the community's assurance and trust in God and they have the gift of transforming the lives of the students and their families:

*No marketing strategy, nor the good will of many Lasallians, can provide the same joyful and prophetic witness of a community of Brothers (MOOC Participant).*

Consequently, this community should motivate the spreading and living out of the culture of vocations, as well as seeking vocations to consecrate themselves as De La Salle Brothers or as Lasallian Sisters.



## 2.4.2 The Teachers

*I live my vocation as a teacher with joy and enthusiasm so that students can see that God has different ways in which we can serve him and contribute to the work (MOOC participant).*

A large number of the Lasallian participants in the MOOC course consider that it is through teaching that students can be guided so that inside and outside the institution they can live the Lasallian spirit and find their vocation, whether as lay people or as religious, and always guide it with love for and with others.

In addition to this, it should be the commitment of every Lasallian Partner to be in line with the present times, always accompanying students in their experience of encountering God through the person of Jesus, guiding them in the growth of their faith in order to strengthen social transformation.

Following this idea, it is necessary to guide them not only in their thinking, but also in helping, feeling and accompanying others. Pope Francis asks that the three languages be in harmony: that young people think and feel what they do, feel what they think and do, and do what they think and feel (Alcolea, 2018).

*“... I find myself supporting groups from youth and vocational ministry that have allowed me to observe the talent of the students and the love they have for their school with the aim of encouraging others to follow God’s call and a social lifestyle that projects improvements in the environment” (MOOC Participant).*

Therefore, the teacher has the responsibility of transmitting happiness in giving oneself, and the joy that comes from being a Lasallian teacher. It is necessary that the students experience, through the teacher, the desire to follow Jesus.

*The culture of vocations is what distinguishes us as Lasallians; it is the environment we have in view to help our students discover their innermost human side, their vocation in this life, to feel God's call through the guidance and accompaniment we provide, to form people who feel love for others, who live what it means to share (MOOC Participant).*

### **2.4.3 The Lasallian Partners or Associates**

In addition to the role of the teacher, the Lasallian community believes that Association, understood as the desire to increase a Lasallian's sense of belonging to the Mission without opting for the consecrated life of the Brothers, is key to the development of the culture of vocations and for collaborative work; but this requires the commitment of the agents, and to bring the life of the associate into line with the Lasallian mission and spirituality.

In this way, associates can revitalise the Lasallian mission and the culture of vocations by making the decision to assist, support and accompany the Brothers, as they have the power to convey to them that they are not alone in this work and that they can count on them.

### **2.4.4 The Pastoral Team**

For the Latin American Lasallian community represented in the MOOC, pastoral ministry should be the transversal axis of the culture of vocations that runs through every educational activity that is carried out, it should be seen as the backbone of the institutions; in other words, the pastoral ministry team should be involved in all school activities, from daily prayer to youth groups, missionary groups, social action groups, among others.

In this context, the MOOC participants think that the animations, the reflections on special days and the intentional groups are essential for the experience of the culture of vocations and for the formation

of the educational community, although more members of the community should be involved in the pastoral ministry, because in this way other members of the community become immersed in the culture of vocations and experience it.

#### **2.4.5 The Culture of Vocations Team**

In the aforementioned guiding document produced by the Network of Evangelisation, Pastoral Ministry and Catechesis, the team of vocation ministry or culture of vocations is defined as the structure responsible for offering accompaniment of vocations and is recognised as a community strategy. The purpose of this team is to provide interdisciplinary and integral accompaniment to young people in their vocational discernment and to lead the promotion of culture of vocations in the educational community. The team can be made up of people from various disciplines and representatives of different Christian and Lasallian vocations.

The existence of these teams will encourage the dissemination and living of the culture of vocations with the involvement of the whole educational community so that they feel that they are living an open and inclusive mission. Within its activities it is recommended that this team should carry out reflections and actions that support the Lasallian community first of all in discovering the love of God, followed by the discovery of its own identity and the lifestyle of every Lasallian.

