

## **The Works for Vocations in the Province of the West – USA**

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During the Jubilee Year 2000, the Province of the West-USA celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an autonomous province. During the past 25 years, vocation work has been varied. From 1975-1987, the Western Province operated a High School Seminary program; vocation work was focused on eighth-grade recruitment for this seminary program. The vocation director would visit Catholic grade schools and parish religious education programs, focusing on seventh- and eighth-grade adolescents. The visits and talks would culminate in what were called “Vocation Weekends” which took place at the high school seminary where the young boys had the opportunity to spend two days and two nights at the seminary. The “Vocation Weekend” included talks by seminarians of the high school, prayer and other interactive activities such as basketball, volleyball and soccer. The primary concern for the vocation director during these years was the attainment of new students for the high school seminary program. It must also be noted that during these years, the majority of the young students were of European descent.

### **Shifts**

Today vocation work no longer consists of the recruitment of adolescent boys for a high school seminary program. Many of the inquirers today are between the ages of 23 and 45 years, and come from many different ethnic groups, in particular the Asian community. The majority of these men are enrolled in some type of college, university or graduate program; some have completed graduate school and many of them are professionals, working full- or part-time. Many of the young men are engaged in some type of ministry at their local parishes as lectors, eucharistic ministers, cantors, youth/young adult coordinators, and catechists.

The approach to vocation work is not seen only as “recruitment,” but as a discernment process, where the primary concern has shifted from enlistment and recruitment to helping an individual discover the vocation to which God is calling him. This includes assisting the inquirers to look at the many options for community and ministry in the Church and – based on the individual’s own self-understanding, as well as his experience of God, the Church and the world – to choose the option to which he feels called by God.

All of the vocation efforts of the Western Province–USA take place in a culture that seems to sanctify individualism: do your own thing, be your own person. They take place in a consumer society where more is better and money is seen as the determining factor for happiness, and pleasure and power are frequently promoted as the goals to be achieved at almost any cost.

## Cultural Diversity

The western United States is culturally diverse. As I have visited many parishes over the past two years as the vocation director, I have encountered people from many different ethnic groups: African, African American, Mexican, Central and South American, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino and many others. Within many of the (arch) dioceses in California there are numerous events that celebrate the cultural diversity of the local church. It has been my role to participate in these cultural celebrations; namely, Sinbang Gabi and the St. Luis Ruiz Feast Day (Filipino), the Vietnamese Martyrs celebration, the Chinese New Year Celebration, Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day/Posadas (Mexican, Central and South American), St. John the Baptist Feast Day (Puerto Rican), Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration/St. Martin de Porres Day (African American), and many others. Through my participation in these celebrations, I not only have the opportunity to share literature about the Congregation of the Mission, but the different groups come to know that the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers of the Province of the West are interested in them; that we as a province are interested in their lives, their concerns, joys and sorrows.

In participating in these cultural events, I strive to demonstrate that the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers will do more than just open their doors to people of different races and cultures. Our commitment is not to have token groups but to truly become multicultural groups.

## Parish Vocation Mission

One of the many activities I wish to highlight is the **Parish Vocation Mission**. I use this title because the activities are parish based, focusing on vocations to the Congregation and conducted in a mission style. These Missions are conducted every year in Vincentian and diocesan parishes throughout the Province of the West. The vocation director and Vincentian seminarians conduct these missions in English and Spanish for five days, including a weekend. The mission includes meeting with the youth/young adults of the parish, preaching at all the weekend Masses, activities within the parish school and religious education program. The Parish Vocation Mission stimulates and challenges the entire parish to pray and encourage vocations.

During the mission, names are gathered from all those who are interested in learning more about the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers. After the mission, contact is made by phone and e-mail. I then invite the inquirers to an “Andrew Dinner” or “Come and See” weekend. This enables the inquirers to come together for prayer, discernment and support. In this setting the inquirers have the opportunity to listen to the vocation stories of the confreres and “what it means to be a Vincentian priest or brother.” Members of the local community have the opportunity to share with the inquirers what life in that particular local community is like, the schedule of the day and the many ways the community spends time together. The inquirers are invited to ask any questions that may have surfaced for them.

## **Community Involvement**

How does one get the community involved in vocation efforts? This was one of my many questions as I began in vocation ministry. Within the first few months as vocation director, I visited many of our local houses and gathered the members together and I invited them to reflect on a few personal questions:

- 1) How did God communicate to me the invitation to become Vincentian?
- 2) Why have I remained a Vincentian priest/brother?
- 3) To what extent is our “charism” obvious in our mission sites to people with whom we work, especially youth?
- 4) Is the community in which I live open to others who may wish to “come and see”?

I then invited each confrere to share his reflections with the larger community. I encouraged each local community to devise its own activities and to include them in their House Plans. After each gathering with the confreres, it was obvious that in order for us to attract vocations we need to share with others who we are, that we are alive, well and a viable choice for other young men. Vocation work is a Community effort and includes all community members in each house through their prayers, witness, and service.

It is obvious that no audio-visual materials, pamphlets, programs or other “tools” can substitute for personal contact. Vocation efforts in the Province of the West–USA are challenging and also exciting. Let us all continue to pray and work for vocations by sharing our charism and inviting other young men to join us in our efforts for and with the poor. It is our goal to pray, to invite, and to encourage others to share our way of life.