In relation to the above in contrast with the formative experience of the MOOC, the Latin American participants share that they place the Brothers at the heart of this process of promoting the culture of vocations, but very much hand in hand with the teachers, even more so with those who assume their professional work as a project of life and meaning, thus becoming partners or associates of the

*Lasallian philosophy*,<sup>1</sup> some of them with public commitments. However, there is a lack of recognition that the culture of vocations can be promoted by vocation teams, which can be different from the teams of pastoral ministry or form part of them; therefore, it is important to make these teams visible as a structure that can facilitate the accompaniment for vocational discernment.

## **2.5 The concrete and symbolic spaces where culture of vocations can be experienced**

*If we feel part of a community, we can work on culture of vocations at any level, from an administrative or sports area, from teaching or the psycho-pedagogical department. Culture of vocations must be part of our daily lives (MOOC Participant).*

When talking about spaces, MOOC participants do not mention many concrete examples of those, but from the little information it is possible to infer that they understand culture of vocations not as a single space where it can be perceived or experienced, but as a generalised environment containing the multiple elements and characteristics we have described above.

Therefore, they think that culture of vocations should be promoted as a common milieu in the various institutional activities and interpersonal relationships, so that it is not only conceived in the activities and curricular elements related to the subjects of formation or faith; but that culture of vocations should be worked on in all contexts: family, school, social, neighbourhood and more...

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**1** “More than a philosophical system, or philosophical structure of thought, which in De La Salle was more theological (...) in De La Salle there is a “philosophical work or task” which underpins his pedagogical framework. His philosophical task is centred on: the child, as a “being, a person”; the school as an “educational task”; the teacher as a “guide-mentor” and on others such as the family, the Church, society and culture ...” (Llano R., 2019).

However, within Lasallian institutions certain places can be found that are more conducive to fostering a culture of vocations, and these are described below.

### **2.5.1 Pastoral projects and intentional groups**

*The creation of new forms of evangelisation that transmit the joy of living the Lasallian Mission. Promoting dialogue with teams of pastoral ministry and educational communities in order to contextualise the common language to the reality they accompany (MOOC Participant).*

A large part of the voices of the Lasallian community thinks that there is no better place to experience the culture of vocations than in pastoral projects and in intentional groups such as: missionaries, prayer spaces, discussion groups, among others.

In this respect, it is stated that having a pastoral project linked or immersed in the institutional project and, at the same time, in the culture of vocations, can guide the processes and actions of pastoral ministry. Likewise, several participants thought that the pastoral teams should be strengthened, raising them to the category of the coordination of pastoral ministry, and that this should be made up of the different bodies involved, such as pre-university and university pastoral ministry, vocation ministry, missions, formation on Lasallian Spirituality among others.

### **2.5.2 Catechism classes and Integral Human Development subjects**

We contribute to the culture of vocations through catechesis, both for children who are preparing for a sacrament and for their families. Likewise, in the subjects related to education and Integral Development, they are ideal places to work in favour of culture of vocations.

Undoubtedly, within Lasallian institutions there are more areas that are linked to the culture of vocations; it will be a task to continue to raise awareness of this subject so that Lasallians can identify them and link them with the experience of this way of life.

## **2.6 The benefits of living and transmitting the culture of vocations**

*I am excited to be part of this proposal, I am excited to know that what I do has a purpose. I am excited to know that my vocation as a Lasallian impacts the community and service (MOOC Participant).*

For the MOOC participants, a first and foremost benefit of the culture of vocations is that the community members can find and develop their vocation from the professional to the existential dimension. Then come benefits such as: motivating young people to find their mission in life, creating a dynamic, more authentic environment and a call to service. They understand that somehow the best impact is demonstrated in commitment and bearing witness. Moreover, culture of vocations motivates young people to find their mission in life. It provokes a dynamic, more authentic environment and calls to service.

Culture of vocations must awaken the youngest with the help of those who have the Lasallian charism, by means of virtues such as patience and listening, in order to be able to guide everyone to choose the path of their life style in the light of the example of Jesus:

*The promotion of culture of vocations is a necessary, serious and urgent issue. It must respond to the new generations. To this end, "the approach of teachers must be affective, humble and generous and see only the good in young people. Search and research until they find the good in the person and recognise the signs of generosity and beauty in the human heart" (MOOC Participant).*

In addition to this, the Lasallian community believes that it must be able to pass on to future generations this lifestyle which will enable them to grow in an integral way, thus becoming men and women who love what they do and live with passion.

A second benefit is that the Christian faith is passed on. Vocation is that inclination that we feel towards the goal that we want to achieve, directed and guided by Lasallian principles. This way of life should bring satisfaction and give meaning to daily work. In this way each person can understand who he or she is, where he or she is going, and most importantly, what he or she is useful for. Apart from this, the culture of vocations invites to greater preparation, to research, to share information and to promote life from faith, as well as to a change into a more proactive attitude, which responds to human and Christian challenges, with a hopeful vision.

Finally, the participants detect a third benefit, which is to provide opportunities to promote, know and appreciate the religious vocation and other specific vocations, since they generate important benefits for the community, as they help children and young people to discover and keep in mind what they want to do with their lives, how far they want to go, towards the common good, from a faith in Christ, avoiding a hedonistic and individualistic posture marked by indifference. This implies that the vocation is varied and from a particular call, but with the function of contributing to the human and Christian development of society.

### **3. Trends in Latin American culture of vocations**

After the preceding documentary analysis of the testimonies, it is possible to begin to sketch a picture of what is understood as culture of vocations and its implications for the people of Latin America. The vision of faith is present, of seeing in this whole cultural approach the inspiration of God as the one who calls each human being to find the best of himself. The formulation of life options in accordance with the Gospel criteria is evident in the different references that the

participants make to them, considering them as a guide that can give directions in the decision-making process, in accordance with the message delivered by Jesus.

It also shows a high understanding that this culture is immersed in the being and doing of the institutions with their current practices, although they indicate the urgent need for it to have an impact on the curricular elements, under the term of transversality.

Culture of vocations is very often linked with service; it is understood as the sense of coming close to touching vulnerable realities and from them feeling the call to a life that transforms the lives of others. Another great tendency of this vision is the centrality of the figure of the religious Brother as an agent who energises others and who inspires a fraternal lifestyle. There is also the need for those involved in pastoral ministry and those who work in a Lasallian institution to work in teams in order to share their experience of culture of vocations.

Finally, the participants tend to speak of witnessing, following and awareness, associate culture of vocations more with being than with doing, and invite the progressive identification of the institutional elements that respond to this culture, which they also see as a way of life rather than as a set of theories.

It is in this way that a concept which has its origins in Church documents and in the documents of the Centre of the Institute is taking shape in the vision of La Salle in Latin America in order to take root in this multicultural society which seeks to root the Gospel among the educational communities which make it up. From this perspective, the following is an analysis of a series of designs which the MOOC participants see as important for the future of the culture of vocations. There is also a review of the current practice of the Districts of RELAL, with the intention of comparing it with what the MOOC participants express and what the inspirational documents of the Institute suggest in this regard.



## **For reflection. Your vocation, your fundamental purpose**

After having read the opinions of the Latin American participants in the MOOC course “From Hope to Commitment”, we provide you with the following questions for your personal reflection:

- Are you clear about your vocation and what personal and professional fruits do you find in it?
- Which areas of your educational institution are most in need of a vocational vision?
- From this answer and as a Lasallian, how can you live your vocation and lead others to discover it?

## CHAPTER III

# MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURE OF VOCATIONS AND ACCOMPANIMENT

**T**he aim of this chapter is to show the ways of designing the experience of culture of vocations from different analyses. The first one arises from the concluding activity of the MOOC course, the object of study of this work, which consisted in the development of an action plan of pastoral ministry by the participants, to integrate the elements analysed in the course and to work on culture of vocations within Lasallian institutions. An analysis is also carried out in which the contributions of Institute documents, the responses of the MOOC participants and the current reality of the Districts of RELAL are triangulated with a view to proposing strategies for action.

## **1. Action plans for Pastoral Ministry**

Among the large number of projects developed by the course participants, various areas of work are identified and described below; they are grouped into three main parts: those aimed at discovering a vocation, those aimed at accompanying the educational community, and projects that incorporate information and communication technologies.

### **1.1 Projects and actions aimed at discovering vocation**

In the first place, many of the participants considered that the culture of vocations should be placed at the top of the structure of the institutions, with a transversal function, so that its essence would permeate all areas. In this way it is thought that not only the Lasallian spirit aimed at discovering a vocation but also the Christian spirit of service and dedication to others can be transmitted to the community and, in a special way, to the students. In addition to this, a personal, organisational and vocational link will be created between the institution and its community.

In this same sense, it is stated that, in those educational works where they do not exist, it is worth the effort to build specific teams on culture of vocations, whose main task, but not the only one, is to

be guides and mentors through reflection and the expression of the vocation of each member of the community; in this sense, the action plans are aimed at holding vocational talks, together with the presentation of the different vocations and the lifestyle that each one can embrace.

In addition, on this topic, on the one hand, it is expressed the strengthening of pastoral activities and, on the other hand, the creation of pastoral programmes that include the educational community in general, from principals, administrative staff, partners, teachers, students and parents, with the aim of reflecting and discerning on the vocation that each one has in their life.

In addition to this, formation processes are also proposed in the Lasallian area, in the areas of Christian education and catechesis, as well as in the programmes of mission and service to those most in need. Emphasis is placed on the importance of generating a greater sense of belonging to the family, to La Salle, to society and to the Christian faith. Specifically, it is proposed to promote experiences of encounter with Lasallians from different countries, with the aim of strengthening the bonds of fraternity among the works and the different Districts, as well as discovering a vocation based on proximity and getting to know one another.

To conclude this section, the Latin American Lasallians believe that promoting vocations ministry projects will help to create a good organisational atmosphere and to train pastoral leaders. Among the concrete activities that are mostly proposed are the sharing of vocational experiences, the opening of spaces for reflection and expression through retreats, workshops, gatherings, forums and conferences, to name but a few.

## **1.2 Projects aimed at accompanying the educational community**

MOOC participants pointed out that on a day-to-day basis, the educational community requires accompaniment and a closer

proximity to the Lasallian foundations in order to reflect on their vocation. They state that this can be applied by promoting personal and community prayer, as well as by encouraging participation in the Eucharist and by raising awareness of the importance of living and educating in the faith. Among other concrete actions, they suggest watching films on the meaning of life.

### **1.3 Incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies**

In the aspects mentioned above, such as formation, training, awareness-raising, accompaniment, outreach, among others, the presence and incorporation of new Information and Communication Technologies is required as a tool for carrying out projects; for example, the use of social networks and other technological means to create moments of prayer, congresses and gathering among Lasallians from different latitudes, listening to life testimonies through the various on line platforms that exist, continuing to develop MOOC courses, among other activities.

In conclusion to this section, Lasallians believe that the culture of vocations should be experienced on a daily basis in the different educational communities that exist, incorporating the new tools that technology offers, as well as linking the testimonies and knowledge of both the De La Salle Brothers and the community in general. This can be achieved by means of simple actions, ranging from daily prayer, to gatherings, workshops, groups for approaching other realities, and others, which bring together the work and being of pastoral ministry.

## **2. Convergences of the culture of vocations: referents, agents and practices**

The contributions of the MOOC participants are strongly influenced by the vision and practices that exist in each of their Districts in relation to pastoral ministry and the concept of vocation. Therefore, a triangulation was carried out in which the theoretical references

that the Church and the Institute have published on the culture of vocations, especially the following texts: Circular 475; A Conversation for the Lasallian Family: Deepening our Identity; Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes; and the Guiding Document for the Region on Pastoral Ministry of Education and Pastoral Ministry of Youth and Vocations. The second element of the analysis was that of the contributions of the MOOC participants and the third aspect was the current practices promoted by the pastoral leaders of the Districts of RELAL with regard to this topic.

This information was organised into the same six indicators as in the previous sections. The most relevant results are shared below with the aim of continuing to contribute to the reflection on the culture of vocations, to its visibility and, above all, to be a sign of hope for this new evangelisation which is already being experienced in Lasallian Educational Communities.

## **2.1 Indicator: meaning and understanding of the culture of vocations**

On contrasting theory and practice with the opinion of the MOOC participants and with the voice of the Districts, we find that the culture of vocations is perceived as the generation of an environment created by the Lasallian educational community for the spiritual, vocational and service experience, which is produced from the personal recognition that helps to discover the meaning of life. This means that the creation of this environment allows us to go beyond the Christian perspective, as it touches on the human, the existential and, in other words, the anthropological.

The experience of a culture of vocations enables young people to question, discern and clarify their own vocational option independently of an option of consecrated life. This means that its creation is made possible in community with the commitment of each member, as a collective responsibility to live their personal vocation and in harmony with a way of life.

In the Lasallian charism, the culture of vocations allows a creative and meaningful response to human challenges, which is possible with the commitment of the people of an educational community that makes known the inner call in its relationship with God, that personalises its existence and thus touches the hearts of the students to embody vocation as service.

## **2.2 Indicator: the aims and purposes of the culture of vocations**

The objectives of the culture of vocations are very varied and depend, to a large extent, on the particular context of each of the educational communities. On analysing the theoretical contributions on the objectives, together with the voice of the participants and the Districts of RELAL, we find that the discourses point to one main objective: that of all those who form part of Lasallian works coming to find their meaning in life. The latter is related to vocation, understood as God's call regarding the mission of each human being in his or her existence.

In each District of RELAL it is reflected that Lasallians speak of vocation as a central aspect of their spirituality, which is largely related to the meaning of life, the motivations of the human being and the relationship between the person and the transcendent. In this same case, the Districts of RELAL, the voice of the participants and the theory agree that the encounter towards vocation should be fostered, understanding it as something that was given as a gift.

Vocation must be seen as an essential element that allows each person to discover their calling. In addition, in a second objective, all (Districts, the voices of the participants and the documents) express and agree that events, meetings should be held or spaces of accompaniment and intentional experiences should be fostered in order to allow the Lasallians to find the meaning of their lives, whether through service experience, youth and social action, and experiences focused on those most in need. That is why it is important to contemplate those spaces that transform experiences, such as immersions in vulnerable

communities, volunteer activities, among others, which are aimed at giving oneself to others in the face of their needs.

### **2.3 Indicator: the forms of the culture of vocations**

Through Circular 475, the Institute has indicated that some good practices for a culture of vocations are the creation of vocational teams that involve the administrative staff; and also to consider formation programmes, vocational weeks, service projects, among other actions. For their part, the MOOC participants expressed the personal experience of living the presence of Jesus as a process of dissemination. This contributes to sharing the construction of the culture of vocations with those around them, which means that they start from their own vocation and this leads to the opportunity to announce God's call.

In the Districts of RELAL, several actions are carried out which allow the dissemination and experience of the culture of vocations in harmony with the Institute, such as the creation of vocational teams in the educational works. However, in the Districts, this team has been linked to psychology and guidance departments in order to provide integral processes. Various formative experiences, retreats, conferences, meetings and follow-up visits have been organised to encourage this culture.

In the contribution to the construction of the culture of vocations, the Institute proposes to relate this culture to the contribution of other religions in order to question the meaning of life; and the MOOC participants also mention it as a contribution to build it from the respect for others who live differently; however, in the Districts it is not mentioned as a strategy within this conception.

Finally, in this Circular the Institute mentions promoting vocational messages through social networks, these same strategies are also considered by the Districts; however, the MOOC participants do not consider them as spaces for dissemination, i.e. the promotion of the culture of vocations through social networks is not yet identified.



In addition, it is important to mention that, due to the pandemic, the use of technology has increased; however, in Latin America, access to connectivity still entails a gap, due, among other factors, to high levels of poverty, which is a limitation for disseminating culture of vocations through digital media. It is also considered that if social networks are used for dissemination, it will probably reach only a sector of the population in educational communities.

## **2.4 Indicator: the concrete and symbolic spaces where the culture of vocations can be experienced**

The Districts of RELAL, the MOOC participants and the basic documents are in line with the affirmation that the spaces where the culture of vocations is built and lived revolve around the participation, collaboration and intentionality of those who are part of the educational community. In addition, they promote the dissemination of vocational processes through the establishment of intentional groups, where they allow the constitution of teams that work for the culture of vocations.

However, for many years, the spaces for living the culture have been very traditional, that is to say that they have been handed down from generation to generation; the same dynamics are repeated in all the Districts of RELAL, even with varied, multicultural and multi-religious contexts. According to the Districts, the culture of vocations is experienced in the following areas: youth groups, children's groups, pastoral teams, missionary groups, activities with staff: management, teaching and administrative staff, activities with parents, vocation fairs, parish vocation activities, activities with former students, subject activities, and spiritual retreats, among others.

In accordance with the above, the basic documents and the Districts of RELAL agree in many areas that the culture of vocations should be lived; however, these areas for living it have transcended to the point of living it in an online reality, that is to say, through virtuality. In spite of the pandemic of the COVID-19, integrating dynamics have been generated which allow both the District and the members

of the educational community to have the possibility of integrating and relating in a number of ways which do not specifically require presence.

Therefore, the theory proposes new ways of living the culture of vocations in different spaces, such as vocation panels, the integration of administrators in the construction of the culture of vocations, knowledge of other religions, the use of social networks as a means of disseminating the culture of vocations, among the most outstanding ones. In other words, new possibilities are opening up for living in different realities, both face-to-face and virtual, and with the benefit of having multiple people connected in formation activities.

## **2.5 Indicator: the agents who promote, receive and live the culture of vocations**

In the different Districts of RELAL, there are District and leaders of local pastoral ministry who lead and accompany vocation processes, as well as teams set up to promote this culture; in some Districts they are called vocation teams and other culture of vocations teams, which are responsible for carrying out activities for the comprehensive accompaniment of young people, as well as educational communities around the proposal of the culture of vocations.

The MOOC participants affirm that the culture of vocations is built from the educational community and emphasise that the joyful and prophetic witness of the Brothers' community encourages this construction; therefore, it is necessary to nurture this culture so that students can see that God has different paths. And in contrast with the Institute's proposal, Circular 475 agrees that the culture of vocations therefore requires a change, which challenges and requires that each actor who promotes this culture be open to an inclusive vision and that, consequently, the Lasallian educational community be committed to promoting the sense of vocation among human beings.

## **2.6 Indicator: the benefits of living and transmitting the culture of vocations.**

The benefits of the culture of vocations, according to the MOOC participants, are very varied and fruitful for Lasallian works. The participants start from the importance of vocation as a culture that is spread for each of the members of the educational community, where it does not become an isolated and indifferent fact, but transcends spaces and ways of being that allow for the construction of dynamics of growth in faith and in the meaning of life.

On the other hand, the theory and the participants point out that a great benefit is that the person feels part of a project such as that of La Salle and this allows him or her to build, feel interested and involved in the culture of vocations in the places where the person carries out his or her mission. Furthermore, the theory and the Districts of RELAL agree that this culture creates a climate where the person finds the answer to their questions about their existence and where they can see their vocation in a broad and projective way in society.

Most of the Districts of RELAL point out that they promote spaces and environments that generate life and meaning for all those who are part of the educational work. Others say that it allows them to be close to the Church and to create a religious space for sharing with others. In addition, some say that the culture of vocations has a positive impact on finding spaces that promote the Lasallian charism, where *“it allows the Lasallian charism to be a proposal for Christian discipleship not only for those who wish to form part of a religious family but also for other people who do not necessarily want to consecrate their lives as De La Salle Brothers”* (Pastoral Leader of a District of RELAL).

The richness of analysing the reality of living the culture of vocations from the point of view of individuals allows us to go deeper into the conceptions that are being constructed in the promotion of life as a vocation and community responsibility in order to make it known to all its members. It is encouraging that steps have been taken to change past paradigms which no longer respond to reality and, consequently, challenge us to renew the ways of living as Lasallian communities,

to dialogue with others outside the school environment in order to build up the Church.

These dimensions continue to be a challenge for vocation accompaniment and creativity is fundamental to allow renewal and a constant return to the fundamental purpose of Lasallian educational works, as those environments which allow growth in freedom, in faith, in the search for meaning and vocation, as well as to feel that one is a member of a Lasallian spiritual family which evangelises with its joyful witness in everyday life, in what is simple and deeply human.

### **For reflection. Projection of the culture of vocations**

Subsequently, after learning about the convergences between different protagonists of the culture of vocations and from the awareness that reality is very changeable, which challenges us to look for new and creative ways of bringing it to life in the educational communities, ask yourself:

- From what concrete actions do I, as a Lasallian educator, contribute to strengthening the culture of vocations in the educational community?
- In my educational community, how can we demonstrate the fruits of the culture of vocations in the lives of the different members of the community?

# CONCLUSIONS

- Vocation is a call that God makes to all people. This call is freely and voluntarily accepted. The culture of vocations is an “atmosphere” which allows Lasallians to give meaning to their lives and to discover their talents and gifts in order to put them at the service of others. For this reason, the culture of vocations is an essential element in all educational works, where the teams of pastoral ministry or the culture of vocations teams are responsible for providing, creating, building and spreading dynamics or activities so that each member of the educational community discovers his or her vocation in the Church and in the world. This vocation has been given by God and is established as a sign of faith.
- There are various ways of conceiving and understanding the culture of vocations from the point of view of the main agents who make up the Lasallian charism in Latin America. But not only are the meanings of the culture of vocations presented, but also from a vision that is based on what, what for, where, how and who, showing a vision of the whole, of the entirety that makes up this concept that is so broad, so full of meanings, and so profound and important for humanity: the call to vocation. In this sense, it would seem that culture of vocations is something that is lived day by day, and that is also discovered throughout life, which is perceived more as a way of life than as a simple homework lesson. It involves principles and values, which are put into practice in everyday life.
- Spaces such as the MOOC course “From Hope to Commitment” encourage reflection, dialogue, formation and experience on culture of vocations, creating a vocational atmosphere in the educational communities and creating a common language. As for the leaders of pastoral ministry of the Districts of RELAL, there is a great tendency to present the practicality of these elements in concrete activities, such as: interiority retreats, meetings, use of social networks, camps, vocation fairs, social service activities, schools for families, celebrations and spiritual moments.

- The experience of the culture of vocations in Lasallian communities brings a Christian value to the discovery of the meaning of life, which has an anthropological component. That is to say, the concept of vocation is promoted from an existential perspective which seeks to achieve personal fulfilment, while at the same time establishing an intimate relationship with the personal experience of God, self-knowledge and connection with others through the formation of community. In addition, a dialogue is established with other religions and beliefs in relation to the transcendent dimension that addresses existential questions.
- In the search for the culture of accompaniment, the Districts have discovered as a strategy the multidisciplinary work in the vocation teams, considering the integration of the areas of psychology and guidance; in this way the members of the educational community are comprehensively attended to and the discernment process is enriched. This seeks to have a direct impact on the analysis of the decision-making process involved in the conscious choice of a vocational journey, since it adds spaces that are not only relegated to the pastoral or theological sphere, but are permeated in other school environments that allow people to think about themselves and their journey.

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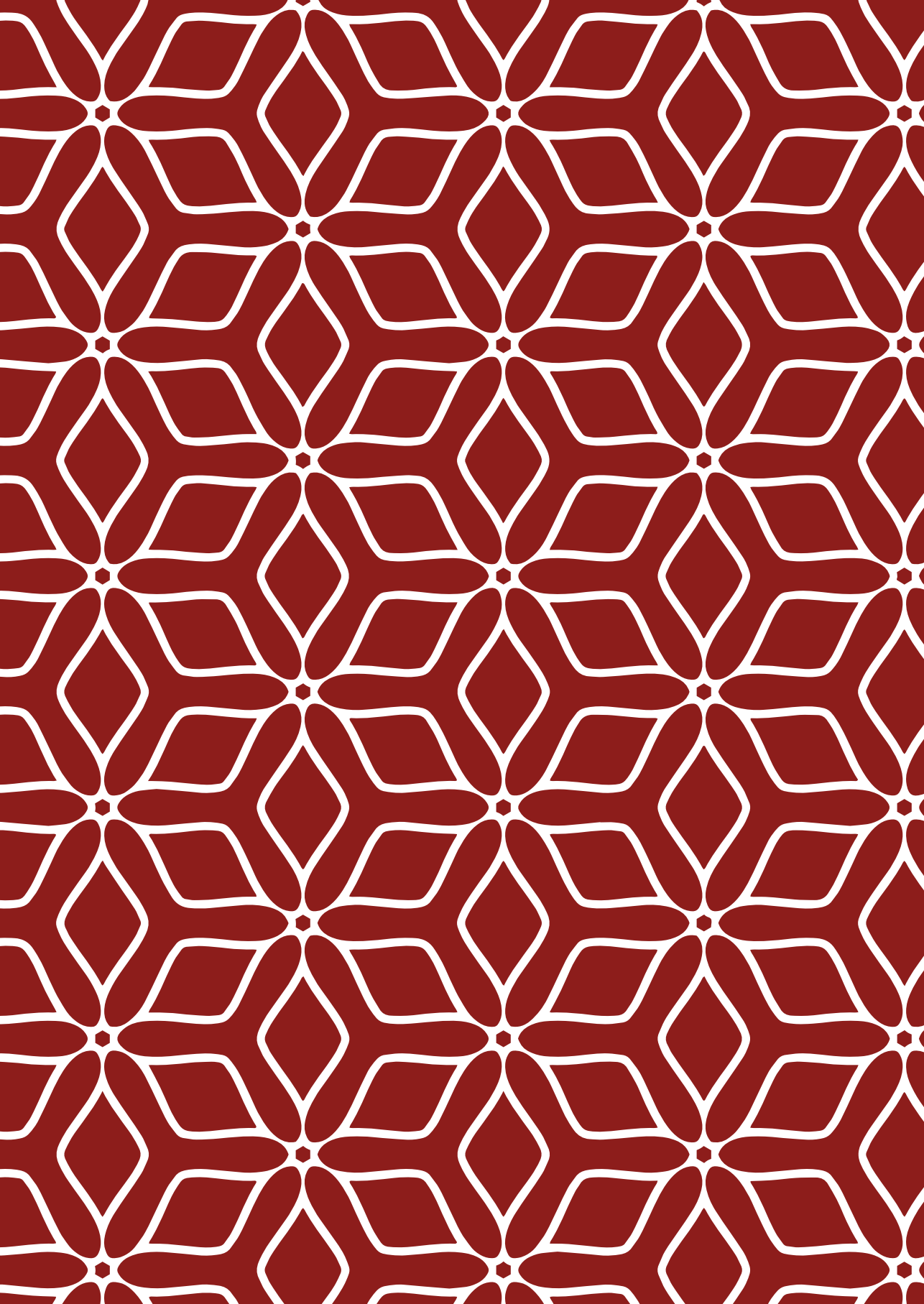






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